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THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
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**ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
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**OPERATIONS OF THE 32D DIVISION
IN THE CAPTURE OF BUNA
18 NOVEMBER 1942-2 JANUARY 1943
(PAPUAN CAMPAIGN)**

**Type of operation described: INFANTRY DIVISION
IN THE ATTACK OF A FORTIFIED POSITION IN JUNGLE TERRAIN**

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7. That the Infantry-Tank team properly employed is effective against bunkers and pill boxes if no tank obstacles are present.

8. That more training in scouting and patrolling -- particularly night patrolling -- was needed. And that more training in small unit tactics was desirable.

9. That control in the jungle is difficult, but essential.

10. That jungle tactics are not entirely new and different from other tactics but are merely special application of the same tactical procedures.

11. That the principles of Defense, which emphasize: deception, depth, concealment, organization of key terrain, when properly applied, greatly increase the strength of a fighting force.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
The Japanese Threat to Australia.....	3
GENERAL SITUATION.....	4
Plan of Allied Counter-Offensive.....	4
Terrain and Climate.....	6
The Enemy Situation.....	10
Our Own Forces.....	13
Communications and Chain of Command.....	14
SPECIAL SITUATION, 32D DIVISION, 18 NOVEMBER 1942.....	15
FIRST PHASE, BUNA CAMPAIGN (19 NOV-14 DEC 1942).	16
Initial Contact.....	16
Developing Enemy Positions.....	19
Situation on 30 November.....	20
Reorganization and Regrouping.....	22
Warren Front (5-14 Dec 1942).....	23
Urbana Front (5-14 Dec 1942).....	25
FINAL PHASE OF THE BUNA CAMPAIGN (15 DEC 1942 - 2 JAN 1943).....	27
Situation on Both Fronts, 14 Dec 1942.....	27
Warren Front: Capture of Old Strip.....	28
Urbana Front: Capture of Buna.....	31
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	36
LESSONS.....	39
MAP A - Papuan Campaign	
MAP B - Buna Combat Zone	
MAP C - Buna Campaign, First Phase	
MAP D - Buna Campaign, Final Phase	

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OPERATIONS OF THE 32D DIVISION
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INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Threat to Australia

Early in 1942 the Japanese were on the offensive everywhere in the Southwest Pacific. On 10 December 1941 they had landed in the Philippine Islands. On 23 January 1942 Rabaul was occupied. Singapore fell in February; and in March, with the campaign in the Netherlands East Indies virtually over, (1) the Japanese landed forces in the area of Lee and Salamaua on the Northeast coast of New Guinea. (2) (See small scale insert, Map A).

Rabaul was to serve as the center of power for the Japanese in this area. From here they would launch a two-pronged drive directed at Australia: one, through the Solomon Islands, south, to cut the American supply line; the other to gain control of Port Moresby on the Papuan Peninsula, southeastern New Guinea. Port Moresby would serve as a base for invasion of the Cape York Peninsula, the northern tip of Australia. (3)

The drive through the Solomon Islands was stopped by the U.S. Marines landing at Tulagi and Guadalcanal in August. The American naval victory in May in the Battle of the Coral Sea stopped the Japanese advance to Port Moresby by water. But they continued their drive toward Port Moresby by land. (4) (See Map A).

On 10 March, Buna was bombed; in February, Port Moresby had been raided by air for the first time; (5) and in July 1942 the Japanese landed troops at Buna, Gona and Sanananda

(1) A, p. 1; (2) B, p. 12; (3,4) A, p. 1; (5) B, p. 12

on the Northeast coast of the Papuan Peninsula. They pushed south across the Owen Stanley mountains, were stopped by the Australians, and, when the American forces joined the counter offensive, were driven back to their bases. The Allies finally captured these bases and therewith accomplished two objectives: Australia was freed from the threat of Japanese invasion, and our first foothold was gained near the Japanese center of power at Rabaul. (6)

The part of the 32d Infantry Division in the capture of Buna is the subject of this monograph. The action took place in fever-ridden swamp and jungle where the Jap had almost impregnable defenses. His troops were seasoned veterans of the Japanese Imperial Army, whereas the men of the 32d Infantry Division were entering combat for the first time. Despite the obstacles, success was obtained.

This campaign is important historically because, with the almost simultaneous action at Guadalcanal, it was the first triumph of American Ground Forces over the Japanese Army. (7) It is important from a military standpoint because of the lessons learned for our future jungle warfare. (8)

GENERAL SITUATION

Plan of Allied Counter-Offensive

After the Japanese landed in the Buna-Gona-Sanananda Area and had driven out the small garrison there, they advanced South over the Owen Stanley Mountains toward Port Moresby. (See Map A) On 28 July 1942 they made contact with the Australians at Kokoda. Japanese strength at this time was estimated at 5000. (9) The Australians were driven back from successive positions until they stopped the Japanese on 14 September at

(6) A, p. 1; (7) A, p. 2; (8) B foreword by General Eichelberger;
(9) B, p. 12

Imita Range, South of Ioribaiwa and about 32 miles from Port Moresby. (10)

During the Japanese advance the Allied Air Force had continuously pounded their bases and supply lines. But this did not prevent the Japanese from landing troops and by 13 August 11,100 had been brought into the area. (11) However, the disruption of their lines of resupply over the Mountains by air attack and the extension of these lines over the precipitous heights were main factors in the Japanese halt. A two weeks stalemate ensued; during this time elements of the 32d U.S. Infantry Division were transported to Port Moresby by air and water. On 28 September the 126 Combat Team and the 128 Combat Team had closed at Port Moresby. The 128 Combat Team was bivouacked near the Goldie River on the Australian left, while the 126 Combat Team, with Headquarters just southeast of the town, sent patrols to reconnoitre to the right along the coast for routes over the mountains.

Each Combat Team consisted of: one Infantry Regiment; one platoon, 114 Engineer Battalion; one Collecting Company and one platoon of the Clearing Company of the 107 Medical Battalion; three 25 bed portable hospitals; and a Detachment of the 32d Signal Company. The rest of the 32d Division was still in Australia. (13)

On the same date, 28 September, the Japanese, ill supplied and exhausted, withdrew from their positions. The strength of the retreating enemy was estimated at 4000 and contained remnants of three Battalions; 144 Infantry Regiment; one Battalion, Pack Artillery; a company of Engineers; and part of one Battalion of the 41st Infantry. (14)

(10), (11) A, p. 2; (12) A, p. 4; (13) A, p. 4; (14) B, p. 14

Now was the time for the Allies to seize the initiative. We could obtain air superiority if the Japs did not divert air power from the Solomons. It was believed that the Japanese troops at Buna were Line of Communication troops and the other two Battalions of the 41st Infantry. (15) Therefore, it was decided by the Allied Commander, General Douglas MacArthur: to maintain pressure on the retreating enemy with the Australian forces, while making a secret wide envelopment of the Japanese left in the vicinity of Buna using the 32d Division. (16) The American force, less the 2d Battalion 126 Infantry (reinforced), were to move by air to gain speed and to conserve their strength. The 2d Battalion 126 Infantry, with the Antitank Company and Cannon Company attached, would cross the Owen Stanley Mountains on foot via the Kapa Kapa trail from Port Moresby to Juare to act as left flank guard of the enveloping force. (17) All of October and early November were required for this move. (18)

Terrain and Climate

It is well at this time to discuss the terrain and climate of Southeast New Guinea because of its extreme importance to the strategy and tactics of the Buna Campaign. (See Map A)

The central ridge line of the Papuan Peninsula is the Owen Stanley Range which rises steeply from the Southwest coast to 10,000 feet, and then recedes gradually to the Northeast Coast forming a wide coastal plain. (19)

The area of the Buna Combat Zone is practically flat. (See Map B). From Soputa, seven miles inland on the Sanananda Trail, to Buna on the coast, the elevation decreases only five feet. (20)

(15) B, p. 14; (16) A, p. 5; (17) B, p. 13; (18) A, p. 5;
(19) B, p. 1; (20) A, p. 9

The rivers, fast in the mountains, slow down to muddy streams as they reach the plain. (21) Their banks inland are of deep loam covered with dense jungle growth. During the rainy season they overflow and flood the plain for miles. This forms swamps and bogs which vary from inches in depth to well over a man's head. (22) After they come out of the swamps they meet the sea in several mouths. (23)

The Girua River is typical. It is 40 to 60 feet wide until it disappears into the swamps south of Buna. Entrance creek which meets the sea just West of Buna, and Simemi creek, running along the north edge of the Old Strip to the sea, are two of its many mouths. In between is the main swamp which runs back to Ango and Simemi. (24) It is impenetrable. Nipa, Sago and Mangrove trees of soft wood with wide buttress flanges prevail. They are from 25 to 100 feet in height, closely spaced, and interwoven with roots, creepers and jungle growth which make visibility poor. On the ground, standing, one can see from 5 to 30 yards; in a fox-hole, the visibility is practically zero; and from the air, it is zero. Many of the plants are poisonous, but two were most troublesome: the stinging plant and the thorny trailers of the lawyer vine. Few poisonous snakes were encountered and no crocodiles reported. (25)

Other ground area is generally water logged except for some places on the coast which are fairly dry. The dry land is covered with Kunai grass and coconut palms. The Kunai grass has broad sharp-edged blades and grows to six feet in height. Where it has been burned, tough tussocks a few inches in height remain.

(21) B, p. 1; (22) B, p. 6; (23) B, p. 1; (24) A, p. 10;
(25) B, p. 6

Coconut Palms are about 18 feet apart with the ground clear underneath. (26)

The battleground of Buna is a small area three and one half miles along the coast and one half mile deep (See Map C). It includes Buna Mission, which was a government station of three houses and a few dozen native huts, and Buna Village, just a cluster of huts. (27)

In the vicinity of Cape Endaiadere on the East lies the Duropa Plantation which is 700 yards wide by 1800 yards long. Over to the west and along the Coast is the Government Plantation, which extends 300 yards inland, and from Buna Mission to the Old Strip. (28)

The Old Strip was the real objective of the American Forces. It existed prior to the Jap landing but was enlarged by them to 1300 yards by 90 yards and dispersal bays were built at the Northwest end. The air distances from ~~it~~ are: 105 miles to Port Moresby; 400 miles to Rabaul; and 147 miles to Salamana. From it the threat against Port Moresby could definitely be checked and, as later proved true, it could act as an excellent base for further advance up the north coast of New Guinea. (29)

To the east and south of the Old Strip, across Simemi Creek, lies the New Strip. It was constructed by the Japs and is 570 yards by 60 yards. Enemy planes were first sighted here on 19 September 1942, but were later learned to be dummy planes, as was the New Strip a dummy strip. (30)

Buna has no harbor. Coral reefs go out to sea for 25 miles, thereby limiting water approach. From the nature of

(26) A, p. 10; (27) A, p. 9; (28) A, p. 10; (29) A, p. 10;
(30) B, p. 2

the terrain, it can be seen that land approaches to Buna were channelized to four routes: (See Map C) Approach #1, up the East coast from Hariko to the New Strip, then West along the North edge of the New Strip to junction with approach #2; approach #2, which comes North from Simemi and crosses Simemi Creek at the bridge between the New Strip and the Old Strip, then goes northwest between the Old Strip and Simemi Creek to Buna Mission; approach #3, north from Ango along the West side of the main swamp toward Buna; and approach #4 which comes Southwest along the coast from Siwori village to Buna. These approaches are narrow trails or corridors about 12 feet wide and so low that heavy rains make sections of them disappear. The Engineers worked incessantly with corduroy to keep them open. (31)

Where Approach #3 splits to Buna Village and Buna Mission, is located that sector called the Triangle, which with the Coconut Grove nearby and "the Bridge" on Approach #2, was to become famous.

The land approaches to Buna allow for no lateral communication and once committed to each side of the swamp, the 32d Division operated on two fronts. The only communication between was by way of Simemi and Ango -- a two day trip. (32)

The climate at Buna is uniformly hot and muggy. Mean annual rainfall for the previous 12 years was 113 inches with November, December and January being the wettest months. For these three months it rains on an average of fourteen to seventeen days each month. Violent rain squalls (Gubas) last from 15 to 20 minutes with an average of about 14 inches for each rain. This mugginess (humidity of 82%) causes a rise of one

(31) A, p. 11; (32) A, p. 13

or two degrees to effect great physical discomfort to the white man. No cyclones or hurricanes were experienced. (33)

The ratio of casualties from disease to battle casualties in this campaign was about five to two. (34) Malaria, Dengue Fever, Dysentery and Sand Flies were abundant. If a man scratched the bite of a sand fly, jungle ulcers resulted. Chiggers carried scrub typhus for which there is no known inoculation. Gonorrhoea is common among the native women, but this was of no particular significance in the campaign as the native women were hidden in the hills throughout the operation. (35)

The Enemy Situation

The enemy situation at the start of the Buna Campaign was far different from what our commanders estimated. The reader will remember; that we knew the enemy was withdrawing over the Kokoda trail toward his bases at Buna, Gona and Sanananda; that we thought his bases were weakly held by service troops; and that we believed an aggressive force could march right in to Buna. On this our plan was based. Actually the enemy situation on the northeast coast was strong. His attitude was that of stubborn defense and his position took full advantage of the terrain and climate just discussed.

In order to better understand the operation of our forces a description of his situation is now included. But it must be kept in mind throughout this narrative that the 32d Division had to gain this information bit by bit against an experienced jungle fighter and in the face of great natural obstacles.

(33) A, p. 12; B, p. 5; (34) A, p. 12; (35) B, p. 8

The enemy's use of the terrain was almost perfect. He hung his flanks on the sea or on rivers at their mouths where the heavy rains made them almost impassable. His front was protected by impenetrable jungle except for the four limited approaches which he covered with an intricate network of mutually supporting bunkers and fire trenches. He joined the strong points with barbed wire and had excellent fields of fire along the Strips and in the Plantation. Movement through Kunai grass could be followed from observers high in the trees. And his position afforded excellent lateral communication for movement of reserves while it denied the same to us.

The positions in general were: (See Map B) at Gona, along the Soputa-Sanananda trail, and at Buna in a perimeter based on the sea. (36)

The Buna position (See Map C) had its right flank where the unfordable Girua River enters the sea, then ran Southwest along the Buna Village-Ango trail to the Triangle. From here it turned north behind the Government Gardens and ran in front of the Government plantation down the Strips to the sea on the east flank south of Cape Endaiadere. (37) They had the Buna Mission -- The Bridge road (approach #2) which was capable of vehicular traffic for rapid movement of reserves. In the Western sector of their line there were two Marine Units: the Yasuda Butai (Detachment) and the Tsukioka Butai commanded by Colonel Yoshitatsu Yasuda. These were veterans of China, Malaya, and other Islands of the Pacific. In the Eastern Sector was the 3d Battalion 229th Infantry and the Yamamoto

(36) B, p. 9; (37) B, p. 10

Butai commanded by Major General Oda. These units totaled about 1165. In addition, there was a heavy AAA battery of the 73d Independent Unit (100 men); a battery of Mountain Artillery believed to be from the 3d Battalion 55th Field Artillery (about 100 men) remnants of the 144th Infantry (100 men); 300 miscellaneous troops; and 400 laborers making the grand total 2200 of which 1800 were combat troops. (38)

Their position was organized in depth such that each bunker was covered by fires from other bunkers. The bunkers were almost entirely above ground. The base was a shallow trench as long as 40 feet or as short as 6 feet. From this ran uprights of coconut logs, steel drums and ammunition boxes filled with sand. The top had as many as three layers of logs and the whole bunker was covered with sand, dirt and fast growing jungle foliage. These bunkers could withstand almost anything but a direct hit with fuze delay. They were usually used for cover during shelling or air attack, then the Japs would move to their fire trenches alongside to meet our Infantry. Entrances to the bunkers were from the rear and on an angle to protect against grenades. In the event that automatic weapons were located in bunkers, fields of fire were seldom cleared. The snipers in trees above, watched our movement and directed fire. (39)

The Japanese tactics at Buna were defensive. He was determined and stubborn as long as he thought he had a ghost of a chance. And he was full of tricks: He used an explosive bullet which when it struck a tree near our troops sounded like a burst of machine gun fire and gave us false location of positions. (40) He also used snipers with great

(38) A, p. 13 and 14; (39) A, p. 14 and 16; (40) F, p. 24

demoralizing and delaying effect. They were high in trees with good observation. As they saw our troops approach they would open fire at close range. We would naturally hit the dirt and start locking. The sniper was almost impossible to locate. Even if hit by our fire, nothing dropped from the tree because he and his rifle were tied in. He would cease fire and wait until our men moved, then fire again. (41) Sometimes he would, through a system of wires or vines, drop a dummy sniper from another tree to make our troops believe it safe to move, then fire again when they got up. In this manner one sniper could hold up a whole unit with dummies. (42) Or if he could not locate our men except through noise, he would fire a shot at the sound, then pull a vine tied to other pieces of vegetation many yards away. When our men opened fire he could locate them. (43)

These tactics and positions forced our troops to attack a prepared defense in depth along predetermined routes. Lateral communication was denied to our forces, while the Japs had excellent interior routes.

Our Own Forces

By the 18 November, Allied forces were over the hump and approaching the enemy bases on the Northeast coast of Papua. (See Map A).

The Australian 7th Division was in the vicinity of Wairepi on the Kokoda-Gona trail on the 15 November. (44) On the 18 November (see Map B) its 16th Brigade (similar to our Regiment) was north of Soputa advancing toward Sanananda;

(41) D, p. 8; (42) H, p. 12; (43) D, p. 8; (44) B, p. 15

its 25th Brigade was on the Jumbora-Gona trail, (45) lead elements of which entered Gona on 19 November only to withdraw because of ammunition shortage. (46)

The U.S. 32d Division forward elements had completed their air movement by 18 November. The 126 Combat Team, less the 2d Battalion which moved overland, had closed by air on Pongani (see Map A, Grid square 40-30) on 11 November (47) and on the 15th were moving to join the 2d Battalion at Bofu. (Grid square 30-30) (48) The 128 Combat Team closed by air at Wanigela (grid square 60-40) on 18 October, moved by small boats to Pongani, and on 18 November was on the coastal trail moving North between Hariko and Cape Endaiadere. (49)

The boundary between the Australian 7th Division and the 32d Division lay east of the Girua River. (50) (See Map B)

The Air Force which had completed this air shuttle was the U.S. Fifth Air Force under command of Lt. Gen. George C. Kenny. Throughout the Buna campaign they did a magnificent job of meeting the logistical and strategical requirements, achieving complete cooperation with the Ground Forces. (51) Their tactical support of the Ground Forces consisted mainly of strafing and bombing of enemy rear areas, attack on enemy lines being kept to a minimum because of the poor visibility and therefore great danger to our own troops. (52)

Communications and Chain of Command

Communications in the jungle were extremely difficult. The trails were hazardous over the mountains. On the plain during this wet season they were often covered with water. Very few vehicular trails existed except on the coast, and railroads were unknown in Papua. (53) Signal equipment was

(45) A, Map #3; (46) B, p. 15; (47,49) A, p. 7; (48) A, p. 14; (50) A, Map #3; (51,52) A, p. 18 and 19; (53) B, p. 1

adversely affected by the terrain and climate. Radios corroded and their range was limited by the thick undergrowth; the larger sets however were able to make contact with Moresby. Headquarters up front were connected by teletype and telephone; the wire many times had to be floated downstream on improvised rafts because the linemen could not traverse the jungle. In all 300 miles of wire was laid. (54)

The Chain of Command to the 32d Division was from the Commanding General Southwest Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur; to the General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) New Guinea Forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey; to the G.O.C. Advanced New Guinea Force, Lieutenant General E. F. Herring (Australian); to Lieutenant General Eichelberger, C.G. I Corps (U.S.); to Major General Harding, C.G. 32d Infantry Division. (55)

This was the General Situation of the 32d Division at the start of the Buna Campaign.

SPECIAL SITUATION-32D DIVISION-18 NOVEMBER 1942

The secrecy of the wide envelopment had been lost. "Bush wireless" preceded the advance, warning the Japanese at Buna of our approach. As such, on the 18 November, the 32d Division was advancing to the attack as rapidly as possible (see Map B). The 128 Combat Team was in line of battalions from Ango, south of the main swamp, to the coast, advancing North. The 1st Battalion was on the right (approach #1), vicinity of Boreo; the 3d Battalion, in the center, was north of Simemi (approach #2); the 2d Battalion, on the left, (Division Reserve) was advancing West of the Main Swamp from Ango (approach #3). Farther south the 126 Combat Team, less the 1st Battalion, was in the vicinity of Inonda, while the

(54) A, p. 24; (55) A, p. 5

1st Battalion was coming up the coast from Oro Bay. E Company 128, Cannon Company 128, and a Detachment of the 114 Engineers were working on the strips at Dobodura. (56)

FIRST PHASE - BUNA CAMPAIGN
(19 Nov. to 14 Dec. 1942)

Initial Contact

The 1st and 3d Battalions 128 Combat Team advancing north along parallel trails toward the Duropa Plantation made first contact with the enemy on 19 November. (See Map C) Company C and Company K, as advance guard, met enemy rifle and automatic fire which stopped them about 500 yards south of the New Strip. In the confusion of the advance through Kunai grass lateral communications had been lost (57). No further advance was made that day and during the night the enemy could be heard re-inforcing his positions.

The 1st Battalion 126 Infantry came up from the south on 20 November and went in on the coast to the immediate right of the 1st Battalion 128 Infantry. On 21 November, late in the afternoon, an attack was launched by all three battalions. This was preceded by an air bombardment. Orders had not arrived in time to the ground units and the air attack hit some of ~~our own~~ troops of the 3d Battalion 128 Infantry. When the attack finally jumped off it bogged down quickly and our force returned to its positions of the 19th. (58)

On the west flank of the Main Swamp, on the 19th November contact had not been made. The 2d Battalion 128 Infantry was still moving north along the Ango-Buna trail. (See Map B). The 126 Combat Team, less its 1st Battalion and its 2d Battalion, crossed the Girua River far south near Inonda and joined the

(56) A, p. 7; (57) A, p. 27; (58) A, p. 28

Australians advancing on Soputa (see Map B). (59) The junction of the Battalions of the 126 Combat Team which was being attempted at Bofu on 15 November apparently never occurred because its 1st Battalion was now on the east flank in contact near the New Strip and its 2d Battalion, which made the entire move from Port Moresby overland, did not arrive at Soputa until the next day. (60) (See Map B).

The 2d Battalion 128 Infantry made their first contact with the enemy on 21 November on the Ango trail (approach #3) at the Triangle (see Map C). Their advance guard was led by Sergeant Irving W. Hall. He saw the Japanese position and moved his men off the trail before receiving fire. The Battalion then moved up on each side of the trail but was stopped by heavy small arms fire. The Triangle was to prove one of the strongest positions at Buna. (61)

The Japs on the night of 18-19 November had four or five destroyers and one cruiser out to sea in the vicinity of Buna which succeeded in landing some troops despite our air attacks. From 20 to 30 November Jap air power was to increase over Buna and our troops were to be strafed almost daily. (62)

On the 22 November the 2d Battalion 126 Infantry arrived, from the Australian command, to the western sector of the Buna Front. This was the last major troop movement in the area until the 127 Combat Team arrived from Australia. From this time on, the Forces came to be known as the Urbana Force and the Warren Force. On the west in front of Buna Village and Buna Mission was the Urbana Force commanded by Colonel

(59) B, p. 15; (60) A, p. 5; (61) A, p. 28; (62) B, p. 14

John W. Mott and consisting of the 2d Battalions 126 and 128 Infantry. On the east of the main swamp near the Air Strips was the Warren Force commanded by Colonel J. Tracy Hale, Jr. and consisting of the 1st Battalion 126 Infantry and the 1st and 3d Battalions 128 Infantry. (63)

On the 24 November the Urbana Force attacked the Triangle (see Sketch #1).



E Company 126 Infantry went west of the trail into the swamp and advanced without opposition to a position on 25 November just west of the bridge over Entrance Creek and close to the trail. F Company which attacked straight up the trail was stopped by barbed wire and enemy fire at the junction.

(63) A, p. 29; (64) A, p. 30 Sketch #1

E Company and G Company 128 Infantry advanced to the right without opposition until they reached the open grass, then came under Jap fire from the Triangle. G Company lost its Weapons Platoon and during the night E and G Companies withdrew to their original lines. (65)

From this initial contact on both fronts until the 30th November a virtual stalemate existed. (66)

Developing Enemy Positions

On the Warren front (see Map C) unsuccessful attacks were made on the 26 and 30 November. The 3d Battalion 128 Infantry left I Company on the Simemi trail at the Bridge and moved to assist in these attacks. (67) The attack on the 26th was the first in which Artillery was used. Brigadier General Albert W. Waldron, Division Artillery Officer, had brought up ten pieces of Artillery, one of which was American and the rest Australian. There were three, 3.7" howitzers; six, 25 pounders; and one, 105mm howitzer. Ammunition supply was difficult, maps were inadequate, and ground observation poor. Australian Wirraway planes were finally used for air observation and did good work (68) During one mission a Wirraway actually sneaked up on a Zero and shot him down. (69)

Despite this artillery preparation, air and mortar preparation, the attack was unsuccessful. But we did learn the type of bunkers used by the Jap. (70) and that a direct fire artillery weapon, such as a tank, was needed to breach his positions.

(65) A, p. 29 and 30; (66) B, p. 16; (67) A, p. 30;
(68) A, p. 32; (69) C, p. 13; (70) A, p. 33

On the night of 25-26 November the Japs reinforced Buna by water. An unknown number of enemy naval units were sighted and attacked by air, but some troops were landed. (71)

On 27 November the 127 Combat Team (less Artillery) arrived at Port Moresby by boat. (72)

On 30 November the Warren forces again attacked the enemy positions in the Duropa Plantation. Although the plan differed slightly from the attack of 26 November, its results were the same - unsuccessful. (73)

On the same day, the Urbana forces attacked with some success. Their main effort was made by elements of the 2d Battalion 126 Infantry and E Company 128 Infantry along the route that E Company 126 Infantry had followed on the 24-25 November. E Company 128 Infantry made limited gains near the Bridge toward Coconut Grove but failed to take it. On the extreme left F Company crossed the Girua upstream from its mouth and advanced to Siwori village on approach #4, while other units of the 126 Infantry approached the outskirts of Buna Village. (74) (See Map C)

Situation on 30 November 1942

On the 30 November 1942 the situation on the Buna front was not too good: "forces were strong in the rear, but weak up front." (75)

The American Air Force had done a tremendous job of moving troops and had laid in limited supplies. Air superiority was gained by this date and thus the Japanese Naval Potential was cut (76) though they did succeed in again landing 1000 reinforcements on the 1-2 December (77) showing that such

(71)(72) B, p. 16; (73) A, p. 33; (74)A, p. 33; (75)(77) B, p. 19; (76) B, p. 16

was still possible by sea.

On the ground the Jap position still had not been breached. The sortie to Siwori Village by F Company, 136 Infantry, though it had cut Jap communications between Sanananda and Buna Village, had not penetrated his defenses or gained the usual tactical advantage of being on the enemy flank. The Girua River at its mouth was still a formidable obstacle.

The Americans had fought heat and jungle, jungle noises and diseases, and had spent twelve unsuccessful and costly days in what they had thought would be a quick capture of Buna. (78) Our troops were disorganized, tired, and ill fed.

The chain of command had been weakened by the terrain, which was unavoidable, but there had also been an intermixing of units, such that even platoons of different companies were grouped under the same command. (79) Battalions and Regiments were hopelessly mixed. This was caused by piecemeal attacks, poor control and coordination, and, in some instances, unaggressive leadership.

Troops had been receiving inadequate rations: no more than two lean meals a day. This was considered to be a result of the 32d Division not setting minimum daily requirements for supply, as well as a result of terrific transportation difficulties. (80)

General MacArthur, at Port Moresby, was well aware of this situation and at midnight 29-30 November, Lieutenant General Eichelberger, C.G. I Corps was ordered to report to him to assume command of the Buna Forces: 32d U.S. Division and Australian Artillery. He was allowed to bring with him his Chief of Staff, six staff officers, his aide and nine enlisted men. (81)

(78) A, p. 7; (79) B, p. 17; (80) B, p. 17; (81) B, p. 18

Although the Situation with which General Eichelberger was to be faced was not good, we had accomplished two things to date: The enemy position was developing, and the continual attacks were adversely affecting his morale. It was learned later that he feared our mortars first, artillery next, and then our Air. American troops gained a healthy respect for our 60mm mortar when, after capture, the Japs turned these weapons on us. (82)

Reorganization and Regrouping.

On 1 December at 1300 General Eichelberger assumed command of the Buna Forces. On 2 December he and his staff observed a previously planned attack all along the Buna Front: General Eichelberger was with the Urbana Forces; and his G-2 and G-3, on the Warren Front. This attack was again unsuccessful (83) except for small advances near the Bridge over Entrance creek on the Urbana Front. (See Map C) (84)

On 3-4 December the forces were reorganized: Major General Harding was relieved by Brigadier General Waldron as Division Commander; Colonel Mott, by Colonel John E. Grose on the Urbana Front; and Colonel J. Tracy Hale, Jr., by Colonel Clarence A. Martin on the Warren Front. The Urbana Force was regrouped with the 2d Battalion 126 Infantry on the left in front of Buna village and the 2d Battalion, 128 Infantry on the right along Entrance Creek. (85) On the Warren Front the 1st Battalion 128 Infantry was placed on the right from the South edge of the new Strip to the coast; the 3d Battalion 128 Infantry, in reserve behind the 1st; and the 1st Battalion 126 Infantry was reformed at The Bridge between the two Strips, relieving I

(82) D, p. 9; (83) B, p. 19; (84) A, situation map 18 Nov - 14 Dec 1942; (85) B, p. 20

Company 128 Infantry which joined its Battalion in reserve on the right. (86)

Division Headquarters and Advance Echelon I Corps Headquarters were located near Simemi Village. (See Map B) Headquarters Advance New Guinea Force, under Lieutenant General Herring, (Australian) was at Soputa. Later in December it was moved to Dobodura. (87)

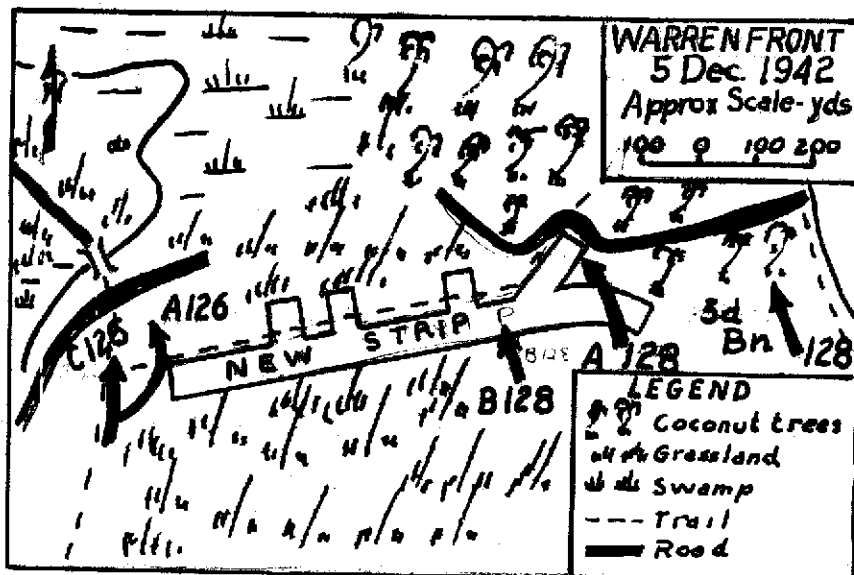
Supply lines were reorganized and Australian Bren Gun Carriers arrived. (88) (Machine guns on a light armored open top carrier about the size of a jeep.)

An attack was ordered for 5 December on both Fronts. (89)
Warren Front (5 Dec - 14 Dec 1942)

On the Warren Front this period saw but one more attack, on the 5 December. Thereafter until the middle of the month, action was confined to extensive patrolling to feel out enemy positions and hold forces from the main effort at the Urbana Front.

For the attack of the 5 December (Sketch #2), the plan was to pass the 3d Battalion 128 Infantry through the 1st Battalion 128 Infantry to follow the Bren Guns in assault along the coast. The 1st Battalion 128 Infantry was to swing left toward the south edge of the New Strip in support of the 3d. The 1st Battalion 126th Infantry would attack North toward The Bridge between The Strips.

(86)(87) A, p. 37; (88) A, p. 38; (89) B, p. 21



The attack was preceded by six A-20s which bombed from the Old Strip to Cape Endaiadere; all Artillery in the Buna area, which concentrated its fire 500 yards in front of the two Battalions, 128 Infantry; and organic mortar preparation. At 0842 L Company 128 Infantry moved out 200 yards behind the Bren Guns; machine guns strafed trees for snipers. Although the Bren guns gained initial surprise, within 30 minutes they had been knocked out from enemy in the trees above. By 1000 the attack along the coast had been stopped. (91)

The 1st Battalions 128 Infantry and 126 Infantry were also stopped. Supporting fires had failed to neutralize bunkers and the need for tanks was again painfully apparent. (92) In the action at the Bridge a 37mm gun firing into apertures in bunkers had forced some enemy out into the open. (93)

(90) A, p. 37; (91) A, p. 38; (92) B, p. 21; (93) A, p. 39

From this attack it was learned that the enemy had a strong position at the Bridge, from the northeast spur of New Strip to the Sea, and that the field of fire afforded by the New Strip was well covered with automatic weapons.

After this attack, rolls were brought up, squad gas stoves obtained and the troops got hot meals for the first time. They conducted extensive patrolling to develop the enemy positions along the Plantation, the New Strip and the Bridge.

Urbana Front (5 Dec - 14 Dec 1942)

On the Urbana Front the attack on 5 December was more successful; the Jap lines were breached for the first time.

(See Sketch #3)



The 2d Battalion 126 Infantry made the main effort to push through to the sea east of Buna Village and cut Buna Village from Buna Mission. The 2d Battalion and Cannon Company 128 Infantry were to protect its flanks.

After artillery and mortar preparation the attack was launched at 1030. They had easy going for about 30 minutes when Cannon Company on the left was stopped. (95) E and G Companies 126 Infantry continued to advance and one platoon of G Company under command of Staff Sergeant Herman J. Bottcher drove a wedge to the sea. He repulsed several enemy counter attacks. (96) General Eichelberger quickly sent F Company 126 Infantry in behind to hold the left flank of the breakthrough. (97) By 1630 the Urbana left was tight against the Japs at Buna Village and well dug in. On the Urbana right we occupied the entire west bank of Entrance Creek with the exception of the Coconut Grove. (98) (See Map C).

The attack on this front on 5 December had isolated Buna Village but the terrain and condition of the troops precluded immediate assault. Continued pressure and infiltration was ordered prior to reduction of the Village, the Grove, and Musita Island in turn. (99) Staff Sergeant Bottcher was later promoted to Captain for his action that day. (100)

This period from 6-13 December was used as preparation for the final assault on Buna Village. The Advance Echelon, Headquarters I Corps and Headquarters 32d Division, were merged into Headquarters, Buna Forces under direct command of General Eichelberger. Front line units were reorganized, and

(95, 96) A, p. 40; (97) A, p. 41; (98) B, p. 21; (99) B, p. 22; (100) A, p. 40

rations were increased. Headquarters 126 Combat Team was transferred from the Sanananda Front to the Buna Front by G.O.C. New Guinea Forces. The 3d Battalion 126 Infantry remained under Australian Command, west of the Girua River, and never did enter the action at Buna. Lieutenant Colonel Tomlinson, Commanding Officer 126 Infantry Regiment was placed in command of the Urbana Force. (101)

On 11 December I and K Companies 127 Infantry, which had spent a few days at Ango for conditioning were put into the line at Buna Village, relieving the depleted 2d Battalion 126 Infantry. Mortars in the area were organized into battery and plans were made to attack the Village on 14 December. (102) (See Map C).

On the night of 13-14 December the Japs landed about 1200 reinforcements up the coast 25 miles northwest of Buna. (103)

The attack jumped off at 0700 after mortar and artillery preparation, and moved forward with almost no opposition. I and K Companies found on entering the Village that most of the enemy had evacuated. Only one casualty occurred: "a souvenir-hunting soldier." By 1000 14 December, Buna Village was ours. (104)

FINAL PHASE OF THE BUNA CAMPAIGN
(15 December 1942-3 January 1943)

Situation on Both Fronts, 14 December 1942

Throughout the Buna sector our Combat Efficiency was on the increase. Though paralleled by slight advances in the malaria and dengue fever rate and the start of torrential night rains, morale had improved greatly. Contributing factors

(101) B, p. 22; (102,103) B, p. 24; (104) B, p. 24

were more food, more aggressive leadership, the arrival of the 127 Combat Team, and the success obtained at Buna Village. General Eichelberger could now turn his attention to the capture of Buna. (105)

Warren Front: Capture of Old Strip
(15 Dec - 2 Jan)

On the Warren front the troops had been relatively inactive since 6 December. All three Battalions had received new commanders and they were now ready to continue their advance. (106)

The period, 15-18 December, was used in reconnaissance in preparation for the attack. The Battalions moved forward to close contact with the enemy. (107)

On 17 December, the 2/9 Battalion of the 18th Australian Brigade arrived with seven light tanks. Brigadier George F. Wooten, being senior to the American Commander, assumed command of the Warren Front, and that night plans were made for a coordinated attack the next day. (108)

On 18 December, our troops drew back to allow for Artillery preparation on definitely located targets. The Australian 2/9 Battalion (less C Company) passed through the 3d Battalion, 128 Infantry, and jumped off with tanks to the north at 0700. By 0930, advance elements had reached Cape Endaiadere (see Map D) and swung west. The 3d Battalion mopped up in rear, while the 1st Battalion 128 Infantry on the left of the Plantation line wheeled to the north and west behind C Company 2/9 Battalion, attacking the northeast spur of the New Strip. (109) Three tanks were knocked out,

(105) B, p. 24 and 25; (106) A, p. 43; (107) A, p. 45;
(108,109) A, p. 46

the enemy had a formidable position, but by the end of the attack our lines extended from a position on the coast 600 yards west of the Cape, south to the eastern end of the New Strip. (110) The 1st Battalion 126 Infantry on the west near the Bridge made no advance. (111)

During the 19th December, the line in the Plantation advanced a few yards while the 1st Battalions 128 and 126 Infantries moved toward the bridge. (112)

On 20 December the attack was continued and by day's end the line ran from the coast 500 yards west of Strip Point, southwest to Simemi Creek, down the creek to a position north of the Bridge, then south across the New Strip about 150 yards east of the Bridge. Troops from left to right were 1st Battalion 126 Infantry, 1st Battalion 128 Infantry, 3d Battalion 128 Infantry, 2/9 Australian Battalion. (113)

The Bridge is 125 feet long and 10 feet wide over a swamp and creek; the creek being six feet wide and over a man's head. The enemy had blown a 12 foot gap in the Bridge covering it with about 40 Riflemen, two light machine guns, and one .50 caliber machine gun. The 1st Battalion 126 Infantry spent the rest of the 20th and most of the night trying to get patrols across the bridge. After repeated attempts Brigade Headquarters decided to outflank it. (114)

As such on 21 December the Simemi creek was patrolled for crossings north and west of the Bridge. Crossings were found on night of 21-22 December; a bridgehead was established by the 2/10 Australian Battalion and on 23 December they moved three Companies south across the creek. (115) The enemy did not withdraw but put up a stiff fight. However, by 1200, 23

(110) B, p. 33; (111) A, p. 46; (112) A, p. 48; (113) B, p. 33;
(114) A, p. 50; (115) B, p. 34

December the 1st Battalion 126 Infantry had crossed the Bridge then moved up south of Old Strip abreast the 2/10 Australian Battalion. The 1st Battalion 128 Infantry moved across and up to the left rear of the 1st Battalion 126 Infantry. By night-fall the Bridge had been repaired for light tanks by the Engineers under fire. The 2/9 Australian Battalion and 3d Battalion 128 Infantry remained near the coast. (116)

It took until evening of the 29th of December to complete the advance up the Old Strip and be prepared for the attack against the Government Plantation. Enemy bunkers had to be knocked out individually as our troops inched forward in the face of heavy small arms fire. Each time the Jap fell back he stopped in a stronger position. (117)

Christmas Day afforded no rest to the troops; they attacked as on any other day. During the action 13 Jap bombers and 22 Zeroes attacked our troops. As the 3d bomber arrived 4 of our P-38s appeared, shooting down 3 Jap bombers and 15 Zeroes with no loss to our Air. (118) On 26 December 25 pounders were used with armor piercing shells firing directly into Jap bunkers. The 29 December saw an unsuccessful Infantry tank attack; tanks in lead. The Japs withdrew in the face of the tanks and then recovered their positions after the tanks passed to fire on our advancing Infantry. (119)

Throughout the advance up the Strip there was plenty of confusion: units became intermixed; Japs appeared in Australian and American uniforms firing M-1 Rifles and, on the night of 28-29 December, got into the command post of C Company 128 Infantry. (120) However, at 1600 29 December

(116,117) A, p. 50; (118) D, p. 8; (119,120) A, p. 52

our line was up against the Plantation extending as follows: right of the line on Simemi Creek 800 yards from the coast, southwest to bend in an arc around the dispersal bays, then due west for about 750 yards. In order left to right were: C and A 2/10 Battalion, C and A 128 Infantry, C 126 Infantry, B and D 2/10 Battalion. (121)

The 30-31 December were used for a general reorganization. The 3d Battalion 128 Infantry relieved the right side of the line and the 2/12 Australian Battalion came up on the left. Eleven M-3 tanks from 2/6 Australian Field Regiment joined the forces. And on 1 January our forces attacked, led by tanks closely followed by the 2/12 Battalion and 3d Battalion 128 Infantry with the 1st Battalion 128 Infantry and 2/10 Battalion in support. At 0930 they had reached the coast between Giropa Point and the mouth of Simemi Creek. The attack was not heavily opposed. We lost few men and one tank. By nightfall only two pockets of enemy resistance were left in this area: one, between the northeast dispersal bays and the mouth of Simemi Creek; the other, in the swamp area about 300 yards south of Giropa Point. (122)

On 2-3 January these were wiped out by the 3d Battalion 128 Infantry and 1st Battalion 128 Infantry respectively while the 2/12 Battalion moved to contact the Urbana Force. (123)

This ended the action of the Warren forces.

Urbana Front: Capture of Buna
(15 Dec - 2 Jan)

During this time the Urbana Forces were not idle. They had the Grove, Government Gardens, Musita Island and the strong positions at the Triangle to take before they could reach Buna.

(121) B, p. 35; (122,123) B, p. 38

Their morale was good. We held the west bank of Entrance Creek except for the Grove and therefore it was decided to reduce that first, then the Triangle. (See Map D).

On 16 December at 1520 after a mortar and artillery preparation. E and F Companies 128 Infantry attacked the Grove. Again the preparation had failed to neutralize the position. By sundown they had reached the edge of the Grove but had not entered. General Byers was wounded. On 17 December they charged and overran the position. Thirty-one Japs were killed and one prisoner taken. (124)

Now we had command of the trail north of the Triangle. G Company 128 Infantry which had been containing the Triangle from the south was given the mission of taking it with the assistance of E Company 128 Infantry attacking from the Grove. The attack was preceded by high explosive and smoke shells of our mortars and artillery. G Company 128 Infantry lost 10 of the 27 men left in their unit. E Company 128 Infantry established a small bridgehead across Entrance Creek. The enemy resisted heavily and no gain was made. (125)

On this date, General Byers was evacuated and General Eichelberger took over direct command of the forward elements of the 32d Division. (126)

During the night of 17-18 December, the 2d Battalion 126 Infantry relieved E and G Companies 128 Infantry, and hammered in vain at the Triangle. On the 18 December at daybreak 13 A-20s dropped almost 500 20 pound parachute bombs then strafed the position. E and G Company 126 Infantry moved up behind a rolling barrage to within grenade range, stopped and fell back losing 34 men, half the Battalion strength. (127)

(124,125) B, p. 26; (126) B, p. 27; (127) A, p. 54

On 20 December E Company 127 Infantry tried their luck at the Triangle attacking twice from the northwest. At 0845 they attacked under cover of artillery, and smoke. At 1230 one platoon tried to assault with grenades after the rest of the company had sprayed the position with tommy guns and small arms fire. Each attack failed and the company lost 35 men. (128) General Eichelberger decided to contain the Triangle and attack Buna Mission. (129)

The first step in the attack on the Mission was to cut through Government Gardens to the sea between Giropa Point and the Mission. On 21 December K Company 127 Infantry established a bridgehead across Entrance Creek under cover of darkness. This was enlarged on the 22 and 23 December, with the help of I Company 127 Infantry. The Engineers bridged the creek, and five companies were now available to push to the sea. (130)

Also on 22-23 December, F Company 127 Infantry had taken Musita Island. Colonel Grose, Regimental Commander of the 127 Infantry, was now in command of the Urbana Front. (131)

L Company 127 Infantry moved up during the night of 23-24 December and led the attack through Government Gardens. One platoon reached the coast but due to loss of contact in tall Kunai grass this advantage was not exploited in time. I Company had bogged down and been relieved by G Company. When Colonel Grose learned of L Company's success he threw in K Company behind them. K Company was not aggressive enough, the Japs closed in behind the L Company platoon; and during the night our forces retired. (132)

(128) A, p. 54; (129) B, p. 30; (130) A, p. 55; (131) B, p. 30;
(132) B, p. 31

The leader of this platoon of L Company was Lieutenant Matz. He was advancing behind a "rolling barrage" of mortars, which because of our gunners' inexperience with this type of fire was generally falling on our own men. He suffered a few casualties from this but once it lifted he galloped through a lane in the Japanese defenses with no contact. After he reached the beach, the enemy discovered his presence and counter-attacked his perimeter many times without success. During these counter-attacks he and a Corporal were wounded. He dressed their wounds, retained command, and anxiously awaited the remainder of the Battalion. When they did not arrive he ordered his platoon to withdraw, which they did during the night. Their circuitous route through the swamp took two days to travel before the 3d Battalion Command Post, just east of Entrance Creek, could be reached. Lieutenant Matz and the Corporal remained behind the enemy lines fighting for survival until reached by A and F Companies on the 28th of December, four days later.. (133)

Our attacks across Government Gardens continued on Christmas Day and through the 28 December with little success. The attack on 25 December had no artillery or mortar preparation, but a diversionary attack from Musita Island instead. (134) A and F Companies did reach the road junction southeast of Buna in the Government Plantation but the Japs attacked their rear, destroyed A Company's Weapons Platoon and cut them off from the remainder of our force. On the 27 December General Eichelberger came to the Gardens to personally direct the operations. Colonel J. S. Bradley took a command group to establish communications with the forward element, and on 28 December this was accomplished. (135)

(133) Statement, Major (then Captain) C. H. Schrader who was S-3, 3d Battalion 127 Infantry during this action; (134) B, p. 31; (135) A, p. 57

E Company 127 Infantry containing the Triangle found, on 28 December, that the enemy resistance was weak. They promptly attacked and took the position. The Japs had evacuated 18 strong, mutually supporting bunkers and connecting fire trenches. (136)

Also on 28 December K Company launched an attack from the Island across Entrance Creek in assault boats. This was repulsed and our troops landed on our side under heavy enemy fire. (137)

On 29 December the attack in the Gardens was renewed and it cut through to the Sea. By late afternoon our troops were well dug in on a corridor which reached across the Gardens and the Plantation fanning out to a width of 200 to 400 yards on the coast southeast of Buna. (138) (See Map D) This corridor was actually a trench about 3 feet deep and 3 feet wide through which men moved single file, to debouch at the trail junction and run for the beach. It was protected by automatic fire along its length. The Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon had done the actual construction. (139)

At the mouth of Entrance Creek on 29 December a patrol from E Company 127 Infantry crossed the spit between the Village and the Mission; they reported it as a favorable crossing site. And on 31 December they, with F Company 128 Infantry, waded the spit before dawn. On the Mission side they swung east, but were unable to secure a bridgehead on the trail for G Company because excessive noise, made in crossing, had alerted the enemy. (140)

(136) B, p. 31; (137) A, p. 57; (138) B, p. 32; (139) Statement, Major C. H. Schrader; (140) A, p. 59

On 30 December the corridor to the Sea was enlarged, and on 31 December the small 2d Battalion 126 Infantry attacked east advancing 300 yards; one patrol operating to the south-east contacted the Warren Forces' left. (141)

New Year's Day 1943 G Companies 127 and 128 Infantries moved into the corridor to attack the Mission. On 2 January they with A, C, F, I and L Companies 127 Infantry attacked northwest behind artillery and mortar fire while F Company 128 Infantry attacked from the spit toward Buna. The mission was taken. The few Japs who escaped swam out to sea. C 127 Infantry moved in support of B 127 Infantry attacking Giropa Point from southeast side of corridor. These two companies were commanded by Captain Charles H. Schrader (later Major). (142) By dark the entire coastline was ours and the Campaign of Buna was over. (143)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The strategic plan of the Allied Forces: to maintain pressure on the retreating enemy with troops already in contact, while making a secret wide envelopment of his left flank at Buna by air-transported troops was certainly sound in principle. (144) Even if the enemy situation had been properly evaluated the scheme of maneuver would have been generally the same. We had to maintain the initiative gained from our successes at Guadalcanal, in the Coral Sea, and on the Kokoda trail.

The tactical plan of the 32d Infantry Division for the capture of Buna failed to succeed, as originally conceived, for many reasons.

(141) B, p. 36; (142) Statement, Major C. H. Schrader;
(143) B, p. 37; (144) A, p. 5

It was based on an improper evaluation of the terrain and the enemy situation at Buna. Intelligence information from higher headquarters described him as weak. His force was believed to be Line of Communication troops, and combat troops already exhausted by their recent retreat over the Owen Stanley Mountains. (145) The terrain, due to inadequate maps and the inability of air reconnaissance to penetrate the jungle cover, could not be appreciated. Everyone, therefore, contemplated rapid movement into Buna. When it was further learned that secrecy had been lost, speed became the essential and the principle of mass was violated. For this the Commanders can not be too severely criticized. Where they did fail, however, was in not realizing the situation before 30 November and changing plans accordingly. But this failure was due to the considerations which follow.

Our forces lacked proper training. Their limited training in jungle warfare was in the Australian "high jungle" which was mountainous jungle quite different from the Buna battleground. (146) They were extremely weak in scouting and patrolling, and in small unit action. And the junior leaders were inexperienced. (147) Even after contact they made incomplete or improper reports to higher headquarters. Patrols very often went out only a few yards, sat down to agree on a story, and returned with an inaccurate report. (148)

The Japanese tactics and utilization of the terrain delayed our estimates and action. He made perfect use of natural cover and concealment; he so organized the ground that it was difficult to penetrate his defenses to gain information; and he took advantage of his complete bag of tricks for deception.

(145) B, p. 14; (146) Statement, Major C.H. Schrader; (147) G, p. 7; (148) Statement, Major C.H. Schrader

Once his situation had been determined reconnaissance was initiated to develop his position, and make a new tactical plan of attack. (This reconnaissance was conducted in force because of the patrolling failures just discussed. (149)) And thereafter action seemed to be better coordinated, although a coordinated attack as conceived on open terrain was never possible.

Staff operation in the early stages was definitely weak. No estimate of minimum daily requirements for supply were given to the Division rear causing the troops up front to suffer unnecessary hardship. Not all supply failures could be blamed on the transportation difficulty, however great.

The part of the Air Force in isolating the battlefield and transporting troops and supplies can not be over emphasized when analysing the success of this operation. Their tactical support of the ground forces in destruction of enemy ground troops was not too effective except as a demoralizing influence. However, it is evident that without Allied air superiority, a much greater ground force and many more weeks would have been required to reduce this position. The Air Force isolated the battlefield preventing Japanese reinforcements and supplies from arriving in large quantities. They resupplied, transported, and evacuated troops over the greatest leg of a 1700 mile supply route (150). Most of the 14,900 men that arrived in the Buna area were flown in C-47s (151). Artillery that finally arrived was all airborne at least part of the way, and when the 127 Combat Team arrived they were flown to within 10 miles of the front lines. To travel by land from Port Moresby to Buna took from 18 to 28 days; by air, 35 minutes. (152)

(149) Statement, Major C.H. Schrader; (150) A, p. 18;
(151) A, p. 19; (152) A, p. 20

Indirect artillery fire against such a position was of questionable value; except that it did contribute to demoralization.

Proper use of Tanks and Infantry was extremely effective. It should be noted that on the attack of 29 December by the Warren force when the Infantry was too far behind, the Japs were able to return to their firing positions in time to stop our foot troops. (153) But when, on 1 January, Infantry operated with the tanks they were successful. (154)

LESSONS

This operation of the 32d Division at Buna taught some new lessons of tactics but for the most part reemphasized many already known. These are:

1. That the Japanese were not invincible.
2. That the tactical principles taught in our Army are sound.
3. That plans must be based on adequate information as well as sound principles, and that they must be flexible to be successful.
4. That determined aggressive leadership, especially in small units, is essential. And that our Army needs more leadership training for non-commissioned and junior officers.
5. That proper staff operation is essential.
6. That the importance of air support to ground action is: first, air superiority; second, isolation of the battlefield; and third, close support of ground troops in the attack. Concurrent transportation and resupply is essential to certain operations.

(153) A, p. 52; (154) B, p. 38