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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 32ND INFANTRY DIVISION
AT BUNA, NEW GUINEA, 20 NOVEMBER 1942 -
3 JANUARY 1943

Type of operation described: INFANTRY DIVISION
ATTACKING A PREPARED POSITION IN THE
JUNGLE

Captain Robert H. Warren, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 2

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 32ND INFANTRY DIVISION
AT BUNA, NEW GUINEA, 19 NOVEMBER 1942 - 3
JANUARY 1943
(PAPUAN CAMPAIGN)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The 32nd Infantry Division, a National Guard unit from Wisconsin, was called into Federal service on 15 October 1940. After participation in the Louisiana maneuvers it was sent to a staging area on the east coast. From there it was ordered overland to the Pacific coast and sent to Australia in April 1942. There it received very sketchy training in jungle warfare under the command of Maj. Gen. Edwin F. Harding. This is the story of their first combat action and, in fact, one of the first counter offensives launched by the United Nations in the Pacific Theatre. (1)

Some of the earlier successes of the Japanese will be briefly recounted here in order to bring the situation confronting General MacArthur's Headquarters into form.

After the initial attacks and occupation of the Philippines, Malay, and the Netherland Indies, the Japanese began looking to the South Pacific, particularly toward New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand.

From Rabaul, New Britain which was occupied by the Japanese on 23 January 1942, they aimed a double pronged offensive. One drive was to occupy the Solomon Islands and thereby sever the American supply line to Australia; the other was aimed at gaining control of southeastern New Guinea in preparation for an invasion of Australia. Both of these efforts were doomed to fail.

(1) A-1, p. 4
A-2, p. 46

The threat to the Solomons was forestalled by The United States Marines in their landings on Tulagi, Gavutu, Florida and Guadalcanal on 7 August.

The Battle of the Coral Sea, 4-8 May 1942, put a damper on the Japanese plans in the Papuan peninsula of New Guinea. In this naval battle, the Japanese convoy was met by an American Naval Force off the southeastern tip of New Guinea and the Jap was decisively beaten. This ended the immediate threat to Port Moresby and northeastern Australia. (2)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The losses in The Battle of the Coral Sea did not deter the Japanese very long. On 21 and 22 July a convoy landed at Gona and put ashore Maj. Gen. Tomitaro Horii with some 4,000 troops. By the middle of August this force was built up to 11,000 men and the drive over the Owen Stanley Mountains to Port Moresby began. (3)

The Owen Stanley Mountains rise to heights of 13,000 feet and to march and supply an Army by hand carry from Buna-Gona-Sananda was no mean feat. None-the-less the Japanese did it and descended the southern slopes to within 32 miles of Port Moresby where the Australians turned them back.

During this period the 32nd Division was broken into Regimental Combat Teams and two of them, the 126th Infantry and the 128th Infantry both minus any artillery and about 2/3 of their

(2) A-1, p.1
(3) A-1, p.1

81 MM mortars, were moved to Port Moresby. However, by the time they were deployed on the Australian flank, the Japanese were retreating back over the mountains and the 32nd Division had yet to make contact. (4)

As the Japanese continued their retreat over the Kokoda trail, more consideration was given to an engagement in the Buna vicinity.

The Advance Detachment, Headquarters 32nd Infantry Division was moved by air to Port Moresby on 2 October. Among the many problems confronting Division Headquarters the most outstanding were:

1. Uncertainty as to size of forces under Division control. The 126th Infantry had been attached to the Commanding General, New Guinea Forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey and the 128th Infantry was under the control of 7th Australian Division.
2. Lack of terrain information because of inadequate and incomplete maps and uncreditable reconnaissance reports.
3. Supply problems, inasmuch as all supplies over the mountains must be hand carried or air dropped. (5)

General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Southwest Pacific Area; Gen. Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander of Allied Land Forces, Southwest Pacific Area and Commanding General, New Guinea Force; and Lt. Gen. E. F. Herring, Commanding General Advanced New Guinea Force met in Port Moresby and decided that the Australians would continue the pursuit of the Japanese over the Owen Stanleys while the 32nd Infantry Division made a wide envelopment in the vicinity of Buna. This decision was reached early in October. (6)

(4) A-1, p.4
(5) A-5, p.7
(6) A-1, p.5

The 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry, acting as left flank guard for the Division, crossed the Owen Stanley Mountains on foot. After a five weeks march, they reached Bofu on 20 November.

The 128th Infantry was moved by air to a hastily improvised strip at Wanigela Mission on Collinwood Bay, about 65 miles from Buna. From there it moved by small boat to Pongani, about 23 miles south from Buna, where it began construction of a landing strip. The 126th Infantry less the 2nd Battalion and part of the 1st Battalion landed at this strip on 10-11 November. (7)

On 13 November Advanced Detachment, Headquarters 32nd Infantry Division was transported from Port Moresby to Pongani thence by canoe and lugger to Mendaropu where the Division Command Post was established. (8)

THE SITUATION AT BUNA

The terrain in the vicinity of Buna is extremely flat coastal plain, characterized by impenetrable swamps. The elevation at Buna air strip is five feet above sea level while Soputa, seven and one half miles inland, is only ten feet above sea level. The Girua River flows from the Owen Stanley Mountains into the swamps southeast of Buna and finally empties into the sea through several mouths. Entrance Creek is one of these mouths opening into a lagoon between Buna Mission and Buna Village. (9)

Buna Mission is the pre-war seat of government for the area. It consisted of three European style houses and a few dozen native huts. Buna Village, about a half mile to the northwest, was a cluster of huts. (10)

(7) A-1, p.5

A-2, p.13

(8) A-5, p.6

(9) A-1, p.10

(10) A-2, p.2

The drier ground is devoted to coconut palm plantations or allowed to grow up in Kunai grass, often exceeding six feet in height. This grass has sharp, broad leaves with stems up to 3/8 inch thick. The remainder of the terrain, for the most part impenetrable swamp, is grown up in snarls of mangrove trees or nipa palms. Visibility to a man standing up was from 5 to 30 yards, from a fox hole there was no visibility. (11)

The area was infested with more than its quota of diseases. Malaria, dengue fever, dhobi itch and scrub typhus were prevalent. For each two battle casualties, there were five men out of action from fever. The diseases, coupled with the temperature, the precipitation, and the depression brought on by the mere presence of the jungle were a more potent enemy than the Japanese army. The compulsory daily doses of quinine and atabrine merely suppressed the symptoms of disease. (12)

Buna's sole tactical importance lay in its air strip, southeast of the mission. This air field had been in operation prior to the war but had been enlarged by the enemy to a strip 1300 yards long and 90 yards wide and dispersal bays added. Our air force had put it out of commission late in September by cratering its runway. The Japanese had also constructed a dummy strip running east and west across Simemi Creek. This dummy strip was called the "New Strip" to distinguish it from the genuine "Old Strip". (13)

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- (11) A-1, p.10
(12) A-1, p.12
A-2, p.8
(13) A-1, p.10

The approach to Buna is difficult to say the least. By sea there are coral reefs and barriers extending out 25 miles. All sea borne cargo has to be discharged into lighters, usually native canoe, for transport to land. Overland there are no roads or rail facilities in all of New Guinea worthy of the name. There are four corridors extending into Buna, each with its trail or track. (14)

The Japanese forces in the Buna area numbered about 2200 men, who, for the most part, had not participated in the crossing over the mountains. They were commanded by Maj. Gen. Oda, replacing Gen. Horii who was drowned in the retreat from Port Moresby. These troops, soldiers and marines, were veterans of China, Malaya and the Pacific Islands. (15)

These forces were in positions at Gona, along the Soputa-Sananda track, and in Buna on their right flank extending along the sea to a point just below Cape Endaiadere. (16)

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The Allied plan called for a coordinated advance by the Australian 7th Division and the American 32nd Infantry Division with the boundry following generally the line of the Girua River. The 32nd Infantry Division plan was to advance with the 126th Infantry inland while the 128th Infantry moved up along the coast. This plan was somewhat complicated by the 126th Infantry being so widely scattered but was implemented never the less.

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- (14) A-1, p.11
(15) A-2, p.42-44
(16) A-2, p.9

THE NARRATION

The picture at the time of commitment to combat of the 32nd Infantry Division is confusing.

The Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Edward F. Harding, was stranded at Embogu when the convoy of small boats, transporting a company of Australian artillery (25 pounders), which the General had boarded was put out of action by Japanese aircraft. This caused all plans, orders, etc to be relayed to him for approval and, doubtless, caused delay. (17)

In addition, the loss of the artillery for support, and the loss of the boats which were scheduled to play a vital role in supply, did not brighten the outlook.

However, these were not the only confusing incidents. Contact was lost with the Australian 7th Division and their whereabouts were unknown. Their radio operators functioning with our Division could not contact them. Higher headquarters were unable to furnish information concerning them. Finally an Australian patrol made contact and revealed that all was going according to schedule as far as the 7th Division was concerned. (18)

On 16 November 2nd Battalion 128th Infantry with one company of Engineers started clearing a landing field at Dobudura. A Japanese air attack on 17 November knocked out what remained of the small boats for supply functions and two additional companies of Engineers were sent to the air field task. These forces completed 1300 yards of air strip in six days.

(17) A-5, p.7

(18) A-5, p.8

Meanwhile the remainder of the 128th Infantry were on the march toward Cape Endaiadere and the 126th Infantry was en-route to Dobudura. As they reached Horando, they were ordered by Headquarters, New Guinea Forces to proceed immediately to Soputa via Pependetta where they would be under control of the 7th Australian Division. This left the 32nd Infantry Division with one regiment committed and no reserve except a portion of the 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry. (19)

On 17-18 November the Japanese garrison was reinforced by one battalion.

There were four narrow fronts on which the Americans could launch their attack on the Japanese positions from Buna Village to a point below Cape Endaiadere. (1) Through the swamp in front of Buna Village. (2) Against the fork at the Triangle on Soputa-Buna Track. (3) Across the bridge between the air strip and (4) Through the coconut plantation below Cape Endaiadere. For the Americans to move from flank to flank of these positions, a two days march was involved while the Japanese could cover the same territory inside their perimeter in a few minutes by motor.

On 20 November elements of the 128th Infantry contacted the enemy on a line roughly 700 yards south of Cape Endaiadere and running inland to the new strip. Their advance was held up by Japanese fires from prepared positions and the 128th Infantry dug in for the night. (20)

That evening G H Q sent orders to take Buna the following morning following an aerial preparation of bombing and strafing. The results of this preparation were not very gratifying because of failure of air-ground communications, ineffectiveness of area

(19) A-5, p.12
(20) A-2, p.15

bombardment against pill boxes and some casualties were inflicted on our own troops. Although the attack was pressed it was again repulsed. (21)

On 20 November the 126th Infantry less its 1st Battalion closed on Soputa. They were ordered to attack at dawn on the 22nd with the 3rd Battalion in assault and the 2nd in support. Immediately after the 3rd was committed, the 2nd Battalion was released from the Australian 7th Division and ordered to move in support of the 128th Infantry before Buna. (22)

The 2nd Battalion, 128th Infantry and the 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry came into contact in Gerai Gardens on the track from Soputa. They encountered weak resistance until Entrance Creek was reached where the track forks. They attempted to move through the swamp between the track and the river. As they approached Buna Village, prepared defensive positions stopped them. (23)

Troop dispositions at this time were:

On the right flank, 1st Battalion and 3rd Battalion, 128th Infantry; 1st Battalion less detachments, 126th Infantry; Australian 6th Independent Company; a troop of three 3.7 inch howitzers and two 25 pounders.

On the left flank, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, less one company; 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry; and two 25 pounders. (24)

Henceforth, the right flank force was known as Warren Force and that on the left as Urbana Force.

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- (21) A-5, p.12
(22) A-5, p.12
(23) A-2, p.15
(24) A-5, p.13

It was now apparent that the Buna operation was not to be the quick assault action that had been anticipated.

On 26 November after 75 minutes of heavy bombardment and tree top strafing by the 5th Air Force and one half hour of artillery and mortar preparation, the Warren Force attacked. However no appreciable gain was made. Maj. Gen. Hanford MacNider, Asst. Division Commander, who was in command was wounded and evacuated on 27 November. He was succeeded by Col. J. Tracy Hale, Commanding Officer 128th Infantry. (25)

The remainder of November was a stalemate with little action except minor patrol engagements.

By the end of November all of the battalions were at about one half strength and the troops were existing on a portion of a ration per day. Quartermaster records indicate that for over a week there was 1/3 of a "C" ration and 1/6 of a "D" ration per man per day. The 32nd Infantry Division had failed to fix a daily minimum supply requirement. (26)

Even the chain of command had broken and the troop units were a hodge-podge mixture including the mixing of platoons from different companies. (27)

Needless to say, morale was low.

(25) A-1, p.29
(26) A-1, p.24
(27) A-2, p.17

BREAK THROUGH TO SEA

On 1 December, General Robert L. Eichelberger, Commanding General, I Corps, assumed command of the Buna Area. An attack, planned by the 32nd Division, was allowed to proceed unchanged. This plan called for a feint by the Warren Force while the Urbana Force pushed against Buna Village. The attack failed. (28)

The Japanese garrison received another reinforcement of 1000 men on 2-3 December. (29)

The period 3-4 December was one of reorganization for the 32nd Division. Maj. Gen. Harding was relieved of command and was succeeded by Brig. Gen. Albert W. Waldron, Division Artillery Commander. Col. John W. Mott who commanded the Urbana Force (left flank) was succeeded by Col. John E. Grose, I Corps Inspector General. Col. Clarence A. Martin took command of Warren Force from Col. J. Tracy Hale Jr. (30)

All units were returned to their organizational integrity to regain the chain of command and immediate steps were taken to remedy the supply situation, particularly rations.

At 1030 hours on 5 December the attack was launched on both fronts following aerial, mortar and artillery preparation which again proved ineffective.

On the Warren front the assault was led by five Bren gun carriers. These were all out of action after thirty minutes due to the vulnerability of the crews to sniper action. This flank pressed the attack all day for no gains against log barricades and bunkers, mutually supported and connected by firing trenches and emplaced in depth. (31)

(28) A-2, p.19
(29) A-2, p.19
(30) A-2, p.20
(31) A-2, p.21

The Urbana Force met the same type of resistance but were able to advance by virtue of determined leadership coupled with sheer guts. One of the platoons of G Company, 126th Infantry drove a wedge to the sea between Buna Village and Buna Mission. This platoon was commanded by S/Sgt. Herman J. Bottcher, German born and a veteran of the Loyalist International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. For the outstanding leadership displayed by Sgt. Bottcher, he was appointed a Captain. (32)

By night fall the Urbana Force was pressed against the defenses around Buna Village and dug in along the corridor to the sea. The entire west bank of Entrance Creek was in our hands except the Coconut Grove. For the first time the enemy lines were breached although the enemy had a marvelous reentrant from the Coconut Grove should they decide to use it. (33)

The Japanese tactics throughout this campaign were entirely defensive. They launched few counterattacks except those in desperation near the end. (34)

During this action General Waldron was shot through the shoulder and was succeeded in command of the Division by Brig. Gen. Clovis E. Byars, Chief of Staff, I Corps. (35)

CAPTURE OF BUNA VILLAGE

From 6-13 December the Division was further reorganized. Headquarters, The Advanced Echelon, I Corps was combined with Headquarters, 32nd Infantry Division to become Headquarters, Buna Forces under the command of Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger. (36)

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- (32) A-1, p.40
A-2, p.21
(33) A-2, p.21
(34) A-2, p.65
(35) A-2, p.22
(36) A-2, p.23

The minimum daily requirement of all types of supplies was established and the flow of rations was increased. Patrol activities were intensified in preparation for the forthcoming attack.

On the Urbana Front enemy counterattacks on our corridor were repulsed.

The strength of the Urbana Force at this time was approximately 55 officers and 1062 enlisted men under the control of Lt. Col. Clarence M. Tomlinson, Commanding Officer, 126th Infantry, which had been released by the 7th Australian Division. The Warren Force was 114 officer, 1955 enlisted men. (37)

While this lull in activities existed, the remainder of 126th Infantry was released by the Australians and the 127th Infantry was air transported from Morseby to Dobodura and Popen-etta. I and K companies, 127th Infantry relieved the 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry around Buna Village. (38)

At 0700 on 14 December, following the usual artillery and mortar preparation, I and K Companies, 127th jumped off for Buna Village which was subdued by 1000 hours. Most of the enemy had been evacuated.

THE ACTIONS OF URBANA FORCE

While the Urbana Force enjoyed the high morale resulting from their taking of the Village, they were aimed toward Coconut Grove and The Triangle. At 1500 on 16 December, artillery and mortars opened a 20 minute preparation on Coconut Grove followed by the attack of E and F Companies, 128th Infantry. Again the preparatory fires were ineffective against the Japanese positions

(37) A-2, p.23

(38) A-2, p.24

and the attack bogged down at the edge of the Grove. At the following dawn a determined charge ^{was} ~~run~~ over the enemy positions and the Grove was taken. (39)

Meanwhile, G Company, 128th had been given the task of containing the Triangle from the south. They were now ordered to attack while E Company, 128th Infantry, advanced from the Grove. H E and smoke covered a bridgehead from the southeast over Entrance Creek. Again the attacks were held up by automatic weapons fire from the superb Japanese defensive positions.

During this action, Gen. Byars was wounded and evacuated and Gen. Eichelberger took direct command. (40)

The 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry relieved G and E Companies, 128th Infantry on 18-20 December. They hammered repeatedly at the enemy with all the strength they could muster, including artillery mortars close enough in front of their own positions to be dangerous. On 20 December, E Company, 127th Infantry relieved the 2nd Battalion 126th. Their attack likewise failed. Gen. Eichelberger ordered the Triangle to be contained while the attack was pushed against Buna Mission. (41)

By 23 December Companies I and K of the 127th had crossed Entrance Creek by paying a heavy toll in casualties to heavy enemy fire and had opened a corridor of sufficient width and depth to allow an attack by the 2nd Battalion, 127th the next day. F Company, 127th had taken the island in Entrance Creek. During the night L Company, 127th Infantry moved into position to spearhead the attack across the Gardens. The results are best recounted

(39) A-2, p.26
(40) A-2, p.27
(41) A-2, p.30

in the following extract of a letter from Lt. Gen. Eichelberger to Gen. MacArthur:

I think the all time low of my life occurred yesterday. We had seven line companies available and I had given five of them to Grose (Urbana Force) to attack but when the rolling barrage started his troops bogged down in the kunai grass, which is about five feet high. He was unable to get reports back from L Company, one platoon of which did go through and arrive at the beach. His right company, I Co. bogged down almost at once - - - - - Instead of pushing through with a power drive as I had instructed - - - - - thinking his whole force had bogged down, he delayed his advance. When he found the platoon of L Co. had gone through he pushed K Co. in. K Co. did not acquit itself well and only one officer and eight men got through. As a consequence the platoon of L Co. which reached the beach - - - - - withdrew." (42)

The attack was renewed on Christmas day with diversiónary fires from the island. Some progress was made but they were still short of the beach. On the 28th an attack by assault boats from the island was launched and at the same time the bridge from the island was to be repaired and an attack launched over it. The boats were forced to land under heavy enemy fire on the American side of the Creek. (43)

On the 28th E Co. 127th Infantry launched a successful attack against the dissipated enemy position in the Triangle. (44)

The 29th of December found a successful attack smashing through the Gardens and by night fall a consolidated corridor was established including 400 yards of the beach between Buna Mission and Giropa Point. (45)

(42) A-2, p.31
(43) A-2, p.31
(44) A-2, p.32
(45) A-2, p.32

ACTIONS OF THE WARREN FORCE

The Warren Force was reinforced on 15 December with seven tanks, M-3s, of the 2/6 Australian Field Brigade and the 2/9 Australian Infantry Battalion of the 18th Brigade. They were accompanied by the Brigade Commander, Brigadier George F. Wooten who, by reason of seniority, succeeded Col. Martin in command of the force. (46)

On the 18th the tanks and the Australian Infantry passed through the 3rd Battalion, 128th Infantry in an attack to the north toward Cape Endaiadere. The 3rd Battalion followed, mopping up. The 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry wheeled to the west and a line was established from the east end of the New Strip to a point on the coast about 600 yards west of Cape Endaiadere. (47)

Progress was made along this line, despite the loss of three tanks and many casualties from snipers. By the 20th our line extended from a point on the coast about 500 yards west of strip point southwest to Simemi Creek thence down the creek to just north of the bridge between the strips and then south across new Strip about 150 yards from the bridge. The troop dispositions, from left to right, were as follows:

1st Battalion, 126th Infantry; 1st and 3rd Battalions, 128th Infantry; and the 2/9 Australian Infantry Battalion.

The Warren Force reorganized on this line while patrols sought a suitable crossing over Simemi Creek. This, they found north of the dispersal bays at the southeast end of the old strip. The 2/10 Australian Infantry Battalion established the

(46) A-2, p.27
(47) A-2, p.33

bridgehead and three companies poured over. The 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry attacked down the New Strip and crashed over the bush between the strips and joined the 2/10 Infantry Battalion on a line facing west 300 yards across the old strip. (48)

24 December saw an attack by 2/10 Australian Infantry Battalion with tanks attached moved up the northeast side of Old Strip while 1st Battalion, 126th Infantry moved across the strip and up the southeast side. They met little resistance until they gained the northeast end of the strip where bunkers supported machine guns and dual purpose anti aircraft guns. They inched ahead by infiltration until 28 December. Meanwhile deep to their rear a force of eleven M 3 tanks of the Australian 2/6 Field Regiment were moving up with the Australian 2/12 Infantry Battalion. (49)

THE SECURING OF BUNA

The Urbana Force was not idle during the latter days of December. On the 31st E Company, 127th Infantry and F Company, 128th Infantry pushed across the mouth of Entrance Creek and established themselves on the spit west of Buna Mission. The 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry, sadly depleted, attacked across the Gardens from the Triangle and established contact with the left flank of the Warren Force.

The final attack jumped off with G Company, 127th Infantry spearheading it, on 3 January. Elements in the assault included A, C, F, G, I and L Companies of the 127th Infantry. At the same time F Company, 128th Infantry moved in from the beach. Despite heavy cross fires from a determined enemy, the attack gained

(48) A-2, p.34
(49) A-2, p.35

momentum and Buna Mission was taken.

General Eichelberger wrote of the action:

"At 4:30 P. M. I crossed the bridge after C Company had passed and I saw American troops with their bellies out of the mud and their eyes in the sun, circling unafraid around the bunkers. It was one of the grandest sights I have ever seen. The 127th Infantry found its soul."

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

ENEMY DEFENSES

Japanese forces had made superb utilization of the terrain. The ground did not permit digging in, because of the high water table, so the enemy used built up positions. These bunkers were constructed of coconut logs and earth using sand bags, gasoline drums, ammunition cases etc to contain the earth. An overhead covering several feet thick was provided. These bunkers were in depth and mutually supporting.

Where fields of fire did not exist, the Japanese did not clear them but depended on sniper-sentinels in trees to warn of the approach of Allied forces. Not all of the bunkers had fire ports. Those without them were used as shelters during artillery and mortar bombardment and accounted for the ineffectiveness of our barrages.

Had the 32nd Infantry Division been in possession of any of our larger direct fire weapons such as rocket launchers, 57 MM rifles, etc these bunkers could have been effectively neutralized in a short time.

SUPPLY AND COMMUNICATIONS

It would be an understatement to say that the problem of supply in this operation was difficult. The Base Section was in Australia (Brisbane) with the Advance Section at Port Morseby and with a sub-section at Milne Bay. Lack of deep water anchorages coupled with enemy surface vessels and air power caused water borne supplies to be transferred from ocean vessels to lighters of from 50 to 500 ton capacity at Milne Bay. (50)

The 5th Air Force with their work-horses, the C-47s, were the redeeming feature of the entire supply and evacuation problem. They not only transported most of the fighting men, some 15,000 of them, to the scene of the engagement but also brought in the bulk of the supplies necessary to sustain them and when they became casualties they were carried out the same way they were brought in.

The movement of the 128th Infantry Regiment from Australia to Port Morseby was the first large unit air movement by the United States in any theatre.

Small arms, ammunition and medical supplies were dropped by parachute. Food, clothing and individual equipment was allowed to fall free. The items that fell free averaged about 50 per cent losses, due to breakage, failure to find the proper drop grounds and in some instances drops into enemy

held territory. Air-ground liaison and communications were simply not capable of coping with the situation. (51)

Some supplies were brought overland from Port Moresby by native carrier. However the trip took from 18 to 28 days to complete and aircraft could fly it in 35 minutes so it can be seen that few supplies came in this way.

The saddest part of the entire supply situation was that the rear supply installations were having to decide what the front line troops needed and would get instead of the front line units saying what they needed. All of the supply requests were marked "urgent" so that the Division Quartermaster at Milne Bay had to decide on all priorities. This condition existed until I Corps combined its headquarters with that of the 32nd Infantry Division. (52)

Many problems in communication presented themselves during this operation. Besides those imposed by the terrain there were many others. Radio sets would not function due to corrosion and short circuiting caused by the damp, hot climate. The portable sets were too limited in range by the dense jungle growth to be of much value when they could be operated. While the larger sets used to communicate with the rear installations worked well, the Signal Corps people were burdened down with the encoding and decoding of messages.

Some 300 miles of wire was laid down, all of it by hand and much of it under fire. In addition to the damages to wire

(51) A-1, p.20

(52) A-1, p.24

communications that can normally be expected, frequent examples are cited of native carriers innocently cutting lengths of it to tie their bundles. Wire communications were somewhat misused to carry out routine administration which could have been handled in other ways, freeing the communications nets for better use.

THE STAFF FUNCTIONS

The Division staff, both special and coordinating, apparently ceased to function from the time the unit was committed until December 1st when the two headquarters, I Corps and 32nd Division, were combined. G-1 neglected his morale contributing activities such as mail etc, at the very time it was worst needed. G-2 failed to establish an intelligence plan and intelligence reports were collated and disseminated haphazardly. The failure of G-4 are outlined in the paragraphs above on supply. The Division Engineer was not consulted prior to the operation and in fact, did not leave Australia until late October when he, the Assistant Division Engineer, and two of his lettered companies joined the Division. As a result the Division had to get along with less than a half of its Engineer Battalion when it could have easily used an entire Engineer General Service Regiment or more. (53)

(53) A-2, p.99

The Division Medical Units were composed of brave and efficient men but were handicapped by insufficient equipment, food and other facilities. There are hints in some of the after-action reports that the medical officers were too quick to order the evacuation of many patients suffering from what the medics call "fever of undetermined origin." The casualties of the Division were 707 killed, 1680 wounded and 8286 disease cases, mostly malaria. (54)

LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLINE

There are many examples of both good and bad leadership in this campaign. Most of the failures in leadership were due to an over-sympathetic attitude toward the hardships of the men, no steps taken to counteract the propoganda concerning the myth of the invincibility of the Japanese forces which had been fostered by the Japanese and kept alive by Allied newspapers and magazines, the break-down of the chain of command, and allowing leaders and followers alike to become permeated with the tendency toward lethargy brought on by the tropics.

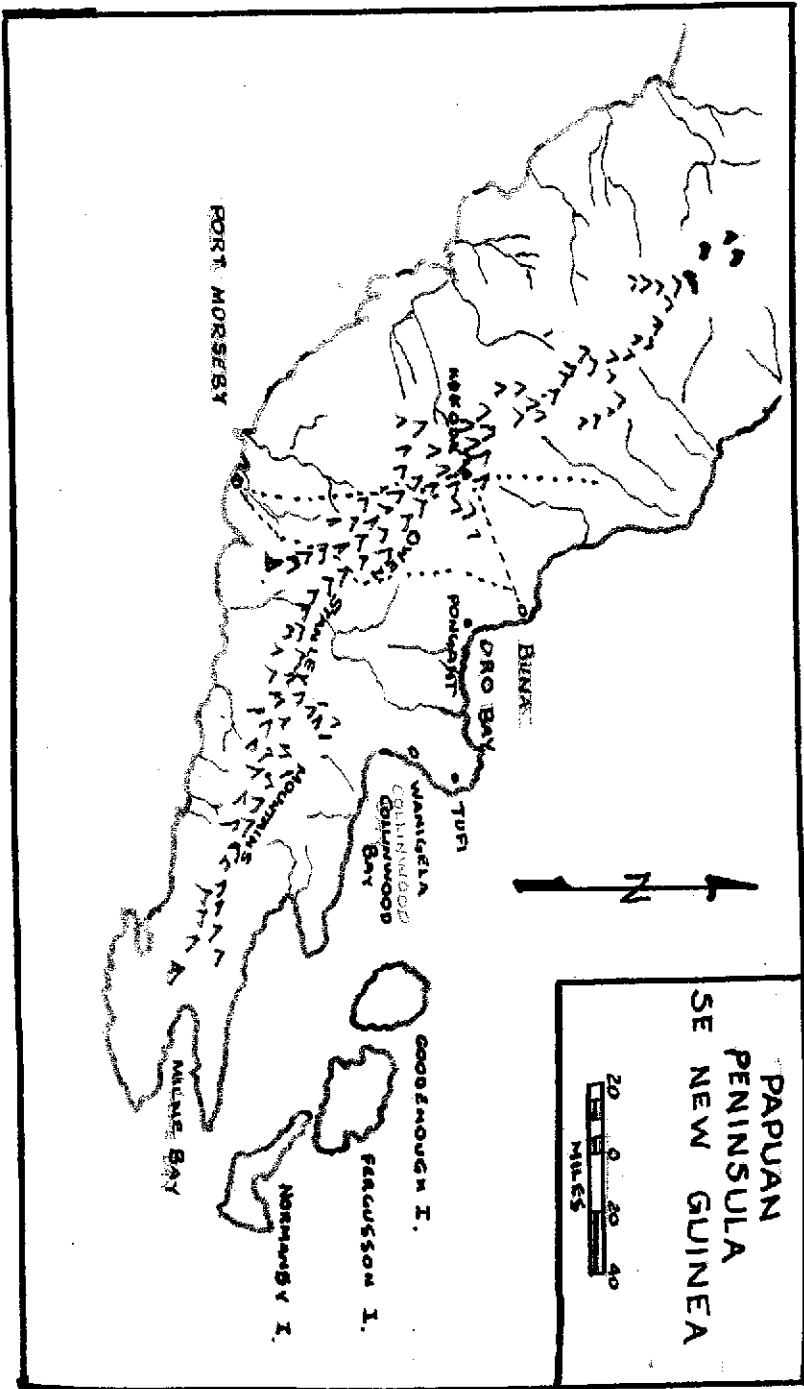
LESSONS

1. The chain of command must remain inviolate if a unit is to succeed in combat.
2. Staffs and staff officers must not abandon the training and principles taught in our schools.
3. Agressive leadership must be maintained and practiced.
Leaders must lead.

(54) A-2, p.71

4. Let the right hand be aware of the movements of the left. Free and full use must be made of all facilities for passing along information from the highest to the lowest units.

5. Training can not be stereotyped. We can not expect a unit which has been trained to fight over a certain type of terrain or a certain portion of the earth to be thrown into something entirely new and not make mistakes. Let all of us profit from the experiences in the different zones of the world during the last war so that we may be better prepared for the next one.



PAPUAN
PENINSULA
SE NEW GUINEA

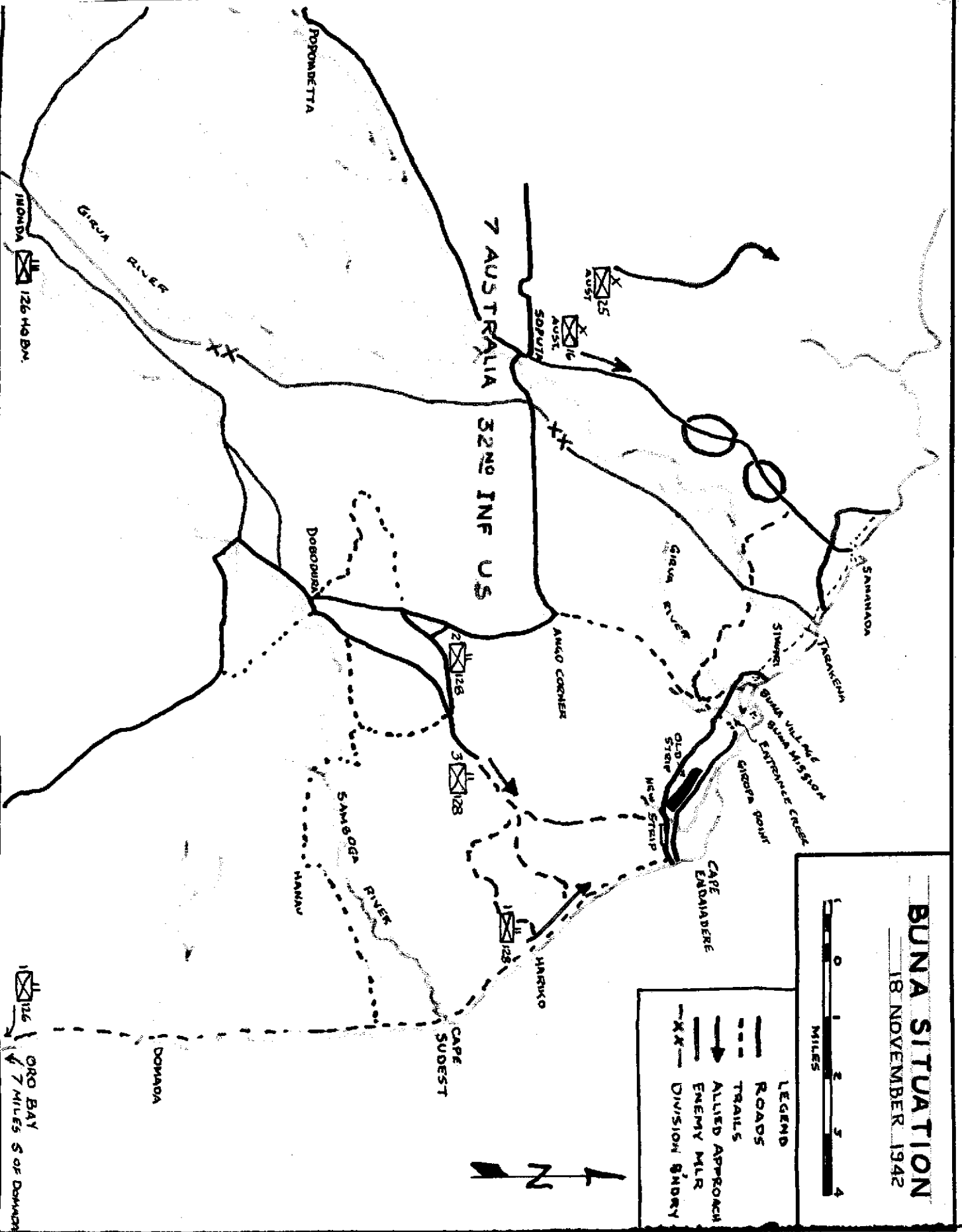
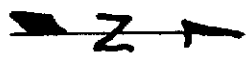


BUNA SITUATION

18 NOVEMBER 1942

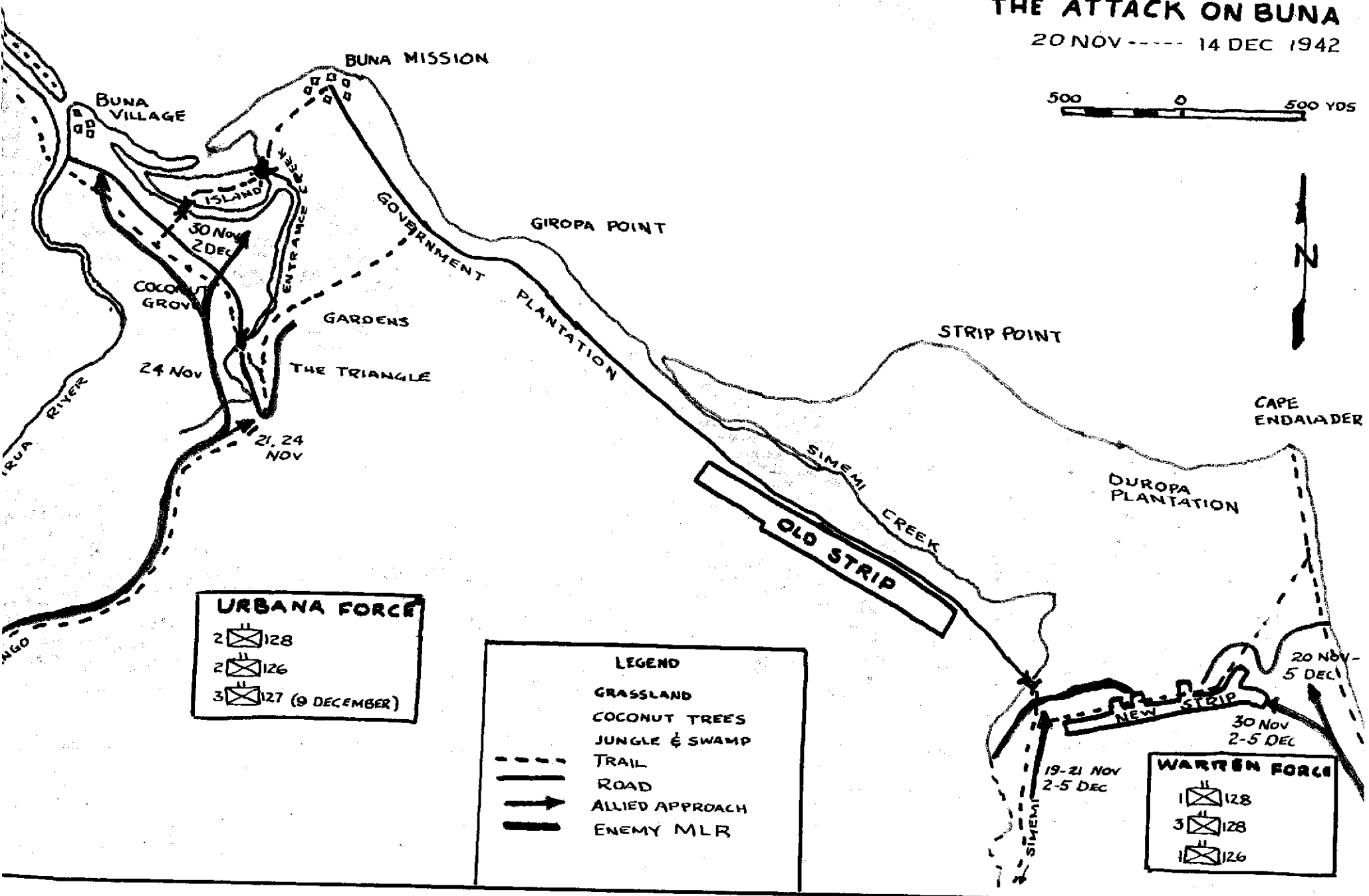


- LEGEND
- ROADS
 - - - TRAILS
 - ALLIED APPROACH
 - ENEMY MLR
 - X-X- DIVISION BOUNDARY



THE ATTACK ON BUNA

20 NOV ----- 14 DEC 1942



URBANA FORCE

2 128

2 126

3 127 (9 DECEMBER)

LEGEND

GRASSLAND

COCONUT TREES

JUNGLE & SWAMP

--- TRAIL

== ROAD

→ ALLIED APPROACH

— ENEMY MLR

WARREN FORCE

1 128

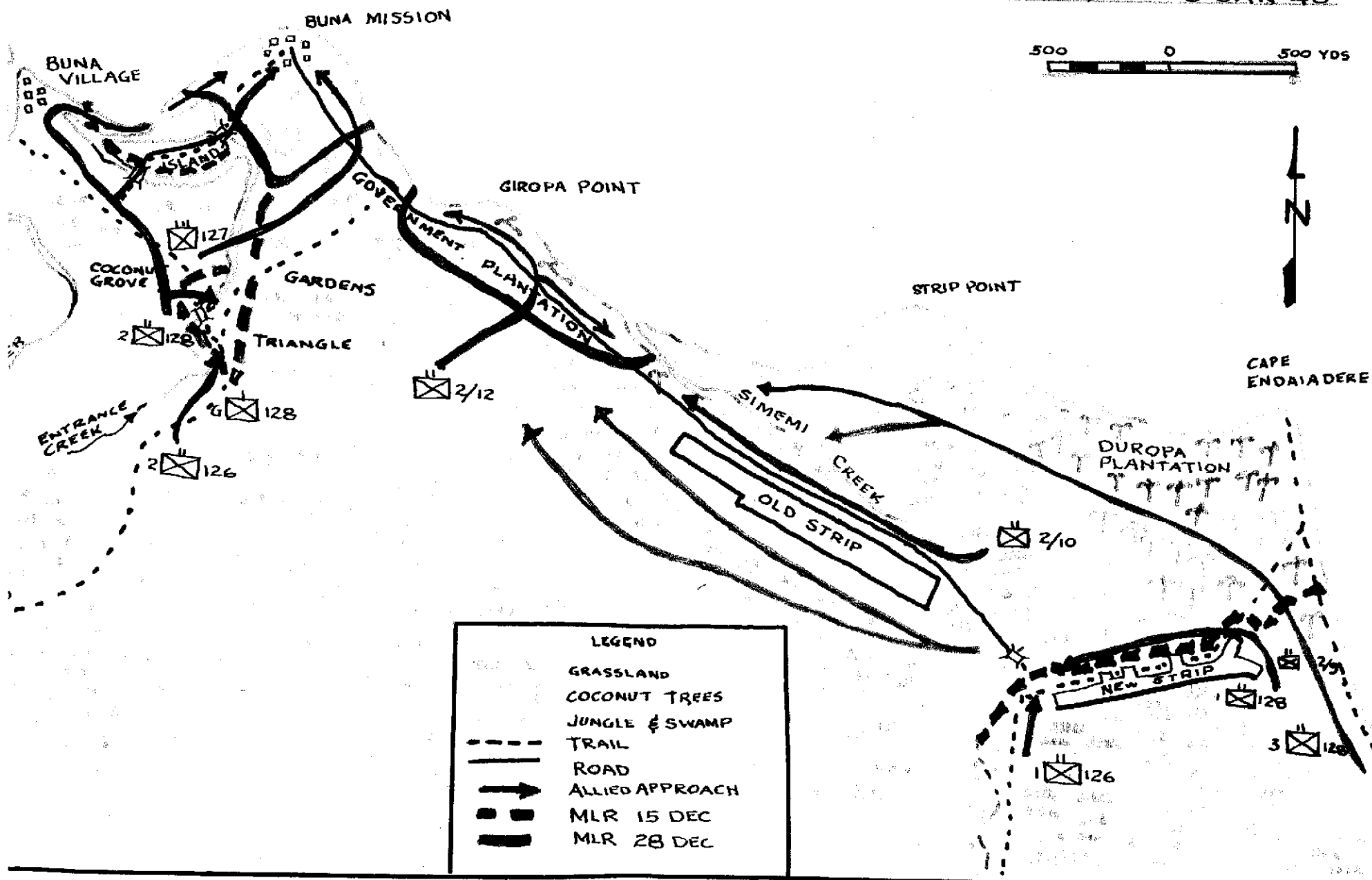
3 128

1 126

AGE

CAPTURE OF BUNA

15 DEC 42 3 JAN 43



LEGEND	
(Dotted pattern)	GRASSLAND
(Small circles)	COCONUT TREES
(Wavy lines)	JUNGLE & SWAMP
(Dashed line)	TRAIL
(Double line)	ROAD
(Arrow)	ALLIED APPROACH
(Dashed arrow)	MLR 15 DEC
(Solid arrow)	MLR 28 DEC