

CHAPTER 13

TO DAGUA: AND ACROSS THE AMUK RIVER

WHILE General Stevens was awaiting a reply to his proposals of 6th January the floods subsided, the repairing of roads and bridges was begun, and Brigadier King's 16th Brigade completed the relief of the 19th in the coastal area. The incoming battalion commanders—P. A. Cullen of the 2/1st, A. G. Cameron of the 2/2nd, and Hutchison of the 2/3rd—had all led battalions in the Papuan operations of 1942 and 1943, and, with few exceptions, the majors and captains had served there as had most of the platoon commanders.¹ The proportion of officers and other ranks who had seen active service in New Guinea was relatively high by reason of the fact that in 1943 the brigade had absorbed large contingents from the battalions of the 30th Brigade, disbanded after their service in Papua.

One task allotted to the new brigade when it was warned to be ready to move forward was to secure the line Malin-Ilap-Aboama if the 19th Brigade had not already done so when it took over. The 19th Brigade had achieved this line, and the principal remaining tasks of the 16th were to harass the enemy by patrolling forward to the Anumb, and to maintain a standing patrol at Walum.² The supply problem, made more acute than before by the floods, was partly solved by running landing craft from Aitape to Dogreto Bay, the first beach on the coast where such craft could be employed. On 30th January 80 tons were put ashore, including six trucks, and jeeps and trailers, and thenceforward craft arrived every second or third day.³

A document captured in February showed that on 25th January there were 770 Japanese in the groups opposing the Australians on the coast. The 237th Regiment was still the main element of the force, but, as was usual with the Japanese when on the defensive, several detachments had been added, including those mentioned earlier.

Ahead of the 2/1st Battalion, which took over from the 2/11th in the northern sector on 24th January, lay the narrow coastal plain cut every few

¹ In October 1944 the 2/3rd Battalion, for example, had only one captain who had been promoted since 1942, and only five lieutenants whose seniority in the battalion was later than February 1943.

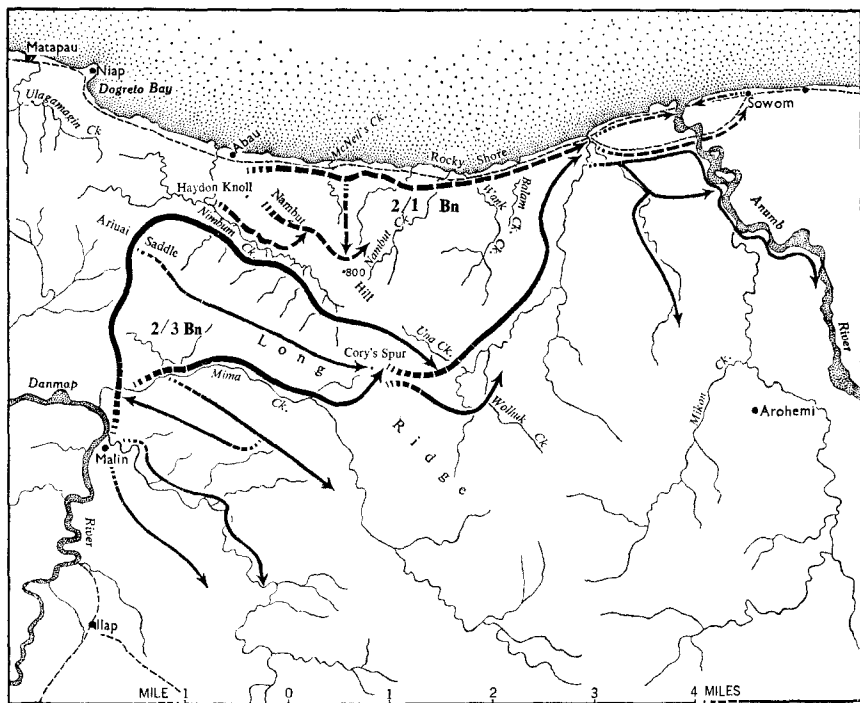
² When Brigadier King took over he had the following troops under command in addition to his own brigade:

- 2/6th Cavalry (Commando) Regiment
- Squadron 2/4th Armoured Regiment less three troops
- 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion less two companies
- Two sections 2/2nd Transport Platoon
- 2/3rd Transport Platoon
- 2/21st, 2/22nd and 2/23rd Supply Depot Platoons
- 2/7th Field Ambulance
- 110th Brigade Workshop
- 110th Brigade Ordnance Field Park
- Detachment 6th Division Salvage Unit
- Detachment Australian Army Canteens Service.

In support were the artillery of the division less one regiment and the engineers of the division less two field companies.

³ In January aircraft chartered from Australian National Airways to conduct a regular service from Australia to Hollandia and beyond began dropping bundles of newspapers to the forward troops. Welcome as this service was, the division as a whole would have preferred to have had some of these aircraft to help supply its force in the Torricellis.

hundred yards by creeks which drained a narrow ridge named Nambut Hill. On the southern side the ridge sloped down to Nimbun Creek. The most easterly position held by the battalion was a platoon post on the westernmost knoll (Haydon Knoll) of Nambut Hill. Cullen sought permission to occupy the whole of Nambut Hill but this was not given.



16th Brigade, 24th January-28th February

From 25th to 29th January, however, patrols probed forward along the ridge without seeing any Japanese, until on the 29th one was shot on a knoll by Lieutenant Haydon's⁴ platoon which was occupying a patrol base on Haydon Knoll. That night (29th-30th) a Japanese force estimated at about 30, using small arms, grenades and gelignite bombs, made a resolute attack which lasted five hours. The Australians, led with great courage and coolness by Haydon, drove off one assault after another, until the enemy withdrew to a knoll 200 yards to the east, leaving seven dead. Captured papers revealed that these Japanese were part of a battalion sent from Wewak to drive the Australians back across the Danmap. Thus began a fight which lasted three weeks.

⁴ Lt J. B. Haydon, NX16272. 7 Cav Regt and 2/1 Bn. Station hand; of Quirindi, NSW; b. Lismore, NSW, 15 Nov 1918.

On the 30th a platoon led by Lieutenant Crowden⁵ moved through the position on Haydon Knoll to attack the Japanese knoll but came under heavy fire. The Japanese, however, withdrew to a farther knoll. Artillery and mortar fire was brought down on them there but it was soon realised that the position could not be taken except with strong artillery and air support. This was organised and patrols were sent out to investigate possible approaches from the south. As a result of this patrolling Lieut-Colonel Cullen planned, on 4th February, that Captain Kendall's⁶ company should attack the hill from the south at a point about 1,000 yards east of the Japanese knoll. Unfortunately the air attack that was to precede the advance had to be cancelled because of the weather, and the attacking company was held by enemy fire when only 100 yards from the summit and eventually withdrawn. Meanwhile Lieutenant McNeil's⁷ platoon advancing on the knoll had almost reached the enemy's position but came under heavy fire which killed McNeil and one other; four Japanese were killed. Lieutenant A. D. B. Murray took command, reorganised the platoon, himself carried in McNeil's body under fire and conducted a withdrawal.

Patrolling and bombardment continued. On 7th February after accurate air attacks Lieutenant Gotts⁸ platoon took the knoll where four Japanese were killed and seven other dead were found, but the main enemy force withdrew. The Japanese then held a position—Feature 800—about 400 yards farther east.

On 11th February Captain C. J. Prior's company, probing along the coast took a Japanese position covering McNeil's Creek due north of the summit of Nambut. A platoon climbed south to seek an approach to the summit from that direction, and found no Japanese on the northern slopes.

To the north and east of Mima Creek in the 2/3rd Battalion's area rose Long Ridge, a long steep spur which culminated in a mountain (later named Mount Hutchison) about 3,200 feet above sea level. Here, as mentioned earlier, patrols of the 2/8th Battalion had had several severe clashes with aggressive parties of Japanese. After a patrol had found a track along the top of the spur, Hutchison on 31st January sent out to Long Ridge a force commanded by Lieutenant Cory⁹ and including two platoons (Lieutenants Weir¹ and Pope²), and an artillery officer (Lieutenant Needham³), with eight signallers and 10,000 yards of cable. The

⁵ Lt C. W. Crowden, TX10303; 2/1 Bn. Buttermaker; of Deloraine, Tas; b. Deloraine, 11 Nov 1918.

⁶ Capt C. McI. Kendall, NX34854; 2/1 Bn. Bank officer; of Port Kembla, NSW; b. Wellington, NSW, 27 Sep 1915.

⁷ Lt L. McNeil, NX114826; 2/1 Bn. Window dresser; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Newcastle, 30 Mar 1922. Killed in action 4 Feb 1945.

⁸ Lt R. J. Gotts, NX15361; 2/1 Bn. Farm manager; of Dunedoo, NSW; b. Wroxham, Norfolk, England, 21 Sep 1911.

⁹ Capt G. E. Cory, MC, DCM, NX7864; 2/3 Bn. Motor car salesman; of Uralla, NSW; b. Saumarez, NSW, 23 Dec 1909.

¹ Lt-Col S. P. Weir, MC, NX148640; 2/3 Bn. Regular soldier; b. Canterbury, Vic, 29 Dec 1922.

² Lt K. R. Pope, NX59156; 2/3 Bn. Law clerk; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 22 Sep 1917. Died of wounds 6 Feb 1945.

³ Lt B. Needham, VX621; 2/2 Fd Regt. Clerk; of Brighton, Vic; b. Brighton, 6 May 1919.

task given to Cory's force was to locate and destroy any enemy force on the track along this ridge, verify the existence of the track itself and check the position of streams on each side of the feature. Early on the 31st the men climbed from Mima Creek on to the ridge, there 2,500 feet high, and bivouacked. Next morning they climbed up towards what was later named Cory's Spur. The forward scouts sent back word that there were huts on the top of the slope and that they were occupied by Japanese. Pope's platoon attacked here, killing three while two others escaped. From this point three spurs rose. Cory chose the main one and the force began to advance along a narrow ridge from which rose a series of knolls on each of which unoccupied enemy positions were found. About 4 p.m. the forward scout, Private Perry,⁴ surprised a Japanese sentry and killed him silently with his machete, and soon reported a big camp and about 30 Japanese who were unaware of the presence of the Australians.

Cory deployed the force to attack this position, which was on a small plateau. This deployment took about twelve minutes with the Japanese working only a few yards away from the concealed Australians. Then Weir's men charged and had overrun three machine-guns and secured about one-third of the plateau before the Japanese had time to man the weapons that remained. Weir, although wounded, seized one machine-gun and fired it at the enemy. This leading platoon was now pinned down and Cory sent Pope's in. Pope reached Weir, who was in a Japanese fox-hole, but before they had time to say much to each other Pope was shot in the head. Sergeant Gooley⁵ took charge of Pope's platoon, and his men pressed on throwing grenades and firing Brens and sub-machine-guns but were soon pinned down by the Japanese who had reorganised on the highest part of the plateau. The fire fight continued until it was nearly dark, by which time little ammunition was left. Cory's force then withdrew with its wounded and its spoils but was forced by the darkness to bivouac just a few hundred yards down the very steep side of the mountain. Next morning they returned to the battalion area well satisfied with the battalion's first successful action in this campaign.

There were 33 Japanese dead—confirmed a week later by a count of Japanese graves on the site—including 10 armed with swords and pistols. The captured weapons included 10 pistols, 37 packs full of new equipment, 6 machine-guns of which some had not been fired. Two Australians had been killed or mortally wounded, and 7 wounded. Captured orders showed that the Japanese force was a special raiding force 62 strong and was to link with the forward troops and attack. Another two-platoon patrol of the 2/3rd, under Captain Gibbins,⁶ on 9th February found a Japanese

⁴ L-Cpl J. W. Perry, NX68719; 2/3 Bn. Apprentice tile-layer; of Kogarah, NSW; b. Kogarah, 15 Sep 1924.

⁵ Sgt B. V. Gooley, DCM, NX68829; 2/3 Bn. Mill hand; of Casino, NSW; b. Casino, 11 Jun 1919.

⁶ Capt G. W. Gibbins, NX12474; 2/3 Bn. Contractor; of Grafton, NSW; b. Sydney, 24 Jun 1916.

position in the vicinity of Cory's Spur and again launched a surprise attack, killing five and taking three machine-guns.⁷

In this period of very vigorous patrol action General Stevens received General Sturdee's decision of 10th February that the division might press on to Wewak, although it would be given no additional resources to help it do so. Promptly Stevens informed his subordinates that he intended to take, in succession, But, Dagua and Wewak, and, in the mountains, to capture Maprik and advance eastward. The 16th Brigade was given the specific preliminary tasks of securing the line of Wank Creek in order to give full protection to the supply base at Dogreto Bay, and then advancing to the Anumb River. Moten was informed that his task would have to be accomplished by a force of one battalion plus a company, two commando squadrons, and service troops, as this was all that the available aircraft could maintain.

After having issued these orders Stevens informed Sturdee that the advance eastward had begun but that "administratively the operation was a complete gamble" because he had no guarantee that the five L.C.T's then at Aitape would remain in his area, and the weather, as it had demonstrated, might dislocate the road, sea and air routes for days on end.

Brigadier King decided as an immediate move that the 2/3rd Battalion on the right would secure the line Wolhuk Creek-Una Creek, and the 2/1st, with a troop of tanks under command, would secure a line Nambut Hill-Nambut Creek. One company of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, at this stage under the command of the 16th Brigade, was to protect Dogreto Bay and prevent infiltration from the south.

The 2/1st made careful preparations for its attack. The task was given to Captain Givney's⁸ company and on the 14th he and a platoon commander looked at the ridge from the air. On the morning of 16th February Givney's men, guided by the Intelligence officer, Lieutenant Begg,⁹ moved up the spur from above McNeil's Creek and gained the summit of Feature 800 unnoticed, killing four Japanese on the southern crest and driving others off. Lieutenant Johns'¹ platoon now advanced along the ridge to take the defenders in the rear and met heavy fire about 400 yards to the west which killed two men in the leading section, but next day Johns patrolled to the Australian position on Haydon Knoll, the enemy in between having withdrawn in the night.

Exploiting from Feature 800 on Nambut, a platoon of Givney's company moved north-east down a steep razor-back saddle on 17th February,

⁷ The report of the 16th Brigade sets out the doctrine concerning attack accepted in this formation at this time: "When the attack is launched and especially if surprise has been effected, the force must at once strike with every weapon and man available and at the same time movement must be maintained. It is fatal for attacking troops to go to ground. . . . Troops who remain on their feet and move quickly from tree to tree run much less risk of becoming casualties even at point blank range. . . . Sufficient reserve should be available to bring through when the assault has lost intensity and the fire fight begins to develop. . . . The only time the soldier becomes so exhausted as to feel incapable of further action is when the officer in command succumbs to fatigue."

⁸ Capt E. C. Givney, MC, NX3908; 2/1 Bn. Public servant; of Canterbury, NSW; b. Tenterfield, NSW, 13 Feb 1912.

⁹ Lt C. E. Begg, NX106855; 2/1 Bn. Solicitor; of Cremorne, NSW; b. Sydney, 31 Jan 1917.

¹ Lt D. H. Johns, VX108505; 2/1 Bn. Tailor's cutter; of Ormond, Vic; b. Armadale, Vic, 6 Dec 1919.



(Australian War Memorial)

Top and bottom: Men of the 2/11th Battalion in an action against Japanese positions east of Matapau, 2nd January 1945.



(Australian War Memorial)



(Australian War Memorial)

A company of the 2/2nd Battalion moving westward past Dagua on the way to the 1410 Feature, 25th March 1945.



(Australian War Memorial)

Dagua airfield, New Guinea, on 25th March, four days after it was occupied by the 2/2nd Battalion.

encountered a strong enemy position, and the forward troops came under heavy fire. Warrant Officer Hall² and Corporal Graham³ courageously carried out wounded men under fire and then, with Lance-Corporal Mould,⁴ advanced along a narrow ridge and stormed the enemy's position, killing eight. Mould and three others were killed and Hall and three others wounded. Next day 14 Beauforts made an accurate attack on the Japanese here, forcing them to withdraw leaving 14 dead. Thence the Australians exploited down the spur to the coast, and Nambut Hill was entirely in their hands.

Cullen now gave Captain Prior's company the task of continuing the advance along the coast to Nambut Creek. Early on the 19th Lieutenant March's⁵ platoon "silently and skilfully" advanced to and captured a knoll overlooking the rocky foreshore at the mouth of the creek, but an enemy machine-gun on the south-east slope fired on a ration party coming behind, killing two and wounding four. Under fire Captain Prior carried out one wounded man and Private Shepherd⁶ another.

March's platoon was now cut off and in need of rations and water. A second platoon (Lieutenant Richardson⁷) was sent forward to clear the area, and a company made an outflanking movement to the south while a Wirraway aircraft dropped cylinders containing rations and water to the isolated men. By 5 p.m. Richardson with the help of artillery and mortar fire had driven the Japanese across the creek and was in touch with March. By 22nd February the area up to Balam Creek had been occupied and barges had landed supplies for four days at Wank Creek, where 100 natives arrived next day to help the unloading.⁸ Next day a platoon advanced to the Anumb River. That night King ordered Cullen not to continue the advance except with patrols until supplies were assured. The sloop *Swan* arrived on the 28th and bombarded the Sowom and Kauk areas that day, bombarded But on the night of the 26th-27th, and the wireless installations on Kairiru Island on the 28th.

The 2/1st patrols had encountered no further opposition until the 26th when a patrol east of the Anumb was fired on by a field gun from the Sowom area. The gun position was bombarded by artillery and, next day, by aircraft. After the air attack a platoon advanced to west Sowom village, overcame a Japanese group, killing four men, and returned. Another platoon crossed the river farther south at the Old German Road and went 500 yards beyond before being fired on. Artillery fire was brought down and the Japanese withdrew; the patrol moved 1,000 yards along the

² WO1 R. E. Hall, DCM, QX38356. 49 and 2/1 Bns. Miner; of Cloncurry, Qld; b. Broken Hill, NSW, 12 Jul 1913.

³ Sgt R. D. Graham, MM, NX73070; 2/1 Bn. Farmer; of Terrigal, NSW; b. Maitland, NSW, 4 Mar 1920.

⁴ L-Cpl E. W. Mould, NX107140; 2/1 Bn. Grazier; of Tenterden, NSW; b. Cooma, NSW, 26 Jan 1920. Killed in action 17 Feb 1945.

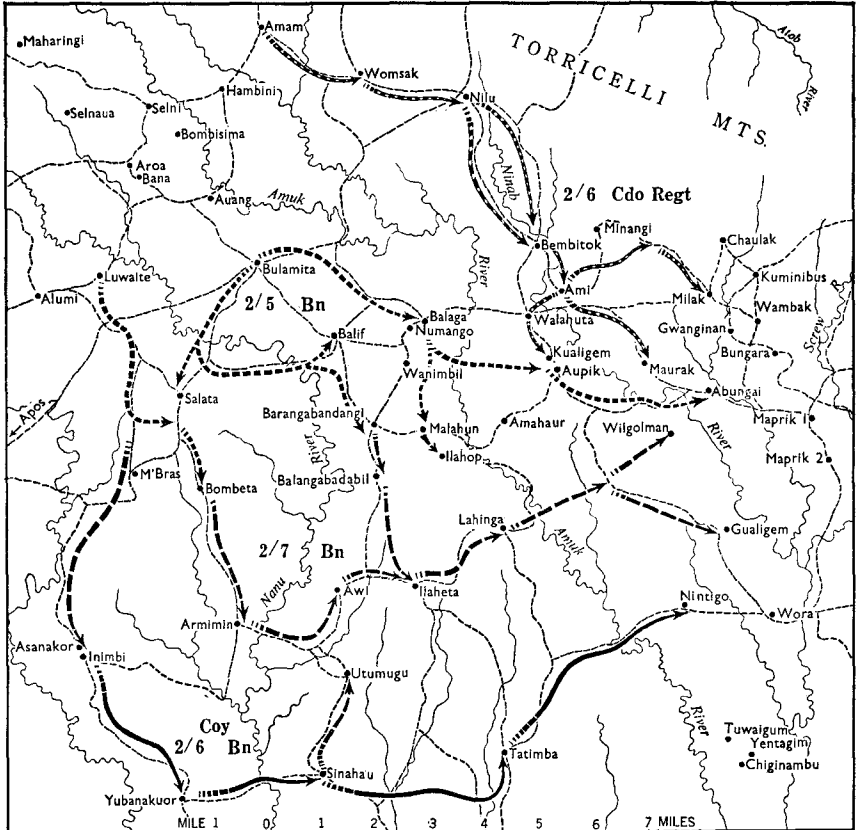
⁵ Lt C. V. March, QX18044. 2/25 and 2/1 Bns. Gardener; of Warwick, Qld; b. Warwick, 19 Nov 1918.

⁶ Pte F. W. Shepherd, MM, NX103788; 2/1 Bn. Clerk; b. Naremburn, NSW, 7 Oct 1920.

⁷ Lt R. R. Richardson, NX69256; 2/1 Bn. Salesman; of Armidale, NSW; b. Armidale, 15 Aug 1920.

⁸ On 27th February the 2/1st Field Ambulance (Lieut-Colonel D. A. Cameron) opened an advanced dressing station, with a surgical team attached, at Wank Creek, thus greatly reducing the distance that seriously wounded men had to be carried for treatment.

German Road. On 28th February the 2/2nd relieved the 2/1st as forward battalion. In this phase the 2/1st had lost 7 killed and 23 wounded, and killed 51 and captured two Japanese.



17th Brigade, 1st February-3rd April

In the brigade's inland area patrols from the 2/3rd in the hills had probed north and made contact with both the 2/1st and 2/2nd. On the 28th two platoons under Lieutenant B. H. MacDougal cleared the enemy from a village between Mikon Creek and the Anumb, killing four. Fifteen to 20 Japanese counter-attacked but were driven off. Next day MacDougal called down artillery fire. The first rounds fell among the Australians and killed one and wounded three, but the patrol killed five Japanese.⁹

On 1st February General Adachi ordered General Aozu if necessary to withdraw his force intact on to the 20th Division, and on the 10th Aozu, hitherto directly under Army command, was placed under the 20th Division. The 2/1st Battalion delivered a heavier blow to the Japanese round Nambut Hill than the Australians

⁹ *Action Front* (1961), the history of the 2/2nd Field Regiment, says: "The targets had been plotted from an ordinary survey map and it was 400 yards out."

realised at the time. The *III/115th Battalion* was "defeated" there, the Japanese reported. At Sowom a company of the same battalion was "annihilated", evidently mainly by air and artillery bombardment.

In the Torricellis on 1st February Colonel Buttrose issued orders for an advance by three companies of the 2/5th: one to Salata, one to Balif, and one to the Balaga-Numango area. By 3rd February Salata had been secured after an accurate air attack the previous day; Walters' company entered Bombeta on the 3rd; a patrol found Balif abandoned and Geer's company occupied it on the 6th, when Japanese made an unsuccessful counter-attack losing five men killed. Patrols found that Balaga, however, was held by about 150 Japanese and about 80 were dug in on the Nanu River. Walters' company attacked these with two platoons on 7th February but could not dislodge them.

At the beginning of February the 2/7th Commando Squadron was based on Nilu. The general intention was that the advance on Maprik should be carried out by the 2/6th Cavalry (Commando) Regiment (of which the 2/7th Squadron was a part) and the 2/5th Battalion; Lieut-Colonel Hennessy's advanced headquarters were moved from the coast first to Nilu and then to Ami, and the 2/10th Squadron was brought forward to Ami. On 8th February Moten sent Buttrose and Hennessy a forecast of future operations. He said that the indications were that the enemy's line of withdrawal was to the south and there were few if any Japanese in the Maprik airfield area. The main concentrations seemed to be about Sinahau between the Nanu and Amuk Rivers. The brigade's job was to kill as many Japanese as possible "as part of the process of cleaning up the country". The capture of ground meant nothing at that stage. After the 2/5th Battalion had taken its present objectives attention would be turned to Maprik as a preliminary to a move to the south. The clearing of the Maprik area would be a task for the 2/6th Commando Regiment with some support from the 2/5th Battalion. After Maprik had been taken the 2/5th (or the 2/7th on relief) would turn south and clear the Sinahau area.

Buttrose in reply submitted an outline plan whereby, when Numango and Ilahop had been cleared, he would leave a company at Ilahop to patrol south-east and clear Lahinga, while with two companies he moved south-west from Balif to M'Bras and then south-east to Ilaheta and Sinahau. One company from M'Bras would drive the enemy from Apos, Asanakor, Yubanakuor and Sinahau. This would require the commando to destroy the enemy east of the Amuk, including Walahuta and the Aupik villages.

On 13th February, after a mortar bombardment the previous day, McBride's company took Numango and the battalion was ready to open the next phase. Buttrose, whose headquarters were now at Balif, ordered one company to take Barangabandangi and another Malahun. There was sharp fighting round Barangabandangi, where a fighting patrol came under heavy fire and was ordered to withdraw. The withdrawal was covered by

Corporal Dunlop's¹ section, which Dunlop led to within 15 yards of the Japanese whence the Australians brought accurate fire to bear. Finally Dunlop alone covered the withdrawal of his section. By the 17th, after bombardments from the air and by mortars, Barangabandangi and Malahun had been secured.

At this stage two heavy 4.2-inch mortars manned by a party from the 2/1st Field Regiment arrived forward. This detachment consisted of Lieutenants Tyndale² and Wilson³ with 20 men; in view of the heavy loads they would have to carry Tyndale chose 13 men from the regiment's first Rugby Union team and 6 from the seconds. Six men carried each weapon along muddy tracks into the mountains—two the baseplate, two the barrel, and two the tripod—while two formed an escort. They made their first shoot on Ilahop, where about 90 Japanese were dug in, on 19th February, and their second on the same target on the 21st, firing 43 bombs in all. On the 21st bombers also struck this stronghold.

In this period a strip for light aircraft was completed at Balif, and on 20th February a Piper Cub landed and took off for Aitape with a hospital patient. Thenceforward wounded were flown from Balif and Ami to the 2/11th Hospital at Aitape, thus saving a six-day carry on stretchers over the mountain range.

On 18th February there was a sharp fight at Bombeta where Lieutenant Milton's⁴ platoon attacked about 40 Japanese well dug in. After three hours and a half the Japanese withdrew having lost 10 killed of whom Milton himself killed six; only one Australian was wounded. The patrol captured valuable maps and other documents.

At this stage the role of the 2/10th Commando Squadron (Captain Woodhouse) was to protect the left of the 2/5th Battalion, and clear the enemy from the area north-east and east of the Ami villages. This was a populous area with many villages sited along the steep-sided ridges. Water supply was a problem but generally enough was found by digging holes in seepages. After some early easy successes in which the Australians had surprised the enemy the Japanese began to fight stubbornly. The lack of supporting weapons was soon felt and each of the three troops was given a 2-inch mortar, and later a 3-inch mortar section was attached to the squadron. The bomber squadrons from Aitape also gave support.

On 6th February Lieutenant Cater⁵ and 23 others had established a patrol base at Bembitok. In the first half of February patrols probed also to the north-east of Ami where five out of 10 Japanese were killed in a sharp clash; and to Walahuta and the Amahaur area where "C" Troop

¹ Cpl R. A. Dunlop, DCM, VX4245; 2/5 Bn. Dispatch clerk; of North Fitzroy, Vic; b. Carlton, Vic, 3 Oct 1915.

² Capt W. Tyndale, NX3397; 2/1 Fd Regt. Butter factory foreman; of Rockdale, NSW; b. Benalla, Vic, 22 Nov 1914.

³ Lt A. J. Wilson, NX16062. 2/5 and 2/1 Fd Regts. Salesman; of Keystown, Saskatchewan, Canada; b. Pense, Canada, 18 Dec 1913.

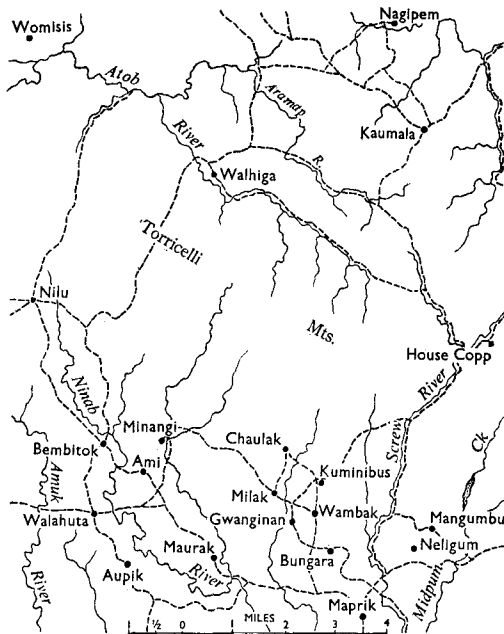
⁴ Lt E. J. Milton, MC, VX5292; 2/5 Bn. Caterer; of Bendigo, Vic; b. Watford, England, 16 Nov 1910.

⁵ Lt R. B. Cater, NX13276. 6 Cav Regt and 2/10 Cdo Sqn. Grazier; of Wellington, NSW; b. Wellington, 23 Jul 1916. Killed in action 20 Feb 1945.

killed ten Japanese. On 20th February Cater's troop attacked Kualigem. Six Japanese were killed but Cater and Lieutenant Liles⁶ were killed and five troopers wounded, and the enemy remained in occupation. This position was heavily mortared. Meanwhile a troop of the 2/7th Squadron, based on Walhiga to the north, patrolled deeply up the Atob River and to the headwaters of the Screw River. The remainder of this squadron (Captain F. J. Lomas) arrived at Walhiga by 21st February. One troop moved east, established a patrol base at Kaumala and held it against a counter-attack by 30 or 40 Japanese. By the 26th the squadron had cleared the country to the Nagipem villages, and on 2nd March it established itself at House Copp. Farther south all approaches were found to be strongly guarded.

The relief of the 2/5th Battalion by the 2/7th was now in progress and Lieut-Colonel Parbury⁷ of the incoming battalion had been in the forward area for about a week. Before the relief was complete, however, Cameron's company of the 2/5th at Malahun had to withstand a sharp counter-attack. At 6.40 a.m. on 23rd February in heavy rain about 60 Japanese attacked from the north, east and south and cut the communications with the rest of the battalion. Ten minutes later some 40 Japanese attacked from the direction of the Amuk River and, 25 minutes after that, 30 attacked from the south-west. All these thrusts were repulsed.

When the attacks were at their height Sergeant Thorn⁸ volunteered to lead out a fighting patrol to distract the enemy. With great dash he led this patrol from a flank into the midst of the enemy, inflicting heavy casualties. He then moved round behind the enemy and attacked again. This forced the Japanese to break contact, and enabled the lines of communication to the battalion to be restored.



⁶ Lt N. J. Liles, QX46939; 2/10 Cdo Sqn. Engine driver; of Innisfail, Qld; b. Esk, Qld, 7 Nov 1919. Killed in action 20 Feb 1945.

⁷ Lt-Col P. K. Parbury, DSO, MC, NX69. 2/3 Bn; CO 31/51 Bn 1944, 2/7 Bn 1944-45. Works manager; of Wollongong, NSW; b. Sydney, 16 Sep 1910.

⁸ Sgt C. Thorn, DCM, VX14574; 2/5 Bn. Farm worker; of Mildura, Vic; b. Walpeup, Vic, 23 Jul 1914.

In its arduous two months in the Torricellis the 2/5th had certainly succeeded in its task of killing off the enemy: 376 enemy dead had been counted and 12 prisoners taken. The battalion had lost 7 killed and 18 wounded in an advance of about 15 miles on a front that sometimes extended over 11,000 yards. Success was partly due to the generous and mostly accurate air support directed often by radio telephone: 62 strikes had been made in close support of the advancing troops.

During the advance of the 2/5th a large part of the enemy force facing it had withdrawn south into a populous garden area bounded by the Nanu and Amuk Rivers. Stevens wished to push the 17th Brigade east across the Ninab and capture Maprik, the former administrative centre of the Sepik area, but the large force of Japanese that had now accumulated on the southern flank could not be ignored, not only because they would threaten the Australians' communications, but because, if they were passed by, they might drive the natives from villages they had now reoccupied. This would have been a breach of faith, particularly in view of the way in which these local people had

acted as efficient guides and sentries for our patrols; they built huts, headquarters, medical posts and jungle tracks for our use; they cleared and cleaned the villages previously occupied by an enemy devoid of the most elementary standards of sanitation; they had buried the enemy dead; had voluntarily aided our indentured labour lines . . . and had assisted to evacuate our wounded across the difficult mountain jungle country.⁹

These "sentries" recorded the killing of a Japanese by tying a knot in a piece of twine. In another part of the twine they tied a knot for each enemy observed, and other knots were tied to remind them to report other things they had seen.

The Japanese were now suffering severely as a result of the natives' loyalty to the Australians.

Once the natives knew where we were (wrote Lieut-General Kane Yoshiwara after the war) they induced aircraft to strafe and bomb us. In addition the natives in the rear rebelled and losses were caused among those of our men who were employed on liaison or food gathering. On top of this at the time rain was falling continuously and the rivers were flooding and the roads were becoming muddy. . . . Now that the enemy were close there were attempts at escape by natives who did not like their task of carrying supplies, and crimes occurred such as the killing of small garrisons. Really, after April 1945, the state of public order on the western front was very disturbed.

If the Australians turned south at this stage they would go farther towards the malarious Sepik country and there would be wide dispersal of their forces. Moten, therefore, on 17th February, had given Hennessy and Parbury instructions to make a wide sweeping movement round the western and south-western flank of the enemy-held area, the move pivoting at first on Balangabadabil and later on Ilahop, the outer flanking company moving through M'Bras, Asanakor, Yubanakuor and then east to the

⁹ 17th Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations in the Aitape-Wewak Area, November 1944-August 1945.

strongly-held Sinahau villages. The flanking company was to move slightly in advance of the rest of the force and press the enemy towards Maprik. This task was given to Major D. O. Hay's company of the 2/6th Battalion, augmented by a section of machine-guns, a detachment of 3-inch mortars, and other detachments.

Some time before this a rumour had been sent out through the natives, from whom the Japanese eventually received it, that a large Australian force was to advance on Maprik through Ami. As was intended, this caused the Japanese to move most of their forces north and north-east and was largely the cause of their pressure on the commando regiment, soon to become even more intense.

When giving instructions to Hay on 21st February Moten said that he considered that there might be 2,000 Japanese living off the country in the southern area, mostly between the Nanu and Amuk Rivers. Hay was to make it his constant aim to drive the enemy east not south, and to destroy them, but without committing his force to a deliberate attack. Maximum use was to be made of air strikes and mortar and medium machine-gun fire to back up patrols.

By the beginning of March the extent to which the Japanese were reinforcing their positions north of Maprik in the 2/10th Squadron's area, and particularly round Kuminibus, Milak and Maurak became more evident. Units of the *20th Japanese Division*, not previously encountered, were identified there. About 100 Japanese established themselves in Bungara and by 7th March the enemy had driven the Australian patrols from Chaulak, Gwanginan and Wambak. About 200 Japanese were found to be occupying Minangi, which was attacked heavily from the air, but without dislodging them. The enemy was now becoming increasingly aggressive, patrolling vigorously, setting ambushes, and reoccupying villages from which they had been manoeuvred in the previous month. They were numerically strong, well organised, and equipped with mortars and grenade dischargers, whose missiles, however, fairly often failed to explode.

Lieutenant Perkins¹ troop of the 2/10th, 50 strong including mortarmen, now bore the main weight of the enemy's pressure. This troop was round Milak, about two days' march from the nearest support. In the evening of 13th March three native sentries, very alarmed, arrived with the news that "Japan man he come plenty". A quarter of an hour later a Japanese advance-guard of about 12 men appeared. Perkins' troop was then manning the weapon-pits in its perimeter, which was about 50 yards by 70, and in thick bush. The men had four Brens, one 3-inch mortar with 90 bombs, and one 2-inch with 20. The Japanese attacked at 8.30 without avail and maintained harassing fire all night. On the night of the 14th-15th, having now completely surrounded the Australians, they attacked again and were again repulsed. By the 15th the troop was running short of food and ammunition. Four aircraft dropped supplies but these fell 50 yards from the perimeter and half the men had to be sent out to fight for them:

¹ Lt K. C. Perkins, MC, NX12843. 8 Cav Regt and 2/10 Cdo Sqn. Mail officer; of Adelong, NSW; b. Adelong, 15 Mar 1915.

they retrieved five cylinders but the enemy got three. That day and on later days aircraft accurately strafed the Japanese to within 50 yards of the perimeter. On the night of the 16th-17th the Japanese attacked persistently and some were killed within three yards of the pits. The Australians were now haggard and weary. Attacks on the night of the 17th-18th were even heavier than the earlier ones, and in the morning 11 Japanese lay dead within a few yards of the perimeter. In the daytime the Australians buried the enemy dead whenever they could, but the stench of the unburied was becoming overpowering. The enemy generally concentrated his force to the north, and often left the Australian line of communication unguarded. Thus on 15th March some native refugees were sent out to Ami. By the 17th patrols had reopened the line of communication and by the 19th the enemy pressure had ceased. During the five-day siege 45 Japanese dead were counted.

During this period Lieutenant Robinson's² troop round Maurak was also attacked and ringed with ambushes by an enemy force of about 45. This force too withdrew after suffering fairly heavy losses. Round Aupik Lieutenant J. W. Carr's troop was opposed by about 40 Japanese but here there were only patrol clashes. In March the squadron lost 3 killed and 8 wounded, but counted 91 enemy dead and was certain that more were killed and their bodies taken away. At the end of the month the squadron had been reduced to 198; throughout the long struggle against a far stronger enemy force lack of food and ammunition had often caused anxiety.

Ammunition remained in short supply during the whole period (wrote the squadron's chronicler). It was impossible to do more than meet the troops' day-to-day requirements. Food was fairly plentiful but essential amenities like tobacco were practically non-existent. . . . The forward troops . . . were reduced to searching Japanese dead for native tobacco. It seems incredible that authority should be so neglectful of its field forces during a time when the troops are going from one victory to another.

"It was apparent," wrote Moten, "that at this stage the enemy had obtained complete initiative in this area. 2/10 Aust Cdo Sqn which had borne the weight of the enemy attacks was completely worn out and the morale of the troops had deteriorated considerably."

On 16th March Captain E. W. A. Price's company of the 2/6th Battalion relieved the 2/7th Squadron at House Copp and next day Lieut-Colonel F. G. Wood took over command of the Ami sector from Lieut-Colonel Hennessy. However, before the 2/10th was relieved it was attacked again round Milak and Maurak. By 23rd March two additional companies of the 2/6th Battalion had relieved the remaining commando troop and Hennessy's weary regiment was moved back to the coast. Price found that in the House Copp area the Japanese had been "stirred up" and were moving about a great deal. On the 18th and 19th two parties of the incoming battalion were ambushed and suffered six casualties.

² Capt G. A. Robinson, NX2073. 6 Cav Regt and 2/10 Cdo Sqn. Station hand; of Pallamallawa, NSW; b. Northumberland, England, 27 Jan 1907.

Parbury took command in the Balif area on 25th February; that day one of his companies found the north Ilahop villages clear, and next day had moved 1,500 yards south before encountering any Japanese. Ilahop was permanently occupied on 10th March. The battalion's plan was that the Ilahop company on the left would maintain contact with the enemy towards Aupik, and the centre company would advance along a line Bombeta-Ilaheta, while "Hayforce" (under Parbury's command) carried out its wide sweep on the right.

The well-organised enemy attack on Malahun on the 23rd opened a period in which they were more aggressive than hitherto. Sharp clashes occurred daily. On 1st March one platoon drove a small group out of Wanimbil and, on the right, a platoon of Hayforce thrust into Asanakor where it killed three and burnt some huts while the enemy held the rest of the village. Next day Captain A. N. Rooke led a platoon to Asanakor, which was attacked by bombers but not accurately; in the fight Rooke and three others were wounded. On the 3rd Captain V. C. Baird led out two platoons to deal with Asanakor; and on the 5th a patrol entered the village, surprising the Japanese, who withdrew to a higher position to the south-east. The patrol burnt the place down and withdrew.

The vulnerability of the supply line in the Torricellis was again demonstrated at this time. Bad weather made the dropping of supplies impossible for a few days early in March. Soon rations for the natives were almost exhausted, and at a time when 310 indentured carriers had just arrived to replace locally-recruited men. Relief came on the 6th when four Beauforts dropped supplies; next day one Dakota dropped another load.

Hayforce entered Asanakor against only slight opposition on 7th March, and pressed on into Inimbi next day. On the 9th it sent a patrol to Yubanakuor. Next day the 2/7th made a general advance: Captain Pearson's³ company from Malahun to Ilahop, Captain E. Arnold's to Balangabadabil, Captain Rooke's from Bombeta to Armimin. From the new bases some successful ambushes were carried out: on 18th March Lieutenant Clews⁴ and a party ambushed 30 Japanese marching along with full packs towards Aupik and killed eight. On the 19th another ambush killed four on the same track and another near Lahinga killed six. Lieutenant B. W. E. Tyres led a patrol to contact Hay's company now at Sinahau, met 20 Japanese, killed four and drove the others off to the south-east. Hayforce swept on from Sinahau north to Utumugu and east to Tatimba, which was reached on 20th March, the enemy withdrawing generally east and north-east, as Moten hoped they would. On the 28th Hay crossed the Amuk River.

The 2/7th found the enemy holding resolutely in Ilaheta where they resisted for three days despite heavy mortar bombardment and air attack. The enemy occupied a perimeter 25 yards in diameter with an 8-foot drop

³ Col C. M. I. Pearson, MC, VX101992; 2/7 Bn. Regular soldier; b. Kurri Kurri, NSW, 24 Aug 1918.

⁴ Lt G. W. Clews, QX23090; 2/7 Bn. Bank officer; of North Rockhampton, Qld; b. Rockhampton, 1 Dec 1916.

on all sides, and held their fire until the attackers were only a few yards away. After one attack had failed a 4.2-inch mortar was sent forward to within 270 yards of the enemy. Lieutenant Wilson (of the 2/1st Field Regiment) directed its fire from a post only 25 yards from the enemy and in the final attack lobbed 13 bombs into the Japanese perimeter. On 20th March a company charged, while bomb splinters flew overhead, and took the position. That day Lieutenant Darryl⁵ led out a patrol to raid the headquarters of General Mano's *41st Division* which had just been located. He found that the general had moved the day before, but the patrol killed 14 Japanese in the area.

The 2/7th Battalion noted at this time that the use of natives by the enemy had become more general than before. Wherever contact had been made the Japanese had standing patrols or sentries on all tracks well out from their perimeters; their positions were now more thoroughly prepared and this was taken as indicating that they were resolved to hold them; enemy patrols guided by natives were moving behind the forward company perimeters by night and cutting signal lines.

In the week beginning on 19th March the general plan of the 2/7th Battalion was altered: the companies were concentrated more closely with the general object of driving north-east towards Maprik instead of eastward to the Maprik-Marui road. The area through which the advance was to be made was thickly populated and had many gardens. Most of the muddy tracks followed the ridges and only a few crossed the valleys.

Between 21st and 26th March there was severe fighting on the ground supported by frequent air strikes against the Aupik villages. By the end of the month the concentration of the 2/7th on the west bank of the Ninab was almost complete. By 3rd April all opposition had been cleared along the east side of the river: one company was at Abungai, one at Wilgolman, one at Gualigem and one at Lahinga. The stage was set for the advance to Maprik.

It had been a hard fight and Parbury was anxious that in future he should have more powerful support. On 1st April Lieutenant Tyndale wrote to his commanding officer:

The C.O. of 2/7 is determined to have a couple of long 25 pdrs here as soon as the Douglas strip is down. He is against mountain guns and said yesterday he would get me two 25s. He won't pay the short 25. If the bringing of long 25's up here involves any argument, we have in our favour the fact that we have men on the spot plus means of communication, so it would be more economical on plane space etc. to just send the guns and ammo along. We must get the job if possible.

When February opened the *41st Japanese Division's* main line of resistance had run through Selni, Luwaite and Salata. During the month "the revolt of the natives" in the Japanese rear areas caused losses and disruption of communications, and led to the reinforcement of those areas; for example, the *5th Shipping Engineer Regiment* was sent to Maprik and the *12th Field Meteorological Unit* and *63rd Air Regiment* were warned to be ready to reinforce Marui. On 25th February Lieut-General

⁵ Lt L. J. Darryl, MC, NX30055; 2/7 Bn. Transport driver; of North Bondi, NSW; b. Muswellbrook, NSW, 28 May 1918.

Yoshiwara, Adachi's chief of staff, was sent into the mountains with 32 officers from *XVIII Army* headquarters to organise supplies and the protection of the rear of the *41st Division*.

The force deployed east of Maprik was about 1,000 strong, was commanded by Major-General Sadahiko Miyake, the infantry group commander of the *20th Division*, and included mainly the depleted *78th Regiment*, a detachment of marines and a company from the *51st Division*. Its plan had been to make a firm base round Yamil, attack Milak and push on westward. However, while attacking towards Milak, the Australians began to come in from the south towards Maprik, and consequently the advance through Milak was abandoned. On 19th March Miyake was ordered to withdraw on to Jamei.

The Australian advance from Balif brought the front line near groups of Indian prisoners of war organised by the Japanese into labour companies and these were moved back. The Japanese claimed that the Indians were not prisoners but enlisted members of the Japanese Army. According to Lieut-General Yoshiwara, writing after the war, the Indians were moved into an area rich in sago palms "so keen was the G.O.C's moral sense of affection for a friendly nation's troops".

On 11th March 1945 a fresh party of experienced A.I.B. men had arrived at Yambes on their way to take over from Lieutenant K. H. McColl, R.A.N.V.R., who had been operating in the Sepik area. It was led by Captain L. E. Ashton and included two other officers, two signallers, one other rank and some native soldiers. Ashton found Japanese in occupation of Nungagua and "after careful thought"—since his role was to gain information—four Europeans and 14 native soldiers attacked the place on 27th March. Two natives were killed but probably 16 Japanese were killed or wounded and thereafter the local natives cooperated with enthusiasm with the Australians. In April, May and June this party continued probing, gathering Intelligence, and arranging air attacks throughout an area populated by 400 to 500 Japanese troops.

Meanwhile in the coastal sector supply difficulties had produced a lull. At the end of February Brigadier King was convinced that the Japanese had only small outposts west of the Ninahau. Heavy rains, however, had damaged the road forward from Dogreto Bay and it had to be closed to traffic until it had been remade. In this pause King regrouped his forces. In the mountain sector the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, less two companies, but with the 2/9th Commando Squadron under command, relieved the 2/3rd Infantry and was to clear the enemy forward to the Anumb and maintain posts at Walum, Aboama and Malin. On the coast the 2/2nd Battalion was to patrol forward from the Anumb, eventually as far as the Ninahau, and the 2/3rd, concentrated in the coastal area since 3rd March, was to patrol in the foothills to the south.

Up to this time 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion (less one company) had been holding the line of the Danmap River from the coast southward as a firm base. Lieut-Colonel Gordon⁶ with his command group was forward at the headquarters of 2/3rd Infantry Battalion. When Brigadier King told Gordon that he wanted the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion to change

⁶ Maj-Gen R. R. Gordon, CBE, DSO, ED, VX17441. 2/3 MG Bn 1940-45 (CO 1944-45). Railways administrative officer; of Essendon, Vic; b. Essendon, 13 Mar 1907.

its role to that of an infantry battalion when taking over from the 2/3rd Infantry, Gordon agreed immediately, but the task presented a number of problems: it left many men without weapons (Numbers 1 and 2 on the machine-guns, and others, were not equipped with rifles) and the battalion had no support weapons of any kind. Furthermore, overnight the battalion undertook a role for which its organisation was not designed and for which it had not been intensively trained. The adaptability of the battalion in changing itself at short notice into an infantry battalion was remarkable, as later operations were to prove.

When he took over the mountain area Gordon began planning an advance on Arohemi by the 2/9th Commando Squadron (Major Nisbet) plus a company of the battalion. Arohemi was selected as the objective because maintenance would have to be by air, and from the map Arohemi seemed the only suitable dropping ground available in the advance to the Anumb River. Gordon's plan was that the 2/9th Squadron with Captain Devonshire's⁷ company of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion under command would capture Arohemi, whither it would be followed by battalion headquarters and Captain Hewitt's⁸ company.

This force set out on 4th March and soon encountered opposition. Five Japanese were killed on the way and Arohemi was found to be defended by a force (it was the *III/239th Battalion*) well dug in. An attack that day failed, Lieutenant Williams⁹ and one trooper being killed. It was planned next day to direct artillery fire on the area from 9 a.m. to 9.30 simultaneously with an attack by aircraft. The artillery officer, Captain Eason,¹ went forward through dense bush with a small party as escort to within 50 yards of the enemy position to register the artillery. Eason's party came under fire from a Japanese position. At 8.45 while registration was in progress word was received that the air strike had been cancelled. It transpired that the air strike was called off by the R.A.A.F. because of bad weather, but one flight of Beauforts was already in the air and did not receive the order. Having learnt of the cancellation of the air strike Nisbet, the commander on the spot, was proceeding with his attack when the air strike in fact developed on his own troops, and completely wrecked the operation. Despite the fact that the strike was put down right on Eason's post and his signaller and eleven of his escort were either killed or wounded, Eason stayed put and tried to bring down artillery fire to indicate the correct target to the aircraft.

Captain Sautelle's² troop plus a platoon of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion (Lieutenant MacFie³) advanced on the 6th, in drenching rain,

⁷ Capt J. W. Devonshire, SX10122; 2/3 MG Bn. Clerk; of Dulwich, SA; b. Adelaide, 31 Aug 1914.
⁸ Capt J. S. Hewitt, VX13851. 2/1 and 2/3 MG Bns. Farmer; of Warracknabeal, Vic; b. Warracknabeal, 14 Nov 1915.

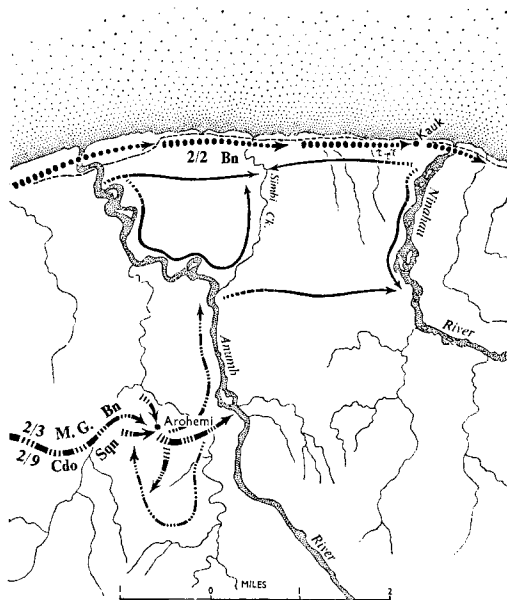
⁹ Lt F. D. Williams, VX42397; 2/9 Cdo Sqn. Sharebroker's clerk; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 10 Jul 1918. Killed in action 4 Mar 1945.

¹ Brig R. T. Eason, MC, ED, VX998; 2/2 Fd Regt. Telecommunications technician; of Maidstone, Vic; b. Geelong, Vic, 20 Nov 1913.

² Capt J. B. Sautelle, NX12430. 6 Cav Regt and 2/9 Cdo Sqn. Grazier; of Cathcart, NSW; b. Bombala, NSW, 27 Jul 1910.

³ Lt H. H. MacFie, MC, TX1766; 2/3 MG Bn. Bank officer; of Launceston, Tas; b. Queenstown, Tas, 28 Aug 1919.

and with Eason again directing the artillery, but the enemy, now considered to be about 60 or 70 strong, were firmly established in positions that could be reached only up steep jungle-clad spurs. It was not until the 7th that flanking moves forced the enemy out; he made a stand some distance to the south-east. In the meantime air dropping of supplies proceeded, the supplies sometimes falling in the enemy's area. On 9th March an air strike was called down and the Australians, now reinforced to two companies and the commando squadron, attacked and captured the remaining enemy position. In six days of fighting the force had lost 9 killed and 9 wounded, but had cleared the enemy out of the area west of the Anumb River and killed 39 Japanese. The 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion was then concentrated at Arohemi, the 2/9th Squadron being sent back to Aitape to rest.



16th Brigade, 2nd-12th March

While the battalion was at Arohemi Warrant Officer Godwin⁴ of Angau and a patrol of natives arrived from inland. As Godwin had no orders and was not required elsewhere he volunteered to make long-range reconnaissance patrols. The information gained from these patrols was of very great value in planning the next advance.

Meanwhile the 2/2nd Battalion had the task of probing forward towards Simbi Creek. On the morning of 2nd March Colonel Cameron sent out four patrols to clear the area up to the creek. One of these, under Lieutenant Shanahan,⁵ was moving astride the Old German Road when it ran into an ambush from which the enemy did not open fire until within ten yards. The two leading scouts were killed. Shanahan went forward and he too was killed, as was Sergeant McCabe.⁶ Sergeant Carnell⁷ took command, led four men round the left flank, surprised and killed two

⁴ Maj J. B. Godwin, MBE, PX102; Angau. Assistant plantation manager; of Roseville, NSW; b. Roseville, 31 Dec 1917.

⁵ Lt J. Shanahan, NX7173; 2/2 Bn. Law clerk; of Cessnock, NSW; b. Randwick, NSW, 12 Feb 1912. Killed in action 2 Mar 1945.

⁶ Sgt F. J. McCabe, NX125761; 2/2 Bn. Labourer; of Wagga Wagga, NSW; b. Goulburn, NSW, 22 Oct 1918. Killed in action 2 Mar 1945.

⁷ Sgt E. J. Carnell, VX105394. 39 and 2/2 Bns. Construction worker; of Geelong West, Vic; b. Hamilton, Vic, 15 Sep 1918.

Japanese and wounded a third, and then charged back along the track killing another. These Japanese had sold their lives dearly.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Thomas⁸ platoon had moved along the coast road to Simbi Creek. As the leading men were crossing the sand bar Japanese fired on them but were driven off leaving five dead. In the course of this fight the platoon sergeant, Hansen,⁹ frequently exposed himself to draw the enemy's fire and enable their pits to be located.

In this period the 2/1st Field Company, which had been working on the lines of communication forward of Dogreto Bay, set about bridging the Anumb River, 300 feet wide, 9 feet deep and fast flowing, but rains caused a flood which washed away 150 feet of piled piers. The bridge-building project was abandoned and enough equipment was obtained to instal a ferry capable of taking loaded trucks; hitherto improvised rafts made of drums and timber had been used.

The lack of equipment, bridging and mechanical plant proved a great handicap during this phase. Fortunately the Ninahau River proved fordable after banks had been cut down and the road from Anumb to But proved sufficient to take the brigade traffic with the assistance of tractors. No mechanical plant was available.¹

Rain continued to disrupt the line of communication from Dogreto Bay, the road to Wank Creek became impassable, and "lack of mechanical equipment so handicapped the engineers that the road had to be temporarily abandoned".² It became necessary to depend on craft landing supplies at Wank Creek—when the surf permitted. An observer who travelled on the road to and from Dogreto on 12th and 13th March wrote:

The bridges, of which there are dozens, are named nostalgically after places in the Middle East: Bagush, Sollum, Barrani, Giovanni (no "Berta"), Athens, Larisa. A strong surf dumps on the beach at Dogreto, so strong that the men ram the L.C.M. or L.C.T. ashore, a loaded truck runs off and the craft pulls out as fast as it can, before it broaches. Supply is the only problem, and all here are convinced that as soon as the supplies are forward it will be only a march to But, but with so few L.C.M.'s the supplies cannot be got forward quickly enough.

The M.D.S. of the 2/1st Field Ambulance is placed just where the road climbs from the beach to go round the Dogreto headland. A sea of mud, with water-carts, 3-tonners, ambulances and jeeps keeping it stirred to a fine paste. A little farther on the mud, splayed out by the moving trucks, is pouring down the side of the hill like thick soup. . . . That night it rained—about 3 inches, belting down and blowing strongly. Today on the road back our jeep was stuck for about an hour on a shingly stretch of beach at one of the smaller creeks and was eventually winched out by a truck. Then we stuck for a time in the Danmap, but dried out the engine and got clear. In the Driniumor we stuck again with the water not so high as in the Danmap where it had been up to the back seat. Again a truck pulled us out.³

⁸ Lt R. R. Thomas, NX8739; 2/2 Bn. Regular soldier; b. Forbes, NSW, 4 Jul 1917.

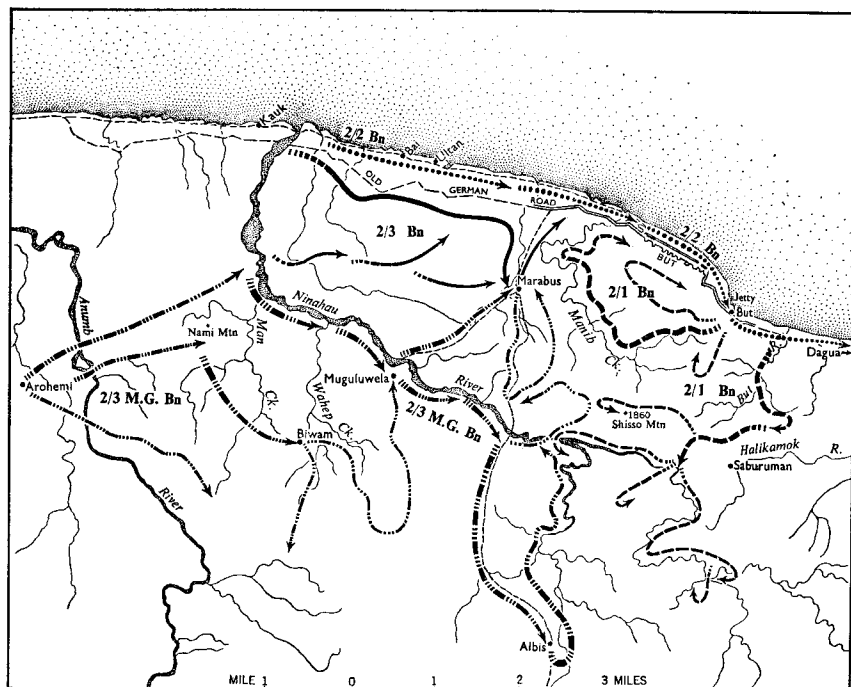
⁹ Sgt F. J. Hansen, NX23995; 2/2 Bn. Storeman and packer; of Penrith, NSW; b. Goulburn, NSW, 11 Apr 1920.

¹ 16 Aust Inf Bde Report on Operations—Aitape-Wewak Campaign, 23 Jan 45 to 8 May 45. Appendix on Operations of 2/1st Field Company.

² 16th Brigade report.

³ The power and swiftness of the floods were immense. At Aitape one morning troops found that whereas they had been able to see five islands off the coast the night before there were now six. "One was a floating island, a bit weather-beaten but complete with its quota of vegetation," wrote a soldier in a letter home. "It looked like what had once been an island in a river, with the low shrubs that grow on such places, and evidently it had been carried bodily out to sea. It must have been a couple of acres. That sort of thing makes it very difficult for the engineers when they build permanent bridges. One of their best ones, in the big floods, got in the way of an island solid enough to have palm trees growing on it, and island and bridge floated gaily out to sea."

At this stage it seemed evident that the enemy were not strong forward of But. Brigadier King considered he had a choice of two courses. The first was to wait until an adequate road was made up to the forward troops and then advance on But at the pace at which that road could be extended; this would take about two months in all. The second was to make a dash to But in sufficient strength to cover the establishment of a field maintenance centre at the beach there, march the remainder of the



16th Brigade, 13th March-1st April

brigade forward, and ferry the vehicles and heavy equipment to But in landing craft. King decided that Cameron should send a company through to But on 15th March to discover what opposition would be offered between Bai and But, what forces were round But and, in particular, whether guns covered the anchorage. If the patrol could not deal quickly with the opposition, it would return; if the approach to the anchorage was "reasonably clear" the whole battalion would move quickly to But next day.

Already on 12th March a series of patrols had cleared the Japanese from the area west of the first creek beyond the swift, wide Ninahau. Lieutenant Park's⁴ platoon, moving along the coast, overcame one Japanese outpost

⁴ Lt-Col E. N. Park, DSO, ED, NX8942; 2/2 Bn. Jackaroo; of Manilla, NSW; b. Manilla, 5 Dec 1920.

killing four. Lieutenant Evans⁵ platoon was fired on by Japanese from among undergrowth in Kauk Plantation and Sergeant Bathgate⁶ was killed and one man wounded. Three Japanese were killed. Lieutenant Ferguson's⁷ platoon farther inland killed three Japanese.

On the 14th Cameron gave the task of making the dash to But to Captain J. C. S. Gilmore's company. It would advance to Bai that day and But jetty the next. It moved out at 11 a.m., reached Bai at 1.50, and advanced thence to Ultan where three Japanese were killed. By nightfall the battalion was concentrated about Bai and Ultan. On the 15th Gilmore's company encountered a strong Japanese position east of Ultan and, in the ensuing fight, lost two men killed and two wounded.⁸ Next day the artillery fired 400 rounds into the Japanese position but the enemy was not silenced until Lieutenants Park and Bower⁹ led their platoons forward in a concerted attack which ended with a bayonet charge. During the action Bower's platoon on the left was held up 15 yards from an enemy position astride the coastal track consisting of four bunkers and several foxholes. Lance-Corporal Stubbs¹ worked his way forward, directed fire on to two bunkers and then rushed them throwing grenades, killing four. He shot three more with his Owen gun and the advance was continued. Ten Japanese in all were killed, and 6 threw away their weapons and fled. Thus, at the outset, the dash to the But airfield met solid resistance.

Captain Derbyshire's² company then moved through and thrust along the coast to Manib Creek where it came under the fire of two 75-mm guns (and probably mortars), which dropped 30 to 40 shells along the beach, and a 20-mm gun. Only one man was wounded by this fire, and after dark the battalion moved forward and dug in along the eastern edge of the airfield itself. Next morning Japanese were seen on the airfield and it was evident that they did not know that the Australians had advanced so far in the night; indeed at 9 a.m. the Japanese guns dropped shells 400 yards to the rear of the advancing battalion.

Cameron now ordered Derbyshire to press on to But and establish a beach-head round the jetty. This he did, and by 5 p.m. the whole battalion had formed an arc a mile long embracing the jetty and the eastern end of the airfield. Aircraft dropped supplies, but only 40 per cent were recovered, largely because parachutes drifted out to sea. The confusion into which this swift advance had put the enemy was indicated next morning when field guns sited west of Dagua airfield fired shells into an area

⁵ Capt J. A. Evans, NX31138, 2/33 and 2/2 Bns. Film dispatch assistant; of Bondi, NSW; b. Annandale, NSW, 1 Oct 1920.

⁶ Sgt H. Bathgate, NX47887; 2/2 Bn. Hairdresser; of Kyogle, NSW; b. Maclean, NSW, 17 Jun 1920. Killed in action 12 Mar 1945.

⁷ Lt K. Ferguson, QX22661; 2/2 Bn. Storeman; of Wilston, Qld; b. 29 Sep 1918.

⁸ That day Lieutenant J. A. Birrell of Angau and five native police returned from a patrol Sowom-Loanim-But, having captured useful papers.

⁹ Lt R. R. Bower, NX167518; 2/2 Bn. Schoolteacher; of Gundagai, NSW; b. Singleton, NSW, 11 Mar 1922.

¹ L-Cpl S. B. A. Stubbs, DCM, NX200338. RAAF; 2/2 Bn 1943-45. Farm hand; of Young, NSW; b. Sydney, 5 Feb 1917.

² Maj M. Derbyshire, MC, ED, NX12177; 2/2 Bn. Motor trimmer; of Wagga Wagga, NSW; b. Launceston, Tas, 27 Jun 1915.

about a mile and a half west of the jetty. Earlier in the day the guns had opened up on the 2/2nd Battalion as it was moving over the airfield but were promptly silenced by the fire of the only 25-pounder then within range, directed by Major Strong.³ The Japanese guns were dual-purpose weapons and fired also at the aircraft that was dropping supplies. That day aircraft attacked the enemy's guns and each platoon of Derbyshire's company patrolled deeply. Lieutenant Goldsmith's⁴ swept the But airfield killing two Japanese. Lieutenant Jackson's⁵ moved into the foothills and found and disabled a 75-mm gun which had been recently used and beside which lay 50 rounds of unexpended ammunition and 30 recently expended. They went on for 500 yards across the But River and back along the coast, killing three stray Japanese.

Lieutenant Cameron's⁶ platoon set out at midday also in search of guns in the foothills. Soon they were moving through recently-dug Japanese gardens in one of which, after a skirmish, they found huts that had evidently housed a headquarters, because there were several telephones one of which was ringing as they arrived. Cameron heard a Japanese voice chattering at the other end of the line and broke the instrument. At another group of huts they saw four Japanese walking about unconcernedly. Corporal Donnett⁷ led a charge, the men throwing grenades and firing as they advanced. Three Japanese were hit and the fourth leaped away and disappeared. Cameron, following, fell through some sac-sac roofing into a pit and found himself beside the fourth Japanese. He clambered out, and the Japanese was promptly killed. Beyond were more huts. Great quantities of stores were found here, including 63 sacks or drums of rice, 70 cases of stationery, 52 of medical equipment, 200 rifles, many cases of ammunition, much clothing, machines and other equipment that had been in use when the airfield was operating. On the 20th Lieutenant Goldsmith led his platoon along the Old German Road, where five Japanese were killed, to a point west of the Dagua airfield and found and spiked two more field guns.

This was a day of wide patrolling of the newly-invaded area. Lieutenant G. Coyle led four sections inland to the Halikamok River where they met a native who led them to a camp occupied by 10 Japanese who were all killed, but not before a sentry had killed one Australian. Also in the foothills Lieutenant Jarvie's⁸ platoon attacked some Japanese dug in on a ridge and drove them off. King ordered Colonel Cameron to secure Dagua airfield next day.

³ Lt-Col J. A. R. K. Strong, MBE, VX102; 2/2 Fd Regt. Architect; of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Three Springs, WA, 3 Jun 1916. Killed in motor-car accident 2 Jul 1960.

⁴ Lt-Col D. V. Goldsmith, NX162784; 2/2 Bn. Regular soldier; b. Hobart, 4 Jan 1921.

⁵ Lt H. H. Jackson, NX42404. 2/1 Indep Light Tank Sqn and 2/2 Bn. Jackaroo; of Killara, NSW; b. Sydney, 12 Mar 1921.

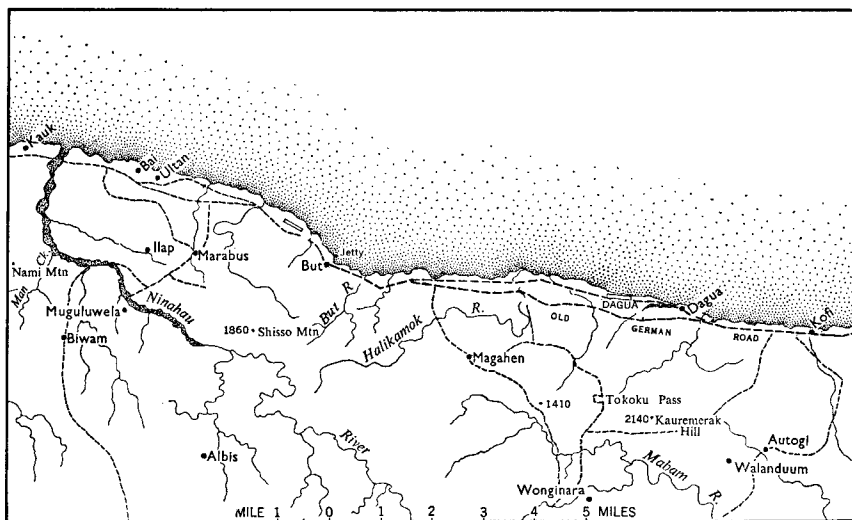
⁶ Lt K. R. Cameron, NX170623; 2/2 Bn. Schoolteacher; of Maroubra, NSW; b. Sydney, 26 Mar 1920.

⁷ Sgt A. H. Donnett, DCM, NX42848; 2/2 Bn. Farm worker; of Gulargambone, NSW; b. Gilgandra, NSW, 4 Aug 1921.

⁸ Lt J. Jarvie, NX105159; 2/2 Bn. Miner; of Weston, NSW; b. Weston, 28 Jan 1919.

Three Japanese were killed in the advance to Dagua on the 21st. On a ridge overlooking the road were signs that 60 to 70 Japanese had camped there the previous night and hurriedly departed leaving some rifles and equipment.

It was remarkable that the Japanese made no effort to harass the advancing column from positions in the hills overlooking the narrow coastal plain. Apparently the rapid thrust to But had thoroughly disorganised them and they had not yet recovered. On the overgrown Dagua strip, as at But, there were some abandoned aircraft, many rusty engines, and dumps of rusty bombs.



On 17th March King had ordered that the 2/1st Battalion should move forward and arrive at But on the 19th to protect the beach, and that Colonel Cullen should take command of all troops in the beach area. Captured documents and interrogation of prisoners and natives gave a fairly clear picture of the enemy's dispositions at this stage. Aozu's headquarters had evidently been moved back to Muguluwela (actually to "Shisso Mountain") and his plan was apparently to hold a line approximately from Muguluwela to Biwam. His force was about 200 strong including stragglers still between the Anumb and Ninahau Rivers. In the coastal area, the defending force included the *II/80th Battalion*, *21st Airfield Battalion* and other detachments, and had apparently withdrawn its main strength into the hills above But. The *80th Regiment* less the *II Battalion* was apparently defending the area from Shisso Mountain—Feature 1860—east and south-east along Manib Creek and the upper Ninahau River to the But River controlling the tracks Muguluwela-Ninahau River-Halikamok River-Dagua-Yamil.

It now appears that at this stage both remaining regiments of the *20th Division*—*79th* and *80th*—plus the *237th Regiment* and the *III/115th Battalion*, the *21st Airfield Battalion* and other detachments were forward round But and Dagua. A Japanese report describes the thrust (by Gilmore's company) on the 15th and 16th as having annihilated the forward troops. The *80th Regiment* was ordered to defend But airfield but was forced into the hills.

Despite the recent setbacks the Japanese commander still cherished dreams of glory. In an order of 18th March Adachi wrote: "It is not an impossibility for us, using our original all-out fighting tactics, to annihilate the 50,000 or 60,000 enemy troops with our present fighting power . . . leaving thus an impressive record . . . in the annals of our Army and paying a tribute to the Emperor and to the spirits of our numerous fellow dead."⁹

While the 2/2nd Battalion was advancing to Dagua the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion was pressing forward to the upper Ninahau. On 13th and 14th March one patrol reached the Ninahau and destroyed a Japanese headquarters on Man Creek; another patrol was ambushed and lost 3 killed and 4 wounded on the track round Nami Mountain; but the combined patrols manoeuvred the enemy off this ground. The battalion established a dropping ground about two miles inland west of the Ninahau on 18th March, and next day established a base at the junction of Wahep Creek and the Ninahau River. By the 22nd Muguluwela had been occupied and the enemy cleared from the area. After a fierce fight lasting eight hours Captain Hewitt's company captured a strong position 1,000 yards east of Muguluwela, killing nine Japanese. By 30th March the battalion had cleared the area up to a north-south line about two miles beyond Muguluwela, killing 35 Japanese. At the same time Major Clennett's¹ company cleared Biwam and patrolled east and south.

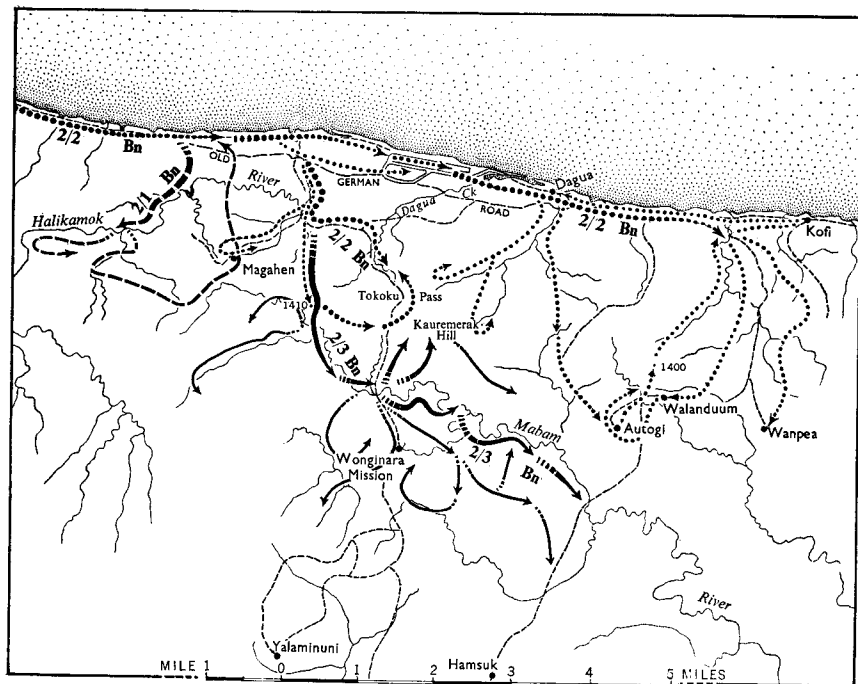
As mentioned, the main enemy strength in the But area was now concentrated in the hills to the south. King gave the 2/2nd Battalion the task of clearing the foothills south of Dagua and destroying the enemy in the Tokoku Pass, while the 2/3rd Battalion outflanked these Japanese by cutting the track leading south from the pass, and then destroyed the enemy in the area Mabam River-Hamsuk-Yalaminuni. The 52nd Battery would be in support. From an intercepted message the total strength of units of the *20th Japanese Division* in the forward area at 26th March was learnt to be 510, of whom probably about 300 were in the front line.

Above Dagua the mountains rose steeply from the plain towards the dominating 1410 Feature—so steeply that in places men had to clamber using hands as well as feet. The track then followed a razor-back ridge only about five feet wide with an almost vertical fall for some distance on either side, the steepness of the descent being obscured by the dense bush thrusting upwards on each flank. This razor-back led to a knoll—a little plateau about 50 yards in diameter. Thence the track fell and then rose again to another small knoll which formed the summit of Feature 1410. The track then descended in a series of steep slopes connected by level bridge-like razor-backs to the Mabam River. On the 22nd patrols

⁹ 18th Army Operations, Vol IV, p. 182.

¹ Maj B. G. Clennett, TX2097; 2/3 MG Bn. Sawmiller; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 22 Jan 1917.

of the 2/2nd Battalion were sent southward into these hills: Captain Derbyshire's company to Magahen, which was taken against only slight opposition; Captain Lovett's² company along the road through the mountains to Wonginara. When they had covered about two miles the leading platoons (Lieutenants Goldsmith and Jackson) moving stealthily, heard chattering and wood-chopping about 100 yards to the left. The Australians



16th Brigade, March-April

worked their way forward until the men of the leading section, under Corporal Chapman,³ could see six Japanese on the track 100 yards away, and hear others in huts beyond. Chapman moved his men into position and they opened fire. The Japanese scattered, after some had been killed, and a fight began against a force of about 30—the strongest encountered since the first day of the drive to Dagua. The remainder of Goldsmith's platoon moved up and, coolly and skilfully directed by Goldsmith, put in an attack to the huts, killing probably 8 more Japanese; 7 others fled. Under sniping fire the Australians held the ground gained until dusk when, after their three wounded men had been carried out, they withdrew about 800 yards to higher ground covered by Jackson's platoon. The Australians

² Capt K. H. Lovett, VX100099. 39 and 2/2 Bns. Assistant shire secretary; of Warracknabeal, Vic; b. Echuca, Vic, 23 Dec 1918.

³ Cpl J. W. Chapman, NX15558; 2/2 Bn. Farm worker; of Boggabri, NSW; b. Portland, NSW, 24 Dec 1919.

had killed 14 at a cost of 3 wounded, one fatally. It was evident that the enemy regarded the track to Wonginara as being of some importance. The artillery observer, Captain Olsson,⁴ ranged the guns by moonlight during the night.

From a position in the hills a 75-mm gun fired on Lovett's company and at targets farther north on the morning of the 23rd, but no one was hit and the gun became silent after the Australian artillery opened fire. Lieutenant A. Chowne's platoon patrolled high up on to the 1410 Feature and encountered Japanese in a group of huts. The Australians attacked, killing one; 15 more, with 10 natives, fled into the bush. On the way home Private Core⁵ killed two Japanese and wounded a third.

Colonel Cameron's plan was now to send fighting patrols on to the ridges west of Lovett's position with the object of outflanking the Japanese force holding the pass to Wonginara, while Lovett probed southward. At the same time a reconnaissance patrol of five under Chowne, a fearless and skilful leader, was to go right through to Wonginara. On the afternoon of the 24th Park's platoon of Gilmore's company found the enemy digging in on the slopes of 1410 and dispersed them. They left 14 packs behind. Park pressed on and found the enemy well established higher up on the summit of 1410. After 250 shells had been directed into the enemy positions by Captain Powell,⁶ the artillery observer, the platoon charged, killed three, and dug in on this dominating feature for the night. Patrols moved out that evening and killed more Japanese making a total of nine in the day's fighting; four Australians were wounded. Park thought a counter-attack likely and formed a perimeter about 30 yards across. It was so cold there at 1,400 feet that at night the men huddled together for warmth.

Another strong group of perhaps 30 Japanese had been encountered that day by Lieutenant Jackson's platoon covering the Wonginara Track itself. In the fight which followed Jackson was gravely wounded. A stretcher bearer, Private Morris,⁷ went forward to attend him and was himself hit, but covered Jackson with his own body and dressed his wounds, being hit a second time as he did so. The attackers could not be extricated until dark, after another platoon had been sent forward to help. On the 24th twenty Japanese were killed by the 2/2nd. That night Chowne's patrol arrived back having reached Wonginara without seeing any Japanese and having obtained valuable information including verification of the existence of a line of communication from the Boiken area to the divide between the Ninahau and the Anumb.

The Japanese resistance was steadily increasing in intensity; this was proving the most severe fighting that had taken place so far in the campaign.

⁴ Maj R. C. Olsson, NX111089; 2/1 Fd Regt. Industrial research officer; of Kogarah, NSW; b. Petersham, NSW, 23 Feb 1919.

⁵ Pte M. J. Core, NX119863; 2/2 Bn. Tally clerk; of Coorparoo, Qld; b. Brisbane, 4 May 1922.

⁶ Capt R. L. Powell, MC, VX565; 2/2 Fd Regt. Salesman; of Armadale, Vic; b. Thornbury, Vic, 13 Mar 1913.

⁷ Pte E. G. Morris, MM, QX30832; 2/2 Bn. Farm worker; of Gayndah River, Qld; b. Gayndah, 1 Sep 1919.

The 2/2nd was now weary and due for a rest, but the final days of this phase were to prove the hardest and costliest. On the night of the 24th-25th Japanese raiding parties cut the lines between Derbyshire's and Lovett's companies. The plan for the day was that Derbyshire should attack through Park's platoon on the 1410 Feature, cut the Wonginara Track to the east, and push north along it to link with Lovett.

Chowne's platoon led the advance from the 1410 Feature. The men were moving along a track on a narrow ridge at about 900 feet when, at 11.20 a.m., the leading scouts were fired on.

The ground consisted of a narrow razor-back about eight feet wide with a high knoll covered with kunai rising abruptly above the general line of the ridge (wrote the battalion diarist).⁸ 7 Platoon was under fire moving slowly forward until 1450 when it was found that the Japs, approximately 30, were in well-concealed foxholes among the tree roots and bunkers. The front presented by the edge of the knoll was only wide enough for 3 men to operate at a time. At 1500 hours artillery concentrations were called down, 7 Pl withdrawing 50 yards and at 1720 hrs a mortar H.E. concentration. Jap snipers were located in trees and one enemy was killed and 3 wounded. At 1800 hrs Lt Chowne led 8 Pl up the track in a bayonet charge.

"The artillery concentration had done nothing to shift the Japanese," said an eye-witness soon afterwards. "Chowne took his platoon in yelling like mad and him leading. The men were firing all they had. Chowne had gone 15 yards when he turned his head to urge the men on and a Nip hit him in the head with a bullet. Our men went on, yelling like stone-age men. Private Conway⁹ was killed, then Sergeant Austin¹ was wounded. They were 60 yards up the ridge when 7 Platoon [Lieutenant Ferguson] went through them. The Bren gunner from Chowne's platoon, Private McClelland,² went on with 7 Platoon and stood on the side of the feature firing his Bren from the shoulder. He went on firing until they took the feature."

Eleven Japanese were killed and the Australians lost three killed or died of wounds (Chowne, Conway and Private Beardow³). Lieutenant Ferguson, who was among the wounded, remained on duty. The regimental medical officer, Captain McLennan,⁴ moved up to the position and treated the wounded there as it was impossible to evacuate them until daylight.⁵

Next morning (the 26th) Colonel Cameron, with Lieutenant Lee's⁶ platoon, moved through Derbyshire's company to reconnoitre the Japanese

⁸ Lieutenant J. Smiles, the Intelligence Officer of this battalion, kept a war diary of unusual completeness and clarity.

⁹ Pte A. W. Conway, NX13471; 2/2 Bn. Labourer; of Ungarie, NSW; b. Ungarie, 22 Apr 1916. Killed in action 25 Mar 1945.

¹ Sgt V. P. Austin, VX103088. 39 and 2/2 Bns. Cabinet maker; of Melbourne; b. Essendon, Vic, 3 Feb 1920.

² Pte K. F. McClelland, MM, NX83427; 2/2 Bn. Storeman and packer; of Bondi, NSW; b. Sydney, 1 May 1922.

³ Pte G. J. Beardow, NX109755; 2/2 Bn. Farmer; of Casino, NSW; b. Lismore, NSW, 30 Aug 1917. Died of wounds 31 Mar 1945.

⁴ Maj H. H. McLennan, VX60829; RMO 2/2 Bn. Medical practitioner; of Northcote, Vic; b. Northcote, 15 Aug 1915.

⁵ Lieutenant Chowne was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

⁶ Lt L. Lee, NX28491. 2/2 MG Bn and 2/2 Bn. Schoolmaster; of Armidale, NSW; b. Goulburn, NSW, 1 Mar 1915. Killed in action 26 Mar 1945.

flank and locate the mountain gun which had again gone into action. Twenty-five yards forward of the company position this group was fired on, Lee and another being killed. The patrol was withdrawn, the artillery observer, Captain Powell, and four others remaining to direct artillery and mortar fire. The Japanese moved forward when the guns opened and seemed only 15 yards ahead in bush in which the visibility was only about five yards. Powell gave a correction to his own gunners calculated to bring shells down on his own position and then he and his men ran back down the track.

On the 27th bombers attacked these resolute Japanese and the artillery fired 500 rounds and the mortars 150, after which two platoons attacked but, at 11 a.m., encountered resistance 50 yards farther on than hitherto. A severe fight developed and after two hours and a half the company, having lost one officer killed—Lieutenant Walker,⁷ who stood up to get a better view—and seven men wounded, gained a foothold on the knoll where there appeared to be some 40 Japanese well dug in with overhead cover. At this stage mortar fire was again brought down on the enemy position; one bomb dropped short and killed 2 Australians. At 5 p.m. the company withdrew, having lost 3 killed and 14 wounded in the day, and having killed 5 Japanese. These Japanese were the best troops the battalion had encountered in this campaign.

On 28th March Gilmore's company took over on 1410. Lovett's company pushed south along the track and after 1,000 yards was ambushed, losing 3 killed and 3 wounded. Patrols from Gilmore's company killed nine Japanese.

On the 30th Lieutenant Norrie⁸ with eighteen men and two natives returned from a fine two-day patrol from Dagua Creek to Kauremerak Hill (2,140 feet) and thence north-east and south-east. He found a few signs of enemy movements and collected valuable information about the tracks in this area.

In preparation for a further attack on the Japanese knoll on the 1410 Feature Lieutenant Park, on 1st April, stealthily climbed an almost vertical cliff and reached a point within ten yards of the enemy. This scouting expedition took the whole day and provided Park with a detailed knowledge of the enemy's position. When he returned he planned an attack for the next day.

Thus, on 2nd April, aircraft attacked the enemy's position, then the artillery and mortars bombarded it. A party moved to a near-by knoll whence they could keep the enemy under mortar and small arms fire during the attack. At 11.30 the two attacking platoons led by Park climbed up a 60-foot cliff to a forming-up place and thence charged with fixed bayonets. At a critical moment Sergeant Finlayson⁹ dashed forward and

⁷ Lt A. J. Walker, NX72232; 2/2 Bn. Bank officer; of Port Macquarie, NSW; b. Henty, NSW, 7 Dec 1918. Killed in action 27 Mar 1945.

⁸ Lt-Col J. W. Norrie, OBE, NX138174; 2/2 Bn. 3 Bn RAR Korea 1952-53. Regular soldier; b. Dyer's Crossing, NSW, 18 Apr 1922.

⁹ Lt M. Finlayson, MM, NX2323. 6 Div Sigs; 2/1 MG, 2/28 and 2/2 Bns. Farm hand; of Ulmarra, NSW; b. Ulmarra, 10 Nov 1920.

overran two forward pits. Although wounded he remained in the lead and was the first to reach the main objective. The skill and courage of Park and Finlayson were the main causes of the success of this action. Two Australians were killed but 26 Japanese dead were counted. Private Jurd,¹ a stretcher bearer, attended under fire 7 of the 10 Australians who were wounded. Jurd, Private Webb,² who distinguished himself in this action, and 3 others were wounded next day, one mortally, when a grenade was accidentally exploded.

Derbyshire's company continued the advance towards Tokoku Pass, and on 3rd April encountered the enemy dug in on a knoll, which they took that afternoon, killing 8 and losing 2 killed and 5 wounded: so far in the campaign this company had had 40 men killed or wounded. On 5th April Derbyshire linked with the 2/3rd Battalion moving up on the west and next day with Lovett's company at the foot of the pass.

Meanwhile Lieutenant D. R. Clarke's platoon had made a three-day patrol deep to the east of the enemy's positions on Tokoku Mountain to collect information about the Japanese lines of communication to Karawop, and kill any Japanese in the area. The patrol moved south from Dagua to the Autogi and Walandum area where twelve Japanese were seen digging in. The patrol returned along the coast finding eleven Japanese lying dead, apparently of illness, between Kofi and Dagua.

The 2/3rd Battalion had moved to a position north of the 1410 Feature on the night of 27th-28th March. Next day it advanced south, encountering several small parties of Japanese and killing eight and taking a prisoner, and bivouacked at the track and river junction south of the pass and in the midst of the enemy's area. On 29th March Major MacKenzie's³ company moved north and encountered Japanese in well-concealed positions south of the pass. At one stage 10 Japanese attacked the rear of the company, but Sergeant Tighe⁴ promptly led his section in an attack, killing 6 and dispersing the others.

Because of the air, artillery and mortar bombardment of the Japanese facing the 2/2nd Battalion, MacKenzie's company was halted until 4th April when it circled east and north and secured high ground east of the Japanese positions. There it was joined by Captain Gibbins' company and on the 5th they attacked.

The ridge occupied by the Japanese had a series of small knolls, each defended, and this necessitated a succession of platoon attacks. At dusk, in the face of enemy small arms fire from the commanding ground, the company consolidated on the highest false crest. Without artillery support any further advance would have been impossible. At first light on 6th

¹ Pte K. T. J. Jurd, NX111597; 2/2 Bn. Clerk; of Neutral Bay, NSW; b. Coogee, NSW, 8 Oct 1922.

² Pte A. Webb, MM, NX211119; 2/2 Bn. Farmer; of Wallsend, NSW; b. West Wallsend, NSW, 30 Aug 1921.

³ Lt-Col K. M. MacKenzie, OBE, NX7596; 2/3 Bn. Regular soldier; b. Ballina, NSW, 22 Aug 1913.

⁴ WO2 R. C. Tighe, NX66463; 2/3 Bn. Drover; of Paddington, NSW; b. Cobar, NSW, 9 Jul 1911.

April Lieutenant Martin,⁵ the artillery observer, accompanied by an Owen gunner for protection, crawled forward and occupied a slit trench a few yards from the enemy. Ranging was extremely difficult because of the nature of the terrain, the nearness of his own troops surrounding the hill, and fire from enemy snipers. Nevertheless Martin completed ranging, with rounds falling within a few yards of his own position. Although he realised he was in the target area, he brought down 350 rounds, completely devastating the enemy defences and blowing in many of the posts. The subsequent infantry attack, which quickly followed the shelling, caught the shaken enemy by surprise, and the position was quickly taken. It extended for 500 yards and included 30 weapon-pits with overhead cover. The pass was now firmly in the Australians' hands.

During this northward advance the main body of the 2/3rd was sweeping the enemy from the area to the south. In this phase the 16th Brigade was receiving very valuable help from Lieutenant Birrell, of Angau, and about 12 native police. Day after day parties of police were sent out either with patrols or with local natives. With the troops they acted as guides; when working by themselves they brought in natives whom Birrell interrogated. One of these announced that the headquarters of Lieutenant-General Nakai of the *20th Division* was just east of Wonginara Mission. Among the native refugees were two who had been employed, with others, carrying Nakai about in a chair. Two companies under Captain Macdonald⁶ of the 2/3rd had moved out on 2nd April and were led along a concealed route by native police and the two former chair-bearers with the object of capturing this headquarters. The leading platoon (Lieutenant J. Copeman) approached undetected to within ten yards and attacked with rapid success. In the fight a platoon that was following came under heavy fire, and its commander, Lieutenant Varley,⁷ was killed. Corporal Kentwell⁸ immediately led his section in a charge and overwhelmed the enemy. Round the enemy headquarters 28 out of apparently 40 Japanese were killed, including 5 officers, but not the general. The Australians lost 2 killed and 3 wounded. After this only isolated Japanese parties were found in the Mabam Valley and Wonginara Mission areas. Up to 12th April 19 more Japanese were killed by patrols.

In this period Angau officers and their native guides collected some hundreds of refugees, thus depriving the Japanese of potential labourers. The 2/3rd Battalion, as mentioned, was greatly dependent upon native guides, and to supply the battalion so far over the rugged hills demanded continuous labour for lines of carriers.

⁵ Lt G. A. Martin, MC, QX11979; 2/2 Fd Regt. Law student; of Townsville, Qld; b. Cairns, Qld, 1 Apr 1918.

⁶ Capt J. E. Macdonald, MC, NX34890; 2/3 Bn. Stock agent; of Wagga Wagga, NSW; b. Gundagai, NSW, 19 Jul 1912. Died 21 May 1958.

⁷ Lt R. A. Varley, NX120685; 2/3 Bn. Bank officer; of Inverell, NSW; b. Inverell, 1 Jun 1923. Killed in action 2 Apr 1945. (Son of Brigadier A. L. Varley, MC, who died while a prisoner of the Japanese.)

⁸ Sgt A. S. Kentwell, NX66620; 2/3 Bn. Shearer; of Warren, NSW; b. Warren, 21 Aug 1920.

Warrant Officer Godwin of Angau said that his line of 150 carriers had gone out over the 1410 Feature to the 2/3rd Battalion on three consecutive days carrying cargo out and wounded back and would probably go out again next day (wrote an observer on 31st March). The journey took from three to three hours and a half each way. It would kill them if it went on, Godwin declared. Among Godwin's police boys are some who know the country thoroughly and he is confident that they will clear up the area west of the present 2/2nd and 2/3rd Battalion positions very quickly and at the same time collect all the "bush kanakas" in the area so as to rob the Japs of carriers and at the same time get the women and children to a refugee camp where they can be properly fed.

As we were wading along the river towards the 2/3rd a police boy suddenly stopped like a hunting dog, announced there were some kanakas near by, disappeared into the bush, and soon reappeared with two of them, each carrying some sac sac wrapped in leaves. They offered to take the police boy out to find the rest of their group, but he was not having any, suspecting a trap. The kanakas were added to our line of carriers, and the search for the others will be made at the police party's own time.

In seven days Godwin and his men collected 250 refugees. Native guides, of whom 40 were now with the 2/3rd, had been largely responsible not only for the success of the attack on the *20th Division's* headquarters, but for other useful patrols and surprise attacks.

After having spent nearly three weeks partly resting and partly on road work, the 2/1st, as mentioned earlier, was moved forward to But on 19th March and took over responsibility for this advanced base from the 2/2nd. That evening the first barges arrived. For the next few days the men were employed partly in building a field maintenance centre and partly in patrolling the hills that overlooked the airfield.

In these hills, as elsewhere during this campaign, considerable numbers of Japanese had been left behind, out of touch with their units. During the five days to 24th March patrols of the 2/1st killed 26 Japanese including an officer. The patrolling was arduous, and when it was over the battalion's medical officer, Captain Sloss,⁹ reported that in some platoons up to one quarter of the men were unfit for duty because of dermatitis, various fevers, and sprains.

In the next phase Brigadier King ordered Colonel Cullen to clear the Japanese from the hills as far south as three miles and a half from the coast and for three miles to the west. Accordingly one company with native guides moved south from But and then west, overcoming with the help of artillery and mortars a series of Japanese positions well dug in on dominating knolls. By 1st April the area had been cleared.

Meanwhile on 26th March another company, also with native guides, had moved into the hills farther east with the object of driving the Japanese from a base named Saburuman whose position was not clearly known. After several patrol clashes Lieutenant Mavay's¹ platoon on 31st March had a fight with a party of Japanese round a group of nine two-storied huts and many lean-to's—evidently Saburuman. Four Japanese and one

⁹ Capt W. L. Sloss, VX70316; RMO 2/1 Bn. Medical practitioner; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Ballarat, 27 Jan 1918.

¹ Lt H. B. Mavay, NX3643; 2/1 Bn. Public servant; of Auburn, NSW; b. Yangan, Qld, 7 Oct 1915.

Australian were killed and other Japanese fled. Next day Mavay patrolled to Magahen. In this period the 2/1st killed 73 Japanese and captured 5 for a loss of 3 killed and 7 wounded.

Meanwhile the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion headquarters had been ordered to Marabus and the battalion cleared the area from Muguluwela to an area 5,000 yards east, where junction was made with the 2/1st Battalion.

The Japanese troops defending the Tokoku Pass included the *79th Regiment*, a company of the *26th Field Artillery*, and the *21st Airfield Battalion*.

As mentioned earlier all but one of the infantry regiments in the *XVIII Army* had been in action against Australians in the Salamaua and Huon Peninsula areas in 1943 and 1944. The *79th Regiment* and the *26th Field Artillery*, for example, had comprised the main part of the force that had delivered the counter-attack against the 9th Division round Scarlet Beach on the Huon Peninsula in October 1943—perhaps the most dangerous attack on Australians in the South-West Pacific Area after the one on Wau in January and February 1943. Parts of the *26th Artillery* had fought also round Salamaua and at Kaiapit in the Ramu Valley.

Since January it had been Adachi's policy to make the Maprik district the main area of resistance because it was able to produce more food than the coastal zone. Already, as we have seen, there had been a steady movement of units from the coast into the mountains. After the loss of But the *20th Division* was ordered to move south of the mountains where it was to take under command *Miyake Force* and other units and fortify a big area to the east of the line on which the *41st Division* was fighting.

During the exacting fighting of February, March and April the Australian troops became increasingly convinced that the campaign was not worth their blood and sweat: and the fact that they had been allotted inadequate shipping, transport aircraft, and heavy engineering equipment tended to reinforce this conclusion.

Among the 16th Brigade battalions (wrote an observer in March) the tale is: "We could go straight through to Wewak if we had the equipment: a few L.S.T's and enough aircraft to drop or land the supplies needed. It's a 'Q' war and there just isn't the equipment to get forward with. But anyhow, what we are doing can't have any conceivable effect on the outcome of the war. We are wasting good lives." One comment on Forde's reported statement that the army was equipped for the task it had to do was: "Well, as we're doing — all, I suppose he's right."

The conviction that the achievements did not justify the losses and the privations seemed to be far stronger in this veteran division than among the (mostly) younger and less experienced troops on Bougainville and New Britain. In the battalions of the 6th Division were many who had fought in crucial campaigns in Africa, Greece, Crete, Syria, and Papua, and who considered that no essential purpose was being served by these constant bitter platoon and company fights against a stubborn enemy who had shown that he would fight only if attacked. The fact that in this bush warfare far more than in open warfare the best and bravest were those who were killed—the forward scout and the veteran platoon and section leader—and these, painfully often, were much-admired soldiers who had survived three or four hard campaigns, made the men more bitter. At the same time a rise in the malaria rate and consequent criticism of the

division and of units within it and a tightening of regulations concerning the taking of atebirin caused irritation at all levels.²

During the advance to Dagua and Wonginara the role of the 6th Division had been somewhat clarified. In the course of a letter to General Blamey on 27th February informing him of events in each of the First Army's areas General Sturdee had written: "I have not sought your special approval to start operations towards Wewak, as there is nothing to start. It would be more a question of stopping the constant process of advance that has gone on since we debouched across the Driniumor last November. . . . The administrative resources for operations towards Wewak are slender, but the plans made for supply will enable the operation to continue provided that there is no reduction of the two C-47's and American-owned L.C.T's. If there should be any reduction there will be no alternative but to draw back towards Aitape."

Sturdee then visited Aitape, and on 7th March (before the dash to But opened) wrote to Blamey again, giving an account of the difficulties of transport in the coastal area. He pointed out that the roads were so bad that jeeps were practically useless and even 6-wheelers were uncertain of getting forward of Dogreto Bay. But could be taken at any time if enough water transport was available, which it was not. The only American landing craft available for unloading the ships at Aitape and moving stores forward were five L.C.T's, of which not more than four were working on any day, and only one could be spared to go forward of Aitape; and 40 L.C.M's of which only 15 to 20 were serviceable daily. Often L.C.M's could not be used to unload ships because of the surf at Aitape. The original plans did not envisage the 6th Division being available at Aitape after about April, he added; consequently no provision was made for landing craft for any considerable advance towards Wewak. Big advances had been made, however, and maintenance of the road was now beyond the capacity of the engineers. Any advance beyond But would be a complete gamble unless further watercraft were made available. Yet it was desirable to seize Wewak in time to move the Aitape base thither before the north-west monsoon began again in September-October. If the 6th Division was to be withdrawn and replaced by the 8th and 23rd Brigades those brigades could more easily control the area from Wewak than from Aitape.

Sturdee then asked whether he could plan on having the 6th Division available for any specified time; whether he could anticipate that G.H.Q. would approve retention of the present watercraft at Aitape; whether he should plan to move the Aitape base to Wewak. If enough watercraft were not available should he progress beyond But?

General Blamey visited the division on 19th March, when General Stevens advanced two plans for the capture of Wewak: the first provided for an overland advance along the coastal plain and the second for a major

² See A. S. Walker, *Clinical Problems of War* (1952) and *The Island Campaigns* (1957), in the Medical series of this history.

amphibious attack at Dove Bay east of Wewak. "As there was little likelihood of obtaining the necessary requirements for the amphibious operation," wrote Blamey afterwards, "I decided that a land assault on Wewak would be undertaken."³

Three days later, on General Blamey's instructions, General Berryman informed G.H.Q. that it was estimated that if the 6th Division was allotted ten additional L.C.T's it could crush enemy resistance in the Wewak area in about three months. The additional craft were allotted, and Stevens learnt of this addition to his resources on 24th March.⁴

In response to a further request by Stevens for additional naval vessels, particularly as he would soon be within range of guns of up to 105-mm round Wewak and on the islands near by, the First Army informed him on 12th April that he would be allotted for the operations against Wewak the support of the sloop *Swan*, of two corvettes (*Colac* and *Dubbo*), five "Fairmile" launches, additional bombers for No. 71 Wing, three Boomerang aircraft for reconnaissance, and four Moths for communication flights. Later he was told that the corvette *Deloraine* and a sixth "Fairmile" would be added.

³ Commander Allied Land Forces, Report on Operations in Australian Mandated Territory, 26 April 1944 to 15 August 1945, p. 106.

⁴ On 24th February General Blamey had informed General Stevens that the Government had agreed that he should be transferred to "a very advantageous position" in the Postmaster-General's Department, in which he had held a senior post before the war. General Vasey was appointed to succeed him. Vasey, however, was killed in an aircraft accident on 5th March, and Stevens remained in command until July.