THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE WASHINGTON



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HISTORICAL RECORDS SECTION

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ITEM NO: 1568

52d int Div - G-2 Report of Action, Papuan Campaign

2 Oct 42 - 24 Jan 4

HEADQUARTERS 32nd DEFARTRY DIVISION Office of the AC of S, G-2 APO 32

MDU/rtm

3 April 1943

SUBJECT: Report of Action, Papuan Campaign, From 2 October 1942 to 24 January 1943.

TO : Commanding General, Headquarters 32nd Infantry Division, APO 32.

1. Pursuant to paragraph 10, AR 345-105, the following report of action is submitted.

- 2. On 30 September 1942, a warning order was given by the Commanding General that the Division Headquarters advanced detachment would move by air on October 2nd from Brisbane to Port Moresby. Two regiments of the Division, the 126th and the 128th, had already arrived at Port Moresby.
- 3. Since the movement of Division Headquarters was to be by air, it was necessary to reduce office equipment to the minimum, consisting of one standard typewriter and a supply chest containing overlay paper, drawing equipment, etc., which was barely sufficient to operate.
- 4. Early in the morning of October 2nd, the advanced detachment of Division Headquarters left from Archer Field, The G-2 Section consisted of the following personnel:

Capt. W. D. HAWKINS, Acting G-2
Lt. R. S. FERGUSON, Assistant G-2
M/Sgt M. W. CZMER
S/Sgt LELAND W. CHENOWETH
Sgt LELAND M. SCORE
T/IV JACK F. HOWIE
T/IV GLAPKE E. FERRILL
Cpl DAVID B. HUIE
T/V REGINALD T. MASON
PFC CLAUDE E. HORRIS
PFC PAUL P. REYNOLDS
PFC LEE SCHWARTZ
PFC ROY D. SLOAN

5. On arrival at Port Moresey to the function of three days, after which the Division by was set up in Kalikodobu (sixty miles Southeast of Port Moresby). The CP was established here for the reason that the plan at that time was to move the two infantry regiments up the trail and over the mountains from this point via Laruni and Jaure to Wairopi and Buna. I remained at Port Moresby for the purpose of obtaining information concerning the enemy situation and the terrain over which it was expected the Division would operate. At this early stage the greatest obstacle which we were to encounter was very evident, that being the great scarcity of accurate information concerning the terrain, probable routes over the mountains, and the

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trail net on the Buna side of the mountains. Initially the only maps available were the strategic maps of the Papuan Pempinsula (four miles to the inch), which were known to be incomplete and inaccurate except as to a comparatively narrow belt along the coast line. Concerning probable routes over the mountains there were no planned trail reports or reconnaissance reports, nor even definite information as to the existence of trails other than the main government trail through Kokoda, at that time completely occupied by the Japanese as far down to Port Moresby as Ioribaiwa.

- 6. For this reason a patroi from the 126th Infantry under Captain Boice had already been sent out from Kaiikodobu to reconnoiter the trail up to Jaure. No enemy contact was made by the patrol although when they reached Jaure the natives reported that a Japanese patrol had been there about two weeks previously, but had withdrawn. In order to ascertain definitely whether the enemy was anticipating a threat from this flank, Captain Boice sent a smaller patrol on down the Kumusi River which made no contact until they reached the immediate vicinity of Wairopi, where it was apparent that the enemy was maintaining a security detachment on this trail.
- 7. Concerning the terrain on the far side of the mountains, little accurate information was at first available. The only maps in use were the Buna sheet of the strategic map series, Buna target plan map No. 24, and an uncontrolled mosaic photo map, consisting of three sheets which covered a strip inland from Buna to Horanda. The first was known to be wholly inaccurate, the second, compiled of aerial photographs, was of one very small area in the immediate vicinity of Buna, and the third did not cover sufficient territory to be of use during the move toward the Buna area.
- 8. The difficulties inherent in using all the strategic maps were increased by the fact that there was considerable argument as to the actual location of villages named on the map. This was due to the fact that the physical location of villages are changed frequently; villages are abandoned, new ones appear, and the names are accordingly very misleading. After word was received by radio that Captain Boice's patrol had reached Jaure, it took three days of searching from the air to locate the patrol because of the fact that the location of the village was approximately fifteen miles from its position as indicated on the map.
- 9. On October eleventh, the Division CP moved back to Port Moresby from Kalikodobu.
- 10. In order to obtain more accurate information of the terrain on the far side of the mountains as well as to develop the possibility of establishing advanced landing fields on the north side of the mountains, thereby eliminating the necessity of marching troops all the way across, I spent

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considerable time in aerial reconnaissance during the ensuing weeks. One advanced field had already been established at Wanigela, which appeared to be a likely base inasmuch as the map indicated the existence of a trail up to Pongani. Its existence was confirmed by ANGAU patrol which traversed it.

- 11. Therefore, the 128th Infantry Regiment was flown to Wanigeia in order to move overland to Pongani. Just at this time a period of heavy rain caused the Musa River to flood, which inundated the entire basin near its mouth to a width of about eight miles and a depth of about five feet. This made the trail which crossed the basin invisible and virtually impassable, which necessitated the movement of the regiment around to Pongani by small boats operating a shuttle service. Meanwhile a probable location for another lending field was found in the upper valley of the Musa River near Safia, and a Mr. Cocal Abel, a local resident of Samarai, volunteered to go in from Wanigela and clear a strip, using natives which he arranged to be sent up from Abau and met him there. This was completed under the direction of Colonel Sverdrup of the Engineers Office, G.R.Q., and the party moved down towards the North coast clearing other strips at Embessa, Kinjaki, and finally Pongani. anticipation of this, only the second battalion of the 126th had followed Captain Boice's patrol up to Jaure, the other two battalions remaining at Port Moresby. It was planned to fly the balance of the 126th into Pongani, but on the day the movement was to commence, the Advanced Headquarters, Fifth Air Force, decided that the Pongani strip was unserviceable. Therefore they commenced the air transportation of the first battalion to Abels Field, whence they were to march overland to Pongant. Later in the day it was decided that the Pongani strip was serviceable, and the balance of the regiment was flown
- 12. In the meantime, in order to have a standard and a reasonably accurate map to use in the forthcoming operation it was necessary for the G-2 Section to draw up its own, attached hereto as Appendix "A" (Note: This map is one of a recent run, hence the notation "for training purposes only" in the heading.) This map was made upon the framework of the Buna strat map corrected by aerial photographs, reports of local residents, and actual aerial reconnaissance of the terrain. It proved to be fairly accurate, except for the trail between Pongani and Bofu, concerning which no information was obtainable. On November 13th, the advanced detachment of the Division Headquarters, including the entire G-2 Section was flown to Pongani, whence it moved by dugout canoe and coastal lugger to Mendaropu. At this point the only direct communication between Division Headquarters and the regiments was by radio which of course prohibited the use of overlays in transmitting information or instructions.
- 13. The first enemy intelligence same from what appeared to be a deserted outpost in the vicinity of Warisota Plantation on November 15th, which substantiated native reports received to the effect that the enemy was withdrawing his outposts back to Buna. The same was borne out by our first actual

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contact with the enemy consisting of a patrol skirmish near Dobodura on November 16th when the enemy patrol withdrew. Up to this time there was no reason to change our estimate of the situation, which was that the Buna area was garrisoned by not more than a battalion with purely defensive intentions.

- 14. In order to determine whether an effort was being made by the enemy to evacuate Buna at night, Captain Keegan, who was in command of the small boat operation along the coast, took one of the boats loaded with twenty men of the 128th, and armed with two .50 cal. MG's and a 37 mm. gun, and on the night of November 15th attempted to go around Cape Endaiadere and get in close to Buna. However, these waters were particularly treacherous at night to inexperienced pilots, and the boat ran onto a reef and was unable to progress.
- 15. The CP was moved from Mendaropu via coastal schooner to Embogu on the 20th November. By November 19th, contact had been made by our three forces, and it was apparent that the enemy had anticipated our routes of attack and the defensive pian was prepared accordingly. From an examination of the enemy defensive system as illustrated in a map prepared after the fall of Buna, and attached hereto as Exhibit "B", it will be seen that the three probable avenues of attack against the Buna area were defended heavily and in depth, with little or no defense along portions of the perimeter which were well nigh impassible. On the 19th, word was received from N.G.F. that there was strong evidence to indicate that the enemy had landed a battalion of reinforcements at Girua on the night of November 17th-18th. This was substantiated by documents captured at a later date, and the battalion was identified as the Third Battalion of the
- 16. On the morning of the 2ist November an attack was launched by all three forces simultaneously after a heavy preparation of concentrated air attack. The aerial attack was found to be largely ineffective against the strong points which were holding up our advance because the latter were pin-point targets which afforded complete shelter from the effects of area bombing. Here, and in subsequent attempts at implementing direct air support the difficulties in coordination which the terrain presented were very evident. Front lines could not be indicated successfully by ground panels because of the absence of suitable open places. It was extremely hazardous to set out panels in the open spaces that did exist because of the effect of enemy snipers. Very pistols were ineffective in the jungle and it is believed that ground projectors are the answer to the marking of front lines in such thickly covered terrain as
- 17. The situation was more or less stabilized for the next three weeks, and during this time communication was constantly improved by the installation of telephone lines. On the 29th November, the CP was moved to Henanamburi, all personal and office equipment having to be carried the fifteen miles by trail.
- 16. In spite of reinforcements there was no apparent change in the attitude of the enemy which remained purely defensive. There was only one



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case noted of a counter attack, and that was more in the form of a harassing raid made into a company CP of the 128th Infantry at night. There was no apparent offensive disposition on the part of the enemy during the entire period, but his positions which were well planned, constructed, and defended, were held with a determination which was indicated by the dength of time it took us to make any substantial advance. From an Intelligence standpoint the greatest problem was in obtaining results from patrolling. The difficulties involved in effective patrolling had not been envisaged in previous training. and were so numerous as to render patrols useless from an intelligence standpoint until the later stages of the campaign when some facility was developed in overcoming these obstacles. In the first place the tack of an accurate tactical or terrain map was felt very keenly. This, together with the shortage of aerial photographs made it extremely difficult if not impossible for a patrol leader to note where he was when he started on patrol, or where he had been when he got back. Moreover, in view of the inaccuracies and small scale of the maps being used it was difficult to make use of or plot accurate bearings. Thirdly, the physical difficulties of trying to estimate distance and follow a compass course over that ground were very great. Both the track north from Sinemi and that north from Ango were flanked on both sides with deep swamp covered with a tangled mass of sago paim, mangroves, and vines.

- 19. As a result of the foregoing most of our information concerning enemy dispositions and emplacements was gained from attacks rather than from patrolling. On December 3rd, the Division Headquarters was taken over by the Headquarters of I Corps, and the staff sections merged, the composite headquarters then becoming known as Buna Forces Headquarters. Up until that time the operation of the Division G-2 and G-3 Sections had been combined, but thereafter the two sections were divorced and sepapate records maintained.
- 20. On December 12th, the CP was moved to Sinemi where it remained for the balance of the campaign. On this date also the 127th Infantry began to relieve the 126th on the left flank, facing Buna Mission. By this time considerable experience had been gained in the overcoming of difficulties incidental to patrolling, and a great deal of useful information was obtained from patrolling of our left flank in the direction of the Sanananda Road.
- 21. During the entire campaign however, there was a considerable volume of information from enemy forces, both from captured documents and material, and interrogation of prisoners. It was found that the keeping of a diary was a custom almost universal with the Jap soldier, which was of great value in reconstructing the enemy order of battle. Prisoners, even private soldiers, had a surprising amount of information concerning the details of their past movements, troop dispositions and strengths, all of which they were perfectly willing to divulge. Of course, there were some contradictions in testimony, but I am quite sure that these were based on genuine mistakes rather than a deliberate intention to mislead the interrogator, because in the main statements were found to be substantially correct.



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- 22. In spite of a shortage of food, medical facilities, ammunition, and an almost total absence of air support and artillery, the enemy morale remained at a high level during the entire campaign, as indicated both by their tenacity in fighting and by diaries which were captured. Their morale apparently broke, however, on December 31st when it was announced by their officers that there was no hope of reinforcements and that they were doomed. The following day marked the beginning of the disintegration of organized resistance as shown by the desperate efforts of unorganized groups and individuals to escape from the area.
- 23. Patrolling was effective and well used in our subsequent advance up the coast through Tarakena to Girua, where forces were joining with the Australians. Combat patrols preceding our advance up the beach, combined with the effective method of advance, reduced casualties to a minimum.
- 24. On January 24th Division Headquarters, relieved by the 41st Division, was flown from Dobodura back to Port Moresby and thence to Brisbane.
- 25. Records of the Section, including Periodic Reports and Intelligence Summaries issued during the period, are attached hereto.

W. D. HAWKINS, Mejor, G.S.C., AC of S, G-2.