

The MacKechnie Force's Command Issues in the Battle of Salamaua June-September 1943

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ABSTRACT

Salamaua was part of Operation Postern which was intended to recapture the Huon Peninsula from the Japanese to isolate the Japanese at Rabaul, an important chokepoint in the Southwest Pacific Theater during World War II. The Battle of Salamaua was intended to distract the Japanese at Lae to allow the 9th Australian Division to take Lae and secure the New Guinea side of the Vitiaz Straits as part of Operation Cartwheel. This article tells the story of the American involvement in the Battle of Salamaua. The Battle of Salamaua was the last time that Americans fought under Australian command during World War II.

Keywords: WWII, Australia, Southwest Pacific Theater, Roosevelt, MacKechnie, Salamaua, Lae, MacArthur, Infantry, New Guinea, Rabaul, Huon Peninsula

Problemas de mando de la fuerza MacKechnie en la batalla de Salamaua, junio-septiembre de 1943

RESUMEN

Salamaua era parte de la Operación Postern, que tenía la intención de recuperar la península de Huon de los japoneses para aislar a los japoneses en Rabaul, un importante punto de estrangulamiento en el Teatro del Sudoeste del Pacífico durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. La Batalla de Salamaua tenía la intención de distraer a los japoneses en Lae para permitir que la 9.^a División Australiana tomara Lae y asegurara el lado de Nueva Guinea del Estrecho de Vitiaz como parte de la Operación Cartwheel. Este artículo cuenta la historia de la participación estadounidense en la batalla de Salamaua. La batalla de Salamaua fue la última vez que los estadounidenses lucharon bajo el mando de Australia durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Palabras clave: Segunda Guerra Mundial, Australia, Frente del Pacífico Sudoeste, Roosevelt, MacKechnie, Salamaua, Lae, MacArthur, Infantería, Nueva Guinea, Rabaul, Península de Huon

1943年6月至9月间萨拉马瓦战役 中麦凯奇尼军的指挥问题

摘要

萨拉马瓦曾是后门行动（Operation Postern）的一部分，后者旨在从日军处夺回休恩半岛，进而将日军孤立拉包尔（二战期间西南太平洋战区的一个重要枢纽点）。萨拉马瓦战役旨在转移莱城日军的注意力，让澳大利亚第9师占领莱城并确保勇士号海峡靠近新几内亚的那一侧成为车轮行动（Operation Cartwheel）的一部分。本文讲述了美国在萨拉马瓦战役中的介入。萨拉马瓦战役是二战期间美军最后一次在澳洲指挥下参战。

关键词：二战，澳大利亚，西南太平洋战区，罗斯福，麦凯奇尼（MacKechnie），萨拉马瓦，莱城，麦克阿瑟，步兵，新几内亚，拉包尔，休恩半岛

There is little research on an important battle of the Southwest Pacific. The last battle in which Americans fought under Australian command, an important push forward against the Japanese and one of the first chances to apply the lessons learned from Milne Bay, Buna, Gona, and Sananada about fighting the Japanese in the jungles of Papua New Guinea happened during Operation Postern, an operation to recapture the Huon Peninsula and isolate the Japanese base at Rabaul. The Battle at Salamaua, as part of that operation, was a ruse to lure the Japanese away from Lae. The miscommunication about the ruse with the

ground troops resulted in the Allies capturing Salamaua too quickly. This article is about the ability of the Australians and Americans to work together, how it was supposed to work, and how it was badly misinterpreted at the command level.

The first phase of Postern called for an amphibious operation at Nassau Bay to create a base of operations at Salamaua to enable the Australian 9th Division to take Lae. This base of operations shortened the overland line of communications from Wau and freed aircraft and logistical support for the assault on Lae.¹ The amphibious opera-

tion was assigned to MacKechnie Force, pulled from the U.S. 41st Infantry Division's 162nd Infantry Regiment.

MacKechnie Force landed at Nassau Bay with orders to strike inland to clear Bitoi Ridge after 17th Australian Brigade had cleared the landing area at Nassau Bay. Brigadier General Murray Moten, the commander of the 17th Australian Brigade, ordered MacKechnie Force to move 10 miles inland to attack the Japanese, but with the great loss of landing craft and supplies, Colonel A.R. MacKechnie could see no possibility of being able to go on the attack. The Battle for Salamaua started on June 29, 1943, and the objective was gained on September 12, 1943. The 162nd Regiment fought in arguably the longest siege of sustained combat in the Pacific area. "A general feeling was expressed that this battalion had climbed more higher and muddier hills than any U.S. outfit known to history. Seventy-six days of continued contact with wide dispersion, serious supply difficulties and varied enemy tracks and position had made the 41st Bn, 162nd Infantry, a battle-wise outfit and all felt that any rest period had been well earned."² The 162nd Regiment's seventy-six days of continuous combat held the record in the Southwest Pacific Area until the end of the war against the Japanese and resulted in a Presidential Unit Citation. In the Australian historical record and in popular commemoration, the Battle of Salamaua is frequently subsumed into the larger two-divisional assault on Lae, if it is mentioned at all. Lae, however, could not have been captured so quickly had the Salamaua Magnet not

worked and ultimately worked exceedingly well.

The 41st Infantry Division, an Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana National Guard Infantry Division was the first American infantry division to arrive in Australia assigned to fight under General MacArthur's command in the Southwest Pacific Theater. The 41st Infantry Division had been put on mobilization orders on September 16, 1940, one of the first four National Guard Infantry divisions activated for World War II. The 41st had a well-connected commander, Major General George Ared White, who had served as the 41st Infantry Division commander before and after World War I. Additionally, he served on General John "Black Jack" Pershing's staff during World War I where he knew the importance of training when a unit went to war. Because of this commander, the 41st Infantry Division trained and trained well during the interwar years. The 41st Infantry Division had participated in many war games before the United States entered the war and had won every game resulting in Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, the Chief of Staff of GHQ (General Headquarters), stating that the 41st Infantry Division was the top-ranked National Guard infantry division in the United States and one of the three top divisions in the United States Army.³ Unfortunately Major General White would die before the 41st went to war. Major General Horace Fuller would take command.

Australia had been fighting for the British Empire since World War II

started. Australia itself was attacked in February 1942 at Darwin by the Japanese, and Australia scrambled to get its troops home. Most of Australia's military were in North Africa, so when Japan started the Pacific War on December 7, 1941, there were few Australian troops available to protect the homeland. "After the bombing of Darwin, all RAN [Royal Australian Navy] ships in the Mediterranean theatre, as well as the 6th and 7th Divisions returned to defend Australia."⁴

The Australians asked for help from the United States and Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, ordered the 41st Infantry Division to transfer to Australia from Oregon and Washington coastline defense on February 17, 1942, with the mission to protect Australia's ports and air bases and provide garrisons for the defense of Australia's eastern and northeastern coastal cities.⁵

The 41st Infantry Division arrived in Sydney and Melbourne in March and April of 1942, consolidated in Melbourne and moved by rail to Rockhampton, where it undertook jungle training in preparation to fight the Japanese in New Guinea. The 41st fought for the first time in December 1942 at Buna, Gona, and Sanananda with the deployment of the 163rd Infantry Regiment commanded by Brigadier General Jens Doe to fight under I Corps' Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger. The 163rd Regiment quickly cleaned up the fighting and returned to Rockhampton, Australia to prepare for its next mission. Next in line to fight was

the 41st's 162nd Regiment under the command of Colonel A.R. MacKechnie.

Americans fought for the last time under Australian command when the 162nd Regiment was ordered to fight in the 3rd Australian Division's area of operation in Papua New Guinea to divert the Japanese from the main objective of Lae by feinting the recapture of Salamaua. MacKechnie Force initially consisted of the 1st Battalion of the 162nd Regiment, a regiment detached from the 41st US Infantry Division, assigned to the 17th Australian Brigade for the Battle of Salamaua, and named for Colonel A.R. MacKechnie, the commander of the 162nd Regiment. A Company from 2nd Battalion reinforced MacKechnie Force and 3rd Battalion was assigned later, but under the Task Force name of Coane Force came the start of the most problematic of Australian and American leadership difficulties during the Battle of Salamaua. The 1st Battalion of the 162nd Regiment was the first unit to land at Nassau Bay on the night of June 29-30, 1943, in one of the first amphibious landings in the Pacific theater.

In 1993, Jon Hoffman wrote an article in *The Marine Corps Gazette* comparing the amphibious landings done by the Marines in the Central Pacific Theater to the amphibious landings done by the Army in the Southwest Pacific Theater. He specifically mentions the landing at Nassau Bay noting that even though it was a tough amphibious landing it was generally more successful than most Marine landings, since there were dramatic differences in the

size of the land masses and the ability to maneuver with the larger land mass based on the location of the Japanese. General Douglas MacArthur had an innate ability to see the opportunity for maneuver if his troops could be landed in locations away from the mass of the enemy so his fighting units could gain a firm footing before having to fight against them. Generally, leaders focus on the final objective and forget to look at all the potential options of taking that objective including the option of using a large land mass for maneuver warfare. Salamaua was one of the first examples of this ability; when MacArthur ordered the MacKechnie Force to land at Nassau Bay 20 miles away from Salamaua, he provided the MacKechnie Force with a relatively protected anchorage allowing them to land artillery and supplies with comparatively light enemy interference.⁶

Unfortunately, the reconnaissance of the beach was inadequate and the surf on the beach selected for the landing force was too high (12 feet) which proved to be difficult to get landing craft through it. The beach also had only about 300-400 yards cleared and ready for the landing force. During the landing, MacKechnie Force lost 18 out of its 22 landing craft, which severely affected the ability to reinforce and resupply the initial landing force. In addition, the troops in the first wave had been scared with “bear” stories about how tricky and clever the Japanese were, which resulted in hesitation to move away from the beach.⁷

A personal journal kept by Captain James Gray, the commander of A

Company, the first company to land at Nassau Bay, documents the landing. “God, it’s cold and wet – we’ve been bouncing around like a cork for hours. It’s blacker than hell. Then it happens! First a couple of boats off our port side collide. Another goes haywire and drops back. The next thing we know; the waves of boats are all separated. Get the picture? About thirty small boats bobbing around in the pitch black with the ocean as rough as all get out and we don’t know where each other are.”⁸ This was the first amphibious landing for the 41st Infantry Division and it had been determined that it would be safer to land during the darkest part of the night. “The ramp goes down and out we go into waist deep water with the high breakers washing all over us. Some of the guys go under and come up spittin and cussin. Now to find our outfit. Are you kidding! You can’t see your hand in front of you. We’re supposed to go 50 yds inland strike a road and organize on it. I’ve got all my guys together and start in. God, its black, but I lead ‘em in.”⁹ Captain Gray tells that eight Australians were at the landing beach to assist the regiment once they landed. One was particularly helpful in having A Company gather together and take cover before the Japanese started spraying the beach with machine gun fire.

The geographical obstacles that were encountered by the 162nd Regiment as they disembarked at Nassau Bay to fight against the Japanese at Salamaua were harsh with sharp ridges separated by deep canyons. The maps used in the landing at Nassau Bay were inaccurate resulting in orders given to take a

ridge without realizing that a deep canyon needed to be traversed over several days before it could be taken. With man-eating crocodiles and natives, snakes, leeches, and a great variety of native diseases, the battle at Salamaua and other locations in New Guinea would make it one of the worst locations to fight during World War II. The 162nd Regiment landed at Nassau Bay south of Salamaua in its first battle of World War II and encountered not only that difficult terrain, but also a strong Japanese defense, a wide front and conflicting command instructions which resulted in slow progress through July and into August.¹⁰

Conflicting command instructions frustrated and bedeviled Colonel MacKechnie for the entire operation. "When Col. A.R. MacKechnie, with 162's 1/Bn [1st Battalion], charged in through heavy surf that black midnight at Nassau Bay, he faced the strangest campaign the 41st ever fought. For Col. Mack had more than Japs to fight. He fought the problem of divided command."¹¹ Colonel MacKechnie not only reported to General Fuller, commander of the 41st Infantry Division, but was also under the direct control of the 17th Australian Brigade. Only two days after the landing, MacKechnie wrote back to General Fuller that he hoped to never serve under dual command again.¹²

MacKechnie Force landed at Nassau Bay with orders to strike inland to clear Bitoi Ridge after 17th Australian Brigade had cleared the landing area at Nassau Bay. The 17th then attacked north to capture Mubo and continued to Komiatum and Lokanu along the

coastline. The 17th Australian Brigade's mission was to clear the approaches to Salamaua in order that the Australian 3rd Division could attack Salamaua itself.¹³

After the "shipwreck landing" at Nassau Bay, Brigadier General M.J. Moten, the 17th Australian Brigade's commander, sent orders to MacKechnie Force to advance to Napier through 10 miles of jungle swamp and to attack the Japanese.¹⁴ Colonel MacKechnie had no native carriers or artillery guns yet and replied in a report about the great loss of landing craft and the distance from the landing site to the battle resulting in the need to leave Company C at the supply location to guard it. "Due to the loss of over half our landing craft and my inability to get my troops, guns and supplies in as originally scheduled, I am naturally delayed in every way due entirely to the unfortunate water transport position."¹⁵ Colonel MacKechnie also remarked, in a bit of criticism on the role of the Australians in the Nassau Bay landing, that a small group of Australians were supposed to be at the landing site to insure that the landing craft came in to the right landing beaches, but only a couple of Australians had made it to the beach in time for the landing: one reason for the loss of landing craft. MacKechnie continued with "construction of a road which will permit moving artillery to the assembly area will require approximately three weeks rather than the two days estimated by your reconnaissance officer."¹⁶

Colonel MacKechnie was concerned about the need to transport rations to the men who were fighting and

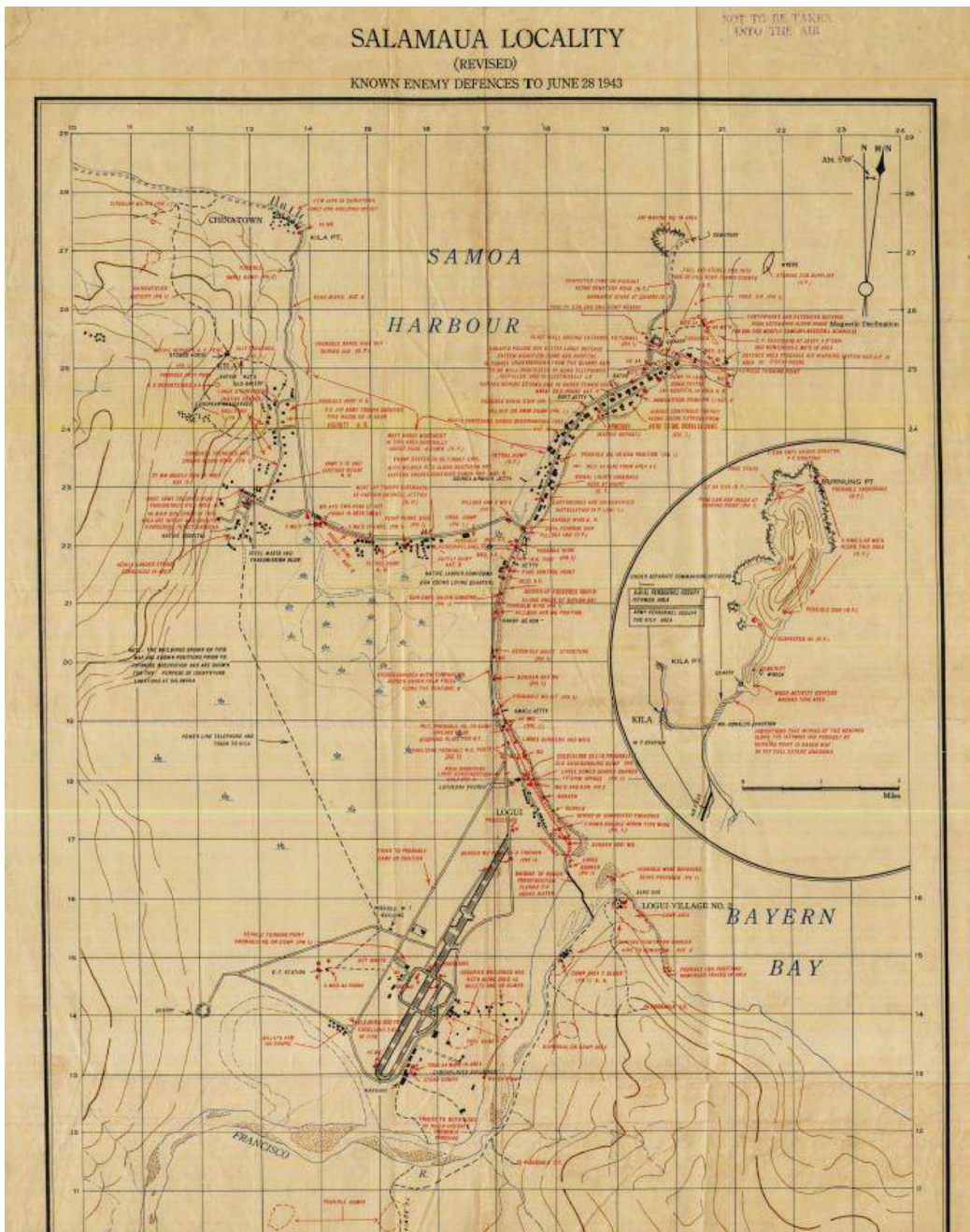


James Gray and John Uppinghouse pose with an unidentified Soldier.
James Gray private collection

the lack of personnel for the transport. These issues forced MacKechnie Force to delay its ability to strike inland to take Bitoi Ridge. MacKechnie was understandably frustrated, but the 17th Australian Brigade had done all it could to make the landing at Nassau Bay successful based on their limited experience with amphibious landings. Since May, they had done aerial reconnaissance, patrols, and interrogation of local indigenous people to determine the feasibility of landing at Nassau Bay.¹⁷

Brigadier General Moten continued to order the MacKechnie Force to push forward— “[j]ust 5 days after the wrecked landing, Moten expected Nassau Bay beaches cleared of Japs, a supply base set up, a 10-mile road over swamps to Napier, and all Yank fighters into the high jungle.”¹⁸ There is proof of con-

flicting orders when MacKechnie notes, “I might say, in passing, that General Fuller, CG [Commanding General] 41 Division, has advised me not to embark on any offensive operation with my rifle troops unless they could be adequately supported by artillery and heavy weapons.”¹⁹ MacKechnie Force was capable of completing the initial mission, but without artillery support, Colonel MacKechnie was hesitant to unnecessarily risk American lives. Moving without artillery and heavy weapons meant close contact fighting and dealing with Japanese banzai attacks. The Australians fought in those conditions with submachine guns, four-second grenades or as a last resort with a bayonet charge, but the Americans did not see a need for this type of close contact fighting when they had mortars and



Salamaua locality map of known enemy defenses as of June 28, 1943. Information derived from aerial photo interpretations, observation point reports and native sources. Compiled and reproduced by 2/1 Australian, Army Topo, Survey Company. Australian War Memorial

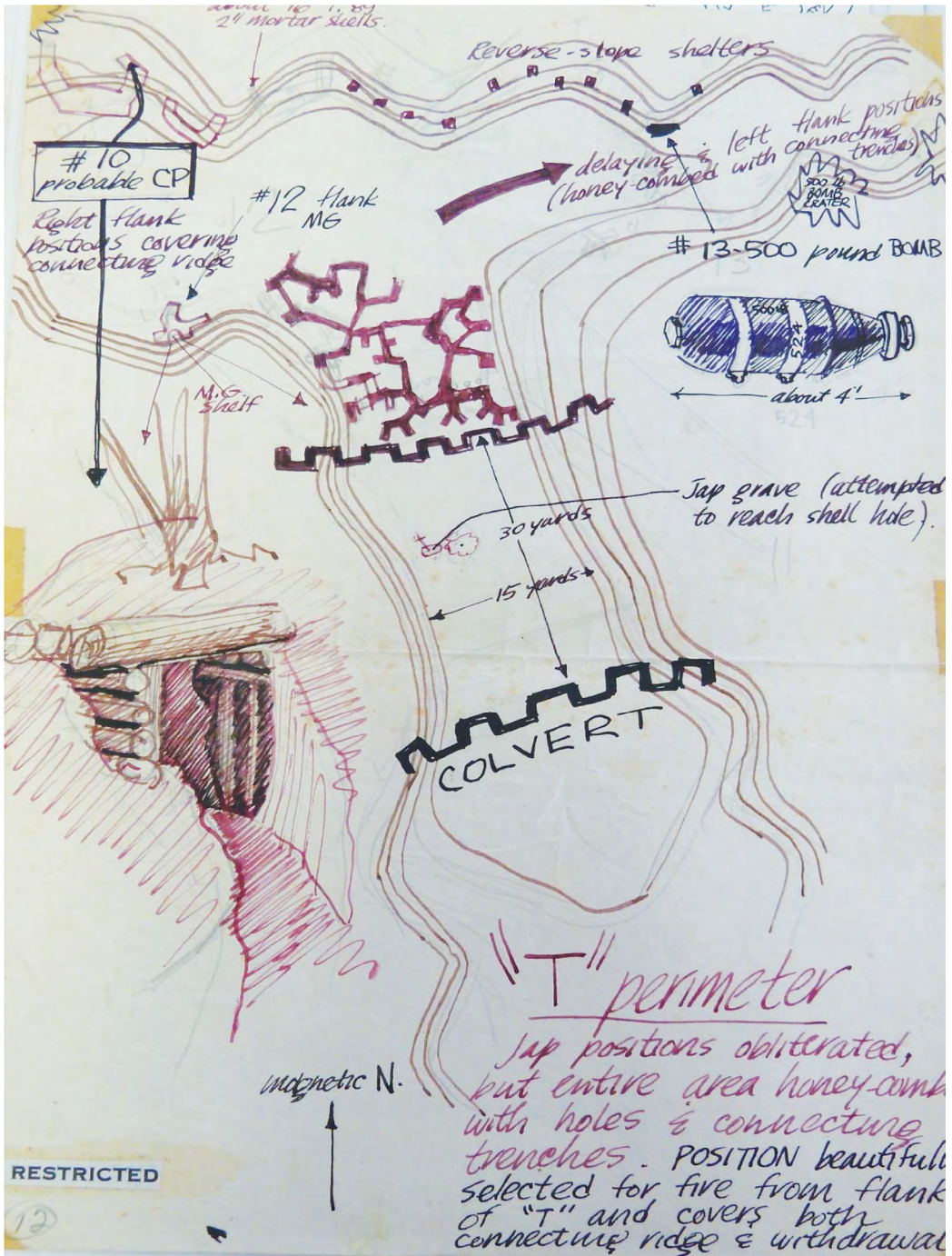
artillery support. The order to move without artillery support was not considered reasonable.²⁰

Colonel MacKechnie asked for additional time, but Brigadier General Moten found an alternate solution. Moten ordered the airlift of supplies direct to Napier instead of moving supplies in by limited water assets and brought in L Company with the mission to garrison Nassau Bay. Once the supplies could be delivered and MacKechnie Force was released from guarding the assets at Nassau Bay, it could finally move in force into the high jungle. First battalion had started to fight, but third battalion was arriving to fight at Salamau and landed at Nassau Bay. More command issues arose quickly with the establishment of the Coane Force under the command of Brigadier General Ralph W. Coane and the commander of Third Battalion, Major Archibald Roosevelt, the son of a past American president. "Then Mack really got involved in a wild farce of divided command—with 3 Aussie generals, 2 Yank generals—and even Maj. Archie Roosevelt."²¹

General MacArthur had offered the Australian 3rd Division the additional asset of the American 3rd Battalion of the 162nd Regiment because he wanted Salamaua taken "as early as possible."²² Major General Stanley Savige, commander of 3rd Division, accepted the additional troops without realizing the strings attached to their use. The strings attached to Coane Force were that it would be left under the command of the 41st U.S. Infantry Division with the expectation that it would cooperate with 3rd Australian Division.

Coane Force was created when Lieutenant General Edmund Herring, commander of New Guinea Force, decided that to protect Yankee morale he would put an American in charge of operations once a supply base had been set up at Tambu Bay. He wanted the American Howitzer 105 guns to blast the Japanese before the attack on Salamaua, which was only five miles from Tambu Bay. "In compliance with telephonic instructions of GOC New Guinea Force on July 7 directing that a senior officer of the 41st US Division be placed in command of all 41st US Division and attached units in the NASSAU BAY-MAGERI POINT-MOROBE areas exclusive of MACKECHNIE Force, Brigadier General Ralph Coane will assume command that area on or about July 12."²³ It is important to note that 3rd Battalion of 162nd Regiment was specifically assigned to Brigadier General Coane's command. Some units in MacKechnie Force now became part of the Coane Force and Colonel MacKechnie temporarily became the S-3, Operations Officer, filling a very important mission in an artillery heavy headquarters with infantry expertise, but with the loss of the troops assigned to MacKechnie Force.²⁴

Lieutenant General Herring had sought to maintain smooth relations with the Americans by leaving Coane Force under the 41st command, but this did not work out as well as Herring had anticipated. Brigadier General Coane outranked Colonel MacKechnie, which caused problems when units of MacKechnie Force were placed under Coane Force without informing

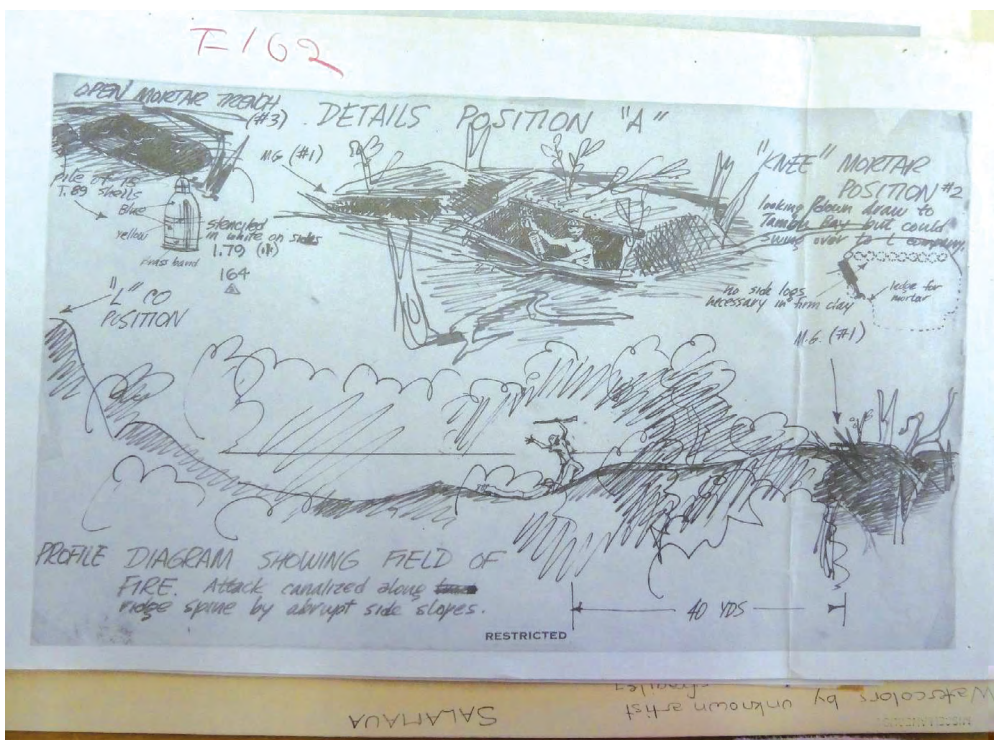


Drawing of a "T" perimeter as part of the "Colvert Force" The "T" perimeter covered both the connecting ridges and the withdrawal. National Archives, Silver Springs, MD, I Company files.

MacKechnie. Lieutenant Colonel John Wilton, General Staff Officer Grade 1 in the Australian 3rd Division, stated, "We were getting on well with MacKechnie, then Coane came on the scene and he couldn't stomach the thought that he wasn't in supreme command himself. He was the one who caused the trouble-MacKechnie was all right, he was a decent guy and understood what was going on."²⁵

To alleviate the command issues that had resulted with the assignment of Coane Force, the Australian 3rd Division staff attended a meeting at the New Guinea Force headquarters with the American 41st Division staff on July 15, 1943. "From the tangled mass of information in NGF 07971 of 15 July,

I arrive at the following interpretation of the intention of HQ NGF. (a) All US troops within 3 Aust Div area of responsibility are placed under command 3 AUST DIV by HQ NGF. (b) US troops now under command 3 Aust Div are: 1 Bn 162 US Regt, 3 Bn 162 Regt, one Coy 2 Bn 162 US Regt plus supporting troops attached to Regimental Group now within area."²⁶ New Guinea Force followed up with a telegram to both 3rd Australian Division and 41st U.S. Division stating, "With a view to straightening out control U.S.A. forces have held conference at HQ with Sweeney. 41 U.S. Div desires that MACKECHNIE retain control of American troops moving inland and agree that this force should operate under operational control of



A drawing by an unknown artist details a combat field of fire during the Battle at Salamaua. National Archives, Silver Springs, MD, I Company files.

MOTEN as in the past. 41 U.S. Div has sent BRIG. GEN COANE to control the coast operations. In view rapid changing situation this force forthwith comes under operational control of 3 Div.”²⁷ Now both the 3rd Australian Division and 41st U.S. Division knew the command situation, but there was some lag time before Coane, Roosevelt, MacKechnie, and 17th Australian Brigade found out.

During that time, Major Archibald Roosevelt, 3rd Battalion Commander, became so frustrated by the conflicting orders coming from three different commands that he used his name, as well as MacArthur’s personal interest in his actions, and hopped a flight back to Australia to visit personally with General MacArthur about the confusing command situation. In addition, he sent a letter to General MacArthur stating, “The combination of two foreign groups and the ill-organized control produced is now producing contradictory orders and no rigid chain of command has or can be established . . . the situation has been brought about by the intermingling of the two armies-Australian and American-and will steadily become worse to the detriment of the American Army.”²⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Wendell Fertig, deputy commander of the 162nd, tried to keep Roosevelt’s focus on fighting the Japanese and to let the higher commands work out their command differences, but Roosevelt was upset and urged MacArthur to “get all American ground forces out of New Guinea as quickly as possible.”²⁹

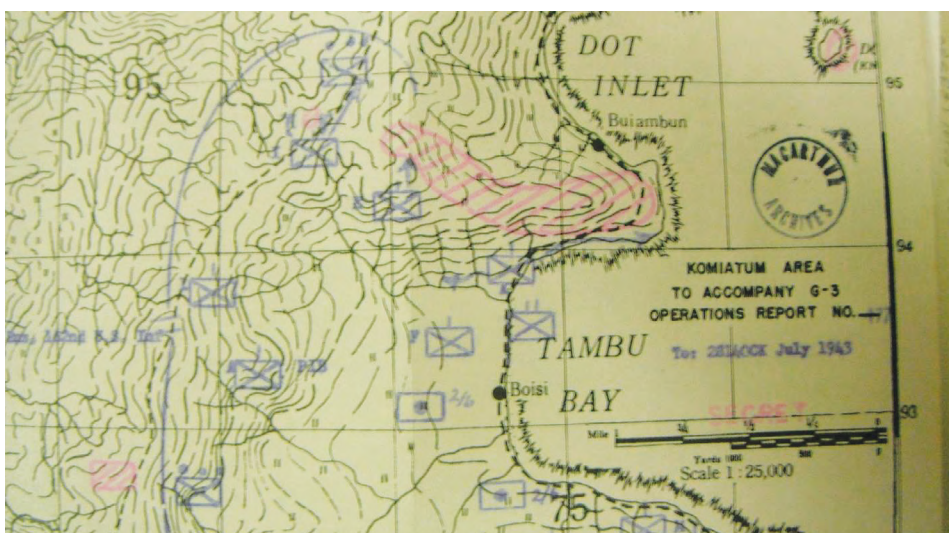
The 162nd Report of Operations states in note 65, “During the period

July 13 to 16 conflicting orders and instructions from 17th Brigade, 3rd Aust. Div. and 41st Inf. Div. regarding composition of forces, command authority and responsibility for execution of the mission north to TAMBU Bay LOKANU RIDGE were received by the C.G. Coane Force, C.O. MacKechnie Force and C.O. 3d Bn. 162d Inf.”³⁰ Third Battalion found itself in the middle and the bottom of the command chain of these conflicting reports. Major Roosevelt would not follow the orders issued from the Australian higher headquarters from July 10-14 because 3rd Battalion was still officially under the command of the 41st Infantry Division. “Also at this time there had been no provision made for supply and evacuation and no advance reconnaissance had been made. The Coane Force was activated on July 12 and the 3d Bn assigned as part of that Force.”³¹ The 17th Australian Brigade’s commander, Moten, was not informed about the creation of the Coane Force, so he continued to issue orders directly to the 3rd Battalion, including an order to send one company with a maximum strength of 138 men to fight a Japanese force that had just been reinforced with 200 men. This order showed the lack of good intelligence at 17th Australian Brigade’s headquarters.³²

Brigadier General Coane did not take kindly to those orders and was very specific in discussions with Major Roosevelt that 3rd Battalion was not part of the 3rd Australian Division or of the 17th Australian Brigade and that Roosevelt was to not follow any orders issued by them. Roosevelt sent a handwritten note to 17th Australian Brigade



The cartoon is from the Polk County Itemizer-Observer in Dallas, Oregon. Dated Thursday, April 6, 1944. The 162nd Regiment held the record for longest number of days in combat at the time of the cartoon.



The Komiatum G-3 Operations Area map is from the MacArthur Archives in Norfolk, VA. It shows where the 162nd landed in Tambu Bay and the village of Boisi. It also shows where the units were located during the operation in July.

stating, "Repeat cannot comply your request through MAC Force dated July 14. I have no such orders from my C.O. As a piece of friendly advice your plan shows lack of recc [reconnaissance] and lack of logical understanding. Suggest you send a competent officer as liaison officer to my HQ as soon as possible to study the situation."³³ Colonel MacKechnie found that Roosevelt would not even take orders from him, insisting that he only took orders from Brigadier General Coane. MacKechnie apologized to Moten for Roosevelt's messages saying that "the confused situation had put Roosevelt in a difficult position."³⁴ Coane Force had been assembled rather hastily and was put into action without informing either the Australians or Colonel MacKechnie.

Colonel MacKechnie was a very patient man and a good leader, but even he started to get angry. The number of messages coming from the different commands became very frustrating. He had been given the plan for taking Tambu Bay with 3rd Battalion from Moten, but when he returned to Nassau Bay to execute the plan, he discovered that General Coane had the mission and the unit that he thought he had. MacKechnie radioed General Fuller, the commander of the 41st U.S. Division and confronted him. Colonel MacKechnie stated that if General Fuller had such little confidence in him that he should be relieved of command or issued a second set of scissors so that he could continue cutting up paper dolls.³⁵ General Fuller promptly relieved Colonel MacKechnie of command and brought

him back to the 41st Infantry Division headquarters.³⁶

General Savige appealed to General Herring to put Coane Force under direct command of the 3rd Australian Division and that Colonel MacKechnie be put back in command of the 162nd Regiment. Herring agreed with Savige's appeal and immediately changed Coane Force to MacKechnie Force, arranged with the 41st Infantry Division to have Colonel MacKechnie return to command of the 162nd Regiment, and put it under Savige's command. General MacArthur confirmed the operational name change and change of command on 23 July. Brigadier General Coane and Major Roosevelt continued to be uncooperative even after Coane Force was officially put under the 3rd Division's command and were relieved for incompetency and lack of aggression on 11 August.³⁷ "ROOSEVELT moves to position approx. 50 yards of ridge each day. (b) He withdraws all troops to beach at night. 6. MOTEN strongly recommends for consideration the immediate removal of ROOSEVELT."³⁸

Colonel MacKechnie was once again in charge of all American forces for the Battle of Salamaua, taking Salamaua by September 12, 1943. The men under his command soon earned a new nickname for the 41st Infantry Division; the "Jungleers" or "MacArthur's Jungleers." "This nickname stuck always is a reminder of those early days when each bit of offensive action in those heretofore little-known, stinking hell holes brought much encouragement to a victory-hungry American people."³⁹

Colonel MacKechnie also received the British Distinguished Service Order for his efforts. The 162nd had been under Australian control for the entire battle and according to MacKechnie, "there has, on account of fatigue, been an increasing tendency among many officers and men of the regiment to criticize the Australian Command for short rations, lack of equipment, and the increasingly difficult task of the Regiment in relation to its strength."⁴⁰ Colonel MacKechnie requested an immediate withdrawal of the 162nd from New Guinea to be returned to the command of the 41st Infantry Division in Australia to be refitted and reorganized, and he requested to not have the unit put under Australian command again.

At Salamaua there had still been a learning curve in fighting against the Japanese. The 162nd Infantry Regiment of the 41st Infantry Division under Colonel A.R. MacKechnie was the main attacking force at Salamaua. MacKechnie Force would land at Nassau Bay and attack through Salamaua in coordination with the Australian forces.

Throughout this operation the regiment was attached to and under the operational control of the Australian 3rd and 5th Divisions, which operated under the command of GOC New Guinea Forces. Differences in operational methods, expressions and customs sometimes caused misunderstandings between the Yanks and Aussies. Several changes in command occurred and questions of command authority arose during the operations, which, added to the natural difficulties of communica-

tion, terrain, climate, and tactical situation, caused no small amount of confusion at times.⁴¹ This confusion resulted in conflicting orders and inefficient use of the forces assigned to fight at Salamaua. The 162nd Regiment's seventy-six days of continuous combat held the record in the Southwest Pacific Theater until the end of the war against the Japanese and resulted in this Presidential Unit Citation.

The Presidential Unit Citation:

The 1st Battalion, 162nd Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty against the enemy near Salamaua, New Guinea, from 29 June to 12 September 1943, this battalion landed at Nassau Bay, New Guinea, in one of the first amphibious operations by American forces in the Southwest Pacific area, on a beach held by the enemy, and during a severe storm which destroyed 90 percent of the landing craft able to reach the beach. Moving inland through deep swamps, crossing swift rivers, cutting its way through dense jungle, over steep ridges, carrying by hand all weapons, ammunition and food, assisted by only a limited number of natives, this battalion was in contact with the enemy for 76 consecutive days without rest or relief. All operations after the initial landing were far inland. Living conditions were most severe because of constant rain, mud, absence of any shelter, tenacious enemy,

and a mountainous terrain. The supply of rations, ammunition, and equipment was meager. For 5 weeks all personnel lived on rations dropped by airplane, for days at a time on half rations. Individual cooking was necessary throughout the period. Malaria and battle casualties greatly depleted their ranks, but at no time was there a let-up in morale or in determination to destroy the enemy. Each officer and enlisted man was called upon to give his utmost of courage and stamina. The battalion killed 584 Japanese during this period, while suffering casualties of 11 officers and 176 enlisted men. Cutting the Japanese supply line near Mubo, exerting constant pressure on his flank, the valiant and sustained efforts of this battalion were in large part instrumental in breaking enemy resistance and forcing his withdrawal from Salamaua on 12 September 1943. The 1st Battalion, 162 Infantry Regiment has established a worthy combat

record, in keeping with the high traditions of the United States Army.

General Orders 91,
Headquarters 41st Infantry
Division, 18
December 1944, as
approved by Commanding
General, United States
Army Forces in Far East. ⁴²

The command problems at the Battle at Salamaua had ended, but MacArthur would not have Australians and Americans fight together again. Was MacArthur influenced by the president's son, Archibald Roosevelt? The battles of 1944 would be notable in that the Americans never did again serve under Australian command and if Australians did serve with American forces, they were to use American supplies and equipment.⁴³ This would influence the use of the Australians from this point. The Australians were relegated primarily to clean up operations or used for what were arguable unnecessary operations to regain control of British territory.

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