Milne Bay 1942 (a 12 day campaign, August 25th to September 5th)

Background

The Australians were commanded by Major General C. A. Clowes. His force consisted of two brigades of infantry and various support groups: two squadrons of RAAF Fighters (the 75th and 76th flying P-40 Kittyhawks) and a detachment of RAAF Hudson Bombers, and a platoon of the US 101st Coast Artillery Battalion. Company E of the 46th Engineers of the US Army Corps of Engineers arrived on the Dutch KPM ship Bontekoe with airbase construction equipment. The infantry included the inexperienced 7th Australian Infantry Militia Brigade, (the 9th, 25th, and 61st battalions), under the command of Brigadier John Field, and Brigadier George Wooten’s experienced 18th Infantry Brigade that had served in the Middle East (they had fought at the siege of Tobruk), consisting of the 2/9th, 2/10th and 2/12th Infantry Battalions. In total, there were 7,459 Australian and 1,365 US Army personnel at Milne Bay, of whom about 4,500 were infantry. In addition there were also about 600 RAAF personnel.

Work on the first airfield, which became known as #1 Airstrip, had commenced on June 8th, with Papuan workers under the supervision of ANGAU while the US 96th Engineer Separate Battalion personnel began clearing the area near Gili Gili for the other two airfields, #2 and #3. Company E of the US 46th Engineers began working on finishing #1 on June 30. Meanwhile, Clowes had assigned the 7th Militia Infantry Brigade to guard key points and kept the 18th Brigade in reserve.

Members of the 61st Battalion, an Australian infantry patrol, at Milne Bay in October 1942. Although taken after the battle, this photograph gives some indication of the conditions that the infantry endured.

Judging that the airstrip would create problems for them the Japanese high command decided to make an amphibious assault to capture it. They sent a task force under the codename ‘Operation RE’,
including two light cruisers, Tenryū and Tatsuta, as well as three destroyers, Urakaze, Tanikaze and Hamakaze, in concert with the transports, Nankai Maru and Kinai Maru, and the submarine chasers CH-22 and CH-24. Unfortunately for them, Japanese Intelligence had determined that only two or three companies defended the airstrips so they only selected about 1250 troops to make the assault. On the 23rd and 24th of August Japanese planes bombed and strafed the airfields. Allied planes spotted the Task Force on the 25th as it approached its target. They bombed and strafed the ships with little result.

At 11:30 PM on the 25th of August, the Task Force landed 1174 Kaigun Rikusentai (Special Naval Landing Forces) troops (designated Hayashi Force) at Ahioma, a little more than 6 miles east of the nearest airstrip. The Allies called this point Waga Waga. The landing force was supported by two Type 95 Ha-go light tanks. D Company, 61st Militia Battalion was caught near the landing zone. A small skirmish occurred and they fell back to KB Mission (Koebele or Koeabule Mission founded by Rev. Charles William Abel from the London Missionary Society).

Map of the Milne Bay area. The Japanese landed at Ahioma (Waga Waga). The Australian command center was located near Gili Gili; airstrips #1 and #2 airstrips were located to the west of it, and airstrip #3 was located to the east. KB Mission was smack in the middle, between the two forces.
The First Battle

**Background:** At dawn the Japanese moved forward supported by their two light tanks. Militia B Company, 61st battalion, skirmished with them at KB Mission, repelling the attack even though they were lacking in AT weapons. Meanwhile the Allied Air Force attacked the Japanese supply base near the landing area, destroying much of the supplies and many of the personnel as well as some of the landing barges. Throughout the campaign the Allies periodically gained air superiority.

The Japanese continued to press B Company, so Brigadier John Field sent two platoons of his 25th Battalion forward. The Australians attempted to move up anti-tank guns but were unable to do so over the muddy roads and sent sticky bombs and anti-tank mines instead. At 4:45 pm, with air and artillery support, the two platoons of the 25th launched a minor attack upon the Japanese forward positions which were located about 600 yards to the east of the Mission. They pushed the Japanese back 200 yards, but weary from the day's fighting, they withdrew to Motieau, just west of the mission.

General Clowes ordered the experienced 18th Brigade’s 2/10th Infantry Battalion to prepare to move eastwards towards Ahioma. Company B of the 61st was recalled to airfield #3 to setup defensive positions. In the early evening, Japanese ships shelled the Australian positions and later, at 10:00 pm, in the moonlight of the night of 26-27 August, the Japanese attacked in force. After a long and ferocious fight that lasted all night, the Australians withdrew to the Gama River, one mile to the west.

*This picture shows two Japanese type 95 Ha-go light tanks that became bogged down on the track near the Gama River and were abandoned during the Japanese attack. It also shows very well the condition of the ‘road’ when it was wet.*
Scenario #1 – First Contact, August 26, 1942

Troops: One Inexperienced Australian reinforced platoon versus one Veteran Japanese SNLF reinforced platoon. Each side may choose 1000 points for their force, and the Japanese may include one Type 95 Ha-Go Tank. Neither side may have artillery but both sides may include an Air Forward Observer team.

Terrain: the terrain consists of medium jungle with a path running down the middle of the board. The jungle has -1 cover, 24” visibility, and reduced movement: Advance -1”, Run -2”. There are two 12”x12” patches of rough ground (no running), one on each side of the board, randomly placed.

Setup: this is a meeting engagement with the board oriented the long way. The Australians are patrolling down the road with the Japanese advancing from the opposite direction. Both sides set up within 12” of the board edge.

Game Duration – The conflict will last six game turns.

Victory Conditions: players are awarded 1 point for the destruction of a weapon team, 2 points for an Australian rifle squad, three points for a Japanese rifle squad, and two points for the Ha-go tank. If the points are tied the player that inflicted the most pins wins; failing that, each player rolls a die and the highest roll wins. This scenario will aptly demonstrate the vast difference between Inexperienced and Veteran troops.
The Second Battle

**Background:** At dawn on August 27 the Japanese sent eight dive bombers with twelve Zero fighter escorts to attack the Allied airfield at Gili Gili (probably #2). One of the attacking aircraft was shot down, while only a small amount of damage was inflicted on the airfield. General Clowes ordered the 2/10th battalion of 420 men forward to retake the KB Mission and establish a defensive line there. This was not the best move since they could not be reinforced at that position. They passed through the lines of the 25th and 61st battalions who were ordered to fall back to Airstrip #3, leaving the 2/10th on their own.

At 8:00pm the Japanese sent their two Type 95 Ha-Go tanks with bright headlights into the plantation. The men from the 2/10th tried to disable them with sticky bombs, but due to the humid conditions the bombs failed to adhere to the Japanese armor. In the fighting that followed over the course of two and a half hours, the Australians suffered heavy casualties. With the help of indirect fire support from the 2/5th Field Regiment’s 25 pounder guns situated near Gili Gili, they repelled four frontal attacks. By midnight the Australian lines were broken and a renewed assault brought the Japanese all the way to No. 3 Airstrip which was still under construction. However, they were pushed back 1.2 miles by Air Force strafing. For the next two days there was a lull in the fighting. Despite being outnumbered the Japanese were proving to be exceedingly tenacious.

**Scenario #2 – Battle of KB Mission, August 27, 1942**

**Troops:** each side may choose 1000 points for their forces. The Japanese are still Veterans but this time the Australians are Regular. The Australians may have an Artillery Forward Observer while the Japanese have none, but they may include one Type 95 Ha-Go tank. The Australians cannot have anti-tank grenades or onboard artillery.

**Terrain:** the board is oriented the long way. The terrain consists of medium jungle with a path running down the middle of the board to represent the primitive road. The jungle has -1 cover, 24” visibility, and reduced movement: Advance -1, Run -2. In the middle of the board, 24” from the Australian short side, is a cleared and cultivated area 24”x24” with a plantation house. Except for the house, there is no cover but the Australians may setup behind light works (-1 cover).

**Setup:** this is another meeting engagement with the board oriented the long way. The Australians are dug-in at KB Mission with the Japanese advancing from the opposite direction. The Japanese set up within 12” of the board edge and the Australians setup around the plantation house, ready to oppose them.

**Game Duration** – The conflict will last six game turns.

**Victory Conditions:** Players are awarded 1 point for the destruction of a weapon team, 2 points for an Australian rifle squad, three points for a Japanese rifle squad, and two points for the Ha-go tank. The player with the most victory points wins. If the game is tied the player that inflicted the most pins wins; failing that, each side will roll a die and the highest roll wins.
The Third Battle

*Background:* On the 29th of August at 20:15 the Japanese landed the SNLF Yano force of 769 men. While this was taking place the warships shelled Allied positions around Gili Gili. The shelling was not significant, however, and no casualties resulted from it. By 11:30 pm, they completed their landing and moved to join up with Hayashi force. That day an Australian patrol found the two Type 95 Ha-Go light tanks bogged down in the mud and abandoned. Throughout the 30th of August, the next day, the Australians carried out patrolling operations while the Japanese rested in the jungle in preparation for a night attack.

That night the Japanese began forming up along the track at the eastern end of No. 3 Airstrip by the sea, and at 03:00 on 31 August they launched their attack. Advancing over open ground and illuminated by flares fired by the Australians, the first Japanese attack was repelled by heavy machine gun and mortar fire from 25th and 61st Infantry Battalions as well as the 46th Engineer General Service Regiment, and artillery fire from the Australian 2/5th Field Regiment. A further two *banzai* charges were attempted, only to meet the same fate, with heavy Japanese casualties including the Japanese commander, Hayashi.

**Scenario #3A – the Battle of Stephen’s Ridge, August 31, 1942**

*Troops:* each side may select 1200 points representing one Regular Australian reinforced platoon, including emplacements, versus one Veteran Japanese reinforced platoon. The Australians may have an Artillery Forward Observer but the Japanese may not. However, the Japanese may have one infantry light howitzer, while the Australians have on onboard artillery.

*Terrain:* the terrain consists of open ground but visibility depends on the effectiveness of the flares employed by the Australians. At the start of each turn roll a D6:

- 1-2 = visibility 18” and cover is -1;
- 3-4 = visibility 24” and -1 cover;
- 5-6 = visibility is unlimited and there is no cover.

*Setup:* the board is oriented the short way. The Australians are dug in on a rise. They Australians are deployed behind sandbag trenches and redoubts. The Japanese are advancing from the opposite direction. Both sides set up within 12” of their board edge.

*Game Duration –* The conflict will last six game turns.

*Victory Conditions:* players are awarded 1 point for the destruction of a weapon team, 2 points for an Australian rifle squad, and three points for a Japanese rifle squad. The player with the most victory points wins. If the game is tied the player that inflicted the most pins wins; failing that, each side will roll a die and the highest roll wins.
**Scenario 3B**

*Background:* After Hayashi’s death Commander *Minoru Yano*, took over command. The survivors of the attack reformed in the dead ground around Point Creek. Yanu led them about 200 yards north of the airstrip in an attempt to outflank the 61st Infantry Battalion’s positions on Stephen's Ridge. They ran into a platoon of Australians who engaged them with Bren light machine guns. They withdrew just before dawn to the sounds of a bugle call. The Japanese troops who survived this attack were shocked by the heavy firepower the Allied forces had been able to deploy, and the assault force was left in a state of disarray.

**Scenario #3B – the Battle of Stephen’s Ridge, August 31, 1942**

*Troops:* the Australian side may select 1000 points of forces and the Japanese have 800 points. The Australians are Regular and the Japanese are also Regular. The quality of the Japanese troops is reduced because of the recent beatings they have taken. The Australians may have an Artillery Forward Observer, but the Japanese have none. Neither side has onboard artillery.

*Terrain:* the terrain consists of light jungle. The jungle and darkness give a -2 cover, 16” vision, and unimpeded movement.

*Setup:* The board is oriented the short way. The Australians are patrolling their flank and the Japanese are advancing from the opposite direction. Both sides set up within 12” of the board edge.

*Game Duration:* The conflict will last six game turns.

*Victory Conditions:* players are awarded 1 point for the destruction of a weapon team, 2 points for an Australian rifle squad, three points for a Japanese rifle squad. The player with the most victory points wins. If the game is tied the player that inflicted the most pins wins; failing that, each side will roll a die and the highest roll wins.
The Fourth Battle

On September 4, the 2/9th battalion moved east along the coast on either side of the coastal track. After about one hour, the advance company struck a Japanese defensive position at Goroni not far from the Japanese supply dump at Wagga Wagga. Goroni is located about a kilometer eastward of KB Mission about mid-way between KB Mission and Ahioma (Wagga Wagga). Throughout the day the Australians worked to outflank the position before launching an attack at 15:15. During this action, one of the 2/9th's Sections was held up by fire from three Japanese machine gun positions. The Section leader, Corporal John French, ordered the other members of the section to take cover before he attacked and destroyed two of the machine guns with grenades. French then attacked the third position with his Thompson submachine gun. The Japanese firing ceased and the Australian section advanced to find that the machine gunners had been killed and that French had died in front of their position. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his “cool courage and disregard of his own personal safety” which “saved members of his section from heavy casualties and was responsible for the successful conclusion of the attack.”

Scenario #4 – the Battle of Goroni, September 4, 1942

Troops: the Australian side may select 1000 points of forces and the Japanese have 800 points. The Australians are Regular and the Japanese are also Regular. The quality of the Japanese troops is reduced because of the recent beatings they have taken. The Australians may have an Artillery Forward Observer, but the Japanese have none. Neither side has onboard artillery. The Japanese may purchase emplacements.

Terrain: the terrain consists of light jungle with-1 cover, 36” vision, and unimpeded movement. The Japanese rifle squads have dug-in behind sandbag works and sandbag machine-gun nests.

Setup: The board is oriented the short way. The Australians are advancing eastward and the Japanese are holding the line as they evacuate their wounded. Both sides set up within 12” of the board edge.

Game Duration – The conflict will last six game turns.

Victory Conditions: players are awarded 1 point for the destruction of a weapon team, 2 points for an Australian rifle squad, three points for a Japanese rifle squad. The player with the most victory points wins. If the game is tied the player that inflicted the most pins wins; failing that, each side will roll a die and the highest roll wins.
Aftermath

By the end of September 4th, the Japanese force included only 50 effective soldiers; all the other surviving troops were either incapacitated or could only offer token resistance. In addition, the commanders of all the Japanese companies had been killed and only three or four platoon leaders remained.

The Japanese sent warships to help their embattled troops, but on September 5 the Navy was told to ‘try to get them out.’ All the available Japanese reinforcements were being routed to Guadalcanal. No more would be sent to Milne Bay. The next day, the Japanese called their invasion off. Some 1318 Japanese were rescued by naval vessels while 311 had been killed and 700 missing. The Allied estimate was 750 Japanese killed at Milne Bay. The Australians had 534 battle casualties. Of these 161 were either killed or missing. As the Japanese retreated the Australians captured their supply dump at Wagga Wagga. The U.S. forces lost 14 personnel killed and several wounded.
Papua New Guinea Theater Troop Selectors

Reinforced Australian Infantry Platoon

1 Platoon Commander (either 1st or 2nd LT)
2 Infantry Sections

Plus additional:
0-1 Captain or Major
0-1 Air/Artillery Forward Observer
0-1 Medic Team
0-2 Signalmen
0-1 Platoon Sergeant
0-4 Infantry Sections
0-2 Medium Machine Gun Teams
0-2 2” Light Mortar Teams
0-2 3” Medium Mortar Teams
0-2 Anti-Tank Teams (Boys Rifle)
0-2 Sniper Teams
0-1 Flamethrower Team
0-1 2# Anti-Tank Gun
0-1 6# Anti-Tank Gun (after June 1942)
0-1 25# Light Howitzer
0-2 Universal (Bren) Carriers
0-2 M3 Stuart Tanks Mark I or II
0-1 Matilda A12 Tank (after October, 1943)

Reinforced Imperial Japanese Platoon

1 2nd LT
1 Radioman
1 Bugler
2 SNLF Infantry Squads

Plus additional:
0-1 1st LT or Captain
0-1 Medic Team
0-1 Air or Artillery Forward Observer w Radioman
0-4 additional SNLF Infantry Squads
0-2 Medium Machine Gun Teams
0-2 Anti-Tank Rifle Teams
0-2 Suicide Anti-Tank Teams
0-2 Light Mortar Teams
0-2 Medium Mortar Teams
0-1 Flamethrower Team
0-2 Sniper Teams
0-2 Suicide Sniper Teams
0-2 Type 92 70mm Infantry Guns
0-1 Type 94 37mm Light Anti-Tank Gun
0-1 Type 1 47mm Medium Anti-Tank Gun
0-1 Type 95 Ha-go Tank
0-1 Type 97 Chi-Ha Tank
0-1 Type 97Kai Shin-Ho-To Chi-Ha Tank (after 1941)

Emplacements

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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
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<td>4” Sandbag Section</td>
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<td>6” Log Barrier</td>
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<td>Log/Coral Pillbox</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>150</td>
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A Japanese map of the Milne Bay campaign

Sources:

Month by month chronology of the 5th AF [http://www.kensmen.com/sep42.html](http://www.kensmen.com/sep42.html)

Battle of Milne Bay, 25 August-7 September 1942 [http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_milne_bay.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_milne_bay.html)


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