Completing the Circle around Rabaul: The Seizure of the Admiralties, February to May 1944.

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Completing the Circle Around Rabaul:  
The Seizure of the Admiralties,  
February to May 1944

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in History

______________________________________________________

by  
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August 2004

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Keywords: World War Two, Pacific, Rabaul, Admiralty Islands,  
First Cavalry Division
ABSTRACT

Completing the Circle Around Rabaul:
The Seizure of the Admiralties,
February to May 1944

by
David Osborn Scott

This study examines the operational history of the First Cavalry Divisions conquest of the Admiralty Islands during World War Two as the final phase of Operation Cartwheel. Cartwheel called a two pronged attack; one prong in New Guinea, by-passing large Japanese garrisons and the other in the northern Solomon Islands with the goal the isolation of the strong point at Rabaul.

The material is drawn primarily from U.S. Army records held by the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, records from the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama and other reports.

The study concludes that the conquest of the Admiralty Islands allowed the by-pass of Rabaul and Wewak, New Guinea. The Admiralty Islands served as a base for future operations carried out against the Japanese.
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CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND

The Admiralty Islands are located in the western Pacific about 200 miles northeast of Papua New Guinea. The islands are 360 miles to Rabaul by air, 500 miles by air or 1,000 miles by sea to Port Moresby, New Guinea. Airfields, and the room to construct more, and the large natural harbor of the islands made the islands important strategic objectives during World War II. The airfields on the islands are 75 miles closer to Truk, 190 miles closer to Saipan, and 530 miles closer to Palau than the airfields at Rabaul.

Manus is the largest island in the group. It is about 50 miles long from west to east and 20 miles across at its widest point. At the eastern end of Manus, and separated from it by the narrow Loniu Passage, lies the crescent-shaped island of Los Negros. Enclosed on its eastern and northern sides by the horn of Los Negros is the principal harbor, Seeadler, its entrance guarded by a series of islets set on the reef running east-west off the north coast of Manus.¹

The Admiralty Islands have an interesting history. First discovered in 1615 by Willem Schouten, the islands were named in honor of the British Admiralty in 1767. German missionaries and planters were the first Europeans to settle there in 1884. The islands were occupied by the Australians in 1914; in 1921 the League of Nations mandated them to Australia. At the start of World War II the Australians had a small detachment of the Australian Defense Force and a regional police protecting and administering the Admiralty Islands.²

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Figure 1. Overview of the Admiralty Islands. Adapted from the First Cavalry Division Historical Report, Record Group 407, located at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.
The Admiralty Islands at the Start of World War Two

The nineteen men of Australian Army force, Number 4 Section, ‘B’ Platoon, First Independent Company, had arrived in November 1941. The Australian Independent Companies were trained to act like the British Commandos. All members were trained in survival, explosives, communications, and effective fighting. Number 4 Section occupied three huts in Lorengau on Manus Island. Number 4 Section joined forces with a small detachment of Australian Infantry, the District Officer, a Police Master, and a civilian radio operator. The first order of business was to improve the small airfield at Lorengau. Using native labor, the airfield was rolled with coral into a hardened surface. When done the airfield was 3,600 feet long, complete with two aviation fuel dumps.³

To protect the radio antenna, the Australians dug a gun pit for a Bren light machine gun to provide anti-aircraft fire. The airfield received a second Bren gun and a Vickers medium machine gun for defense. On 12 January 1942 three Australian Catalina PBYs, stopped so that their fuel tanks could be topped off for a raid on the Japanese base at Truk. On a second mission the Catalinas returned for refueling on 15 January and left behind an aerial gunner who was quickly attached to Number 4 Section. These were the last Allied aircraft to land in the Admiralties until after the invasion in 1944.⁴

The U.S. Enters the War

For the United States, World War II began with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Basic Plan of the Japanese had three phases. The first phase was the attack directed against the United States fleet at Pearl Harbor and other coordinated attacks against Allied forces in the Philippines, Dutch East Indies, and Singapore. The second phase planned on the Japanese consolidating their positions and reinforcing their defensive perimeter. Third, all Allied attacks against the Japanese perimeter would be

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⁴ First Independent Company
intercepted and destroyed with other operations conducted as needed that would be designed to destroy the American will to fight. With the three phases complete the Japanese would have met their goals for the war and would be self-sufficient. Because of the relative ease of the first phase of operations the Japanese decided to speed up the second phase of the plan of expansion. Port Moresby in New Guinea needed to be captured in order to strengthen the positions in New Guinea and the Bismarck Islands. Midway Island would be captured in order to force a decisive engagement with the United States fleet and strengthen positions in the central Pacific. The northern front would be strengthened by the capture of islands in the western Aleutians of Alaska. Once these objectives had been achieved the Japanese planned to capture New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. With these islands in Japanese hands Australia would be cut off from reinforcements from the United States.\(^5\)

**Japanese Advances**

After the attack on Pearl Harbor the Japanese continued to advance southward in the Pacific. While the Japanese 14\(^{th}\) Army was fighting the American and Filipino forces in the Philippine Islands, the Japanese 25\(^{th}\) Army was attacking British forces in Singapore. The Japanese 16\(^{th}\) Army was attacking the Dutch in the East Indies to gain control of the oil, rubber, and other natural resources in the region. Another prong of the Japanese advance, the South Seas Detachment, moved to isolate Australia and its advance bases in the southwest Pacific. Utilizing these bases, the Japanese hoped to disrupt the Allied lines of communication.


airfield west of Rabaul, and Australians defending Rabaul were either captured or escaped to New Guinea and Australia.\textsuperscript{6}

The Japanese followed the landings at Rabaul with attacks on Lorengau in the Admiralty Islands on 25 January 1942 with three separate air raids conducted with two or three sea planes. The air attacks killed one native but managed to miss their supposed target of the radio station. The Australian defenders claimed to have shot down two planes. The Australians began to destroy anything that would be of value to the enemy and waited for the invasion they knew was coming. The plan for destroying the fuel dumps was to toss in a grenade and run.\textsuperscript{7}

**The Japanese Invade the Admiralty Islands**

On 8 April 1942 the Japanese light cruiser, *Tatsuta*, destroyer, *Mutsuki*, and the troop transport, *Mishima Maru*, arrived in Seeadler Harbor. A detachment of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Special Base Force landed, damaged the airfield at Lorengau and destroyed some of the Australian buildings. After building facilities for communications, the Japanese attack force departed for Rabaul on 11 April. The Japanese left behind the 51\textsuperscript{st} Transportation Regiment to improve the airfield at Lorengau and to provide defense for the islands. The Australians and remaining Europeans retreated deeper into the jungle on Manus, moving about 20 kilometers down Number Three Road to the village of Bulihat. The Australians began actively patrolling the Japanese positions. After several patrols without any causalities on either side the Australians realized they were running out of supplies and the promised relief was not coming. They decided to evacuate the island on their own.\textsuperscript{8}

The Australians had thought ahead and requisitioned two boats for this purpose which they hid on the southern coast of Manus. The detachment marched for five days until they reached the first boat, the launch *Fidelis*. The other boat, the ketch *Edith*, had been seen by the Japanese and was lit at night by a search light from a Japanese ship. The Australian Commander decided he would go to the *Edith* and survey the situation. When

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\textsuperscript{7} First Independent Company

\textsuperscript{8} First Independent Company
he got there he found the search light off, so he swam aboard, raised sail and headed for a rendezvous with the remainder of his party. On 17 April the group headed for the coast of New Guinea. After contacting Port Moresby they were told to head for Astrolabe Bay then head inland to Mount Hagen, finally arriving on 16 May.  

With the Admiralties firmly in control, the Japanese did little to improve the one primitive airstrip at Lorengau. Not until early in 1943 was the field at Lorengau improved by the 51st Transportation Regiment and work started on a new field on Los Negros, Momote, which was not completed until late in 1943. Once put into operation, these two airfields were used as staging areas for Japanese aircraft flying between Rabaul, Wewak, and Hollandia. The islands were defended by Japanese Navy elements of the 36th Air Defense Unit and the 88th Military Patrol concentrated around Lorengau. In the great natural harbor, Seeadler, the Japanese built defensive fortifications as protection against Allied attacks.

Japanese Advances Continue

From Rabaul, the Japanese continued their advance down through the Solomon Islands and against New Guinea in an inverted V. With both flanks secure, the lines of communication to Australia would be threatened and the Japanese could attack Australia. Japanese bomber forces attacked Darwin, Australia for the first time on 19 February 1942. Other raids continued until the end of May. The Japanese attacked Tulagi in the Solomon Islands 3 May 1942 and immediately established a seaplane base. With a base on Tulagi the Japanese could provide support and reconnaissance to forces trying to move southeast against the New Hebrides, Fiji and New Caledonia. As part of the Tulagi invasion plans, an airfield was to be built on the near-by island of Guadalcanal.

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9 First Independent Company
While Japanese forces were advancing on Tulagi another landing force was advancing on Port Moresby, New Guinea. The Allied facilities at Port Moresby threatened the entire Japanese war in the Pacific. If Japanese bases could be maintained and Allied lines of communication disrupted the Japanese could consolidate their positions and reinforce their forces at leisure. This would have either forced the Allies to accept a negotiated peace or to extend the length of the war several years. The United States forces knew that the Japanese would next attempt to invade Port Moresby. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), realized that Port Moresby was crucial to the Allied plans for stopping the Japanese. The Port Moresby landing force was detected and intercepted by an American and Australian naval force and in the battle of the Coral Sea in early May 1942, forced to turn back.\footnote{Samuel E. Morison, \textit{Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, May 1942-August 1942} (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1988), 21-64, hereafter, Morison, \textit{Coral Sea}.}

In early June 1942 the Japanese attempted to capture the American held islands of the Midway atoll. American planes from aircraft carriers intercepted the invading forces and sank four Japanese aircraft carriers. As a result of the defeat at Midway the Japanese lost the momentum that had driven their war effort.

\textbf{America Counterattacks}

To counter the Japanese offensives in the Pacific, the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) put a three-phase plan to paper in the JCS Directive of 2 July 1942. The first phase covered the seizure of Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. Phase two covered the capture of the remainder of the Solomon Islands, Lae, Salamaua, and other locations on the eastern coast of New Guinea. Phase three was the capture of Rabaul and its surrounding positions, including the Admiralties. Shortly after receiving the JCS July Directive, MacArthur met with the Commander of the Pacific Ocean Area (COMPOA), Admiral Chester Nimitz, in Melbourne, Australia. The two commanders agreed that the operations would be carried out on two basic principles. First, the advance of a series of air bases to provide air umbrellas covering the eastern coast of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands; second, the isolation of Rabaul before the final assault.\footnote{John Miller, Jr., \textit{Cartwheel: The Reduction of Rabaul} (Washington: Center of Military History, 1959), 5, hereafter, Miller, \textit{Cartwheel}. Louis B. Morton, \textit{Strategy and Command: The First Two Years},}
Despite the Japanese strategic defeat at Coral Sea the Japanese knew that Port Moresby still had to be taken, so they and landed troops at Buna on the eastern coast of New Guinea on 21 and 22 July 1942. Once Buna was secure, the Japanese began construction of an airfield that would provide air cover for the troops that would be attacking Port Moresby. The Japanese then began an overland attack against Port Moresby by crossing the Owen Stanley mountain range on the Kokoda Track. On maps the track is emphasized and appears to be a major route. The reality is much different. The track is a series of steep trails with numerous stream and river crossings.\textsuperscript{13}

When the Australians realized that this was the goal of the Japanese they advanced against the Japanese invaders and fought the Japanese at every creek crossing and bend in the track. As the Japanese advanced their supply lines became longer while the supply lines for the Australians became shorter. The Japanese advanced to within twenty air miles of Port Moresby until Australian resistance, along with starvation and disease, brought them to a halt. The Japanese were left with no choice but to retreat towards Buna, leaving rear guard elements to hold or slow the Australian and American troops following them along the track. Between the terrain and the attacking Australian infantry on the Kokoda Track the Japanese were doomed. The Allies advanced over the Owen Stanley mountain range by foot and air. Other Allied forces were moved along the coast by small ships which landed south of Buna. Not only were the Japanese fighting the Australians at every creek crossing, trail intersection, and natural ambush position, they were also struggling against some of the most inhospitable terrain and fauna in the world. After a long and bloody fight the Allies were in control of the eastern coast of New Guinea around Buna. Existing airfields had been recaptured and new ones built as the troops advanced.\textsuperscript{14}

While the Japanese were making their attempt to capture Port Moresby they were also busy on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. After they had captured Tulagi the Japanese decided to build an airfield on Guadalcanal. When the Allies realized that the

\textsuperscript{13} USSB, \textit{Pacific Bombing Survey}. For the best account of the fighting along the Kokoda Trail see Dudley McCarthy, \textit{Australia in World War II, South-West Pacific Area- First Year}, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1959).

Japanese were building an airfield that could support bombers and fighters which threaten supply routes to Australia, they knew that it must be captured. In August, the United States Navy landed the First Marine Division near the airfield. The Japanese only offered a token resistance to the Marine landing. When the Japanese destroyed the Allied covering force in the Battle of Savo Island, the American transports withdrew from the area without offloading ammunition and other supplies for the Marines. Once the Japanese realized that the Marine landing force was going to stay they began to reinforce the defending forces. The Japanese air forces began to raid the Marines almost daily with flights from Rabaul. The Americans responded by completing the airfield and sending in an ever increasing number of aircraft.15

The resulting battle for Guadalcanal lasted almost six months and involved land, sea, and air forces. Once Guadalcanal was secure, the Allies could begin a series of landing operations up the Solomon Island chain with each operation supported by air and sea forces from the position previously captured. In order to secure the western flank, the Allies continued to advance up the coast of New Guinea capturing ports and airfields. In early 1943, the surviving Japanese evacuated Buna and Guadalcanal.16

Japanese advances against Port Moresby in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands had to be contained before any grand strategy could be put into action. The mandate by the JCS for attacks against the Solomons demanded that the forces in the Pacific be increased from the minimum needed for defense of the area to units needed for the planned offensives. Once Guadalcanal and Tulagi were securely in Allied hands, the strategy to advance up the Solomon Islands and the coast of New Guinea could begin.17

In December 1942 Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations and Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, proposed bypassing the Solomon Islands entirely, capturing the Admiralty Islands, and thus isolating Rabaul without a series of frontal assaults in the Solomon Islands. Nimitz responded with a letter explaining that the

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17 Morton, Strategy, 311-323.
Japanese bases in the Solomon Islands, New Ireland, New Britain, and Rabaul were self supporting and that the capture of the Admiralty Islands would not reduce the fighting strength of the Japanese. Capturing the Admiralty Islands before the Solomon Islands would expose the Allies to attacks on their flanks and give the Japanese the ability to attack the lines of communication with the Admiralty Islands.  

Allied leaders met at Casablanca, Morocco in January 1943 to plan military objectives world wide for the coming year. The agreed upon strategy for the Pacific was to maintain pressure on Japanese forces and to capture Rabaul. The Pacific theater was considered the secondary offensive. Men and material would only be made available once the needs of the European area had been met. Once Germany surrendered, the Allies would concentrate their forces for an all out attack against the Japanese.

The Japanese suffered a major set back in their plans to secure New Guinea when the American 5th Air Force attacked a convoy of eight troop ships transports and a destroyer escort headed for Lae on 2-4 March 1943. In the resulting battle of the Bismarck Sea, the convoy was attacked by planes and Motor Patrol Torpedo boats (PT boats) for three days. All the Japanese transports and four destroyers were sunk for a loss of five aircraft. Out of almost 7,000 Japanese troops of the Japanese Army’s 51st Division aboard the transports nearly half were lost.

Allied Plans in the Pacific

In March 1943 the commanders in the Pacific sent their representatives to Washington D.C. for a series of conferences referred to as the Pacific Military Conference. Major General Richard K. Sutherland, MacArthur’s Chief of Staff, presented a five stage plan, ELKTON II, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. First, airfields on the southeast coast of New Guinea would be taken to provide support for further advances. Second, the Solomon Island airfields had to be taken, especially Munda Point on New Georgia. Third, airfields on New Britain and Bougainville were needed to support future operations. Fourth, the airfields around Kavieng on New Ireland would be taken to isolate Rabaul.

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19 Miller, *Cartwheel*, 7-8.
fully. Last, Rabaul itself would be occupied. The last two operations, it was agreed, might be switched in order. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the plan was too ambitious for the resources allocated for the Pacific. The Pacific representatives immediately responded with a reduced plan of only the first three objectives with the addition of establishing two airfields at Woodlark and Kiriwina islands. These plans would result in a two pronged attack. One prong would advance northwest through the Solomons while to the west another prong would advance along the east coast of New Guinea. A total of thirteen separate operations would take place during 1943. Each operation would be supported by operations of the other prong in coordinated moves always under cover of Allied fighter aircraft. The result would be the elimination of threats to Australia and the Allied lines of communication. The code name for the resulting operation was CARTWHEEL.\textsuperscript{21}

Cartwheel was a series of campaigns in the advance on Rabaul. The first landings took place on 21 June 1943 when part of a Marine Raider Battalion landed at Segi Point on the island of New Georgia in the central Solomon Islands. Ten days later on 30 June a combined force of Army and Marine troops landed on Vangunu Island just south of New Georgia to secure the Wickham Anchorage, while another force landed on Rendova Island to the west of New Georgia. Landings continued with Allied troops going ashore in a two pronged attack to capture the airfields around Munda on northern New Georgia. Other islands were captured that strengthened the Allied positions. To the west as part of Cartwheel, landings took place on 30 June 1943 with the invasion of Woodlark off the eastern coast of Papua New Guinea in the Solomon Sea. In September Allied troops landed near Lae on the eastern coast of Papua New Guinea. The advance up the Solomon Islands continued with landings on Bougainville on 1 November. In December landings were made on New Britain to secure Cape Gloucester. By the end of 1943 the Allied forces “dominated the skies all the way to Rabaul, and Allied ships sailed the Solomon Sea and the Huon Gulf in comparative safety”.\textsuperscript{22} Japanese forces at Rabaul were isolated, but the Allies still needed a harbor and air fields for the future attacks against the

\textsuperscript{22} Miller, \textit{Cartwheel}, 272.
Philippine Islands. Because the decision had been made to by-pass Rabaul, which was strongly defended, the Admiralty Islands were substituted.

The start of the by-pass of Rabaul began with attacks from the air. The first major missions to attack the Japanese facilities around Rabaul began late in October 1943 with the 5th Air Force. The 5th Air Force continued to attack the area around Rabaul with some success throughout October and continued until mid November. On 17 December 1943 a combined force of U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and New Zealand fighters struck at Rabaul. This was the beginning of the complete destruction of Rabaul as an effective air base. By 21 February 1944, according to U.S. intelligence estimates, Rabaul had ceased to be an effective Japanese air base and was left alone to sit out the war as just another by-passed fortress.23

23 Ronnie Day, “COMAIRSOLS Against Rabaul: The Last Air Battle of the South Pacific Theater” (paper presented at the Society for Military History meeting with the Ohio Valley History Conference, Western Kentucky University, Oct. 2001).
CHAPTER 2
THE INVASION OF LOS NEGROS

General Douglas MacArthur’s plan for a return to the Philippines called for a “base near enough for staging purposes and with a harbor of sufficient size to accommodate a large amphibious striking force. At the same time I [he] wished to insure the protection of my right flank, and to prevent reinforcements from reaching enemy troops bottled up in the Bismark-Solomons areas.”\textsuperscript{24} The decision not to take the harbor and airfields at Rabaul made the Admiralty Islands the logical alternative for future invasions.

The Initial Phase

The attack against the Admiralties began from the air. The first missions flown against them were scheduled in early January, 1944. On 6 January the 90\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Group (H) of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Air Force bombed Momote airfield on Los Negros, cratering the runway and dispersal area. The first reconnaissance missions were flown by the 8\textsuperscript{th} Photo Reconnaissance Squadron on 22 January. The bombing and strafing started the same day with an attack against shipping in the harbor by eleven B-25s from the 345\textsuperscript{th} Bombardment Group out of Dododura, escorted by P-38s. The bombers hit a variety of targets on Manus and Los Negros, destroying an ammunition dump, a house, and various shipping. The bombers dropped thirty-seven tons of 1,000 pound bombs and during their strafing runs expended more than 25,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition. The P-38s, in their strafing runs expended 127,000 rounds of 20mm and .50 cal ammunition. On 24 January thirty-eight B-25s from the 345\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Group hit shipping targets in Seeadler Harbor and Momote airfield expending thirty-seven tons of bombs. During strafing runs against the airfield and shipping the B-25s expended nearly 100,000 rounds of .50 cal ammunition, reportedly destroying the last enemy planes reported on Momote. The 345\textsuperscript{th} and 38\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Groups hit again on 25 January with fifty-nine B-25s striking Momote.

and Manus. The planes arrived in four waves between 1125 and 1205, dropping 259 five hundred pound bombs and during their strafing runs firing almost 145,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition. Three planes were lost to antiaircraft fire, ending B-25 low level attacks until 13 February. On 26 January forty-one B-24s from the 90th and 43rd Bomb Groups, escorted by three squadrons of P-38s, bombed Momote dropping over 114 tons of bombs, mainly 500 pounders. The next day, forty-one B-24s bombed the town of Lorengau and the airfield there dropping over 120 tons of 500 and 1,000 pound bombs.25

With both airfields out of service the islands were not bombed again until 6 February when the 43rd Bomb Group hit them with twenty-four B-24s with an escort of twenty-four P-38s. Bad weather and other operations kept the 5th Air Force away until 13 February when the 38th and 345th Bomb Groups returned with eighty-two B-25s dropping 95.5 tons on Momote airfield. The same groups returned the next day dropping eighty-nine tons of 500 and 1,000 pound bombs on Momote. B-24s and B-25s returned to the Admiralty Islands every day until the landing, attacking both airfields and other targets of opportunity and dropping a total of 270 tons of 1,000, 500, and 100 pound bombs.26

The 17th Reconnaissance Squadron sent three B-25s over Manus and Los Negros on 23 February. The B-25s spent ninety minutes over the islands flying as low as twenty feet and not receiving any enemy fire. The pilots reported, “Bombers over Manus report nil signs enemy. Crews say Los Negros and Manus are evacuated.”27 The islands appeared deserted and the airfields overgrown. This mission set into motion the new time table for the invasion of the Admiralty Islands.28

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27 ICD Message In Log, 26 Feb 44 for radio message, RG 407, National Archives and Records Administration, hereafter, NARA. Also see MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 188.

The Invasion Date is Changed

With this new intelligence, General George C. Kenny, commander of the 5th Air Force, went to see MacArthur. On 26 February, MacArthur approved the plan to occupy the Admiralty Islands with an invasion date of 29 February instead of 1 April. “The situation presented an ideal opportunity for a coup de main which, if successful, could advance the Allied timetable in the Pacific by several months and save thousands of Allied lives.”29 Between the new intelligence and the planned invasion date more missions to soften up the islands were scheduled. On 24 February twenty-four B-24s and twenty-seven B-25s set out for the islands, but because of bad weather only three B-24s managed to get to the target. Nine B-25s of the 405th Bomb Group hit the islands on 25 February.30

This change in the time table caused the invading forces to plan and execute a movement of men and material over 500 miles in less than four days. The major problem was that transportation was unavailable to move the entire First Cavalry Division to Los Negros as scheduled.

The Japanese Defense

Until December 1943 the Admiralties had been garrisoned by the 51st Transportation Regiment under the command of Colonel Yoshio Ezaki. In December, with Rabaul receiving increasing Allied attacks, the Japanese sent elements of the 14th Naval Base Force to the Admiralties which consisted of the 36th Air (AA) Defense Unit, the 88th Naval Guard Unit, 1st Field Hospital, 51st Division, and various other support troops and replacements. To further strengthen the area two more infantry battalions were needed. The 2d Battalion of the 1st Independent Mixed Regiment arrived from Kavieng by 25 January and by the end of the month the 1st Battalion, 229th Infantry, 38th Division had also arrived. The total number of defending Japanese was estimated at between 4,650 and 4,970. Ezaki assumed command of all Japanese forces in the islands and prepared to defend the harbor and airfields. What the Allies did not know was that Ezaki

See also 90th Bombardment Group History Operational Narrative February 1944 GP-90-HI 1 Jan 44 – 31 Aug 44 AFHRC. And Warren, Fifth Air Force, 101.

29 MacArthur, Reminiscences, 188.

had ordered his troops to not fire at aircraft flying over the islands and to stay out of sight during the day. Far from being abandoned, in fact the islands held nearly five thousand defenders.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{The Allied Invasion Force}

The Allied unit selected for the invasion was the newly arrived First Cavalry Division under the command of Major General Innis Swift.\textsuperscript{32} In July 1943 the division arrived at Strathpine, Australia. Acting as an infantry division, the men of the division spent their time training in jungle warfare and were as prepared as any other unit fresh to the Pacific theater. The division was organized as a “square” division having two brigades, 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and the division artillery. Each brigade was assigned two cavalry regiments: 1\textsuperscript{st} Brigade had the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Regiments and the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Brigade had the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Regiments. Each regiment had two squadrons, equivalent to a battalion, with additional units of headquarters, service, and weapons troops (a troop was the equivalent of a company). Each squadron was assigned three rifle troops, or companies, with a headquarters and a weapons troop. The division artillery had a headquarters battery and two battalions of 75mm howitzers and two battalions of 105mm howitzers. The First Cavalry Division and its support units were designated Task Force Brewer for the invasion of the Admiralties. The landing would be made at Hyane Harbor on Los Negros, near Momote airfield.\textsuperscript{33}

Orders for the invasion of a “Reconnaissance in Force” of the Admiralties were also issued. This force which consisted of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Regiment, a platoon of the 99\textsuperscript{th} Field Artillery Battalion, the 673\textsuperscript{rd} Antiaircraft Machine Gun Battery, and liaison parties for coordination of naval and air support under the command of Brigadier General William C. Chase began to move from Oro Bay, Cape Sudest, New

\textsuperscript{32} Wright, B.C., \textit{The First Cavalry Division in World War Two}, (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Company, 1947), 3, hereafter, Wright, \textit{First Cavalry}. The First Cavalry Division was comprised of elements of units that had served with distinction during the Indian Wars and the Mexican Expedition during World War One. The division traded in their horses for trucks and tanks in 1921 at Fort Bliss, Texas. See also page 4
\textsuperscript{33} Miller, \textit{Cartwheel}, 322.
Guinea on Seventh Amphibious Fleet ships that formed Task Force 76, a mixture of US and Royal Australian Navy ships. The light cruiser *Phoenix* would serve as MacArthur’s flagship during the invasion so that he could take active control if necessary and be in position to observe first hand the progress of the invasion. If the landing was unsuccessful, then MacArthur could call for the immediate withdrawal of the troops and not have to second guess the decision of a subordinate. If the invasion was a success, then he could make the decision to hold until the rest of the division could be brought to the islands.\(^{34}\)

The first assault wave was transported in three APDs, World War One destroyers converted to carry troops, and nine destroyers, using the ships’ boats as the transport to the beach. The follow-on units were to be transported in six LSTs that would depart from Cape Cretin about 2200 on D-Day. If the landing force encountered more opposition than it was able to deal with, it would form up on the outer side of Jamandilai Point south of Hyane Harbor and be evacuated with the boats from the APDs.\(^{35}\)

As stated in the Task Group 76, Task Force Brewer After Action report, the idea of withdrawing the troops in case of a strongly opposed landing was pure fantasy. “If evacuation became necessary, it is doubtful if many of these boats would have survived the enemy opposition that forced the evacuation. . . . it is probable that most of the landing force would have been lost.”\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) This is from Miller, *Cartwheel*, 321-6; Morison, *Breaking the Bismark Barrier*, 432-7.

\(^{35}\) TF 76 Op Plan 2-44, 3, RG 407, NARA.

\(^{36}\) Task Force Brewer After Action Report, 1st Cavalry Division G-3 Plans, RG 407, NARA. RG 38 also has a copy of TF 76 Op Plan, TF 76.1 Action Report, para 6, p 3. Also see TF 76 Op Plan 2-44, 2.
Figure 2. Detail of Hayne Harbor. Drawn from the First Cavalry Division Historical Report, map 6, RG 407, NARA.
The Allies Land

An advance party, a small patrol of Alamo Scouts, was dropped off by a PBY, at 0645 on the morning of 27 February near Los Negros’ south shore under the cover of a two plane B-24 raid dropping 20 pound fragmentation bombs and 100 pound general purpose bombs, along with empty bottles for added noise. The Alamo Scouts reported back that night, “Unable to cross river, north bank lousy with Japs.” Kenny’s intelligence staff felt that the scouts might be exaggerating the force opposing them as any enemy at night might seem to be a large force. It was this report that caused Macarthur to accompany the invasion force. The Alamo Scouts were pulled off Los Negros by PBY at first light on 28 February under cover of a single B-24 escorted by two P-38s.

Chase’s “Reconnaissance in Force” departed Oro Bay at 1800 on 27 February 1944. The same day the follow-on units, 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment loaded onto 3 LSTs at Oro Bay and departed on the same day for the invasion. The only problem encountered was that one LST was unable to get off the beach by 2000. This force departed Oro Bay for the Admiralties at 0400 29 February 44.

The “Reconnaissance in Force” landing started with a “devastating bombardment from sea and air”. The flagship Phoenix, the cruiser Nashville and four destroyers, Daly, Hutchins, Beale, and Bache, supplied the naval bombardment while seven B-24s hit Momote airfield as the troops landed. At 0800 on 29 February, in a pouring rain, the 2nd Squadron of the 5th Cavalry Regiment of the First Cavalry Division landed along with the attached units. The invasion launched in four waves and was met by fire from an emplaced 25mm gun located on Jamandalai Point. The first three waves were unscathed by this gun, but the fourth wave began to receive accurate fire before the supporting destroyers and a covering B-25 targeted the enemy 25mm gun and silenced it. At first, the landing was essentially unopposed and the troops got ashore with minimal casualties. By 0950 the entire Momote airfield was declared secure. The landing forces continued to advance under light opposition. Patrols were sent out to the north reaching the Native

37 1st Cavalry Division In Messages File, 2400 27 Feb. 1944, RG 407, NARA.
38 Miller, Cartwheel, 322. Also see Warren, Fifth Air Force Combat History, 104.
39 G-3 Operations report, 27-28 Feb. 44, RG 407, NARA. Wright in First Cavalry gives Cape Sudest as the departure point. Cape Sudest forms part of Oro Bay.
Skidway connecting Hayne Harbor with Seeadler Harbor, to the west reaching Porlaka, and to the south reaching a Japanese encampment about one mile away. That afternoon MacArthur came ashore and ordered General Chase to “Hold what you have taken, no matter against what odds. You have your teeth in him now, don’t let go”.41

The Japanese Response

The Japanese forces under Colonel Ezaki expected any Allied landing to take place on the opposite shore of the island and believed that the initial landing was a diversion. The slow reaction to the initial landing allowed the 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry to consolidate its position around Momote airfield on Los Negros. The reported casualties from the landing forces were one Killed in Action (KIA) four Wounded in Action (WIA) and five known enemy dead. As night fell, the Brewer Task Force consolidated their positions to the harbor side of the runway and by using the aircraft revetments the 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry was able to construct a defendable position with minimum effort.42

During the night of 29 February - 1 March the Japanese constantly infiltrated the 5th Cavalry’s positions. They crept silently up to the defenders positions, attacked with grenades, and advanced into the defenders positions and fought desperate hand to hand fights. The constant infiltrations and noise kept the troopers alert. Anything that moved was a target in the near pitch darkness. The Task Force wounded had to lie in their foxholes until light when it was safe to move about and then they were then taken to a former Japanese bunker along the shore that had been set up as a field station. There the 1st Medical Squadron detachment treated the wounded on captured Japanese mess tables under gas lantern light. In the brutal, bloody fighting the Japanese managed to reach as far as some command posts. Two Japanese soldiers got as close as fifteen feet from General Chase’s position before they were cut down by the Task Force intelligence officer (S-2) with a Thompson sub-machine gun. The Allied forces were able to repulse

40 G-3 Historical Report, 2, RG 407, NARA.
42 G-3 OP’s Report 28 Feb 44, RG 407, NARA.
the Japanese with a loss of seven KIA, twelve WIA, while the Japanese suffered sixty-eight known dead.\textsuperscript{43}

On 1 March the Allies searched the perimeter for Japanese snipers that had gotten through the lines during the night. Snipers and infiltrators had cut the phone wires and were still in positions to fire at anyone who passed by. One group of Japanese occupied an unoccupied trench and bunker. They were not discovered until they fired on the Division Chaplain. The wounded Chaplain pointed to where the fire had come from so that soldiers with him could return fire. When some of the Japanese tried to escape they were cut down by the riflemen. The survivors retreated to the bunker and kept up sporadic fire until the bunker was blown up with them inside. While the “Reconnaissance” waited, patrols were sent out to try and estimate enemy positions and strengths. During the day supplies were dropped from B-25s and the “Yankee Diddler”, a B-17 from the 39\textsuperscript{th} Troop Carrier Squadron. The “Yankee Diddler” alone dropped over three tons of plasma and ammunition to the troopers. At 1700 the Japanese attacked again, but after a fierce three-hour battle the main Japanese attack ended. Intermittent attacks continued throughout the night. The US forces suffered no casualties during the night attacks, while the known Japanese dead were fourteen. By the morning of 2 March, Japanese snipers were still inside the American lines.\textsuperscript{44}

**Allied Advances**

The first order of business on the morning of 2 March was to eliminate the remaining snipers. As the troopers cleared out the Japanese that had gotten into the perimeter the “Yankee Diddler” returned with another load of plasma and ammunition. At 0900 the first reinforcements, the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry and the 40\textsuperscript{th} Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees) arrived at Hayne Harbor aboard six of Task Force 76’s LSTs. The LSTs were met by fire from the Japanese gun on Lobortutu Point and scattered mortar fire. During the landing, eleven B-25s from the 38\textsuperscript{th} Bombardment Group (M), strafed and bombed Japanese positions in front of the American lines. By


\textsuperscript{44} 5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 2, RG 407, NARA. Warren, *Fifth Air Force Combat History,* 110.
0945 the LSTs beached inside the harbor and began unloading troops and equipment. Part of the equipment on board the LSTs was the remaining guns of the 99th Field Artillery. They brought with them “only fifty seven [sic] vehicles” and three batteries of artillery consisting of 75 millimeter, (mm) pack howitzers.\(^{45}\) The 40th Seabees also landed with its construction equipment and immediately put the bulldozers to work reinforcing fighting positions and burying the enemy dead. The initial force was relieved to see the remainder of the 5th Cavalry arrive and quickly put them to work clearing out snipers threatening the perimeter. Except for the soldiers unloading the LSTs the incoming soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry troops went straight into combat, defending the secured positions already occupied and eliminating Japanese troops that had continued to infiltrate throughout the night. B-17s of the 69th Troop Carrier Squadron returned late in the morning, dropping more ammunition and plasma.\(^{46}\)

The newly arrived members of the 5th Cavalry were immediately issued orders for an attack at 1500 to secure all of Momote airfield. At 1415, P-47s and B-25s, 38th and 345th Bombardment Groups, began bombing and strafing Japanese positions. Unfortunately, due to radio trouble, three bombs landed on the eastern side of the airfield, killing two men and wounding four members of E Troop 5th Cavalry and damaging a gun position of the 673rd Antiaircraft Machine Gun Battery. The attack at 1500 was supported by sixteen A-20s of the 13th and 90th Bombardment Squadrons (L), eight P-47s of the 340th Fighter Squadron, and sixteen P-38s of the 433rd Fighter Squadron. By 1800 both cavalry squadrons and their attached units occupied the entire airfield and were digging in for the night. Ammunition for the Task Force was in short supply and was dropped throughout the day by B-17s.\(^{47}\)

With the position secure, Chase requested that reinforcements be sent as soon as possible. He knew that the battle was still in doubt. He requested “ADDITIONAL REGIMENT TO COPE WITH INCREASING ENEMY RESISTANCE ESTIMATED AS TWO BNS [battalions] RPT BNS . . . MOVE A MINIMUM OF ONE TWO FIVE NAUGHT [1,250] MEN CMA [.] INCLUDING ARTILLERY CMA [.] SO AS TO

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The reinforcements would proceed in two groups.

The night of 2-3 March was very much like the other nights, the Japanese attacked in several small groups with heavy mortar fire and grenades and suffered heavily for it. The majority of attacks were directed against the northern half of the perimeter close to the Native Skidway. The Japanese lost four hundred known dead to American losses of seventeen KIA and thirty-six WIA. In the morning the lines of communication had to be repaired and the remaining infiltrating Japanese cleared out.49

During the day of 3 March the Task Force was congratulated on the 89th anniversary of the establishment of the 5th Cavalry by a message dropped by the Division Commander, Major General Swift, from a B-17 flying over the island. The 40th Seabees began the task of clearing the airfield, making it suitable for use. The remainder of the forces prepared for an offensive attack at 1200. The attack was preceded by artillery fire from the 99th Field Artillery Battalion and went smoothly. Shortly after, the task force controlled all of the airfield and Jamandalai point. Movement during the day was easy and unopposed for the troops.

Heavy Night Fighting

The night of 3-4 March saw the heaviest fighting yet. It was evident that the Japanese Commander, Colonel Ezaki, realized that he was facing the only landing in his area and that he had to defend the airstrip and harbor to the best of his ability. The Japanese started attacking shortly after nightfall. Most attacks were made by platoon sized elements and did not appear to be well coordinated. Units of Japanese “tried every trick in the book to confuse our troops and cause them to disclose their positions.”50

The first indication of an attack was the sighting of four Japanese troop-carrying barges at 1600 approaching from the north west. The barges were fired upon by the 99th Field Artillery using 75mm pack howitzers and anti-aircraft guns. All the barges were destroyed and the troops were last seen swimming for the area of the Native Skidway.

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48 First Cavalry Division Message In Log, 02 March 44, RG 407, NARA.
49 G-3 Historical Report, 5, RG 407, NARA.
Other Japanese field artillery pieces were spotted near the Native Skidway and fired upon by American artillery and naval fire.\textsuperscript{51}

Shortly after dark, about 2100, the Japanese attacked the American positions. In the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron area the Japanese infiltrated small groups and individuals through the lines and set up sniping positions from which they would open fire at dawn. The attacks continued throughout the night with the fiercest occurring at dawn on the northern sector near the taxiway and the Porlaka Road. The Japanese concentrated the majority of their forces on the northern end of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron perimeter. The Japanese walked down the road singing and yelling to each other. The American forces opened up with concentrated light machine gun fire, cutting down whole squads. The best use of the machine guns was to remove them from their tripods and fire them standing or kneeling. The machine guns soon ran out of ammunition and the crews resorted to their individual weapons.\textsuperscript{52}

The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron was attacked by a battalion plus of Japanese moving from the Native Skidway. Attempting to take the positions held by the 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Regiment and occupy them, the Japanese cut all lines of communication. The defenders had to resort to yelling out instructions, which was of minimum effect in the confusion of battle. The troops were instructed to stay in their individual fighting positions and fire at anything that moved. This proved to be the best defense possible.\textsuperscript{53}

The 40\textsuperscript{th} Seabees were positioned on the northern end of the perimeter and came under heavy attack during the night. With their assistance the defending troops were able to maintain the perimeter. According to the 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry Division Historical report the 40\textsuperscript{th} Seabees “saved the day with their defense”.\textsuperscript{54}

Around midnight, “all hell broke loose” along the perimeter when the Japanese attacked in strength.\textsuperscript{55} It seemed to the defenders that there was no coordinated attack plan. The Japanese swarmed in head-on attacks with no regard for casualties. The only plan was to drive the Americans into the sea. A few of the defending troops were forced to withdraw in several locations when their positions were in danger of being overrun but

\textsuperscript{50} G-3 Historical Report, 7, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{51} 1\textsuperscript{st} Bde Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA. Also 99 FA Historical Report, 6, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{52} G-3 Historical Report, 7, and 5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{53} G-3 Historical Report, 7 and 5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{54} 40\textsuperscript{th} Naval CB Bn Action Report, 3, RG 38, NARA.
\textsuperscript{55} 99\textsuperscript{th} FA Historical Report, 6, RG 407, NARA.
the majority held their positions until morning. As one soldier put it, “where the hell are you going to go?”.

An indication of the intensity of the fighting is given in the citation of the only Congressional Medal of Honor awarded during the campaign.

During the night Sgt. Troy A. McGill of G Troop and his 8 man squad were holding a revetment. “At about 0400, more than 200 drink-crazed fanatics loomed out of the underbrush recklessly screaming threats and curses. As the attack progressed all of Sergeant McGill’s men were either killed or wounded except one whom he ordered to drop back to the safety of the next revetment. Sergeant McGill remained in his position and kept mowing down the enemy until his weapon would fire no more. By this time the Japanese had reached a point about five yards from his bunker. With utter disregard for his personal safety and knowing that he faced certain death, he left his foxhole and using his rifle as a club engaged in hand-to-hand combat until he was killed by the enemy. After daylight, 105 enemy dead were found in front of and within the area occupied by the 1st Platoon of Troop “G”, the platoon of which Sergeant McGill’s squad was the defensive spearhead. Sergeant McGill’s courageous and determined stand, his spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty were a source of inspiration to his comrades and contributed greatly toward breaking the frenzied attack.” For his stand in the defense McGill was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

On the morning of 4 March the American troops got to work clearing out the infiltrators and snipers from the perimeter. Many positions had Japanese dead piled around them. One heavy machine gun position had sixty-eight dead in front of it in the morning. The total known enemy dead were one thousand in the area of the Skidway and another four hundred along the road to Porlaka. Some of what appeared to be enemy dead were actually alive waiting for the chance to kill members of the defending force. The American losses for the night were forty-eight killed, ninety-two wounded.

56 40th Naval Construction Battalion Action Report, 4, RG 38, NARA.
57 Wright, First Cavalry, 22.
58 Miller, Cartwheel, 335.
59 G-3 Historical Report, 7, RG 407, NARA. 99th FA Historical Report, 7, RG 407, NARA. Miller in Cartwheel puts U.S. casualties at 61 KIA, 244 WIA, including the Seabees 9 KIA 38 WIA.
Figure 3. Detail of Los Negros. Adapted from First Cavalry Division Historical Report, R.G. 407, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, MD.
Reinforcements Arrive

On the morning of 4 March the 2nd Squadron of the 7th Cavalry Regiment and the 82nd Field Artillery Battalion landed along with their 75mm pack howitzers. The remainder of the day was spent clearing away the enemy dead and preparing for more attacks. The night of 4/5 March was the quietest night so far with no attacks.60

The Division Commander, Major General Innis Swift, arrived on the morning of 5 March aboard the destroyer Bush. The Bush spent the day firing on enemy positions and did not off load Swift until 1600. At 1200 the newly arrived 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry received warning orders to “move North on the MOKERANG PENINSULA, via the SKIDWAY, thence West to RED BEACH [on the Seeadler Harbor side] in the SALAMI PLANTATION area, and secure a beachhead to protect the landing of the 2nd B.C.T [Brigade Combat Team, consisting of the 8th Cavalry and 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry and supporting units]”61 The 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry moved out at 1500 but only progressed 500 yards up the Native Skidway. The Squadron dug in for the night and fought off scattered groups of Japanese attempting to infiltrate the American position. The number of Japanese killed that night is impossible to estimate as the area already had enemy dead lying around.62

During the morning of 6 March the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry moved north towards Salami Plantation. That morning also saw the arrival of the 12th Cavalry at Hayne Harbor aboard four LSTs. On board the LSTs were four light tanks of the 603d Tank Company, five LVTs of A Company, 592nd Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, the 105mm howitzers of the 271st Field Artillery Battalion, and two L-4 Liaison Planes. The route north was a sea of mud that only got deeper as the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry troops and their vehicles moved along it. The retreating Japanese had cut down trees along the road as barriers to delay the advance. The going was slow and muddy, but unopposed. The only vehicles that were able to move unaided were the tanks and LVTs, also known as buffalos. By 1600 the Salami Plantation and Red Beach were in American hands. The troops found “large amounts of enemy supplies . . . including five trucks; abandoned buildings containing radios, drafting equipment, charts, food and propaganda

60 G-3 Historical Report, 7-8, RG 407, NARA. 82d FA Historical Report, 2-7, RG, 407, NARA.
61 7th Cav Historical Report, 2, RG 407, NARA.
pamphlets.” Now future landings would not have to be made in Hayne Harbor. The 5th Cavalry advanced west towards Porlaka and occupied the enemy positions there. The first aircraft to land on Momote airfield was a B-25 that arrived at 1330. The night was quiet for the defenders except for the usual harassing rifle fire and grenade throwing.

On 7 March the 12th Cavalry sent 2 squads with three tanks to Mokerang Point. The 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment sent out small patrols that killed three Japanese and two Indians. The regiment was resupplied during the day with ammunition, rations, and blood plasma by B-24 aircraft. LCVs were loaded with ammunition and rations at Momote and proceeded to Salami by way of Ndrilo Island, arriving at 0800 on 8 March. The main activity of the day was two separate landings on different parts of Los Negros.

A platoon of B Troop of the 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry moved from their positions at Momote airfield to Porlaka and assaulted Papitalai by “Canvas pneumatic boats, rubber boats and engineer assault boats . . . (additionally) one Jap barge . . . was captured and placed in use.” They were met by “stiff opposition on the beach but were able to establish and hold a beachhead until they were relieved.”

From the positions at the north end of Los Negros a platoon, twenty men, of the 12th Cavalry departed Salami in two LVTs (buffalos) and crossed the entrance to Papitalai Harbor to Papitalai Mission. They were met by “entrenched Japs” defending the Papitalai Mission with mortars, machine guns, rifles, and a 75mm howitzer. The first platoon across “held alone during the 45 minutes necessary to land the subsequent wave.” The two LVTs shuttled men and equipment until the third wave, when a third LVT came up from Momote and assisted in the shuttle operation. The Japanese counterattacked the landing with thirty men and were defeated. By 1930 the 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry minus two companies, had established a beachhead “50 yards

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62 Miller, Cartwheel, 336-7. 7th Cav Historical Report, 2, RG 407, NARA.
63 7th Cav Historical Report, 3, RG 407, NARA. G-3 Operations Report, dtd 7 March 44, RG 407, NARA.
64 Miller, Cartwheel, 338 and Div Arty Historical Report, 5, RG 407, NARA.
65 12th Cav Historical Report, 4 -5, RG 407, NARA.
66 5th Cav Historical Report, 7, RG 407, NARA.
67 G-3 Historical Report, 10, RG 407, NARA.
68 12th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.
69 12th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.
inland and 150 yards in width”.

As the afternoon wore on the supply situation was becoming critical. The troops would soon be critically short of food, ammunition, and medical supplies. The buffalos were busy shuttling much needed troops to the beachhead and could not be used for supplies so the decision was made to use the recently arrived and assembled L-4’s to drop supplies to the beachhead. When night fell the shuttle operation was stopped because the coral reefs made further crossings impractical. During the night the Japanese defenders attempted to counterattack several times. Each time the 271st Field Artillery Battalion fired at the enemy troop concentrations using 75mm and 105mm howitzers emplaced at the south-east end of Momote airfield, sometimes hitting as close as fifty yards to the squadron’s positions, and broke up the attacks. The next morning the remainder of the 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry landed “without incident”. The only activity that night was the appearance of “Washing Machine Charlie” who dropped one bomb near the Momote airfield.

On 8 March two British Indians surrendered to the Americans. They identified themselves as part of the 511th Sikh Regiment that had been captured at Singapore and brought to the Admiralties only about a month earlier as labor troops. They also told the Americans that there were another sixty-nine Indians waiting to come in. One Sikh returned to the group and led them in. The group was fed and stayed in the regimental area until 9 March, when they left for Brewer Task Force Headquarters by LCVs.

Just after noon on 8 March, orders were received notifying the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry to move to Lombrum Plantation by LCMs and secure the beach near there. After a preparatory bombardment by the 271st Field Artillery Battalion and destroyers, the squadron landed on the beach at 1420 to a defense of light weapons, including some 20mm fire. By 1430 the beach was secure and the Squadron advanced one hundred yards and established a perimeter. Patrols sent out from the perimeter encountered no resistance and found “abandoned gas, oil, and bomb dumps as well as one serviceable LMG [Light

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70 12th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.  
71 12th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.  
72 7th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.  
73 7th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.
Machine Gun] Cal 25.6 with abundant ammunition. A fresh water well was also found which eliminated the need for water to be brought forward.

Before Seeadler Harbor could be used the Navy and Air Force shelled and bombed enemy positions defending the harbor. On 5 March the navy shelled suspected positions and did not receive any return fire. The following day the destroyer *Nicholson* entered the harbor and, as planned, drew fire from the defending Japanese. The Allied response was to shell and bomb the disclosed positions. On the 7th and 8th the positions were struck from the air again. Never again did the Japanese fire on ships entering the harbor.75

Now that the harbor was secure, the Allies could land troops on Red Beach inside Seeadler Harbor near Salami. The 2d Brigade arrived at Red Beach on the morning of 9 March. This force consisted of the majority of the 8th Cavalry; 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry; assorted divisional and nondivisional units of support troops; 61st Field Artillery Battalion; Battery B 168th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion; Battery B 211th Coast Artillery Battalion; Company F 592nd Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment; an Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) detachment; and a detachment of No. 62 Works Wing Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). The remainder of 9 March was spent unloading the incoming troops and getting them into position.76

Now that the entire division had landed several separate operations would take place at the same time. In order for the reader to best follow the actions, they will be described as complete operations.

**Hill 260**

Most of the division spent 10 and 11 March trying to locate the remaining enemy units and get a fix on their positions. The 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regimental Reconnaissance Platoon moved to Papitalai and continued southwest towards Hill 260 and moved up the hill until they encountered enemy resistance. After a brief exchange of rifle and machine gun fire, the platoon retreated and requested artillery fire on the hill. The 271st Field Artillery Battalion fired 225 rounds at the positions. The platoon made

74 7th Cav Historical Report, 4, RG 407, NARA.
75 Morison, *Breaking the Bismark Barrier*, 444-5.
another attempt, but was stopped again. F Troop of the 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry was tasked to send a reinforced platoon up the hill. At 1400 the 82d Field Artillery Battalion fired 1200 rounds on the hill. F Troop advanced up the hill until they were stopped and forced to withdraw to the regiment’s positions at Papitalai. At 1800 Division Artillery shelled the enemy positions. 77

At 0730 on the morning of the 11 March, Division Artillery began shelling the Japanese defenders of Hill 260. The 5th Cavalry sent a reinforced platoon equipped with two medium tanks, flame throwers, and bazookas and began to try to take Hill 260 again. The tanks bogged down just two hundred yards up the trail. Infantry had to be placed around the tanks to protect them from Japanese infiltrators. The bazookas and flame throwers were not able to keep up with the advancing infantry in the steep jungle terrain. The remaining infantry advanced up the hill until they were fired on by rifle and machine gun fire. The platoon had no choice but to retreat down the hill. They estimated that the position was held by at least a company of determined Japanese troops. The attacking forces used an extremely steep trail that was only wide enough for two men to walk abreast. Visibility was restricted to five to ten yards at all times. The Japanese forces were easily able to defend their positions. 78

At 0730 on 12 March, after a barrage of mortar and artillery fire, F Troop of 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry started up Hill 260. They encountered heavy sniping and machine gun fire and returned to their camp. The Japanese were well dug in and seemed determined to hold Hill 260. The remainder of the day was spent patrolling around Porlaka and Papitalai, but no Japanese activity was noted in these areas. After a relatively quiet night, with only three enemy air raids directed against Momote airfield, the 5th Cavalry sent out patrols again on 13 March and prepared for a major assault against Hill 260 with the entire squadron of the 5th Cavalry. 79

As planned in Field Order Number 4, there were four objectives to be taken as the regiment advanced up Hill 260 on 14 March. Each objective was known to be a Japanese

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76 7th Cav Historical Report, 8, RG 407, NARA. Miller, Cartwheel, footnote 339.
77 5th Cav Historical Report, 8, RG 407, NARA. 271 FA Bn Historical Report, 5, RG 407, NARA. 82d FA Bn Historical Report, 10, RG 407, NARA. Also see Div Arty Historical Report for the appropriate days.
78 5th Cav Historical Report, 9, RG 407, NARA.
79 5th Cav Historical Report, 9, RG 407, NARA.
strong point. A preparatory barrage of artillery and mortars began at 1030. A and B Troops of the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry advanced to their first objective with only light opposition. Once they reached their objective, they held up until the 76th RAAF Squadron struck Japanese positions ahead of them at 1245. At 1300 A and B Troops of the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry advanced under a coordinated artillery barrage toward the second objective. The troops moved forward using bazookas and rifle and machine gun fire to knock out pillboxes with eight pillboxes destroyed in this action. By 1440 the 1st Squadron had captured the Japanese pill boxes at the second objective and dug in for the night. Artillery fire and mortar was directed against the Japanese positions that formed the third objective every thirty minutes during the night. The Japanese counterattacked Troop A at 1555 and 2100, but they were driven off by fire from the troop and artillery fire from the 82 Field Artillery Battalion.  

At 0730 on the morning of 15 March A and B Troops of the 1st Squadron 5th Cavalry advanced toward the third objective. “Having overcome sporadic resistance” they occupied the Japanese fox holes that formed the third objective by 1035. Patrouls were sent out in the direction of the fourth objective, the top of Hill 260, and encountered only light enemy activity. At 1400 the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry dug in at the third objective and waited for night. During the day C Troop was busy bringing up water, rations, and ammunition to the remainder of the squadron. The round trip from Papitalai to the third objective took five hours over the one and a half mile “narrow, rutted and slippery trail. On return trips they evacuated the sick and wounded.” The 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry conducted patrols departing from their positions around Momote airfield. E Troop moved west along the coastal trail toward the trail junction of Puwas and encountered strong organized resistance near the junction. In the brief encounter they killed four Japanese, ran off the other defenders, and captured a machine gun. The Regimental Reconnaissance Platoon moved from Momote airfield to the south and west.

80 5th Cav Historical Report, 10, RG 407, NARA. 82nd FA Bn Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
81 5th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
82 5th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
crossing Porharmenemen Creek. They encountered dense swamp and jungle as they advanced towards Lemondrol Creek but no enemy or trails.83

On 16 March the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry held their positions on Hill 260 and spent the day with small patrols to their front and in re-supply operations. The 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry moved from their positions at Momote airfield toward the trail junction at Puwas. This squadron encountered strong resistance along the coastal trail that prevented them from advancing all the way to the trail junction. E Troop moved inland to bypass the resistance and was soon fired on by two heavy machine guns, forcing them to retreat. 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry estimated that they were facing at least a “heavily reinforced platoon.”84 The patrol returned to their positions at Southeast Point due to the difficulties of re-supply and the poor trail conditions.85

The night was quiet for both squadrons. On the morning of 17 March C Troop of the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry launched an attack against Hill 260. B Troop moved off the trail to the north in an attempt to flank the Japanese defenders. They found the going in the dense jungle slow and made a great deal of noise cutting through the jungle. Hearing all the noise, the Japanese retreated from their positions and the fourth objective was taken by 1310. The squadron spent the remainder of the day digging in and trying to bring supplies forward to their positions. Two bulldozers were dispatched to Papitalai in an attempt to build a road up Hill 260. Both bulldozers became so bogged down that the attempt was stopped. A Troop sent a patrol south in an attempt to reach Lemondrol Creek. The patrol was unable to reach the creek in the impenetrable undergrowth.86

Clearing Los Negros

The 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry on the southern side of Los Negros sent F Troop towards Chapotup Point, about one and a half miles west of Southeast Point. F Troop spent the day building up an intermediary supply point for the regiment before the

83 5th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
84 5th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
85 5th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
86 5th Cav Historical Report, 12, RG 407, NARA.
scheduled move west along the coastal trail. The bulldozers sent to Southeast Point had an easier time of it and were able to accomplish the start of a corduroy road.\textsuperscript{87}

The following days for the 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry, in both locations, were spent consolidating positions and sending out patrols trying to locate enemy units. On 20 March the brigade commander, General Chase, issued the plans for the total occupation of Los Negros. The 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry would move from their positions near Hill 260 to the south west and link up with the 12\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry that had been held in reserve at Papitalai Mission. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry would continue to move along the coastal trail and drive the defenders into the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron and the 12\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry.\textsuperscript{88}

On the morning of 21 March the brigade moved out as ordered. The 2d Squadron, 12\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry moved southwest under a covering barrage of mortar and artillery fire at 0830. They met resistance at 1115 and continued “doggedly pushing the attack against determined Jap resistance until nightfall.”\textsuperscript{89} That night a large group of Japanese tried to infiltrate the positions of B Troop. While the Japanese were on the trail B Troop waited “until the trail was well filled with Japs and then opened up with devastating effect.”\textsuperscript{90} The surviving Japanese attempted to get through the perimeter all night but failed. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 12\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry made no contact with the 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry even though they were only 250 yards away in the dense jungle.

The 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry moved out under coordinated artillery and mortar fire and moved to the south west in an attempt to link up with 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 12\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry. They met heavy machine gun fire and retreated to their previous positions and called for concentrated fire on the Japanese positions. After an intense barrage, the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron advanced again and “were again met with withering fire from the well concealed machine guns and rifles in the dense cane growths.”\textsuperscript{91} The 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron retreated to the positions they had held the previous night. The 2d Squadron, 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry continued to work on building up the supplies necessary for their push along the Coastal Trail.

\textsuperscript{87} 5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 12, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{88} 5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 14, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{89} 12\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 14, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{90} 12\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 14, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{91} 5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 14, RG 407, NARA.
Surprisingly, there was very little enemy activity for the 5th Cavalry during the night. On 22 March the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry moved forward at 0900. They soon came under heavy fire and were not able to advance despite attempts to flank the Japanese positions. The squadron was forced to again withdraw to their previous positions. To the south, G Troop of the 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry patrolled to Palapi Hill. E Troop patrolled toward Tauwi Hill. The only activity that either troop saw was when E Troop called in artillery fire on a Japanese mortar position on the eastern end of Palapi Hill. The 12th Cavalry continued to push south towards the 5th Cavalry. They were able to advance 800 yards through the small village of Juarez before they were forced to stop and dig in for the night. 92

On 23 March the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry finally linked up with the 2d Squadron, 12th Cavalry at 1130. The two units spent the day reorganizing and re-supplying. The wounded and sick of 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry were evacuated down the 5th Cavalry supply route. The 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry sent out patrols in preparation for the next days operations. 93

On 24 March A and C Troops of the 5th Cavalry along with E and F Troops of the 12th Cavalry advanced again. The four troops were held up by machine guns in a small village. With the troops unable to advance the commander, Captain Greer, brought forward the heavy machine guns. He then instructed the men to wait until the machine guns could fire on the village, and then all four troops would move forward under the covering fire of the machine guns. When the machine guns opened up the troops moved forward firing with everything they had -- rifles, carbines, BAR’s, Thompsons, and light machine guns. This caught the Japanese by surprise and suppressed their fire, every defender died in the assault. The advance continued until 1400, when the four Troops dug in for the night. The 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry continued to patrol the Coastal Trail and continue the build up of supplies for their final push. 94

On 25 March the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry and the 2d Squadron, 12th Cavalry advanced against light resistance toward the trail between Chaporowran Point, on the

92 5th Cav Historical Report, 15, RG 407, NARA.
93 5th Cav Historical Report, 15-16, RG 407, NARA. And 12th Cav Historical Report, 15, RG 407, NARA.
northern end of Los Negros, and Lolach Passage, on the south shore. All units had to hold their positions as the supply situation was becoming critical. It was impractical to continue to re-supply the 5th Cavalry up the trail over Hill 260. For the 12th Cavalry the re-supply started on the north shore of Los Negros, along a jeep trail towards Chaporowan Point. The terrain was steep and extremely rugged and very time consuming. Fortunately, water was not a problem. There were numerous creeks and pools that when used with Halazone tablets made the water safe to drink. This expedient cut down by a third the amount of supplies that had to be brought forward. The 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry kept up its advance and continued construction of the Coastal Road. The road was to be used for re-supply once all the units reached the coast.  

On 26 March the two squadrons of the 12th Cavalry met up on the southern shore of Los Negros. The two squadrons of the 5th Cavalry also managed to finally meet. The supply situation was solved with the use of the Coastal Road and by using boats from Hayne Harbor. Now that the brigade was back together the remaining Japanese could be cleared up.

The following morning, 27 March, the 5th Cavalry and 12th Cavalry sent out patrols looking for any remaining Japanese. From the evidence it seemed that any survivors had gone over to Manus Island. Except for a few scattered and starving Japanese, Los Negros was completely secured. The next few days were spent in patrolling and looking for Japanese survivors and intelligence gathering.

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94 5th Cav Historical Report, 17, RG 407, NARA. And 12th Cav Historical Report, 15, RG 407, NARA.
95 5th Cav Historical Report, 17, RG 407, NARA. And 12th Cav Historical Report, 15, RG 407, NARA.
96 5th Cav Historical Report, 18, RG 407, NARA. And 12th Cav Historical Report, 16, RG 407, NARA.
97 5th Cav Historical Report, 18-19, RG 407, NARA. And 12th Cav Historical Report, 16, RG 407, NARA.
Figure 4. Detail of Manus Island. Adapted from First Cavalry Division Historical Report, map 9A, R.G. 407, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, MD.
CHAPTER 3
THE ATTACK ON MANUS

While the Second Brigade was getting ready to attack Manus, the division artillery needed to be placed close enough to provide supporting fire for the landing. The outer islands of Hauwei and Butjo Luo would be ideal.

Islands for the Artillery

On 11 March three patrols, each with twenty-four men, from the 302d Recon Troop and attached artillery left Salami at 0800, each patrol aboard an LCVP and a PT boat. One patrol reconnoitered Bear Point on Manus Island. They encountered no enemy resistance and returned at 1100. The second patrol reconnoitered Butjo Luo Island and found it deserted. They were safely back at Salami by 1130. The third patrol totaling twenty-six men, with the addition of two ANGAU members, landed on Hauwei Island.98

The patrol moved inland about 150 yards where it was hit by enemy mortars, machine gun, and rifle fire. The patrol requested fire support from the PT boat. But after a few rounds the PT boat was fired on and the skipper wounded, so the PT boat returned to its tender. The patrol had to fight its way back to the beach and after two and half hours finally managed to reach it. Five members of the patrol boarded an LCVP while the others gave covering fire. As the LCVP pulled off the beach it was hit by machine gun and mortar fire as it continued to pull away and hit a reef two hundred yards offshore. The Japanese attempted to set up a machine gun position to fire on the survivors but were fired on by patrol members still on shore. The patrol members on shore wisely retreated to the reef where the LCVP crew and the surviving patrol members were stranded under fire until 1400. At 1600 they were picked up by a PT boat while a destroyer shelled the island. Eight members of the patrol and two artillery men were killed in the engagement and all members of the patrol were wounded.99

99 302nd Historical Report, 2, RG 407, NARA. Also see Miller, *Cartwheel*, 340-1.
With the enemy’s presence confirmed, at 1415 on 12 March two reinforced troops from 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry landed on Hauwei Island from LCMs, after an artillery barrage from the 271st Field Artillery Battalion. Support for the landings came from naval fire from within Seeadler Harbor, rockets launched from LCMs, and the aircraft of the 77th Pursuit Sqdn, RAAF. Troop E landed on West Beach and was met by rifle fire. Troop G landed on South Beach under machine gun fire from bunkers. The two troops moved inland until a line from north to south was established about three hundred yards inland. Both troops were pinned down by machine gun, mortar, and grenade fire. The remainder of the troop came ashore during the advance. The troop was unable to advance in the diminishing light and realized that they could not secure the entire island before night. The units pulled back into a defensive perimeter for the night but the Japanese did not attack. Losses for the day, were three killed and ten wounded.

At dawn on 13 March a machine gun burst wounded three troopers. At 0900 a tank arrived on the island for close fire support and at 1000 an attack was launched using Troops C, E, and G on a north-south line across the island with the tank on the southern end. The tank was quickly put to good use in destroying a bunker holding two heavy machine guns, knee mortars, rifles, and eight defenders. The bunker took four mortar and four 75mm tank main gun hits to silence it. In the center of the island a short trench was encountered that held light machine guns, mortars, and riflemen. After a short sharp battle, the trench defenders were killed. By 1200 the island was secured at a cost of eight killed and forty-six wounded. Forty-two Japanese defenders were known killed. The 7th Cavalry settled in on the western end of the island where the men were able for the first time “to sleep above ground since its initial landing.”

Once the island had been cleared of opposition, the artillery battalions could move there. The 61st Field Artillery Battalion moved to Hauwei the afternoon of 13 March. The movement was slow due to a lack of over water transportation. The next day the remainder of the battalion arrived and set up their 105mm howitzers on the east end of

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100 7th Cav Historical Report, 5-6, RG 407, NARA. 1st Cav Historical Report, 27, RG 407, NARA.
101 7th Cav Historical Report, 6-7, RG 407, NARA. Also see G-3 Operations Report, dtd 13 March 44. The US casualty figures differ in the two reports. The 7th Cav reported 43 WIA, while G-3 reported 24 WIA. I have included the 7th Cav figure since they were the actual unit.
the island. The 271st Field Artillery Battalion moved to Hauwei Island on 14 March and set up their 105’s on the west end of the island.102

**Landing on Manus**

While the First Brigade, 5th and 12th Cavalry Regiments, were clearing Los Negros, the Second Brigade consisting of the 7th and 8th Cavalry Regiments was tasked with clearing Manus. The 99th Field Artillery Battalion had landed on Butjo Luo Island on 13 March and had set up their 75mm howitzers. In addition, the 61st and 271st Field Artillery Battalions could also provide close fire support for the landings. The plan called for the 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry to land on Yellow One Beach and drive eastward to Lorengau airfield and the 2d Squadron, 8th Cavalry to follow on and drive inland in a flanking move to capture the town of Lorengau. The 7th Cavalry would land the same day, secure the beachhead, and act as brigade reserve.103

A twelve-hour artillery barrage by the 99th, 27th, and 61st Field Artillery Battalions preceded the landings on 15 March. Six destroyers in Seeadler Harbor fired at targets on the landing beaches for one hour.104 Five minutes before the landing three Rocket LCVs launched their rockets at the beach and the RAAF 77th Fighter Wing provided air cover. At 0935 the buffalos carrying A Troop, 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry landed on Yellow 2 and was met by heavy machine gun fire that was quickly silenced by the LCMs and buffalos of the landing force. The troops got ashore with little further resistance and rushed inland to the Lugos Mission where they found several dazed Japanese who were killed before they could respond. All the pill boxes that still had defenders were quickly silenced by the first wave. Troop C landed on Yellow 1 also at 0935 and quickly advanced to a ridge overlooking the landing beaches. With the beaches secure, the remainder of the regiment landed without incident. The First Brigade reached its initial objective overlooking the beach without sustaining any casualties. The 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry landed on Yellow 2 at 1315 and established a beachhead perimeter for the landing of the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry. Once both squadrons were ashore they

102 61st FA Bn, 9 and 271st FA Bn, 4, Historical Reports, RG 407, NARA.
103 8th Cav Historical Report, 5-6, RG 407, NARA.
104 Morison, *Breaking the Bismark Barrier* says four destroyers supported the landings while the 8th Cav Historical Report states six destroyers.
moved towards the positions of the 8th Cavalry near Lugos Mission, established a perimeter defense along the western flank, and waited in reserve.  

**Movement to Lorengau**

The 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry began its’ advance down Number 3 Road along the coast towards Lorengau Airfield while the 2nd Squadron, 8th Cavalry began its move inland on Number 1 Road. Troops A and B of the 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry advanced down Number 3 Road meeting only light resistance from the numerous bunkers. The squadron advanced nearly a mile before they came to a narrowing of the road. In front of them were three mutually supporting bunkers blocking the road. The lead troopers rushed the bunkers but were stopped before they could get into grenade range. The squadron commander, Major Shore, called for an artillery strike on the bunkers by the 105s of the 271st Field Artillery Battalion. The fire was laid down within one hundred yards of the men and appeared to devastate the bunkers. The troopers, however, moved forward into an undiminished fire. The bunkers had only been scratched.

Another artillery strike was called for, this time with the support of the 75mm howitzers of the 99th Field Artillery Battalion, 1st squadrons own organic 81mm mortars, the RAAF P-40’s, and an M-5 light tank. This time the bunkers were destroyed and the squadron could resume its advance toward the airfield. The squadron stopped on a ridge overlooking the airfield and dug in for the night. Except for intermittent sniper fire it was a quiet night. During the day a total of more than three hundred bunkers were captured or destroyed.

The 2nd Squadron, 8th Cavalry began its advance inland on a track that intersected Number 1 Road. The route was a mess of ridges, close jungle, and “nerve wracking sniper fire.”

The squadron reached the intersection of the track and Number 1 Road about 1500 and found that it was well guarded by three bunkers and mortar positions in the jungle. The squadron dug in for the night about 600 yards from Number 1 Road. Artillery fire was directed against the bunkers and the suspected mortar positions. Except

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105 8th Cav Historical Report, 5-6, RG 407, NARA. 7th Cav Historical Report, 9, RG 407, NARA.
106 8th Cav Historical Report, 7, RG 407, NARA.
107 8th Cav Historical Report, 7, RG 407, NARA. 7th Cav Historical Report, 9-10, and G-3 Historical Report, 22, RG 407, NARA.
for scattered sniper fire it was a quiet night and the squadron made plans for the morning attack.¹⁰⁹

On the morning of 16 March the Regimental Commander, Colonel Bradley, and the Brigade Commander, General Mudge, came forward to the 2nd Squadron, 8th Cavalry’s position. The 2nd Squadron, 8th Cavalry got off to an early start, overran the three delaying bunkers and proceeded down Number 1 Road towards Lorengau Town. The narrow road was protected by well camouflaged bunkers. By using “a combination of grenades and superior assault tactics on the part of the attacking troops, the bunkers were isolated and reduced.”¹¹⁰ After knocking out eight bunkers during the day the squadron stopped one thousand yards from Lorengau Town and dug in for the night.¹¹¹

Just after 0800 on 16 March a platoon from A Troop, 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry, moved out to clear a group of snipers on the north side of Lorengau air field before the regiment began its advance. The snipers kept the platoon busy until almost noon, delaying the advance of the regiment. 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry advanced against Lorengau Airfield. Troop C moved inland towards the southern edge of the airfield but after just two hundred yards Troop C came under heavy machine gun fire. Troop C moved up the attached platoon of the Regimental Weapons Troop and directed them to fire their .50 cal machine guns and 81mm mortars on the positions. Under the diversion of the supporting fire, a flanking platoon from C Troop moved to the south and succeeded in destroying two bunkers and flushing the Japanese from their positions.¹¹²

Once the snipers were cleared out and the flanks secure, the remainder of the 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry assaulted the airfield in two moves. Troop A was told to cross the airfield and move east along the edge of the airfield. Troops B, D, and Headquarters Platoon were to move down the airfield. As the main body, B, D, HQ, moved down the airfield they came under heavy fire from a series of bunkers concealed along the south side of the airfield. B Troop in the lead got caught in the open and the men scrambled for any cover they could find and tried to fight to the east edge of the airfield where the other

¹⁰⁸ 8th Cav Historical Report, 8, RG 407, NARA.
¹⁰⁹ 8th Cav Historical Report, 8, RG 407, NARA.
¹¹⁰ 8th Cav Historical Report, 8, RG 407, NARA.
¹¹¹ 8th Cav Historical Report, 8, RG 407, NARA.
¹¹² 8th Cav Historical Report, 8-9, RG 407, NARA.
troops had found cover. The remainder of the advance force retreated to the northern edge of the airfield.\textsuperscript{113}

The flanking platoon from C Troop was engaging the same position that was firing down the airfield and pinning down B Troop. With B Troop firing on the same positions from the opposite direction, the flanking platoon from C Troop was forced to withdraw. An artillery barrage was then ordered on the positions holding up the advance. After four hundred rounds were fired, Troop C advanced against the positions and immediately encountered such heavy fire from the bunkers that they had to withdraw. The squadron reformed on the north end of the airfield and prepared positions for the night. Because of the heavy resistance, the 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry moved from brigade reserve to the airfield to assist in the attack the next morning.\textsuperscript{114}

The morning of 17 March brought a heavy concentration of fire against the Japanese positions around the airfield. Fire from the 271\textsuperscript{st} and 61\textsuperscript{st} Field Artillery Battalions, destroyers off shore, 37mm anti-tank guns, and two light tanks practically eliminated Japanese resistance. The 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry, supported by B Troop, 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry attacked the airfield at 0900 and found only light resistance. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry swept to the south towards Lorengau meeting only scattered sniper fire. It then linked up with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry and the two squadrons advanced towards Lorengau Township, reaching Lorengau River by 1500. A patrol was sent across the river and was met by fire from bunkers surrounding Lorengau Township. The patrol retreated back across the river and the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry regiments dug in for the night.\textsuperscript{115}

On 18 March the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry advanced into Lorengau Township. The 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry and the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry remained in their positions from the previous night overlooking Lorengau. The route to Lorengau Township was known to be mined with command detonated anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, the mines running from the hills surrounding Lorengau to the beach just across the river. But the river crossing was unopposed and the troops advanced with only light resistance against them. The reason the mines were never detonated was discovered when a defender was found in

\textsuperscript{113} 8\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 9, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{114} 8\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 9 and 7\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 10, RG 407, NARA.
a bunker dead from concussion with the detonator still in his hand. Each remaining bunker had to be silenced individually. The remaining defenders retreated into the hills over Number Two Road towards Rossum. The afternoon was spent in bringing up the 2nd Squadron, 8th Cavalry and fortifying positions in Lorengau Township. Patrols were sent out toward Salesia Plantation. The patrols used a buffalo moving off shore as a fire support team while the patrol closed on the Japanese bunkers. Seven bunkers along the route were cleared this way with only light resistance. To avoid the possible use of the bunkers by Japanese defenders, the bunkers were destroyed with captured naval mines.116

That night General Mudge directed the 7th and 8th Cavalry to clear Manus of all remaining Japanese. The morning of 19 March the 7th Cavalry patrolled close to Lorengau and made preparations for the intensive movements that would come on 20 March. The 8th Cavalry sent Troop B down the Salesia Track to McElroys Plantation, where they dug in for the night. A Troop was given the task of patrolling Number Two Road towards Rossum. Using captured documents, the patrol leader was briefed on the expected opposition. Almost as soon as leaving the perimeter, the patrol came under fire from a pair of mutually supporting bunkers, wounding the patrol leader and one other man. The platoon sergeant then took command of the patrol and attempted to flank the bunkers. When he was unable to do so he “decided as long as his mission was one of reconnaissance, it was time to withdraw and report.”117

When the platoon sergeant reported that the enemy was in strength not more than two hundred yards down the road another patrol was dispatched. This time, Troop A and a weapons platoon with machine guns and two 37mm anti-tank guns were given the task. As the patrol moved down the road it came under sniper fire, but the snipers were killed in flanking movements. The patrol then moved down the road to the location of the earlier resistance at the two bunkers. When the patrol came under fire from these two bunkers, the attached 60mm mortars and the two 37mm anti-tank guns fired on the bunkers knocking them out with six hits. The patrol was able to move down the road a total of five hundred yards where they stopped. Troop A was relieved in place by Troop C just in time to meet the Japanese counterattack. In the resulting battle two men were

115 8th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA. 7th Cav Historical Report, 11, RG 407, NARA.
116 8th Cav Historical Report, 12, RG 407, NARA. 7th Cav Historical Report, 12, RG 407, NARA.
killed and ten wounded. Although it was now dark, the decision was made to evacuate the wounded down the road. The stretcher bearers were fired on as they approached the perimeter near Lorengau, killing four and wounding six more. Troop C received intermittent sniper and machine gun fire during the night.\footnote{8th Cav Historical Report, 14, RG 407, NARA.}

That night at the beach head near Lorengau there was one of those darkly funny moments that occur in war. Just before dark, a large group of men noticed movement in the hills overlooking Lorengau. A single Japanese sniper had been observed climbing a tree about 1200 yards from the perimeter. It is claimed that over one hundred rifles and machine guns fired on him to no effect. A mortar crew from the weapons troop observed the action and “estimated the range and deflection, and without further ado or registration (sic), dropped one each round, 81mm HE light, fuse quick, squarely in the crotch of the tree where the sniper lay.”\footnote{8th Cav Historical Report, 14-15, RG 407, NARA.}

The Road to Rossum

In support of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Brigade, the 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry sent out three patrols on the morning of 20 March. Troop A went down Road Number One toward the village of Tingo and returned in four days after no contacts. Troop B went by LCM toward the northern coast and made a reconnaissance of Brundralis Mission. Troop F was given the main task of reconnoitering Road Number 2, the road to Rossum. The road to Rossum was to be the last major engagement of the campaign.\footnote{7th Cav Historical Report, 12, RG 407, NARA.}

While the orders and maps call the objective the Number Two Road or “Road to Rossum”, the G-3 Operations Report gives a much better description. “This track, a much more applicable and descriptive name, was along a spur to the main east-west ridge. It is flanked on both sides by precipitous banks descending into deep, swampy jungle covered ravines. The track is a narrow corridor and the enemy has taken full advantage of this canalized axis of advance.”\footnote{7th Cav Historical Report, 15, RG 407, NARA.} This restricted maneuver room and the strong defensive positions help explain the resistance faced by the 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry. The area before Rossum and the roads to it on Manus were the last place the Japanese offered organized

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resistance. A description of the next couple days fighting can be summarized by an entry in the G-3 Historical Report, “Day after day it was the same. A heavy artillery barrage and an assault, a withdrawal, another barrage, another assault and so on till the 1st Squadron [7th Cavalry Regiments] troops were on their last legs.”122 Because the narratives and maps differ on the names of the obstacles and objectives, the names used here are based on map overlays from the Historical Report of the 7th Cavalry.

On 20 March at 0800 Troop F of the 7th Cavalry set off down Number Two Road with a “radio bantam” (Jeep), and an artillery tractor pulling a one ton trailer.123 By 1015 the troop had moved through the 8th Cavalry positions and was proceeding inland. The 8th Cavalry was relieved by a platoon of Troop F, and they returned to their positions near Lorengau. The remainder of Troop F pushed inland and encountered resistance that was increasing as they moved towards the first objective of Ridge Number One. The troop sent out flanking patrols that reported “numerous shacks and supply dumps.”124

By 1500 the patrol leader reported that the enemy resistance was increasing all around him and that reaching Ridge Number One was not practical that day. The patrol attempted to withdraw to the ridge overlooking Lorengau, but either the Japanese had managed to sneak a group in behind the patrol and mine the road, or the vehicles had managed to miss them in their advance. As Troop F was withdrawing the tractor ran over a mine and blew off a track. The radio Jeep was unable to get around the tractor with trailer. After the radio was removed, the radio Jeep and trailer were abandoned. The patrol continued their withdrawal with the support of Troop E. The patrol dug in for the night with the rest of the 7th Cavalry near Lorengau. Fire was directed against the Japanese positions all night long in an effort to soften up their bunker network. The 7th Cavalry had lost 5 KIA and 11 WIA.125

21 March was spent in looking for routes around the Japanese positions, but the jungle in the area is steep and impenetrable and no alternate routes were found. The Japanese positions were continually under fire from artillery and the RAAF P-40s. The main attack would advance down the road in the morning.

121 G-3 Operations Report, dtd 21-22 March 44, RG 407, NARA.
122 G-3 Historical Report, 29, RG 407, NARA.
123 7th Cav Historical Report, 13, RG 407, NARA.
124 7th Cav Historical Report, 12, RG 407, NARA.
The attack began at 0830 22 March with artillery, mortar, and rocket barrages on the Japanese defensive positions. B, C, and D Troops, along with two medium tanks and the very necessary bulldozers, tried to force their way down the road. The going was very slow and the route well defended. Each bunker had to be knocked out individually. They were well camouflaged, and usually the first the troopers saw of the bunker was the muzzle flash of a machine gun. At that point the troopers began a systematic reduction of the bunker. The troopers would then call for the tanks to move forward to use direct fire. The troopers would then sweep the mined road in front of the tanks, often under enemy fire. When necessary, which was often, the bulldozer had to either push or pull the tank into position. Once the bunker was silenced, the advance continued until the next bunker, where the sequence was repeated. Troops B, C, and D continued past Ridge Number One against “strong enemy opposition in the form of MG and knee mortar fire.”

23 March opened with the usual artillery strike on the defending Japanese. At 0900 Troops B and G moved up the road with two tanks and their bulldozers. As expected, enemy opposition was fierce and the troops came under fire as soon as they left the perimeter. Mortar fire had to be called in to suppress the Japanese so that the troopers could finally claim Ridge Number Two. A light tank moving up to Ridge Number Two hit a mine which blew off a track. As the troops moved down from Ridge Number Two they came under fire from more bunkers and attempted to retreat. Ridge Number Two was the site of the night’s defensive perimeter. Artillery fire continued through the night.

126 7th Cav Historical Report, 13, RG 407, NARA.
preventing the Japanese from moving against the perimeter. The nine hundred yards gained during the day had cost the 7th Cavalry Regiment three KIA and twenty WIA.\textsuperscript{128}

On 24 March the attacking elements of the 7th Cavalry were reinforced with a medium tank. Following the usual artillery barrage the attack set off at 1142. The tank soon proved to be a liability to the troops; it could not leave the road and the tank commander refused to move forward until the road had been swept of mines. But Japanese defenders quickly brought both the mine sweeping troops and tank under fire and halted the advance at 1250. At 1320 the patrol requested permission to withdraw to Ridge Number Two. Permission was granted and the old positions were reoccupied. The remainder of the day was turned over to the artillery and RAAF. The artillery, in response to the ineffectiveness of their fire, began using delayed fuses to penetrate the jungle and reduce tree bursts. The RAAF strike used different colored smoke for each strike, calling in strikes based on the direction and color of the smoke. With the 7th Cavalry in the same positions it had occupied the night before the net gain was zero yards at a cost of four KIA and twenty WIA. Troop B had borne the brunt of the attacks and lost two commanders, 87\% of its officers, and 10\% of the enlisted men. Artillery fire continued throughout the night.\textsuperscript{129}

25 March saw the end of the 7th Cavalry’s participation in the Rossum attacks. At 0900 they pulled back five hundred yards for an intense barrage of artillery, mortars, rockets, and air attacks against the remaining Japanese positions. The 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry passed through the lines of the 7th Cavalry under cover of artillery from the 61st and 99th Field Artillery Battalions at 0930. The 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry made slow progress against the positions around Rossum. The two tanks had to have the road swept for mines, a job the troops dreaded because they were totally exposed to enemy fire. Continuous sniper fire and the thick jungle terrain forced the troops to confine their advance to the only track to Rossum. It was not until 1500 that the 1st Squadron was in position to finally take Rossum. Under the fire of 81mm mortars the 1st Squadron made the final attack on the village. The remaining bunkers fired at the squadron with rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire. Once the Japanese realized that their positions were being

\textsuperscript{128} 7th Cav Historical Report, 14, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{129} 7th Cav Historical Report, 15, RG 407, NARA.
overrun, the survivors ran for the jungle. Very few of the Japanese actually made the
cover of the jungle due to the rifle fire of the enraged troops.\textsuperscript{130}

7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry operations for the next four days, 26-29 March, were confined to
patrolling in the Rossum and Lorengau areas. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Squadron, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry uncovered
numerous caches of Japanese supplies, mainly ammunition and rations. The Japanese
who had survived the attacks were living off the land and attempting to resist individually
or in small groups where they could. By 30 March the squadron had returned to Lorengau
while the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry was making preparations for an attack on Pityilu
Island.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{Pityilu Island}

Pityilu Island is one of the larger islands forming Seeadler Harbor. Almost three
miles long it varies in width from 250 to 650 yards. Pityilu Island “had been
intermittently bombed and strafed by aircraft and shelled by destroyers for about two
weeks.”\textsuperscript{132} About fifty to sixty Japanese were believed to be concentrated in the jungle on
the eastern half of the island; the western end of the island was a coconut plantation and
was believed to be largely undefended. The attack by the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry was
reinforced with a detachment of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Engineer Battalion, amphibious trucks and
buffalos, one light tank, one medium tank, and additional medical support from the 27\textsuperscript{th}
Portable Surgical Hospital. Because of the experiences on Hauwei Island, the preliminary
bombardment and striking power of the force were to be massive. On 30 March, under
cover of the bombardment the 1\textsuperscript{st} Squadron, 7\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry landed unopposed at 0845 in the
center of the island on the south shore where the island is only 250 yards across. The
troops quickly advanced across the island and established a perimeter cutting the island in
half. Patrols were sent out to locate enemy positions and to estimate strength. Concern
centered on the right flank at the eastern end of the island. All patrols reported back by
1000 having encountered no resistance. Troops A and B moved out to the east at 1015. B
Troop was fired on by a light machine gun concealed in a bunker under a shack. The four
Japanese in the position were silenced quickly. Seven more Japanese were encountered as

\textsuperscript{130} 8\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 18, RG 407, NARA.
\textsuperscript{131} 7\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 15-16, RG 407, NARA.
B Troop advanced and they were quickly killed. The main resistance encountered was at 1430 when twenty-one Japanese in a trench fired on B Troop wounding three men. Private Lahman advanced on the position with his Browning Automatic Rifle, BAR, and “unhesitatingly and repeatedly fired clip after clip as he moved forward.” Troop A was fired on by a concealed bunker which they silenced with the medium tank. Progress was slow since every bunker and emplacement encountered had to be destroyed. With darkness falling the squadron withdrew to the edge of the jungle and dug in for the night. What they did not know at the time was that all the Japanese on the island had already been killed or wounded. In the morning after a bombardment of the eastern end of the island the squadron moved out at 0730. By 1225 the squadron had reached the eastern tip of the island without encountering any resistance. The 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry returned to the landing beach and returned to Lorengau. The cost in American casualties was eight KIA, six WIA while fifty-nine dead Japanese were counted.\footnote{G-3 Historical Report, 31, RG 407, NARA.}

With the return to Lorengau the 7th Cavalry patrolled the surrounding area and the interior of Manus. The Japanese encountered on these patrols were, for the most part, sick, wounded, or starving. For the 7th Cavalry, the major difficulty was re-supply. The constant rains and the terrain turned the few roads available into impassable quagmires. Local natives were employed as porters and scouts. The natives were able to move a forty-one pound box of K-rations “from SABON to YIRINGO in about 3 ½ hours whereas the average soldier required two to three days.”\footnote{7th Cav Historical Report, 17, RG 407, NARA.} Alternate re-supply methods included the use of tractors or buffalos and DUKWs over water. By 5 May the entire 7th Cavalry had returned to Hauwei Island where it established its base camp.\footnote{7th Cav Historical Report, 21, RG 407, NARA.}

**Clearing Operations**

For the remainder of the island clearing operations the responsibility fell to the 12th Cavalry Regiment at its old camp at Lombrum Point. On 30 March they were told of

\footnote{7th Cav Historical Report, 16-18, RG 407, NARA. The G-3 Historical Report, states 58 Japanese.}

\footnote{7th Cav Historical Report, 19-25, RG 407, NARA.}
the plans for future operations against the islands that make up Seeadler Harbor. The first landings would take place on 1 April on Koruniat Island and Ndrillo Island.

First to be cleared was Koruniat Island. A preparatory barrage was laid down on Koruniat Island by artillery, rocket boats, and the RAAF. After thirty minutes the 1st Squadron, 12th Cavalry jumped off at 0700 on 1 April. The landing was unopposed and by 1200 the troops had swept the island. Finding no Japanese on the island, the squadron moved to Ndrilo Island and found it unoccupied. The squadron dug in for the night and the morning of 2 April returned to Lombrum Point on Los Negros.\(^\text{137}\)

The morning of 3 April the 2nd Squadron of the 12th Cavalry loaded on destroyers for a landing on Rambutyo Island. Rambutyo is a fairly large island eleven miles long and five miles wide located off the southern coast of Los Negros. The 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry landed unopposed at 1200 after the initial bombardment. The landing was more difficult than other landings in the Admiralties because of the rough seas and the lack of a decent landing beach. The landing craft could not actually land and had to let the troops off into the water, forcing them to wade ashore. Once ashore, the troops found the terrain extremely difficult to move through. The jungle was thick and mountainous; the troops had difficulty moving inland. Any surviving Japanese on the island found it easy to evade the pursuing troops by hiding in caves and ravines where the squadron could not find them. The 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry spent nearly three weeks on the island patrolling and in the end killed thirty-one Japanese and captured two. At the end of the operation the squadron returned to the regimental bivouac area at Salami Plantation on 24 April.\(^\text{138}\)

On 9 April the 1st Squadron, 12th Cavalry landed unopposed on Pak Island. While a headquarters was established at a European plantation house, patrols were sent to the west end of the island. After finding no Japanese, the patrols returned to the headquarters house and established a perimeter for the night. The next morning Troops A and C were sent to patrol the east end of the island. The patrol was fired on by Japanese soldiers in a cave; a flame thrower was brought forward to assist in the assault on the cave. With the

\(^{137}\) 12th Cav Historical Report, 17, RG 407, NARA. G-3 Historical Report, 33, RG 407.
\(^{138}\) G-3 Historical Report, 33-34, RG 407, NARA. 12th Cav Historical Report, 17-19, RG 407, NARA.
enemy fire stopped the cave was sealed with TNT trapping the surviving Japanese in the cave. The squadron counted fifteen Japanese dead and three captured.¹³⁹

Once the remaining small islands had been swept for Japanese, the campaign was declared closed on 18 May. The division had lost two hundred ninety KIA, one thousand nine hundred seventy-six WIA. The known Japanese losses were three thousand three hundred seventeen KIA and eighty-two POW. Japanese survivors escaped to the northern part of Manus where some managed to survive the war. U.S. troops would occasionally go on patrol looking for survivors as a way of indoctrinating fresh troops. The division liberated thirty-six Chinese and seventy-one Sikhs labor troops.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ G-3 Historical Report, 34, RG 407, NARA. ¹⁴⁰ G-3 Historical Report, 35, RG 407, NARA.
The conquest of the Admiralty Islands was one of the most daring operations MacArthur staged in World War Two. The “Reconnaissance in Force”, instead of the full scale invasion that was planned, took the Japanese by surprise and allowed Allied forces to gain momentum in the assault against the Japanese. As we have seen, the cost in men was relatively light and in return the Allies took possession of one of the finest natural harbors in the South Pacific. The capture of the Admiralties completed the encirclement of Rabaul and made a frontal assault unnecessary. By seizing the Admiralties, MacArthur was also able to avoid attacking the 18th Army at Wewak and instead by-passed it to take the relatively lightly defended port of Hollandia far to the west on the New Guinea coast.\(^{141}\)

One major concern was who would control the base. MacArthur believed that because it was in his area of operations he should control the base and give priority to organizations under his command. Admiral Nimitz believed that because the navy was building the majority of facilities and the base would primarily service navy ships he should control the base. After much heated deliberation a compromise was reached, MacArthur would be the ultimate commander of the facilities, but he would provide services to any and all Allied services that used the bases.\(^{142}\)

**Construction**

The first engineers to land were a detachment of the 8th Engineer Battalion, a part of the 1st Cavalry Division. While the 1st Cavalry was fighting for control of the islands, the engineers were working on repairs to existing facilities and making infrastructure improvements. The 8th Engineer Battalion was primarily responsible for the operational requirements of the division. They brought with them 7 bulldozers, 6 carryalls, 2 road


The construction of bases on Los Negros began when the 40\textsuperscript{th} Seabees, along with a regimental task group of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Special Brigade, landed on 2 March. The Seabees began clearing Momote airfield even before they were totally relieved of combat duties. The detachment from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Special Brigade was put to work in amphibious operations, especially on 15 March with the landings on Manus. Momote airfield was first put into operation on 7 March when a B-25 made an emergency landing. On 9 March, twelve Kittyhawks from No.76 Squadron R.A.A.F. landed and immediately became operational in support of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry Division operations on the islands. Twelve more Kittyhawks landed the next day putting the total strength at twenty-four Kittyhawks. Other R.A.A.F. units were soon operational at Momote and other Allied aircraft began to use the field.

The 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry Regiment, elements of which had landed on the first day, began to move to Koruniat Island on 3 April. The 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry began construction on a base camp that by 19 April had “a theater, boxing ring, PX and Red Cross buildings . . . volley ball and basket ball courts and an excellent beach for swimming . . . A chapel was built to seat 400 men.”\footnote{5\textsuperscript{th} Cav Historical Report, 19, RG 407, NARA.}

During the middle of March a detachment of Headquarters, 931\textsuperscript{st} Aviation Regiment arrived. By 1 April they had been joined by the 836\textsuperscript{th} Aviation Battalion and the 617\textsuperscript{th} Base Equipment Company and the 104\textsuperscript{th} Seabees. These units enlarged Momote airfield and because the field at Lorengau was impractical to recondition an air field was built at Mokerang. By 1 June Momote airfield had grown to 7,800 feet in length. Necessary taxiways and hardstands were constructed to accommodate ninety fighters and eighty heavy bombers. Fuel requirements were met with a 17,000 barrel tank farm and the means to offload more from a jetty in Hayne Harbor. All the necessary storage and administrative buildings had also been completed.\footnote{Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 296.}
Originally Mokerang had an 8,500 foot bomber runway that was constructed along with taxiways and hardstands for 50 bombers. Bombers from the 307th Bomber Group 13th Air Force flew in from Munda, New Georgia on 21 April and the field was officially completed on 22 April. As resources and time allowed, the original taxiway was enlarged and two more taxiways were constructed. Additionally, one more airstrip of equal size was added. Shops, personnel facilities, and a 30,000 barrel tank farm were added to support operations.\textsuperscript{146}

At Hayne Harbor the Seabees constructed a five hundred bed evacuation hospital. The harbor was improved to include two cargo ship wharves, an eight hundred foot long fuel pier, small boat repair facilities, and a repair pier with a fixed crane. A pontoon assembly depot was constructed that could turn out nine hundred pontoon cells per month. The adjacent housing and administration area could house fifty officers and five hundred enlisted men in forty huts. Momote was further improved to include an aviation supply depot of twenty-four steel warehouses and eighty-three Quonset huts and an aviation repair and overhaul unit with twenty-five steel buildings. An additional naval airstrip 5,000 feet long was built with hardstands. Another 7,000 barrel fuel storage farm was added to the Hayne Harbor complex.\textsuperscript{147}

Construction projects at Papitalai Point were started on 18 April. The first project was a thirty foot wide road connecting Papitalai Point with Lombrum. A dry-dock storage area was built which included “seven 40 by 100 foot warehouses, twenty-nine Quonset huts, a mess hall, a galley, a water system, and a coconut-log, coral-fill jetty, 40 by 80 feet.”\textsuperscript{148} A PT-boat overhaul base with personnel camp was also constructed with the assorted support buildings needed. To fuel the large numbers of expected ships a tank farm of sixty-three tanks, each holding 10,000 barrels, was begun on 23 June. By 15 August twenty-five tanks had been completed and eventually the entire farm was completed.\textsuperscript{149}

At Lombrum Point three major projects were completed. The landing-craft repair base had a 250 ton pontoon dry-docks, six warehouses, two Quonset huts, and all the

\textsuperscript{146}Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 296.
\textsuperscript{147}Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 296.
\textsuperscript{148}Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 296.
\textsuperscript{149}Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 296.
necessary camp facilities. A ship repair base for capital ships was constructed with three docks; a 100,000 ton, a 70,000 ton, and an 18,000 ton dock. Ships up to battleships could use these facilities. A sea plane base was also constructed with a 50 by 250 foot concrete launching and recovery pad, a nose hanger, and an 8,000 barrel tank farm for aviation fuel. All the necessary support buildings and docks were built to make it a complete facility.\footnote{150}

Manus Island was also subject to the Seabees’ efforts. The primary installation located next to the Lorengau airstrip, which had been declared unfit for use, was a supply depot of one hundred twenty-eight storage buildings, fifty 6,800 cubic foot refrigerators, an eight hundred foot pier, a five hundred foot pier, an LST landing beach, and five miles of auxiliary roads. The supply depot was officially opened on 2 July. All these facilities would have been useless without water. A major project was needed to supply the facilities and personnel that would be using Manus. A water system that produced on average 4,000,000 gallons per day was constructed. The Lombrum River was tapped for the majority of the supply, with other small streams and wells providing the balance. The whole system was tied together and treated then gravity fed to the users with the help of some pumps where needed.\footnote{151}

To oversee the entire Admiralty Island complex a central base was constructed at the mouth of the Lorengau River. This was a complete city in itself. The base had all the necessary buildings for the administration of the islands, forty-eight Quonset huts just for officers, quarters for enlisted men, and a 2,000 man mess hall. A 1,000 man hospital with eight wards, five operating rooms, and its own 1,000 man mess hall was collocated with the administration facilities. To help complete the city a 5,000 man receiving station was constructed, complete with its own mess halls and facilities.\footnote{152}

Two airfields for carrier aircraft were constructed. On Ponam Island a 5,000 feet runway and support buildings to handle 1,500 men with an 8,000 barrel tank farm that supplied the base with aviation gasoline. On Pityilu Island the airfield was 4,500 feet long with parking areas for 350 planes. A 7,000 barrel tank farm was constructed for the airfield, complete with a pipeline for replenishment of the tank farm. The island had

\footnote{150} Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 299.  
\footnote{151} Bureau, \textit{Building the Navy’s Bases}, 299-300.
accommodations for 350 officers and 1,400 men. This base was operational by June; later the base was enlarged to handle 2,500 men, the airfield was extended by 1,000 feet, and the clinic was upgraded to a small 100 bed hospital. The eastern end of the island was leveled to create a fleet recreation center capable of handling up to 10,000 men at once. At a cost in lives of 290 Americans killed and 1,976 wounded and a cost in money of $131,757,843, the Allies got a major base from which to press home the attack against the Japanese. During the 1944 offensives the Admiralties were used as a main naval repair depot. In addition they were used as airfields for supply, bombing, and reconnaissance missions. Throughout the remainder of the war as the Allies advanced on the Japanese home islands, Seeadler Harbor was used as a staging point in coming operations.

152 Bureau, *Building the Navy’s Bases*, 301.
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