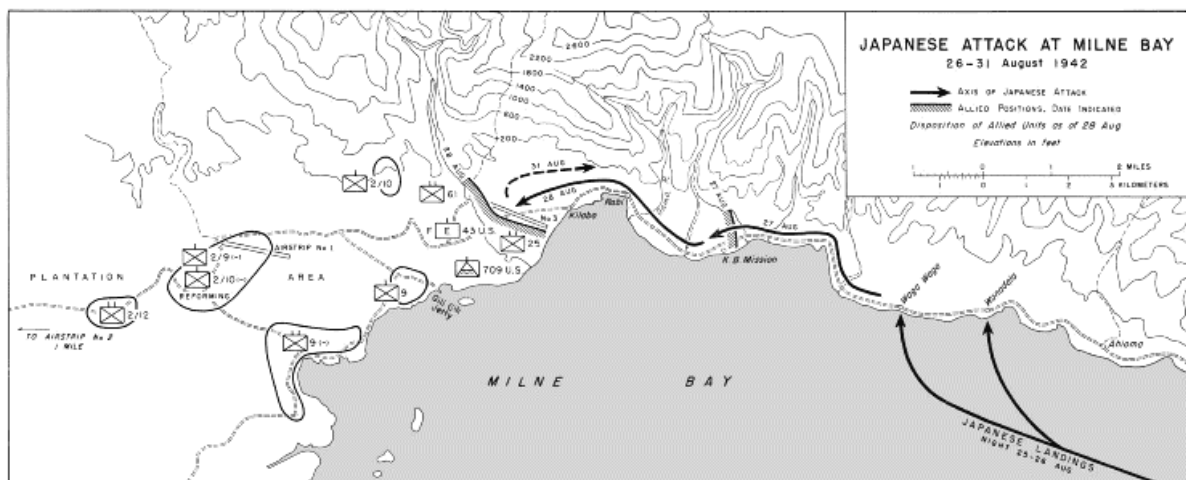


# 1. Milne Bay (August 1942)

As part of the plan to deny Japanese objectives in Papua-New Guinea, the 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade (2/9<sup>th</sup>, 2/10<sup>th</sup>, and 2/12<sup>th</sup> AIF) under Brigadier Wootten had completed its movement to Milne Bay by 21 August 1942. There it joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade (the 9<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 61<sup>st</sup> CMF) under Brig. John Field, which had reached Milne Bay in July. The following day Maj. Gen. Clowes took command. His instructions were to protect the airfields and deny Milne Bay to the enemy.

Two companies of the 43<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Engineers had also arrived, as well as the 709<sup>th</sup> U.S. Airborne Antiaircraft Battery with its .50 calibre machine guns. The engineers also had a few .50-caliber machine guns and some 37-mm. antitank guns. Australian troop strength was 7,429, of whom 6,394 were combat troops. American troop strength, mainly engineers and antiaircraft personnel, numbered 1,365.

Milne Bay is about twenty miles long and five to ten miles wide. It lies at the southeast tip of New Guinea. It is often closed in from the air, which accounts for the time it took for the Japanese to discover the Allies presence. On either arm of the bay, mountains 4,000 feet high rise abruptly from the shore. Between the mountains and the sea are narrow coastal corridors consisting for the most part of deep swamp and dense jungle. The rainfall averages 200 inches a year, and during wet weather the corridors are virtually impassable. At the head of the bay is a large plain into which the coastal corridors merge. This plain, the site of an immense coconut plantation, was the only place in the entire area which was not completely bogged down in mud. Because it already had a small road net, all the base installations and airfields were concentrated there. The roads, for the most part a corduroy of coconut logs covered with decomposed coral, were in very poor condition.



Toward the latter part of August the Japanese decided to invade Milne Bay as part of their drive on Port Moresby. However, the IJA force earmarked to land at Milne Bay was still at Davao. Nevertheless, with naval troops available for action at Kavieng and Buna, the IJN decided to proceed with the operation without waiting for the army. Severely underestimated the size of the force defending Milne Bay at two or three infantry companies and twenty or thirty aircraft, Admiral Mikawa on 20 August ordered some 1,500 men to Milne Bay. A total of 1,171 men (612 Kure 5<sup>th</sup> Special Naval Landing Force (SNLF) troops, 362 16<sup>th</sup> Naval Pioneer Unit troops, and 197 men of the Sasebo 5<sup>th</sup> SNLF) were ordered to Milne

Bay from Kavieng. The rest, 353 *Sasebo 5<sup>th</sup> SNLF* troops, were to come from Buna. Commander Shojiro Hayashi, of the *Kure 5<sup>th</sup> SNLF*, was in command of the landing forces from Kavieng. His orders were to land at Rabi, a point about three miles from the Gili Gili wharf area at the head of the bay. The troops from Buna were to land at Taupota on the north coast and march on Gili Gili overland. The first echelon from Kavieng, bearing mostly *Kure 5<sup>th</sup> troops*, left Rabaul for Rabi in two transports in the early morning of 24 August.

The troops of the *Sasebo 5<sup>th</sup> SNLF* at Buna left for Milne Bay at approximately the same time in seven large motor-driven landing barges. The seven landing craft were soon detected by the Allies, and early the next morning a reconnaissance aircraft reported that they were nearing Goodenough Island. Twelve P-40's from Milne Bay took off for Goodenough Island at noon and discovered the landing craft beached on the southwestern shore of the island. When the attack was over, all of the landing craft had been destroyed, and the *Sasebo* unit was left stranded on Goodenough Island with no way of reaching its objective, or even returning to Buna.

The Rabaul convoy fared better in its approach to the target. Attempts to hit the convoy proved fruitless because of violent rain squalls and a heavy overcast. The Japanese landing began about 2200 hours 25 August, on the north shore of the bay near Waga Waga and Wanadala--five to seven miles east of Rabi, their intended landing point. The landing force set up headquarters at Waga Waga and established a series of supply dumps there and in the Wanadala area. The shore east of the K. B. Mission, which the Japanese continued to think for some time was the Rabi area, became their main bivouac site.

The Japanese could scarcely have chosen a worse landing place. Their objectives, the airfields and the wharf, were at the head of Milne Bay, and they had landed several miles from the plantation area on a jungle covered coastal shelf, flanked on the right by mountains and on the left by the sea. Because the mountains in the landing area were steep and very close to shore, there was virtually no room for manoeuvre, and the heavy jungle which covered the bay shore made it impossible to find a dry bivouac for the troops anywhere in the area. While individuals could infiltrate through the jungle, a large organised body of men, with their support weapons, were confined to the single road. It had rained steadily during the preceding few weeks, and the mountain streams had become roaring torrents, and the spongy soil of the corridor a quagmire. The single coastal track that skirted the corridor had in places completely washed away, and the level of the many fords that cut across it had risen to almost three feet. Except for a few abandoned plantations and mission stations, the corridor was a sodden welter of jungle and swamp, an utter nightmare for any force operating in it. Worse still, the day after landing their bivouac area was spotted by the allies and subjected to intense air attack. Most of their supplies, support weapons and critically, their troop transport barges, were destroyed.

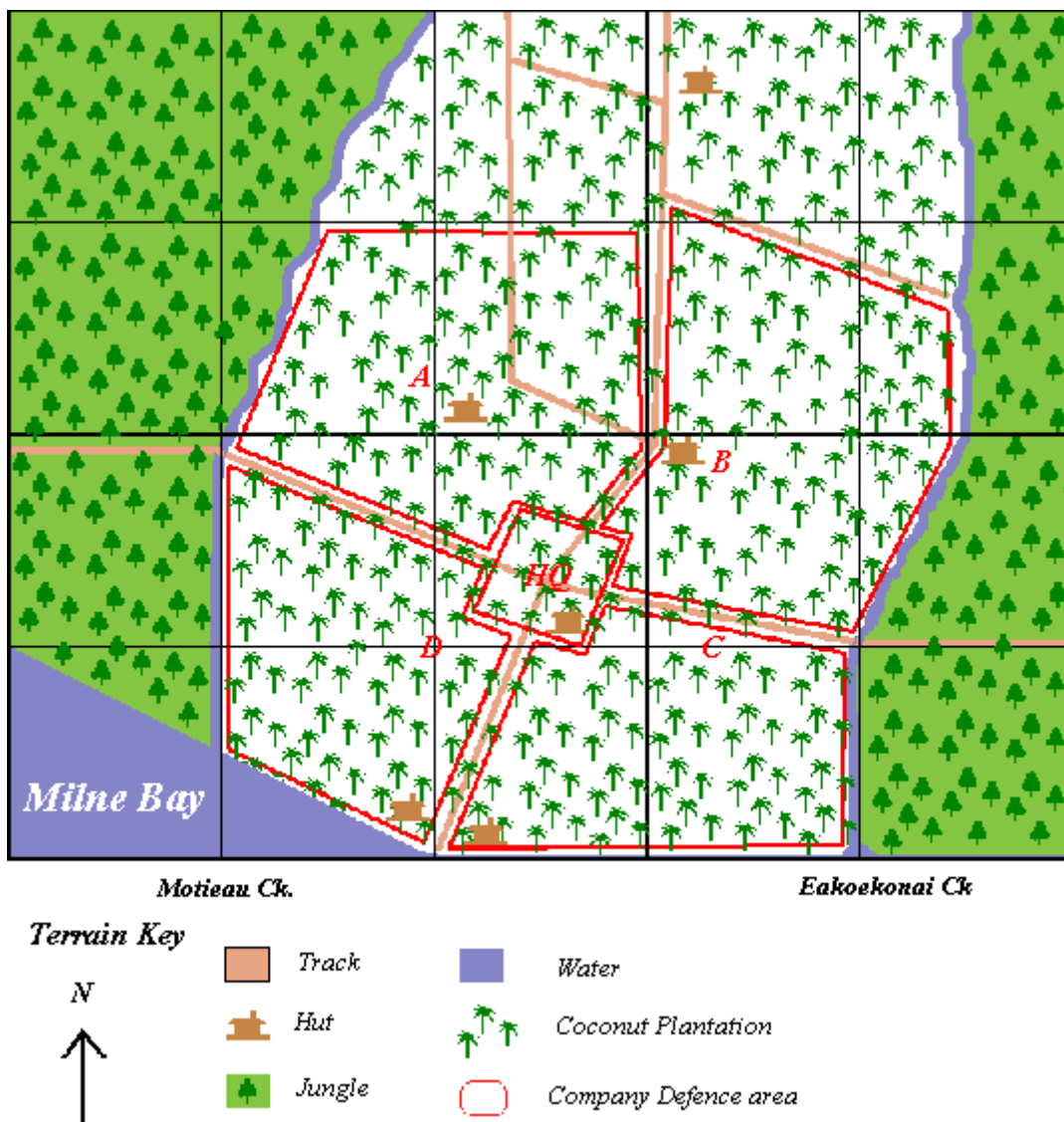
The K. B. Mission was held by two companies of the 61<sup>st</sup> Battalion. The Japanese, who had reconnoitred the mission during the day, struck that night and the militia was forced out of the mission and all the way back to the line of the Gama River, just east of Rabi. Fortunately for the Australians, the Japanese chose to break off the engagement at dawn. The following morning, General Clowes sent the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade to the mission. The battalion, intended to be a reconnaissance force, was lightly armed. Its orders were to keep in contact with the Japanese, draw them out, and in general find out what they were up to.

## 2. The Kristian Broders Mission

*The Milne Bay weather had two classifications:  
 Summer Time – rains every day  
 Winter time – rains all day*

The 2/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion reached the mission unopposed in the late afternoon of 27 August. Under orders to move on again in the morning, the battalion had barely settled itself for the night when the Japanese struck at the mission again, this time with two tanks and all their available combat troops.

### 2.1 The Battlefield



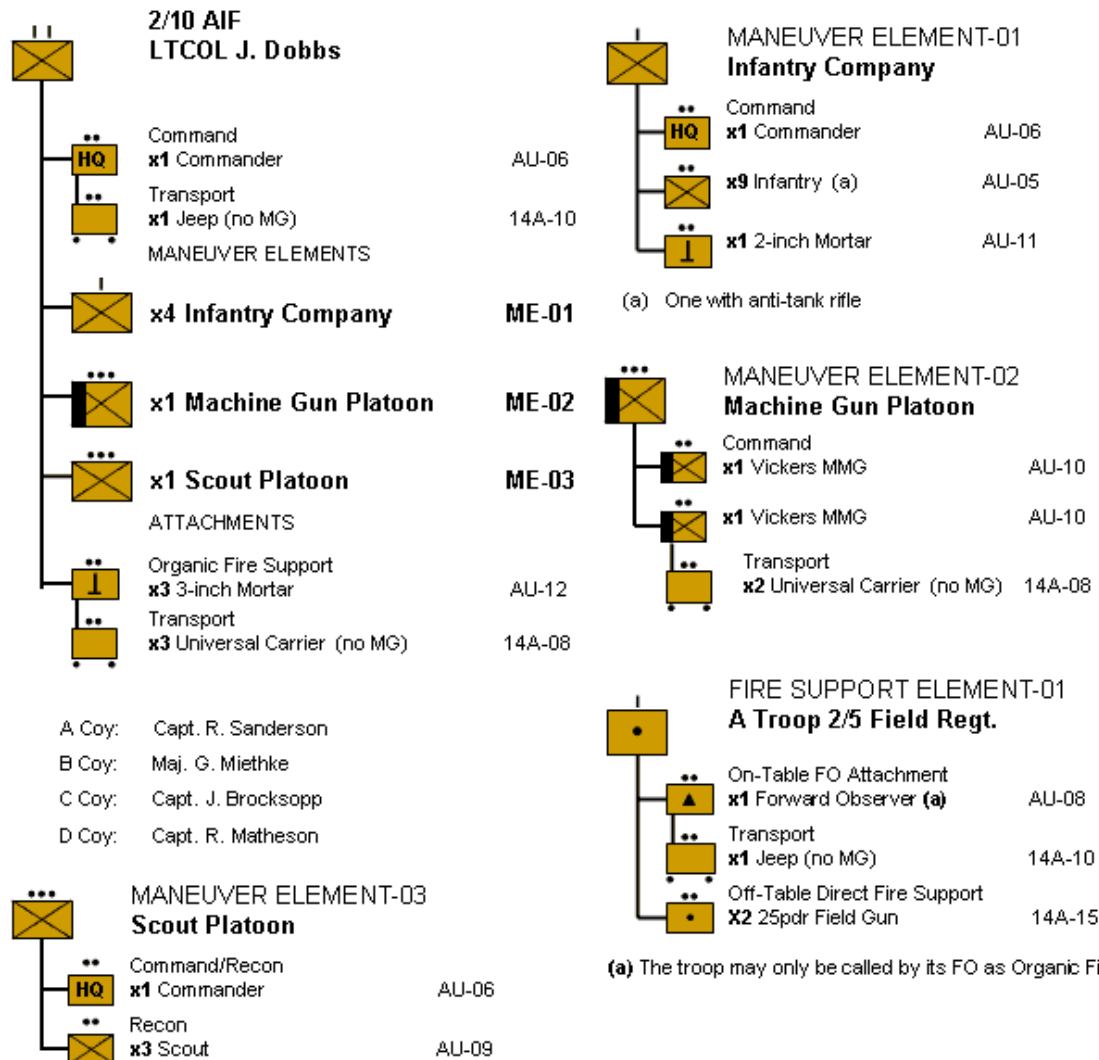
The area around the KB mission is unsuitable for defence as it is one of the few firm pieces of land suitable for tanks in the Milne Bay area.

- Milne Bay (entire south edge) is impassable
- All Tracks are 1 element wide (about 1") UNPAVED ROADS

- Both Creeks are considered a 1" wide DEEP GULLY and are impassable to vehicles. They are crossed using a BREACH action and provide HARD COVER to troops in them, **unless** the firing unit is lining the creek in which case there is NO COVER.
- Both fords provide easy crossing of the creeks and are part of the tracks
- Huts are a 1 sector **wooden** Built Up Area (SOFT cover).
- The plantation areas at Milne Bay were more open than similar terrain elsewhere. Contemporary photographs show unobstructed lines of sight between the rows of palms. To reflect this, treat the plantation as ORCHARD, but apply an additional **up 1** modifier on the spotting table. They still provide SOFT cover to troops.
- Jungle is treated as WOODS with underbrush PLUS impassable to vehicles
- The canopy of both Jungle and Plantation areas is thick enough to prevent mortars from firing INDIRECT fire.

## 2.2 The Australians

The forces potentially available for the defence of the KB Mission are:

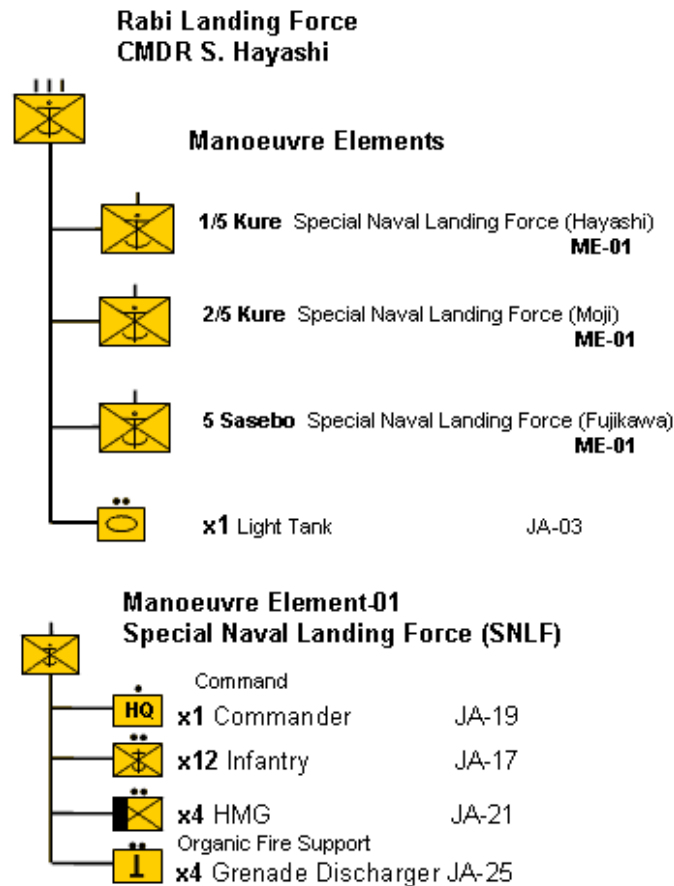


The 2/10<sup>th</sup> had not fought in Greece and this was their first operation in the jungle and at night. To make matters worse, the battalion was short of junior officers and this was Dobbs first combat command. He ignored advice and micro-managed the placement of his troops,

giving standing orders that restricted his subordinates initiative. For this reason, the 2/10<sup>th</sup> should be rated as EXPERIENCED and are NOT night combat trained.

## 2.3 The Japanese

The forces available for the attack on the KB Mission are:



The SNLF units were an elite formation with an unsavoury reputation, with extensive combat experience and training in assault and infantry tactics. Highly motivated, they are rated as VETERAN and ARE night combat trained.

## 2.4 Night Fighting Rules

Allied airpower at Milne Bay meant that any Japanese spotted in daylight could expect to be attacked. Consequently, they adopted a strategy of concealment in the jungle by day and moved at night. For night scenarios the standard Battlefield Rules are modified by:

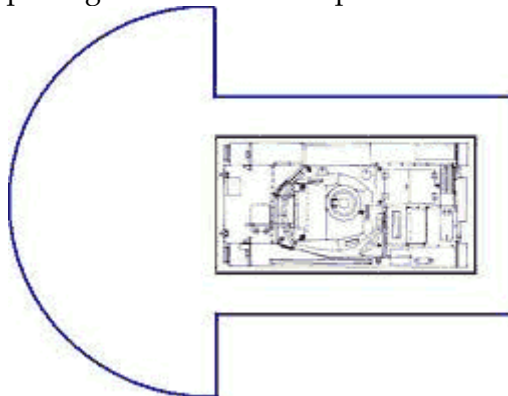
- **Discipline Rating**
  - All units are rated one level lower than normal unless they are considered *night combat trained*.
- **Spotting**
  - Additional **down 2** spotting modifier
  - **No up 1 modifier** for higher elevation.
- **Direct Fire**
  - Additional modifier of **-1** for all direct fire.

- **Manoeuvre**
  - No rapid advance.
  - No +1 command modifier for troops unless within 1 inch of commander.
  - No +1 command modifier for vehicles unless within 4 inches and LOS of commander.
  - No **+2 modifier** for no LOS to spotted or suspected enemy.
  - Additional -1 modifier on bog down table.

## 2.5 Special Rules.

Additional special rules that apply to this scenario are:

- Elements that have **Panicked Disordered**, are treated as lost when rolling on the Manoeuvre Table until they are rallied.
- An additional modifier of -1 applies to the “Call for Fire” table when a spotter is used to call fire against “suspected” targets when the *Night Combat* rules are in effect, unless the “suspected” target is illuminated by flares or a **pre-registered** aiming point is used.
- the additional -1 modifier for all direct fire at night **is not additional** to the -1 factor for emplaced MMGs that are using the grazing fire rules and template.
- Accounts of the fighting do not mention illumination other than from the tanks or burning huts. Consequently, the use of flares for illumination is not allowed.
- All accounts speak of the dramatic effect of the tanks’ headlights, and their tactics where the light of one tank was used to prevent unseen approaches to the other. These effects are simulated by:
  - Any stand within 5 inches of a tanks FRONT AIM POINT is spotted as if illuminated by flares.
  - Stands within 1 inch of a tank’s side or rear are spotted as if illuminated by flares. (NB: defensive fire against infantry attempting to close combat is not subject to the -1 for direct fire at night.)
  - The tank’s spotting is not reduced as per the flares spotting rules.



- Huts targeted by direct fire may catch on fire (thanks Paddy Green for this)
  - Huts fired at by a tank , or in a close assault, catch fire on a roll of 3-10
  - Huts fired at by an MMG catch fire on a 4-10
  - Huts fired at by rifle stands catch fire on a 5-10
  - Burning huts block line of sight
  - Stands within 2 inches of a burning hut are treated as if illuminated by flares
  - Huts burn for 4 turns starting at the end of the phase in which they catch fire
- Troops may Rapid Advance while on the track in this scenario.

## 2.6 Flares

- Generally, a unit that can fire smoke can fire a flare out to its maximum range.
- Additionally, a commander (troop stand) may also fire a flare out to 10 inches using a small template.
- Normally, like smoke, a unit may only fire a flare once per game, although many night scenarios may have reason to allocate more.
- Flares are fired in the Indirect Fire segment, using the same procedure as for smoke.
- Flares may be fired at the same targets as smoke.
- Each firing section gets 2 templates of the same size as its indirect fire template.
- The centre of the beaten zone is placed over the target just as in normal indirect fire.
- Any unit with an aiming point within the beaten zone is considered to be in **Day - Good Visibility** when a **TARGET** of spotting and fire combat. In addition there is a modifier of +1 to the spotting table when spotting such targets.
- A flare template remains on the table until the beginning of that player's next Indirect Fire segment.
- A unit with an aiming point inside a placed flare template suffers an **ADDITIONAL "DOWN 2"** modifier on the spotting table when trying to spot an enemy target. (loss of night vision).

## 3. Historical Scenario

This scenario starts at 2000 on the night of 27 August 1942, and lasts 15 turns. The Australians set up first and the Japanese move first.

### 3.1 Commander's Intent

The Japanese forces must advance down the road and reach the airfields at Gili Gili by daylight.

The Australian forces must hold the KB Mission and await further orders.

### 3.2 Victory Conditions

The Japanese must advance down the road sweeping aside opposition and cross Motieau Creek with the tank and at least half of an SNLF company within the time allowed to achieve a strategic victory.

If the Japanese do not achieve a strategic victory by the end of the scenario, a tactical victory may be claimed if at least two companies of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> have been broken. A company counts as broken if at any time the current total of destroyed, surrendered or panicked elements exceeds 75% of that company's original total.

All other results are an Australian victory.

### 3.3 Available Forces

The Japanese player has all forces available, but the 5<sup>th</sup> Sasebo was under strength. Remove 3 INF, 1 MMG and 1 Grenade Discharger from its Order of Battle.

Not all the potential Australian forces took part in the fighting at the KB Mission. The following adjustments should be made to the Australian forces:

- The 2/5<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment spotters arrived too late to pre-register targets, and at night the risk of friendly fire was too great. The 2/5<sup>th</sup> took no part in the fighting and should not be deployed.
- The 2/10<sup>th</sup> was only supposed to be on patrol when they marched out in light order. They left behind all mortars (2" and 3"), their MMGs and their anti-tank rifles. Remove these from their order of battle.

### 3.4 Deployment

The Australian forces should be deployed in their company areas as indicated on the map. Due to having marched out in light order (they left behind their entrenching tools) they may not use improved positions. They must rely on the cover of the plantation itself. Until their company has been broken they may only voluntarily leave their company deployment area if within 1" of a commander stand. Hidden (map) deployment is recommended for the Australians. If using hidden unit markers, allow a generous number of dummy markers. After a company has been broken, its elements may leave their deployment area provide they move towards the western or northern table edges. Otherwise, the Australians deploy first. All troops are concealed when initially deployed (i.e. ambush applies).

The Japanese set up anywhere East of Eakoeakonai creek, within 12" of the track. The restrictions on the Australians ability to leave their deployment areas, reflect Dobbs standing orders for night combat and also avoid the need to use hidden unit markers for the Japanese.

## 4. Variation 1: AT Rifles

The 2/10<sup>th</sup> veterans always maintained that the tanks gave the Japanese the edge at the KB Mission, and that without them they would have been beaten. The troops later determined that their AT rifles were effective against those tanks, resulting in much controversy about the decision to leave them behind. This scenario is exactly the same as the historical scenario, except that the companies of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> are allowed to keep their AT rifles.

## 5. Variation 2: Prepared Defence

Had they known they were not patrolling, the 2/10<sup>th</sup> would not have left their support weapons behind. In this scenario, the Australians may use all of the troops in their order of battle. Note the restrictions on mortar indirect fire and flares still apply. Additionally, the presence of entrenching tools means they may begin the scenario in improved positions. The artillery observers may pre-register 2 locations. The poor maps and dense terrain of Milne Bay made it difficult to adjust fire onto a target, as well as presenting a high risk of friendly



fire<sup>1</sup>. All indirect artillery fire, except at the pre-registered locations, is treated as General Fire Support on the Call for Fire Table. Danger Close results on a roll of 8, 9 or 10! They have unlimited ammunition.

## 6. Historical Outcome

The two tanks, equipped with brilliant headlights that made targets of the Australians and left the attackers in darkness, inflicted heavy casualties on the 2/10<sup>th</sup>. The Australians' sticky-bombs were ineffective in Milne Bay's tropical conditions. After about two hours, the Japanese managed to split the battalion in two. Battalion headquarters and two companies were forced off the track and into the jungle. The remainder of the battalion was pushed back to the Gama River, where their retreat was covered by the CMF battalions. With the 2/10<sup>th</sup> out of the way, the Japanese continued on to No. 3 strip, arriving around dawn. CMDR Hayashi decided to wait for night and to give his troops a chance to recover before attempting to storm airstrip No. 3.

## 7. References

Author: Nigel Perry ([perryn@alphalink.com.au](mailto:perryn@alphalink.com.au))

Thanks to Paddy Green for his ideas on illumination by fire.

This Battlefield scenario is based on the information presented in:

1. *Milne Bay 1942*, Clive Baker and Greg Knight, Australian Military History Publications, 2000.
2. *The War in the Pacific: Victory in Papua*, S Miller, US Army in WWII series, CMH, 1957.

## 8. Hints

The Australians must be wary about lining the creeks and tracks. The EDGE concealment actually makes them easier to spot. Lining the edges will enable fire against attackers in the open (especially in the creek), but make it easier for Japanese MMGs to provide suppressive fire. A defensive line about 1" in from the edges will prevent this, plus ensuring the defenders get the ambush modifier. This is important where most targets will have a -2 modifier (night + soft cover).

The Japanese must remember that TANK TERROR is in force and use it. They must work around the Australians flanks and push down the track simultaneously for their best chance of a strategic victory. The Rapid Advance allowed on the track mandate this axis of attack, as it is almost impossible to make the scenario time constraint otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> One FOO at Milne Bay adopted the technique of calling all initial shots into the Bay itself! He then adjusted fire onto the target. This was the safest approach as the maps, and the accuracy of his location, were that poor.