

# **The Ambon Forward Observation Line Strategy 1941-1942**

**A Lesson in Military Incompetence**

**By**

**David A Evans B. Asian Studies, BA (Hons) History.**



**History**

**Faculty of Arts and Humanities**

**A dissertation submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at  
Murdoch University**

## **Declaration**

Except where I have indicated, I declare that this dissertation is my own work and is an account of my research that has not been submitted for assessment for a degree at a University or other Tertiary Institution.

(Signed)

David A Evans

## Copyright Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that a copy of this dissertation will be held at Murdoch University Library.

I understand that, under the provisions s51.2 of the Copyright Act 1968, all or part of this dissertation may be copied without infringement of copyright where such a reproduction is for the purposes of study and research.

This statement does not signal any transfer of copyright away from the author.

(Signed)  
David A Evans

Full Name of Degree:	Doctor of Philosophy
Dissertation Title:	The Ambon Forward Observation Line Strategy 1941-1942: A Lesson in Military Incompetence
Author:	David A Evans
Year:	2010

## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge Senator Chris Back for facilitating my entry into tertiary education at Curtin University's Muresk Agricultural College in Western Australia. Under Senator Back's mentorship I developed a lifelong interest in learning that led to the completion of my university studies at Murdoch University.

I also acknowledge Associate Professor Lenore Layman and Professor Michael Durey for their professional approach in mentoring and guiding me through my education as a historian at Murdoch University. Furthermore, acknowledgement is given to Murdoch University for providing me with a scholarship and all the welcoming support required to complete this dissertation.

Finally, I acknowledge the Australian Army Research Grants Scheme for providing a financial grant for field research conducted at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

## **Abstract**

In October 1940 and in February 1941, the Australian Chiefs of Staff agreed to supply a task force (Gull Force) and an air strike group to garrison the small Dutch Island of Ambon. The decision to send troops to support the Dutch was made at Singapore where Australia ostensibly agreed to send three squadrons of aircraft to support Ambon in exchange for the Dutch sending four of their squadrons to support Malaya and Singapore should they be attacked. Under closer examination, however, the reasons for sending Australian troops and aircraft to Ambon become more obscure.

Historians and writers in the past have provided various explanations for Australia's commitment to Dutch Ambon as being; because the Island was a steppingstone for the Japanese to use in approaching Australia; because it was necessary to delay the Japanese for a couple of days; because Australia required a forward operating base; because Timor and Ambon were necessary for maintaining an open air route between Java and Australia; and, because Australia needed to demonstrate to its allies that it was prepared to fight the Japanese regardless of the disproportionate cost in doing so. Considering the paucity of facts regarding the Ambon case, the aim of this dissertation is to examine the question of why the Australian Government knowingly made the decision to send an under equipped, under-strength and unprotected task force to an isolated island in the Malukus to face overwhelming Japanese forces without any hope of reinforcement, rescue or withdrawal.

The conclusions show that the Australian Government and its military advisors were unequal to the task of successfully formulating grand war policy and military strategy in the Ambon Island case during 1941-1942. The minimum aim of war strategy is to formulate a decisive war plan in balance with the attainable political objective and the military's ability to achieve those ends. The Ambon strategy failed these criterion where Gull Force was sent to garrison the Island without any stated aims other than fighting to hold the Japanese advance for no longer than a few days to demonstrate Australia's willingness to fight. Gull Force was given an impossible task to fulfil at a price that could not be justified under any conventional strategic principles of the time.

# Table of Contents

<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Ambon: Grand Strategy and the Anglo-Dutch-Australia Mutual Air Defence Scheme</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Ambon: The Position and Line Holding Strategy</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Chapter Three -The Japanese Grand Strategy, Strategy and Tactics on Ambon</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Organisation of the 38th Division Detachment</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Organisation List of the Ito Detachment</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Operations at Hitulama and Laha - Kure 1st Special Naval Landing Force and 10th Company (3rd Battalion detached) Northern Assault Unit (Laha Airfield)</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>31 January – 3 February 1942</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Operations Paso - 2nd Battalion Right Assault Unit (minus the 7th Company)</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>31 January - 1 February 1942</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Operations Rutung, Leahari, Hukurila, Ema and Sojadiatas - 1st Battalion Left Assault Unit</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>31 January – 1 February 1942</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Operations Rutung, Ambon and Amahusu Line - 3rd Battalion Central Assault Unit (minus the 10th Company)</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>31 January – 3 February 1942</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Chapter Four - The Australian Story</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>The Japanese Attacks at Kudamati and Mount Nona</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>The Dispositions of Gull Force on the Laitimor Peninsular and the Japanese Attack at Amahusu (See Ambon Dispositions Map in Appendix One)</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Chapter Five - Incompetence in Command</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>Appendix One - Ambon Dispositions Map</b>	<b>255</b>

**Appendix Two - Ambon Photographs**

**256**

**Bibliography**

**265**

## **Maps**

<b>The Malay Barrier Map</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Laha Battle Map</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Paso Battle Map</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>Ambon Town Battle Map</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Kudamati Battle Map</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>Ambon Dispositions Map</b>	<b>Appendix One – 225</b>



## Glossary of Terms

AACC	Australian Army Catering Corp
AASC	Australian Army Service Corp
ABDA	America British Dutch Australia
ABDACOM	America British Dutch Australia Command
ADS	Advanced Dressing Station
AHQ	Army Headquarters
AIF	Australian Imperial Forces
Bn	Battalion
Capt	Captain
CAS	Chief of Air Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
Coy	Company
CQMS	Company Quartermaster Sergeant
Det.	Detachment
Gen	General
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff Officer
HMG	Heavy Machine Gun
HQ	Headquarters
KNIL	Dutch East Indies Army
LAD	Light Aid Detachment
Lt	Lieutenant
Lt-Col	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt-Gen	Lieutenant General
LMG	Light Machine Gun
Maj	Major
Maj-Gen	Major General
MLKNIL	Dutch East Indies Army Air Corps
MMG	Medium Machine Gun
NEI	Netherlands East Indies
OC	Officer Commanding
pl	Platoon
POW	Prisoner of War
Prahau	Malay word for traditional boat
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
SNLF	Special Naval Landing Force

## Introduction

Ambon fell into Japanese hands on 3 February 1942. Since that time the battle of Ambon has remained, to a greater or lesser degree, obscured from mainstream Australian military history and consequently the consciousness of many contemporary Australians. Although this history is recorded in books such as Lionel Wigmore's contribution to the official histories *Australia in the War of 1939-1945 - Volume IV*, Joan Beaumont's *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941-1945*, Peter Henning's *Doomed Battalion: Mateship and Leadership in War and Captivity, The Australian 2/40 Battalion 1940-1945*, Christopher Wray's *Timor 1942: Australian Commandos at War with the Japanese* and Courtney Harrison's *Ambon: Island of Mist*, little has been written in-depth about why Australia decided to send its troops to Ambon Island in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). This dissertation aims to examine the question of how the Australian military leaders came to make the decision of sending an ill-equipped task force of Australian troops to protect the small isolated Ambon garrison 933 kilometres north of Darwin.

The fact that the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Gull Force) of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade 8<sup>th</sup> Division was sent to Ambon following Japanese attacks on Malaya/Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Hawaii points to the importance that must have rested behind that decision at a time when Australia itself was threatened by Japan's actions. This was especially the case when the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Sparrow Force) and the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Lark Force) had also been dispersed to Timor and Rabaul respectively at a time when no other adequately trained forces remained to defend Australian shores with the resources then available. If no rational general would dissipate and isolate poorly armed forces miles

from supply, support or chance of rescue against overwhelming forces and without just cause, why did Australia's Chief of the General Staff dispose of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion to an isolated Dutch garrison at faraway Ambon Island?

In the official history, *The Japanese Thrust*, Wigmore explained that the task set for Gull Force was based on the strategic importance of Ambon to Australia's defence and on a long-standing agreement with the Dutch. Ambon Island had a newly constructed airfield at Laha on the Hitu Peninsular, which was of ostensible strategic importance to both the Allies and the Japanese. Notwithstanding its importance, Wigmore explained that the Australian Chiefs of Staff sent an inadequately resourced Gull Force to defend the island.<sup>1</sup> This raises the question, if Ambon was so important why was it reinforced with such an inadequate task force? Wigmore's chapter on *The Loss of Ambon* does not reveal the answer to this question.

The nearest explanation Wigmore gave for the Australian Chiefs of Staff sending Gull Force to Ambon stemmed from the Singapore Conferences. Notwithstanding Wigmore's examination of the 22-25 February Singapore Conference in his chapter *Plans and Preparations*,<sup>2</sup> in regards to Ambon he vaguely explained that Australian Chiefs of Staff were anxious to establish air force bases as far north of Australia as was possible and that an Australian infantry force was needed on the island to protect those RAAF assets. Then in contradiction to the above, Wigmore went on to claim that General Vernon Sturdee, Chief of the General Staff, had only reluctantly agreed to send a battalion

---

<sup>1</sup> Wigmore, L., *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957), pp. 420-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 420-24.

group to Ambon and one battalion group each to Rabaul and Timor and that it was initially done on the basis that the islands were ‘stepping-stones’ to Australia.<sup>3</sup>

When Gull Force was finally confronted with the Japanese invasion at Ambon, the Advisory War Council decided it would be too difficult to withdraw the battalion from the garrison and that it remained imperative to delay the Japanese at the island for as long as possible.<sup>4</sup> Considering the supposed importance of Ambon to Australia’s higher strategy, it seems enigmatic that Wigmore could not provide a more detailed explanation regarding that strategy or explain the Chiefs of Staff’s provision of such a small commitment to defend Ambon in the form of Gull Force, especially when Sturdee was supposedly reluctant to send troops there in the first place. Rather than clarify the reason for sending under-equipped troops to Ambon, it seems Wigmore only served to confuse the issue; either Ambon was important or it was not.

Beaumont also skipped over the question of why inadequate Australian forces were sent to Ambon in the face of overwhelming forces. The reason for this was perhaps that her thesis was directed more to the question of why some Gull Force men survived the stresses of Japanese internment where others did not. Beaumont’s explanation for the disposal of Gull Force to Ambon was simply that the island was strategically important to Australia and that Australia had committed itself to defending the Netherlands East Indies against Japanese attack.<sup>5</sup> This brief explanation is no clearer than Wigmore’s

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 69, 76.

<sup>4</sup> National Archives of Australia, Advisory War Council Minutes (Original Set) Chronological Series, A5954, 812/1 to 815/2, 29 October 1940 to 30 August 1945, Meetings 16 Dec to Mar 1942. Minute No 724.

<sup>5</sup> Beaumont, J., *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941-1945*, (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 5. 19.

above. Nevertheless, Beaumont noted that only a large well-equipped force could defend Ambon and that Gull Force was under equipped and therefore unlikely to have been able to defend the island.<sup>6</sup> This observation only lent support to the question of why, when Ambon was so strategically important, did the Chiefs of Staffs knowingly send such a small ill-quipped battalion to defend the island against an expected overwhelming Japanese attack.

Henning, on the other hand, seems to come closest to explaining the dispersal of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to the islands. He explained that the strategy of sending Australian troops to the islands was derived from the British led Singapore conferences, where Malaya Command was required to examine the Japanese threat to the Far East and especially Malaya and Singapore. Here, he made it clear the conferences had decided that, without a fleet to protect Singapore, a modern air force was required to deter the Japanese from attacking the island even though few modern aircraft were available for Far East deployment.

Henning explained that, in the context of those meetings and where Australia was relying on Britain's inadequate defence of Singapore, the Australian Chiefs of Staff had agreed to send air forces to the islands north of Australia such as Rabaul, Timor and Ambon. To protect the air force assets on the islands the Australian Chiefs of Staff had decided that two battalion groups should be dispersed to garrison the island airfields. According to Henning, the Australian War Cabinet accepted the Chiefs of Staff's recommendations to garrison the islands on 14 February 1941 and committed one

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

battalion group each to Ambon and Timor along with an air striking force that was earmarked for operations over these islands from Darwin.<sup>7</sup> Although Henning provided a little more detail to the question, the reasons behind sending Gull and Sparrow Forces to the islands still remain obscure.

Wray also came no closer to explaining why under equipped forces were sent to defend such strategically important outposts as Timor and Ambon. He explained that the Singapore Conference had found it was in a position where it had too few aircraft even with the addition of those held by the NEI Government.<sup>8</sup> Wray provided no in-depth analysis on why the Australian chiefs of staff had decided to send the under equipped troops to the islands and particularly in his case to Timor.

Although Harrison was a member of Gull Force and experienced the privations of captivity, he refrained from commenting on whether Sturdee had made the right decision or not in sacrificing Gull Force. In his book *Ambon: Island of Mist - 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion AIF (Gull Force) Prisoners of War 1941-45* Harrison stated that:

It was a well kept secret that the future plans for their ultimate destination had been established because of a long standing agreement by Australia with the Netherlands Government should Japan enter the war and, when this did eventuate, Gull Force moved to Ambon a small island N/W of Darwin and a comparable distance from Melbourne to Sydney. Together with a regiment of poorly trained native troops led by Dutch officers, they were given the impossible task of defending it against a Division of experienced well trained enemy with modern arms and equipment, aided by Naval ships and carrier-borne [sic] aircraft which made the result never in doubt.

As to the correctness or otherwise of the conception of Australian troops being sacrificed in such circumstances, I refrain from comment with the understanding that any war means sacrifice.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Henning, P., *Doomed Battalion*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Wray, C. C. H., *Timor 1942: Australian Commandos at War with the Japanese*, (Port Melbourne: Mandarin Australia, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison, C. T., *Ambon: Island of Mist - 2/21<sup>st</sup> Battalion AIF (Gull Force) Prisoners of War 1941-45*, (North Geelong: TW & CT Harrison, 1988), Post Script.

The problem with Harrison's failure to comment on the sacrifice of Gull Force is that he, for whatever reason, has served only to obscure whether the Australian Government was justified in that sacrifice in the wider context of the war.

A better explanation for Australian participation in occupying the garrisons at Ambon and Timor comes from Jack Ford in his book *Allies in a Bind: Australia and the Netherlands East Indies in the Second World War*. Ford revealed in more detail how the agreement between the Australians and the Dutch was made at the Singapore Conference of 22-25 February 1941. According to Ford, the Dutch committed to transferring three Glen Martin squadrons and one Buffalo squadron (24 aircraft) to Singapore at the outbreak of war with Japan in exchange for a similar commitment from the Australians for three squadrons to operate over Ambon and Timor. It was suggested that the Australians garrison Ambon because it was an important link between Australia and Java.<sup>10</sup> However, Ford failed to clarify why, if Ambon was so strategically important, did Australia commit to protecting the airfield at Ambon with only one under equipped battalion.

In *The Supplement to The London Gazette* in January 1948 Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the architect of the mutual air defence scheme at Singapore, gave his account of the Singapore Conferences and Australia's commitment to Malaya Command's principle of mutual air support in the Far East. As part of this agreement the Dutch promised to provide one fighter and three bomber squadrons in the defence of Malaya should it be attacked in exchange for a similar British commitment in the NEI.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ford, J. M., *Allies in a Bind: Australia and Netherlands East Indies in the Second World War*, (Loganholme: Australian Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association, 1996), pp. 20, 31.

Under this agreement Australia promised to provide Army units and an air striking force to Ambon and Kupang at Timor. This was agreed to on the basis that a Japanese attack on one would be an attack on all. As the Australian Chiefs of Staff were left with the planning of the sending of reinforcements to Ambon and Kupang, Brooke-Popham was unable to report further on the outcome of Australia's commitment to the mutual support scheme in the Far East, leaving it for the Australians to report.<sup>11</sup>

It seems counterintuitive that the Australian Government would send an under equipped inadequate force to face overwhelming forces only to protect such a strategically important island, as Ambon was described, without any hope of holding the island and at a time when Australia needed all the military resources it could retain on the mainland. The answer to this question must lie with Australia's Chiefs of Staff, the high strategists in Australia at the entry into the Second World War. Accordingly, to find the answer to the above question, this dissertation will focus on the Chiefs of Staff and the records they have left behind.

The first chapter of this dissertation, *Ambon: Grand Strategy and the Anglo-Dutch-Australia Mutual Air Defence Scheme*, examines in detail the proposals that were settled upon at the Singapore conferences of October 1940 to February 1941. During this period Australia initially agreed to provide the Dutch garrison of Ambon with an air striking force and a brigade of infantry as part of its commitment to the mutual air

---

<sup>11</sup> Brooke-Popham, R., "Operations in the Far East," Supplement to the London Gazette, 22 January (1948), p. 543.



defence scheme along the Malay Barrier. It was on this basis that the Chiefs of Staff formalized their strategy to defend not only Ambon but Timor and Rabaul also.

Chapter Two, *Ambon: The Position and Line Holding Strategy*, in the context of Carl von Clausewitz's book *On War*, examines Roach's questioning of the Chiefs of Staff's strategy of retaining Gull Force at Ambon to face overwhelming forces for no gain other than a few days delay to the Japanese advance. This chapter demonstrates how Roach exposed the weaknesses intrinsic to the Chiefs of Staff Operation Instruction No. 15, under which Gull Force was required to operate. The reader is also made aware of the circumstances surrounding the dismissal of Roach and his replacement with Lieutenant Colonel John Scott, while exposing the reason why the Chiefs of Staffs disposed of Gull Force against such insurmountable odds.

Both Chapters Three, *The Japanese Grand Strategy, Strategy and Tactics on Ambon*, and Four, *The Australian Story*, are presented to juxtapose the Japanese offensive with that of the Dutch and Australian defence of Ambon. The stark difference in approach to Japanese and Allied strategies is used to reveal the commitment, or lack thereof, of the respective combatants to the strategic importance of Ambon. The description of the Japanese attack is taken from Japanese as well as Australian accounts of the battles. The description of the Australian story is taken from various Australian archival sources.

The final chapter, *Incompetence in Command*, demonstrates General Sturdee's lack of competence as Chief of the General Staff and self appointed nominal Commander-in-

Chief and architect of the Australian commitment to the Malay Barrier strategy, which later became known as the Forward Observation Line strategy. It will be argued that Sturdee was incompetent for sending Gull, Sparrow and Lark Forces as isolated penny packet garrisons lacking the means to carry out their duties to defend the islands of Ambon, Timor and Rabaul during 1941-1942.

## **Chapter One: Ambon: Grand Strategy and the Anglo-Dutch-Australia Mutual Air Defence Scheme**

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to a given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.

The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which the play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of the commander and the army; but the political aims are the business of government alone.<sup>12</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz

Clausewitz divided his theoretical concept of strategy into three basic categories: grand strategy, the realm of government in harnessing the moral passions of the people, in implementing policy to guide the conduct of war, in coordinating the people and the utilisation of national resources and in attaining the political objects of war; strategy, the realm of military leaders in implementing policy to overcome the enemy's will to fight by using the means provided to it by government in achieving the objects of war; and tactics, the realm of field commanders who practice method and routine, or ways in which to engage in or to avoid battle.<sup>13</sup>

Acting in agreement with these principles of grand strategy the Australian government initially created the War Cabinet on 15 September 1939 to forge policy and grand strategy in a war with Germany. The Prime Minister, Treasurer, Ministers for External Affairs, Defence, Supply Development and Commerce all held permanent seats in the

---

<sup>12</sup> von Clausewitz, C., *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. Peter Paret, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Liddell Hart, B. H., *The Classic Book on Military Strategy*, 2nd ed., (London: Meridian, 1991) pp. 321-32.

War Cabinet. The service chiefs and various ministers of departments later became integrated into war cabinet meetings to conjoin wartime military, civil and economic imperatives.<sup>14</sup>

The War Cabinet needed to frame its strategic deliberations on defence in accord with long standing Imperial Conference agreements concerning British Commonwealth predominance in the coordination of foreign policy, security and joint defence. These arrangements called for Australia to act in concert with British strategic concepts regarding ‘when, how and with what means that united action could be taken’ during the war.<sup>15</sup>

On 28 October 1940, Prime Minister Robert Menzies established a supplemental advisory war council to help engage bipartisan support in Australia’s strategic approach to the war. He had previously invited opposition groups to unite in all party government as contributors to the decision-making processes of policy and grand strategy. The opposition leader John Curtin refused because he believed a unity government could intrinsically bind the Labor Party to government policy and stifle independent critical debate in opposition.

At the first sitting of parliament after war on Germany was declared, Curtin expressed the Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) policy in opposition. In part it stated:

---

<sup>14</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Hasluck, P., *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, vol. 1, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952), p. 36.

The democratic rights of the [Australian] people must be safeguarded to the maximum. The very minimum of interference with the civic liberties of the people should be the objective of the Government in carrying through its measures for national security. To ensure that this is done, it is essential that the Parliament of the Commonwealth should remain in session ... The suggestion that here should be a government composed of all parties in this Parliament appears to me to be one which, if carried out, would not be in the interests of either the Parliament, the Government, or the people of Australia.<sup>16</sup>

The Labour Party's intention in stating their policy was to inform the parliament that the opposition wanted to maintain independent scrutiny of the government's war measures and to ensure democratic processes were maintained.<sup>17</sup>

To relieve Curtin's concerns Menzies formed the Advisory War Council to act as an advisory body only in allowing the opposition to contribute to formulating government policy without compromising their political independence or integrity. Between 1940 and 1942, the Advisory War Council had four cabinet ministers and three opposition members provide policy recommendations to the war cabinet. Albeit an unusual augmentation of policy and grand strategy, the Advisory War Council remained in service until 30 August 1945.<sup>18</sup>

In agreement with contemporary principles of grand strategy the Government passed the National Security Act in September 1939 to address its concerns regarding military training and organisation, civil liberty and democratic process, financing the war effort, inflation and interest rates, the mobilisation of economic resources and administrative organisation. These arrangements allowed the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council to become instrumental in the organisation of war policy and grand strategy. In

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp.159-60.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis, P., Grey, J., Morris, E. et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, 2nd ed., (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 7.

conformity with the Clausewitzian principle cited above, that ‘the political aims [of war] are the business of government alone’, the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council established their roles in producing the strategic object of war in continuing Australia’s political interests and national security.

The second layer of strategy, except in historical precedents where the same person embodied the office of both government and military leader (for example Napoleon and Fredrick the Great), belongs to the military. Military leaders under Australia’s democratic government had the responsibility of applying the object of war in the areas of higher war policy and the use of force in the theatre of operations assigned to them. The Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) in overseas theatres, for example, were placed under the control of the C-in-C of the theatre in which it served, as in the case of 1941 and early 1942 where both Gen Thomas Blamey in the Middle East and Gen Gordon Bennett in Singapore, subject to Australian and British war policy, reported directly to the Minister of the Army. These units remained independent of the responsibilities of the Chiefs of Staff in operational affairs.

The role of the of Chiefs of Staff was to advise government on operational matters, strategic appreciations and to act in the implementation of orders stemming from War Cabinet decisions. Under these arrangements the Chiefs of Staff had responsibility for the administration of their respective services only. The only exception to the rule seems to have happened after Lt-Gen Vernon Sturdee took over full control of operations for Ambon-Timor-Rabaul from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in December 1941. In his capacity as Chief of Staff, Sturdee had advised the Government on grand strategy in the Far East and

Australia stemming from the Singapore conferences, prepared plans for operations at Ambon, Kupang and Rabaul and personally directed those operations from staff headquarters in Melbourne.

In 1941, and before the war in the Far East began, the governments of Great Britain, the United States (US), the NEI and Australia held few illusions about the Japanese intention to expand southward. Following the Manchurian Incident in 1931, the Shanghai Incident in 1932, the signing of the Tripartite Pact with Italy and Germany in 1936, the invasion of China in 1937 and the Japanese occupation of French Indochina in 1941, concerns were mounting that Japan would soon open war in the Far East and Southwest Pacific theatres. There was a prospect of war with Japan if it expanded both its political and economic aspirations deeper into Southeast Asia under its 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' policy. In response to this threat, Britain and the United States began secret discussions in Washington in early 1940 to develop a common strategic approach to protecting Anglo-American interests in the Far East and South Pacific regions.<sup>19</sup>

In August, the British Chiefs of Staff produced an appreciation of the Far East situation, which outlined a secret proposal for Britain (and its dominions), the NEI and the United States of America (USA) to combine forces if Japan declared war in Southeast Asia. In advancing this policy, the Secretary for Dominion Affairs, Lord Caldecote, sent a series of cables to Australian Prime Minister RG Menzies on 11 August 1940 summarising the

---

<sup>19</sup> Hayes, G. P., *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War against Japan*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), p. 13; National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, A5954, 803/1 to 811/2, 27 September 1939 to 19 January 1946, Minute 1073, 16 May 1941.

British Chiefs of Staffs strategy for defending its Far East outposts. Assumption 3 in the strategic paper considered the question whether Britain 'should go to war with Japan if she attacks the NEI'. Caldecote explained to Menzies that the defence situation in the Far East 'would be better served' with the mutual support of the Dutch; however, he wrote, 'with our present limited resources ... we could not offer the Dutch any effective military support against Japanese aggression'.<sup>7</sup>

To engage Dutch cooperation Caldecote recommended that staff conversations with the NEI should begin once the security position in Singapore and Malaya had improved. Menzies knew that Australia's strategic defence was intrinsically tied to Singapore's and agreed to raise talks with Dutch authorities.<sup>20</sup> To begin the process the British Chiefs of Staff organised a staff conference at Singapore for 22 October and invited delegates from Australia/New Zealand and the USA (as a neutral military observer).

Except for local defence issues that remained under Australian control in its theatre of operations, the October conference set out to coordinate the overall defence requirements of the Far East region. Considering the assumption that Japan would most likely invade Malaya, the NEI or the Philippines, but not simultaneously and not Australia initially, the conference came to the conclusion that without a main fleet at Singapore it would use its available air forces to deter Japan. This policy was:

To prevent or at least deter the Japanese from establishing naval and air bases within striking distance of our vital interests in Malaya, Burma, the Dutch East Indies, Australia and New

---

<sup>20</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, <<http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/info/historical/HistDocs.nsf/vWeb?OpenView>>, Menzies to Caldecote, 29 August 1940, Vol. IV, No. 65, Cable 263, Caldecote to Menzies, 11 August 1940, Vol. IV, No. 84; Robertson, J. and McCarthy, J., *Australian War Strategy 1939-1945: A Documentary History*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1986) p. 169.



Zealand. By using advanced operational bases throughout the area, we should aim at being able to concentrate aircraft at any point from our collective air resources in the Far East, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>21</sup>

This policy, however, remained contingent on convincing the NEI authorities that it was in their interests to support the October conference plan for a combined air resource scheme in the first instance and receiving enough Royal Air Force (RAF) aircraft from Britain to deter the Japanese in the second.

On 16 November 1940, the Australian Chiefs of Staff produced a report to the Australian government that endorsed the combined air resources plan. The Chiefs of Staff explained to the War Cabinet that British planners had previously designed the defences at Singapore and Malaya based on symmetrical army, navy and air force scales and that without a main fleet coming to Singapore the army and air force defences in Malaya would be unbalanced.<sup>22</sup> Far East Command had decided to replace the fleet component of their plan with a combined air resource scheme to rebalance its defences as a deterrent to Japanese designs on Southeast Asia.

The Chiefs of Staff also recommended that two brigades of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division should be temporarily sent in support of Far East Command on its way to the Middle East. Its role would be to assist Far East Command in reinforcing Malaya Command until either an Indian division could be organised for Malaya, or a fleet became available to Singapore.

Under these arrangements the Chiefs of Staff informed the government that the Royal

---

<sup>21</sup> National Archives of Australia, Singapore Defence Conference, 1940. Report, British Staff Conversations with Officers from Netherlands East Indies 26th to 29th November, 1940. Combined Far Eastern Appreciation of Australian Chiefs of Staff. Feb 1941. Anglo - Dutch - Australian Conference, 22nd - 25th February 1941, A5954, 565/4, 1940-1941, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941* p. 298.

Australian Navy (RAN) would need to be recalled from overseas duties in the Mediterranean to protect Australian convoys and trade routes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.<sup>23</sup>

The October conference estimated the minimum numbers of aircraft needed for the Far East. They calculated the number of aircraft required at 534 for Malaya and Burma, 278 for Australia, 50 for New Zealand, 8 for New Guinea-Solomon Islands-New Hebrides, 9 for Fiji and Tonga, 87 for the Indian Ocean and 187 for the NEI. Considering their estimate of existing stocks, including outmoded aircraft, this amounted to a total deficiency of 1,153 modern aircraft. Despite being informed about the large shortfall in aircraft, the Australian War Cabinet nevertheless approved the Chiefs of Staff recommendations to prepare aircraft facilities at Darwin, New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides in readiness for the scheme and in the hope that aircraft numbers could be increased before war broke out.

To address the shortfall in aircraft, the Australian War Cabinet decided to ask Britain for the additional aircraft supplies so that the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) could fulfil its commitment to the combined air concentration scheme.<sup>24</sup> The allotment of aircraft for Australia, however, remained contingent on the progress of war in Europe and the Mediterranean, conflicting demands with Far East Command and the rates of aircraft production in the British Commonwealth and USA.

---

<sup>23</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Records. Defence Staff Conversations with Netherlands East Indies Government. Singapore 1941 Batavia 1941, A981, DEF143, 1941 -1942, pp. 295-98.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 9, 28, 36-37; National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 632, 26 November 1940.

Interestingly, the Anglo-Dutch-Australian air defence scheme, now based on limited aircraft supplies, defied common sense when all military services in the Far East dominions were short of armed forces equipment and especially aircraft. At the conference the British Chiefs of Staff estimated that Japan controlled an expeditionary force of ten battleships and seven aircraft carriers (with cruiser and destroyer escorts), six to ten army divisions with troopships and 336 to 432 aircraft, which Far East Command then could not match.<sup>25</sup> The war in Europe had besieged Great Britain and ruled out any immediate or longer-term hope of sending more ships, munitions or armed forces to Singapore, let alone modern aircraft to Australia. It seems that the Australian War Cabinet and Far East Command were being ambitious if they thought Britain could make these supplies available to them at that time.

Far East Command nevertheless maintained their optimistic outlook although its combined dominion air force consisted of 118 outdated aircraft only. Malaya and Burma had 48 (40 obsolete), Australia 42 (40 obsolete) and New Zealand 28 (all obsolete). Moreover, Australia's projected output for aircraft manufacture in 1941 was 180 outmoded Beaufort torpedo bombers of which the first 90 were destined for the undersupplied RAF in Malaya.<sup>26</sup> The British Chiefs of Staff considered the October conference recommendations but informed Far East Command that 336 aircraft would be sufficient for their defence. They also explained that it was unlikely that further aircraft could be made available for Malaya before the end of 1941.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, Caldecote to Wiskard, 11 August 1940, Vol. 5, No. 66.

<sup>26</sup> Brooke-Popham, "Operations in the Far East," p. 551.

<sup>27</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945* p. 51.

The British and dominions' aircraft numbers in the Far East were clearly unable to fulfil the needs of the Singapore conference's combined air scheme plans. Even with the expected addition of the Dutch Militaire Luchtvaart Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indische Leger's (the Dutch Army Air Corps or MLKNIL) 137 mostly obsolete aircraft, they were unlikely to be enough to balance Allied military forces and effectively deter the Japanese. Furthermore, the MLKNIL's aircraft needed maintaining and, after Germany's invasion of the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, there remained no hope of drawing on spare parts for its Dornier aircraft from the Netherlands or its German suppliers.

The NEI's best option for getting munitions was from Australia, which was also suffering war supply shortages. The governor general of the NEI, Jonkheer Tjarda Van Starckenborgh Stachouwer, nevertheless approached the Australian government to acquire munitions supplies for the Royal Netherlands-Indies Army (KNIL). Menzies, probably considering previous British requests for Australia to help open talks with the NEI, used this opportunity to approve Van Starckenborgh Stachouwer's request and a KNIL commission travelled covertly to Melbourne on 2 October 1940 to begin the negotiations.<sup>28</sup> These talks opened the way for further discussions between Australia, Far East Command and the NEI.

With meetings continuing between Australia and the NEI, Far East Command invited the Dutch Chiefs of Staff to talks at Singapore on 26 November 1940. Major-General ter Poorten (Chief of General Staff), Capt Van Staveren (Chief of Naval Staff) and Capt

---

<sup>28</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 512, 16 September 1940; Ford, J. M., *Allies in a Bind: Australia and Netherlands East Indies in the Second World War* (Loganholme: Australian Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association, 1996), pp. 19-20.

Buurman Van Vreeden (of the General Staff) represented the Dutch. The aim of the meeting was to discuss cooperation between Dutch and British air forces in case the Japanese attacked either the NEI or Malaya. From Far East Command's perspective, however, the conversations seemed more about getting the Dutch to commit to supplying air support for Malaya rather than providing British support to the defense of the NEI, because the British at Singapore could not fulfill that obligation without further reducing its own badly needed resources.

The Dutch Chiefs of Staff accepted the plan in principle and approved the mutual redistribution of the region's air forces between Malaya, Borneo and the NEI. They agreed that command of the air forces would transfer between British and Dutch control depending on their respective areas of responsibility in Malaya and the NEI and that each party could recall its air forces as required.<sup>29</sup> These talks encouraged Far East Command and further talks were scheduled with the Dutch at Singapore for 22 February 1941.

On 14 February, in preparing for the upcoming talks at Singapore, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander in Chief (C-in-C) Far East, travelled to Sydney to brief the Australian War Cabinet on the Singapore situation. Brooke-Popham presented the War Cabinet with a positive outlook on the defence of Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore. He told the meeting that his expectations were that, if Japan attacked, Hong Kong would hold out for four months, that Singapore would hold out for up to nine

---

<sup>29</sup> National Archives of Australia, Singapore Defence Conference, 1940. Report, British Staff Conversations with Officers from Netherlands East Indies 26th to 29th November, 1940. Combined Far Eastern Appreciation of Australian Chiefs of Staff. Feb 1941. Anglo - Dutch - Australian Conference, 22nd - 25th February 1941, A5954, 565/4, pp. 45-48.

months and, with the Indian Army's 9<sup>th</sup> Division scheduled to arrive in Singapore in March and April, he believed he had reached the minimum requirement of ground forces for Malaya.

The War Cabinet questioned Brooke-Popham about Britain's policy of protecting Britain and the Mediterranean ahead of Singapore. Brooke-Popham assured the meeting that Singapore could hold out until capital ships arrived and that he had Churchill's assurance that Britain 'will not let Singapore fall'.<sup>30</sup> He also explained that the Japanese were poor pilots, 'not air-minded' and no match for British pilots and aircraft and that he regarded Japanese fighter planes as comparatively inefficient and inferior to the Brewster Buffalo aircraft, which he now had on order from the USA.

This seems misleading, however, as the British Chiefs of Staff had already informed Brooke-Popham that Britain, the battle for the Atlantic and the Middle East all took precedence over the Far East.<sup>11</sup> He was also aware that the Singapore Strategy had been in transition from 1937 to the time he arrived in Singapore on 14 November 1940. In 1937 the British Chiefs of Staffs had assumed that a fleet would arrive in Singapore within 70 days of the outbreak of war with Japan and, despite the situation in Europe, automatically end any threat to Singapore. After a reappraisal in 1939, 180 days became the benchmark. By August 1940, the British Chiefs of Staffs secretly accepted that it would be impossible to send a large fleet to Singapore.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Brooke-Popham, "Operations in the Far East," p. 536.

<sup>31</sup> Percival, A., "Operations of Malaya Command," Second Supplement to the London Gazette, London, 1948), p. 1250.

These changing circumstances had forced a review of Far East Command's strategic policy, which now called for all available forces to not only protect Singapore but the whole of the Malayan Peninsular. It is also clear that Brooke-Popham was conscious of the shortage of modern aircraft in Malaya, the lack of trained pilots to fly them and, as far as he was concerned, the ignorance of the RAF about modern warfare conditions. His true opinion was that 'what the R.A.F. lacked in Malaya was a good proportion of pilots with practical war experience and these were not yet available to Far East Command'.<sup>32</sup>

On route to Singapore on 21 February, Brooke-Popham met Van Starckenborgh Stachouwer at Batavia to discuss the upcoming Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference. At this meeting the Australian delegates raised the strategic importance of Dutch Timor to Australia's northern defences. In discussions with the Gen Berenschot, the NEI's Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C), the Australians suggested that if war opened with Japan it would be in Australia's interest to defend the Dutch air and port facilities at Kupang.

Berenschot agreed and suggested that Australian officers should visit Kupang to assess the military garrison. He told the delegates that Australian officers could also take over command of the garrison at Kupang. Moreover, he informed the delegates that he had already given orders to prepare new barracks for one thousand European troops, however, he made it clear to the Australian delegates that there were no anti aircraft

---

<sup>32</sup> Brooke-Popham, "Operations in the Far East," pp. 550-52, 544.

artillery (AAA) or coastal defence guns on the Island.<sup>33</sup> This meant that Australia would need to supply its own guns to cover the airfield and littoral approaches to Kupang when garrisoning the Island.

Berenschot then raised the issue of Dutch-Australian cooperation in the greater Darwin-NEI area. He explained that the MLKNIL might move its air force commitments to Java and possibly Malaya, leaving the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago unprotected. He asked whether Australia could provide bomber squadrons to defend sea communications between the Celebes (present day Sulawesi) and northwest Dutch New Guinea. The defence of this area would depend on holding Ambon as an advanced air base instead of Kupang. He added that Ambon was close to the important strategic areas at the north-eastern end of the NEI archipelago and that four 6" guns and 1,600 garrison troops were already present on the Island.

From the Australian delegates' viewpoint, despite Australia having limited munitions, arms, troops, aircraft, and naval resources, this seemed a sensible proposition. It projected Australia's defences further north; it was in range of bomber aircraft stationed at Darwin; and it allowed Kupang to become a secondary support base for offensive operations north of Ambon while maintaining communications between Australia and Java. The Australian delegates agreed to the proposition, but remained cautious about maintaining control over their bomber squadrons by telling Berenschot that the RAAF would provide patrols to Ambon and Kupang from their base at Darwin.

---

<sup>33</sup> National Archives of Australia, Singapore Defence Conference, 1940. Report, British Staff Conversations with Officers from Netherlands East Indies 26th to 29th November, 1940. Combined Far Eastern Appreciation of Australian Chiefs of Staff. Feb 1941. Anglo - Dutch - Australian Conference, 22nd - 25th February 1941, A5954, 565/4, pp. 117-19.



Air Chief Marshal Charles Burnett, however, insisted that if Ambon became a forward air force base of operations he wanted Australian troops to reinforce the garrisons at both Ambon and Kupang. This was not necessary, however, as the Dutch were already preparing to send an additional KNIL Battalion to the Island. This point was noted by Australian authorities when later referring to the unified command of troops at Ambon by cable:

In view of Ambon being important adm centre existg there of coast defences and naval estabs and adm of larger Malay garrison, Dutch desire retain control. If pressed on cmd point Dutch are prepared to send Malay bn instead and dispense w[ith] Aust land forces at Ambon.<sup>34</sup>

Berenschot had had forces available for reinforcing the Ambon garrison, but nevertheless accepted the offer of Australian troops and agreed to supply two or three Dutch troopships to take the AIF to the Islands from Australia if required.<sup>35</sup>

On 22 February the Australian delegation met in Singapore with Brooke-Popham and admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, C-in-C of the China Station. They discussed the upcoming defence conference with the Dutch and the USA to ensure that the British and Australian representatives spoke with one voice. Layton began by criticising the Australian Chiefs of Staffs appreciation, which he thought overestimated Japan's potential to launch large-scale simultaneous actions across the Southwest Pacific without excessively dissipating its forces. In dismissing the Chiefs of Staffs appreciation, Layton sought to persuade the Australian delegates that RAN destroyers and sloops operating in the Mediterranean and Red Sea should remain there, but

---

<sup>34</sup> National Archives of Australia, Court of Inquiry Vol 1, with Reference to the Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor and Ambon - Volume 1 - Reports Part 1, AWM113, MH1/121, 1942-1942, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> National Archives of Australia, Singapore Defence Conference, 1940. Report, British Staff Conversations with Officers from Netherlands East Indies 26th to 29th November, 1940. Combined Far Eastern Appreciation of Australian Chiefs of Staff. Feb 1941. Anglo - Dutch - Australian Conference, 22nd - 25th February 1941, A5954, 565/4, pp. 117-19.

suggested that RAN cruisers serving with imperial forces in the Middle East should return to Australia to protect its convoys.

Brooke-Popham also persuaded the Australian delegation that in persuading the Dutch to concentrate their air force in Malaya, Australia would need to provide similar support to the NEI at Ambon. He suggested that two brigade groups; two Hudson bomber squadrons and possibly a third reinforcing squadron of shorter-range Wirraway light bombers were needed to operate in the Darwin-Ambon-Timor area.<sup>36</sup> Brooke-Popham suggested that an Australian contribution to the area was advantageous to its own defence as well as to the promotion of Dutch cooperation. He concluded that RAAF operations in the Darwin-Ambon-Timor region would project regional air defence further forward and provide greater depth in defence.

This meant that if Australia acted in support of Ambon and Kupang it would open the way for the Dutch to commit to a combined air defence scheme between Singapore/Malaya and the NEI. This agreement was an integral part of Brooke-Popham's plan to ally all parties concerned in Far East defence to enter the war as one, instead of standing alone and facing the prospect of defeat in detail.<sup>37</sup> For Australia, the ostensible advantages of Ambon over Kupang were that the former already had a garrison, coastal defences and deep-water port *in situ*. Working from this basis the meeting agreed to upgrade Ambon to first-line defence in protecting communications between Australia and Java and other strategic areas in the NEI's eastern archipelago.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 120, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Brooke-Popham, "Operations in the Far East," p. 536.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 118, 120.

The full Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference met at Singapore on 22 February. Subject to the ratification of the governments concerned, the delegates approved the mutual Anglo-Dutch-Australian combined air defence scheme where the NEI agreed to supply three Glenn Martin and one Buffalo squadrons to Malaya. In return Far East Command promised to reciprocate in providing four RAF squadrons to the NEI when required while Australia agreed to base two Hudson and one Wirraway squadrons at Darwin to cover the Darwin-Ambon-Timor theatre of operations.

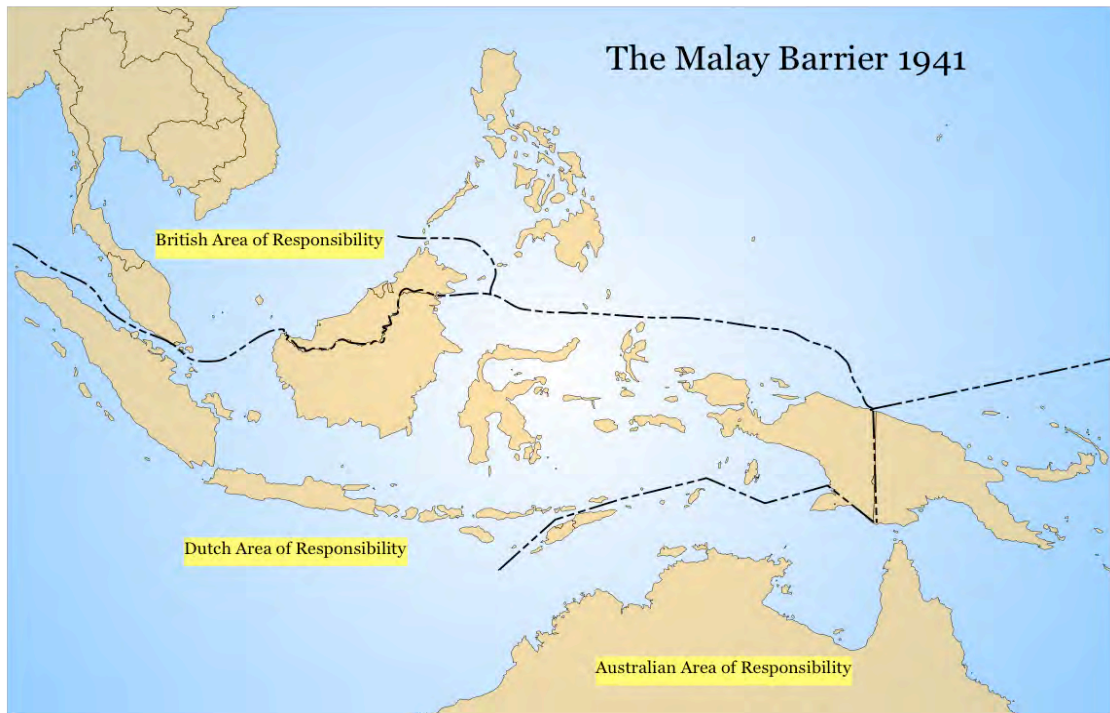
The assumptions underpinning these talks were consistent with the previous October conference, which stated Japan would not launch major simultaneous attacks on Malaya, the NEI and Borneo, that the USA was unlikely to intervene initially and that Japan's first objective would be Singapore. It was also assumed that the threat of the Soviet Union to Japanese forces in Manchuria combined with the possible intervention of the US on the side of the Anglo-Dutch allies in the Far East was enough to deter the Japanese from attacking Singapore. With these assumptions in mind, and while accepting that a threat to one constituted a threat to all, the conference agreed to coordinate the combined air defence scheme within three theatres of responsibility under British, Dutch and Australian control.<sup>39</sup>

The British area of operations rested above the Dutch line. The Dutch area of operations included the NEI bounded by a line north of the equator running east from Aceh and below Malaya, across Borneo, the Sulu Sea and down through to the south coast of Dutch New Guinea, but excluded the Islands of Roti, Semau, Timor, Mulu and Cape

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Valsche. The Australian area of operations lay south of the Dutch theatre of operations and included Roti, Semau, Timor, Ambon, Mulu, Cape Valsche, Papua New Guinea, islands in the Solomon Sea and Nauru. Under these arrangements, Australia was committed to providing two brigades of infantry and three squadrons of aircraft to the Darwin-Ambon-Timor area of operations.<sup>40</sup>



### **The Malay Barrier Map**

On 22 March, Sturdee and Burnett recommended the Singapore strategy agreements to the War Cabinet for approval where they were accepted in full. The War Cabinet noticed, however, that owing to demands elsewhere Sturdee had independently reduced the number of Australian troops allocated to the Darwin-Ambon-Timor area from two brigade groups to one brigade group, one battalion and one artillery battery. At the time there were no other 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF brigades available apart from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and Sturdee explained that he had since agreed with the Dutch CGS to provide one task force each

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-11, 120.

of 1,200 troops for Ambon and Kupang combined with an allotted air strike force operating out of Darwin.<sup>41</sup>

Sturdee also explained the Dutch had stipulated at the Singapore conference that the movement of Australian troops to Ambon and Kupang could not take place until after war with Japan had been declared. He told the meeting that this condition would greatly affect Australia's ability to transport troops and organise defences on the Islands at short notice. Because of the political implications connected with maintaining Dutch cooperation in the combined air scheme, and owing to the possibility that it could provoke Japan with a pretext for war, the War Cabinet considered it important to seek advice on both the political and military considerations from Britain before approaching the NEI authorities on the matter. Meanwhile, the War Cabinet approved the despatch of materials to Ambon and Kupang ahead of time. To avoid provoking any misunderstanding between Dutch and Japanese authorities the War Cabinet decided the goods shipped to the Islands should be labelled with Dutch markings.<sup>42</sup>

The War Cabinet also learned from the Chiefs of Staff report that despite asking Far East Command to coordinate a naval plan for the Far East this had not happened.<sup>43</sup> The War Cabinet viewed this failure in planning as a substantial setback in organising a coordinated defence plan for the Far East and the Southwest Pacific theatres generally and Australia in particular. Menzies was in England at time when he also discovered

---

<sup>41</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 909, 22 March 1941.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

that no coordinated naval plans had been arranged by Far East Command and he cabled the Australian war cabinet from London on 12 March to express his concern.

Menzies wrote that the discussions he had held with the British Admiralty regarding a co-ordinated naval plan for the Far East were troubling:

It was stressed to me that such a step would not be practicable until after the lapse of a considerable period, and might not be possible even then. It was urged that it was imperative to resolve a general declaration of this nature into a plan of specific measures that really would be possible in event of such a contingency arising. There are large forces in the Middle East, including three Australian divisions, and they could not just be left to their fate. To withdraw them, however, would take time, shipping would have to be provided, convoys organised, and naval protection afforded in the meantime. Much could happen in the Far East during that period, and it was unwise to delude ourselves regarding the immediate dispatch of a fleet of capital ships to Singapore if such reinforcement was impossible. It was far better to face the facts by preparing a definite plan of naval reinforcement east of the Suez on a progressive basis according to the probable outcome of events in the Mediterranean. I have asked that this be done.<sup>44</sup>

This cable demonstrates that Menzies' confidence in Britain's determination to defend Singapore and by implication Australia had been shaken.

He informed his cabinet that 'in general reference to reinforcing our position in the Far East with capital ships we have only been deluding ourselves'.<sup>45</sup> He maintained this concern notwithstanding Churchill's earlier assurance that 'It always being understood that if Australia is seriously threatened by invasion [not just subjected to raids] we should not hesitate to compromise or sacrifice the Mediterranean position for the sake of our kith and kin'.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Minute 909, 22 March 1941; Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, Cable, Note of Conversations at U.K. Admiralty, 8 March 1941, Vol. IV, No. 343.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Cable, Note of Conversations at U.K. Admiralty, 8 March 1941, Vol. IV, No. 236; Cable, Churchill to Menzies, 23 December 1940, Vol. V, No. 236.

At an Admiralty meeting in London the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Phillips, further dispelled Menzies' confidence in Britain's commitment to Singapore when he stated that:

We should not go to war with Japan over their occupation of any part of Netherlands East Indies-this would only add to the number of our enemies, and if Germany could first be defeated we could turn to Japan later and deal with her. [As far as he was concerned] [h]e would bluff up to the point of telling Japan that if she went into the Netherlands East Indies we would fight ... if we had adequate air strength in the Far East Japan would not attempt such an operation.<sup>47</sup>

The fact remained, however, that Far East Command did not have an adequate air force in the Far East large enough to deter Japan. Arguably, Philips was voicing Britain's higher policy of which Churchill wrote following the War: 'I would not tolerate the idea of abandoning the struggle for Egypt, and was resigned to pay whatever forfeits were exacted in Malaya. This view was shared by my colleagues'.<sup>48</sup>

Menzies nevertheless remained determined in his outlook and responded to Phillips that the political implications of not aiding the NEI against Japanese occupation were a powerful threat to Australia's security as well as to that of Singapore. He explained that if Japan invaded the NEI 'Australian public opinion would undoubtedly insist on military action to eject her' to prevent attacks on Northern Australia. He also made it clear that the Australian Chiefs of Staff had based Australia's local defence on the hypothesis that Singapore, protected by the British Navy, would remain a powerful deterrent to Japan.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Churchill, W., *The Grand Alliance*, vol. III, (London: Cassell & Co, 1950) p. 379.

As it was there were no substantial naval forces or aircraft destined for the Far East in the near future. Without a naval force or adequate numbers of aircraft, Menzies was justified in pointing out that Far East Command needed a 'definite plan' for naval and air force reinforcements at Singapore to deter Japan from encroaching on the Far East region. To these ends, he vainly made his case to the Admiralty to increase aircraft shipments to the Far East and to create an adequate naval plan for reinforcing both Singapore and Australia.<sup>49</sup>

In support of Menzies' concerns the Australian War Cabinet immediately asked British authorities to convene a meeting of Naval Commanders-in-Chief to address the alarming gap in the overall Far East strategic defence plan. Even though the War Cabinet was reluctant to keep Australia's naval forces in the Mediterranean, they nevertheless remained committed to the agreements made at the Singapore conference. Australian ships would remain in the Mediterranean depending on unfolding events in the Middle East and the Far East.<sup>50</sup>

The meeting agreed, however, that this would remain policy only on the proviso that the British Government considered the possibility of providing alternative naval assistance for the defence of the sea-lanes in Far East waters. In reaching this decision the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff were aware that Australia was depriving itself of naval protection and that extricating their ships from the Mediterranean in the future would be problematic. In addressing this problem the War Cabinet instructed the Chiefs of Staff

---

<sup>49</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, Cable, Note of Conversations at U.K. Admiralty, 8 March 1941, Vol. IV, No. 343.

<sup>50</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 909, 22 March 1941.



to report to Far East Command on the particular importance of defending the strategic port of Darwin and its forward operations bases to the north with adequate naval forces.

They believed the success of these measures would be crucial to Australia's defence in the Darwin-Ambon-Timor area even though Ambon and Timor were outside Australia's naval operational control. This was especially the case, as the War Cabinet knew that the Dutch had already made plans to withdraw its ships from the eastern archipelago of the NEI if war came to Malaya. The War Cabinet felt 'great concern at the failure of the conference to draw up such a plan', where it had such a direct bearing in the organisation of Far Eastern defence.<sup>51</sup> The War Cabinet had decided that without the means to concentrate adequate Australian army, air and naval forces in the Darwin-Ambon-Timor area of operations, the defence plans for Australia's northern areas of responsibility would be difficult to sustain.

The problem lay in the reality that Far East Command, the NEI and Australia all lacked the economic and military resources to stand alone, or even combined as the case transpired, in a war with Japan. Far East defence weakness had been exacerbated by the ranking of the British Isles, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean ahead of the Far East in the supply of troops, aircraft, munitions and naval resources. Unfortunately for the Far East region, Britain was being prudent in not dissipating its forces to the point where their theatres of war would become 'weak everywhere'.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, Cable, Memorandum for U.K. War Cabinet by U.K. Chiefs of Staff Committee, Vol. IV, No. 400.

The policy of Far East Command aimed to encourage Australia in gaining Dutch support for a combined air defence scheme to protect Malaya without necessarily committing itself to the defence of the NEI. The difficulty for Australia was its insecure dependence on a weakened 'Fortress Singapore' when that policy affected Australia's own strategic interests. Australia had linked its strategic defence policy to British strategy in the Far East through long standing mutual Imperial cooperation defence principles established as far back as 1926 and the combined air defence scheme now became the most compelling policy for Australia to follow in the absence of a substantive naval fleet at Singapore.

Notwithstanding the Singapore agreements, the British remained unwilling to ratify the Anglo-Dutch-Australia unified defence pact for fear of being forced to reciprocate with the Dutch if the Japanese attacked the NEI exclusively. Under such circumstances, the British Chiefs of Staff feared the Japanese navy would attack its British shipping lanes. Their main hope was in gaining support from the Americans before committing themselves to defending the NEI and weakening their own defences.<sup>53</sup>

The British Government was, however, later forced to reconsider its position after the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs, M Van Kleffens, made a radio broadcast on 6 May 1941 stating that the NEI would support Far East Command if Japan attacked Malaya and Singapore and that he would welcome a corresponding assurance from the British Government. In making the broadcast Van Kleffens proved to the allies that the Dutch were not only committed to resisting Japanese aggression in the NEI but that they

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Cable, Lord Cranborne to W. Fadden, 22 May 1941, Vol. IV, No. 464.

were committed to defending Malaya and Singapore also, leaving no doubt about their intentions of standing in solidarity with the British in the Far East. In effect, Van Kleffens' broadcast forced the British to reify their grand strategy policy of unified defence in the Far East.

Deliberating on Van Kleffens' broadcast the British Defence Committee of Cabinet finally accepted that they would have to commit in ratifying the agreement with the NEI. The committee decided that 'our alliance with the Netherlands and the necessity of safeguarding our own communications would leave us with no choice but to make common cause with the Netherlands East Indies'.<sup>54</sup> They came to the conclusion that Britain needed to reassure the Dutch in case they changed their minds about committing to the combined air scheme in support of Brook-Popham's unifying plan, which they knew hinged on NEI support and the aircraft they could supply.

The defence committee also believed that a resolute united stance by Far East Command and the NEI against Japanese aggression would be a strong inducement for the USA to take corresponding action in the Far East.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, rather than making a public declaration in support of the NEI, the British Defence Committee of Cabinet decided to privately reassure the Dutch government-in-exile that an attack on one would be accepted as an attack on all, as was initially agreed to at the February Singapore conference.<sup>56</sup> The Van Kleffens affair effectively demonstrated that the object of British policy in the Far East was two fold; to bind the Dutch into committing to a unified

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 1137, 1 June 1941.

combined air scheme for Malaya and the NEI; and, to induce the Americans to support the Far East by way of demonstrating a united NEI/British resolve to fight against Japanese aggression.

Lord Cranbourne cabled a full account of the Van Kleffens declaration to acting Prime Minister, AW Fadden. Cranbourne's cable explained in detail that the NEI had steadfastly resolved to ally itself with the British Commonwealth in resisting Japanese aggression and that as a result Britain was preparing to reciprocate. He relayed his hope to Fadden that this would now induce the USA to take corresponding action. On 10 June 1941, the War Cabinet concurred with Cranbourne's cable, in the presence of the three services Chiefs of Staff, and discussed the release of a private assurance to the NEI 'that a line running from Singapore via the Netherlands East Indies to Australia must be treated as one unit, and that an attack from outside on any point situated on this line must be considered and dealt with as an attack on all affected parties alike'.<sup>57</sup> In the context of the Cranbourne cable it is clear that the British government, the Australian government and the three Chiefs of Staff that the NEI authorities were determined to fight alongside the British dominions against any encroachment of Japanese aggression in their delineated theatres of operations in the Far East.

The object of the Singapore conference policy had now achieved its ends in uniting Allied British Commonwealth and NEI policy in the Far East. The object of the Australian government's policy in supporting the Ambon strategy had also achieved its ends in helping to convince the NEI to ally itself with Far East Command against

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Meetings 9 May 1941 to 18 Jul 1941. Minute No.s 1027 to 1227, p. 828.

Japanese aggression in the Far East. This turning point should have prompted the War Cabinet to review its grand strategy commitments to Timor and Ambon as the political object of gaining NEI support had met its ends. A new policy was now required to sustain the object of grand strategy where it related to sending troops to Ambon. Without a political object the Ambon strategy would default back to pre-Clausewitzian Prussian doctrine where positional line warfare and the taking or holding territory, rather than defeating the enemy's forces to achieve a political end, was the norm.<sup>58</sup>

Clausewitz believed war was 'not an independent phenomenon, but the continuation of politics by other means'. He determined that grand strategy is principally political in nature and that the use of military force is only one of several options utilised in resolving conflict between states; the military objective is thereby derived from the political purpose and the achievable means available to accomplish it where all other means have failed.

In the realm of Realpolitik, war cannot be considered to exist in isolation from its political object and pure military strategy cannot exist in separation from the political object of policy, for without policy war would serve no ends other than to justify the absurdity of fighting war for its own sake; war without ends.<sup>59</sup> Without a renewed policy, a purely military strategy involving the garrisoning of troops at Ambon now existed. For these reasons the Timor and Ambon strategies required a reappraisal of the policy objectives to justify the garrisoning of the Islands and a policy statement indicating its

---

<sup>58</sup> Paret, P., *Understanding War: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 126-27.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

political ends. Notwithstanding these crucial principles of policy development, the Australian authorities continued in their resolve to support the NEI at Ambon.

In March 1941, the Australian Chiefs of Staff began making plans to move supplies and troops to the forward operations bases at Ambon and Kupang. Australian AHQ in Melbourne produced AHQ Operational Instruction No. 15 for the defence of the Darwin-Ambon-Timor area. Operational Instruction No. 15 was intended to give Brigadier Edmund Lind responsibility for dispersing the battalions under his command to the Islands.<sup>60</sup> AHQ had earmarked a copy of the instructions for Lind as commander 2/23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade at Winnellie, but he claims it never arrived.<sup>61</sup>

Lind, however, did receive orders from AHQ to detach the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Bn from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to form Lark Force and send it to Rabaul during March and April 1941. The remaining 2/21<sup>st</sup> and 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn.s were converted to a forward operations reserve at Darwin while awaiting embarkation for Ambon and Kupang. According to Operational Instruction No. 15, the objectives of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's two remaining battalions were to strengthen the existing Dutch garrisons in the static defense of the airfields at both Ambon and Timor. Subject to these arrangements, brigade headquarters was to remain in control of the administration of the two battalions. Under these orders the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn. was to become known as 'Gull Force' and the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn. as 'Sparrow Force'.

---

<sup>60</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Operations:], Army Headquarters Operation Instruction No 15, (Advanced Copy) and Raising of Units 1941-1942 "Gull and Sparrow" Forces, AWM54, 571/4/46, 1941-1942, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon & Timor: A.H.Q. Operation Instruction No.15, MP729/7, 37/421/373, 1941-1941, p. 44.

Despite having to cooperate with the Dutch commander at Ambon on all operation matters, AHQ directed Gull Force HQ to retain control of all Australian troops when they arrived at Ambon. The Dutch were to remain in general command of the military and administrative responsibilities for the Island. All operational command of local defences and air operations on Ambon also remained under Dutch headquarters control, but it later came to include both the Dutch naval and army commands acting in cooperation with Gull Force and RAAF commands.<sup>62</sup>

AHQ based Operational Instruction No. 15 on a report written by the 8<sup>th</sup> Division's senior engineer, Lt-Col ECB Scriven RAE, following his visit to Ambon during March 1941. From a tactical point of view Scriven found Ambon a difficult place to defend. He described Ambon as a small rough island surrounded by littoral approaches unsuitable to amphibious landings where the coast rose up directly into steep jungle clad mountains making it difficult for anything other than small military patrols to approach. He also found that Ambon's food production amounted to limited pig and chicken production, fishing, the harvesting of tropical fruits and vegetables. Considering this finding Scriven decided that, apart from tropical fruit, fish, sago and rice, Gull Force would need to import all of their food supplies from Australia.

Scriven also reported that although water supplies were plentiful on the Island it required chlorination, as he had found that the local population tended to contaminate the streams. In addition, apart from a slipway for ships of less than two hundred tons there was little industry at Ambon town and the surrounding villages, although a

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

privately operated 600 kW powerhouse supplied electricity to the town. The port facilities were found serviceable and amounted to a concrete wharf with 29 feet of water at low tide, a timber wharf with 20 feet of water at low tide and a boat jetty with 13 feet of water at low tide.<sup>63</sup>

Scriven reckoned that the main strategic points on Ambon for the Dutch were the airfield at Laha, the seaplane base at Halong, the oil holding facilities, the towns of Ambon and Paso, the landing beaches at Hitulama, Hutumuri, Paso, Batugong and Latuhalat as well as the approaches to Ambon from these potential landings sites across the mountain pathways. Nevertheless, he believed that defending these points would be difficult owing to the lack of space for manoeuvring troops. He concluded that the Laitimor Peninsular was the most exposed part of Ambon to attack, because as he put it, 'the loss of the first line of resistance will bring the enemy perilously close to the proposed narrowly defended bases that lay between the towns of Amboina [Ambon] and Paso'.<sup>64</sup>

To address the restrictive spatial issues on the Island, Scriven recommended siting a reserve company of motorised troops armed with Tommy guns near Ambon town. Their task would be to move rapidly against any points of unexpected attack. He believed that the Australian mobile reserve company should also support the KNIL Indonesian infantry units in defending Paso as well as the various fortified positions located in the

---

<sup>63</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Ambon and Timor. Proposed Dispatch of Troops to Netherlands East Indies, Tentative Draft of Probable Requirements for the Establishment of Advanced Bases at Koepang and Ambon, April - May 1941, AWM54, 573/6/5, 1941-1941, pp. 1, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Allied Geographical Section. Southwest Pacific Area, "Area Study of Ambon Island", ([S.l.]: 1943) p. 1.



mountains. However, he recommended against sending Bren carriers to Ambon because he thought they were useless when bound to narrow coastal roads that ran exclusively along the fringes of the Island.<sup>65</sup>

Scriven also reported that the Laha Airfield and the Halong seaplane base were of the highest in tactical importance to Gull Force, notwithstanding the thirty-three kilometres of poor quality track separating the two locations. To defend both locations Scriven advised AHQ that Gull Force would need to either split as a group and risk isolating its units or construct a new roadway between Paso and Laha to maintain rapid vehicle movement. He also recommended sending two Australian battalions to Ambon; two companies including a section of headquarters company, one troop of Howitzers and one section from a field company for Laha; and, one battalion, one battalion less two companies, two troops of mountain guns or Howitzers, one field company (less two sections) and all ancillary units joined with other infantry units supplied by the KNIL at Halong.<sup>66</sup>

Scriven's report demonstrated that Ambon was difficult to defend. This fact was exacerbated by the Dutch decision to prohibit Australian troops going to the Island until after Japan attacked the NEI. This imposition left Australian unit and sub-unit commanders little hope of gaining access to the defences on Ambon between war breaking out and their later arrival on the Island. To overcome this problem Scriven

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Ambon and Timor. Proposed Dispatch of Troops to Netherlands East Indies, Tentative Draft of Probable Requirements for the Establishment of Advanced Bases at Koepang and Ambon, April - May 1941, AWM54, 573/6/5, p. 2.

advised AHQ to ask the Dutch for permission to send Gull Force commanders to Ambon so that they could study the defences on the Island for themselves.

Scriven's final recommendations were that a GSO from Melbourne should visit both Ambon and Timor to acquaint himself, and through him other headquarters operational planners at AHQ, with a firsthand assessment of the defence problems existing on the Islands. To increase Gull Force's capabilities Scriven further recommended that AHQ recall the 8<sup>th</sup> Division's stocks of mountain guns from Malaya to provide extra firepower for Ambon.<sup>67</sup>

Despite these recommendations Sturdee dismissed Scriven's report where he advised sending a GSO from AHQ to do of their own reconnaissance and providing two battalions and mountain artillery or Howitzers to Ambon. AHQ Operational Instruction No. 15 formed Gull Force from the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn with one section from the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Field Engineers, C Troop of the Australian Antitank Battery, a detachment from the 2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, the 104<sup>th</sup> Light Aid Detachment, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Dental Unit, a detachment of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade signals section, a detachment each from the Intelligence Corps, the Australian Army Canteen Service (AACS) and the Australian Army Catering Corps (AACC), which included detachments of motor transport. An officer and three sergeants would makeup an advance maintenance party for securing the arrival of stores and munitions from Australia. Considering these arrangements, Gull Force came to 1,038 men plus trucks and equipment, which amounted to half of what Scriven had recommended.

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

AHQ Operational Instruction No. 15 also prepared Sparrow Force along similar lines to that of Gull Force albeit drawing on the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn plus detachments from disparate sub-units and where AHQ expected Sparrow Force to gain an independent (commando) company as well as two 6-inch guns for Kupang when they became available. In addition, both Gull and Sparrow Forces would receive twenty-six 1.5 tonne trucks, twenty-six light machine guns (LMGs) and fourteen anti-aircraft light machine guns (AALMG), four 3-inch mortars and ten medium machine guns (MMG) instead of armoured Bren carriers. These preparations concerned Lind, however, especially where the omission of the artillery, Bren carriers and the loss of one battalion group were concerned, but he refrained from commenting until after May 1941 when he, Roach and Youl visited Ambon and Kupang to assess the military situation on the Islands for themselves.

Lind was a medical doctor who turned soldier and had gained his military experience during and after World War I. He served as a Captain in the Medical Corps at Gallipoli and in France at Armentières, Messines, Broodseinde, Passchendaele, Hamel and the Hindenburg Outpost Line. He enlisted as a Captain in 1914 and returned to Australia after the War as a temporary Lt-Col with a DSO and two mentions in dispatches. He commanded the Melbourne University Rifles from 1921 to 1926 and later became a staff officer with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division HQ Australian Military Forces (AMF militia). He also commanded the 29<sup>th</sup>, the 29/22<sup>nd</sup> Bns and, after gaining the rank of brigadier, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. In July 1940, Lind took command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division's 2/23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade,

which consisted of the 2/21<sup>st</sup>, 2/22<sup>nd</sup> and the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bns operating under the respective commands of Lt-Cols Roach, Carr and Youl and eventually Leggatt.<sup>68</sup>

Roach was also a veteran of World War I. He enlisted in the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn 1<sup>st</sup> AIF as a private soldier in August 1914 and served in both Gallipoli and France. Rising through the ranks, he received a commission as a Lieutenant in December 1916. From 1918 to 1921, he took a commission in the Indian Army and served in Persia and Afghanistan until he was forced to retire on medical grounds. On returning to Australia, he enlisted in the AMF's 5<sup>th</sup> Bn for three months and then transferred to staff duties with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's HQ. He served in various AMF units until 1934 when he rose to the rank of Major and became Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster and then GSO Grade 2 with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division HQ. During 1939, he was commanding an AMF Battalion when he enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF to become a temporary Lt-Col in command of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn.<sup>69</sup>

Youl was the son of the prominent Tasmanian pastoralist and politician, Alfred Youl. As a young man, he had gone to Britain to join the British India Office. When war broke out in 1914, he enlisted in the British Army and became a Major in the Royal Field Artillery. Fighting in France, he received the Military Cross and the Belgian Croix De Guerre. On returning to Australia, Youl remained on the reserve officers list until October 1936 when he joined the Tasmanian 12<sup>th</sup> and later the 12/50<sup>th</sup> AMF Bns. Between 1937 and 1940, Youl commanded the 12/50<sup>th</sup> Bn where he rose to the rank of Lt-Col. In July 1940, he enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF and took command of the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn,

---

<sup>68</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Online: National Centre of Biography, <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100099b.htm>, Edmund Frank Lind, [cited 12 December 2007]).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Leonard Nairn Roach, ([cited 12 December 2007]).

which he formed, trained and later led to the Northern Territory in March 1941.<sup>70</sup> After visiting Ambon and Timor each of these officers came home with significant concerns about the capacity for their under-equipped forces to operate successfully on the Islands.

On 19 May, Lind, his 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Major Sheehan, Roach, Youl and a RAAF reconnaissance party left Darwin aboard a Hudson aircraft to examine the defences at both Ambon and Kupang. Youl deplaned at Kupang while Lind's party continued to Ambon. After examining the respective reports, Lind confirmed that the forces projected for both islands did not have the balance of arms needed to defend Ambon or Kupang and that the only communication lines open between the Islands and Australia during the early stages of a war would be dependent on RAAF aircraft stationed permanently at Darwin.<sup>71</sup>

Like Scriven, Lind found that stores, barracks equipment and medical supplies were unavailable on the Islands and that all provisions and equipment would need to be shipped from Australia.<sup>72</sup> This meant that when war broke out it would be unrealistic to expect new supplies to come safely by ship to the Islands from Darwin. The bulk of the RAN was still serving in the Middle East and had a limited naval capability at Darwin for escorting supply ships to the Islands. The RAAF was also ruled out because it could

---

<sup>70</sup> Henning, *Doomed Battalion* p. 7; Australian War Memorial, *Australian Military Units and Commanders* ([cited 12 December 2007]); available from <http://www.awm.gov.au/units/ww2.asp>, Geoffrey Arthur Douglas Youl.

<sup>71</sup> National Archives of Australia, 2nd Australian Imperial Force and Commonwealth Military Forces Unit Diaries, 1939-1945 War, AWM52, 8/2/23, 1941.

<sup>72</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Gull and Sparrow Force Outline Plans of Commanders for Defence of Ambon and Timor - Reconnaissance Reports, Including Reports on Combined H.Q. Koepang and Ambon, 1941, AWM54, 573/6/4, 1941 -1941, pp. 2-6.

not then maintain supply shipments to Ambon or Kupang by air in peacetime let alone in war.

To overcome these difficulties and to enhance efficiency in making war preparations on the Islands, Lind asked AHQ to attach an Australian army liaison officer to KNIL headquarters at Bandung. His only existing connection with Dutch headquarters in Bandung was through a RAAF liaison officer whom, from Lind's perspective, remained focussed more on advancing air force preparations on the Islands ahead of the requirements of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. Lind suggested that an army liaison officer stationed at Bandung could serve the interests of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade more efficiently by speeding up preparations for his troops to arrive on the Islands.

While on sick leave in Melbourne during July 1941, Lind made 'strong personal representations' to Sturdee and to express his growing concerns regarding the efficacy of defending Ambon and Kupang with the limited tasks forces now allocated to the Islands. Lind explained to Sturdee that the forces projected for Ambon and Kupang were inadequate in both numbers and armaments, but much to Lind's chagrin Sturdee disregarded those concerns.<sup>73</sup>

Henning, the author of *Doomed Battalion*, believed the cause of Sturdee's lack of interest in Lind's concerns was that:

---

<sup>73</sup> National Archives of Australia, Australian War Memorial, 2nd Australian Imperial Force and Commonwealth Military Forces Unit War Diaries, 1939-45 War, 23rd Brigade, AWM52, 8/2/23, May-June 1942.

The Australian senior military leaders had already concluded that the isolated battalion on Rabaul, and the two earmarked for Ambon and Timor, would be attacked by overwhelming enemy forces and that the requests of Lind were of little practical importance.<sup>74</sup>

Sturdee's own words support Henning's conclusion. On 8 February 1955, Sturdee wrote to Official Historian Gavin Long explaining that:

With regard to the establishment of what you call the Chiefs of Staffs Forward Observation Line, you will realise that it was most important that we should have the earliest warning of the approach of the Japanese Forces, and for this purpose air forces had to be as far north as possible ... with great reluctance I agreed to send a battalion group to each of Rabaul, Timorn [sic] and Ambon ... This decision was made fairly early in 1941. I realised at the time that these forces would be swallowed up if the Japs made a determined attack in force, but these garrison[s] were the smallest self contained units then in existence ... at no time did I consider that addition[al] troops and arms should be sent to these potentially beleaguered [sic] garrisons, as it would only put more [of our resources] in the [Japanese] bag.<sup>75</sup>

This revelation raises the question of why, should the forces would be swallowed up if the Japanese made a determined attack, did he send the tasks forces to the Islands to be overwhelmed when that course of action was wasteful and avoidable?

This question is important where Sturdee's responsibility in applying the most profitable means to the interest of higher war policy with the forces allotted to him in the Australian theatre of operations became paramount to his role in developing military strategy towards the Islands. His plan to send inadequate units consisting of 1180 men against a probable overwhelming Japanese force consisting of at least one division, while preserving what remained of Australia's fighting forces, is contrary to the obtainable or the profitable use of the means to fight war and waxes in contravention of established standards of political and military strategy.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Henning, *Doomed Battalion*, p. 36.

<sup>75</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, 1953-1956*, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Liddell Hart, B. H., *The Classic Book on Military Strategy*, 2nd ed., (London: Meridian, 1991), p. 320.

Despite telling Long that he harboured 'great concern' about the strategy for Ambon from early 1941 onward, he did not inform the War Cabinet of that concern when it mattered most. His obligation to the War Cabinet and higher strategy was to inform the cabinet when the expenditure of forces allotted to him were inadequate to the task indicated or indeed redundant. Under normal conventions he had the responsibility of explaining those issues to his masters, and if his opinion were overruled, the option of refusing duty or resigning; he did not exercise any of these options.

If Sturdee's lack of disclosure invites criticism here, so does the War Cabinet where it failed to readdress the object of policy towards garrisoning the Islands. The War Cabinet held responsibility for formulating achievable policy and the right to intervene in military strategy to ensure that its commanders conformed to the policy tasks allotted to them. It was their responsibility to Sturdee to adapt grand strategy to the changing circumstances and probable outcomes of war and clearly indicate any new directions in that policy. On the other hand, if the War Cabinet believed that Sturdee was acting independent of that policy in contravention to those guidelines it had the power to correct him or remove him from command.<sup>77</sup> This was important when in May 1941 the Dutch broadcast that they were committed to fighting in common cause with the British Commonwealth against Japanese aggression in the Far East, which was the initial political object of garrisoning Ambon. This event should have prompted the War Cabinet to review its policy objectives where that policy had achieved its logical ends.

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 320.



This trigger had occurred when Van Kleffens broadcast the NEI's intention to fight and after Cranbourne asked the Australian government to unite its policy with Britain in supporting the NEI to those ends, but somehow this turning point seems to have escaped the attention of the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff. Considering these events it seems the link between policy and its instrument had parted company where Sturdee had failed to fully inform his political masters of the great concern he had regarding the profitability of the Ambon policy and where the War Cabinet had failed to review its policy towards Ambon when that was required.

Sturdee's claim to Long that the long-standing establishment of an air force early warning system in the Islands was policy in early 1941 was also misleading. Until late May 1941 Australian war policy remained geared to inducing the Dutch to join Brooke-Popham's Unified Strategic Command in the Far East theatre as decided at the February Singapore conference. Under the Singapore conference policy the Australian War Cabinet retained the right to unilaterally form high strategic policy in its theatre of operations, which included Ambon, and could withdraw or withhold forces from that commitment at any time subject only to informing Far East Command before taking such action.<sup>78</sup> In this context, Australia was never inextricably bound to a determined policy of forward observation at Ambon. Strategy for Ambon at this point became one of position and line fighting independent of political objectives. There was no longer a logical strategic or political object in sending Gull Force to Ambon other than to occupy and hold. On this point Sturdee's ineptitude is more to blame than that of the War Cabinet, which was operating without the CGS's full disclosure regarding his concerns

---

<sup>78</sup> National Archives of Australia, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, p. 4.

over the unprofitability of sending troops to Ambon and the likely outcome of overwhelming forces attacking the Island.

Position and line fighting in isolation of policy here was contrary to Clausewitz's principle that defined military strategy as 'the employment of the battle to gain the end of the War; it must therefore give an aim to the whole military action, which must be in accordance with the political object of War'.<sup>79</sup> That is, under a democratic system, the military must direct its strategy in agreement with the political aims of policy to which it must remain subordinate, otherwise position and line fighting alone exists in its purest form; that is means without ends. This suggests that under a democratic system, where the functions of political leaders and the generals do not reside in the same person, position and line fighting serves no purpose whatsoever.

Sturdee had realised at the beginning of 1941 that the forces he was sending to Rabaul, Timor and Ambon would be swallowed up if the Japanese attacked with determined force. He compensated by deciding to send one battalion group each to the Islands and limit the losses, albeit without fully informing the War Cabinet of that decision or its associated implications until he was questioned on the matter by the War Cabinet. If Sturdee's reasoning was based on Clausewitz's conception that:

---

<sup>79</sup> von Clausewitz, C., *On War*, trans. Colonel JJ Graham, (London: N Trubner, 1873), p. 87.

One country may support another's cause, but will never take it so seriously as it takes its own. A moderately-sized force will be sent to its help; but if things go wrong the operation is pretty well written off, and one tries to withdraw at the smallest possible cost ... the auxiliary force usually operates under its own commander; he is dependent only on his own government, and the objective the latter sets him will be as ambiguous as its aims ...<sup>80</sup>

he had misconceived Clausewitz's intentions.

This concept rests under Clausewitz's chapter heading *The Effect of the Political Aim on the Military Objective*, which argues that the agreement to provide mutual support for another state in this way is a matter for high politics between those states alone. By not informing the War Cabinet of his concerns about the inadequacy of the forces he was sending to the Islands and his policy to limit those losses in the Islands, Sturdee was acting independent of policy and in contravention to normalised democratic principles, where governments determine the aims of policy and where the military serves in achieving those political ends.

A better strategy, perhaps, would have been one of limited aims achieved by withdrawing closer to Australia and concentrating forces in preparation for the decisive moment and then counter attacking in force. According to Clausewitz, without possessing superior forces or an inclination to take serious risks, limited aims fall into two categories; seizing enemy territory (offensive warfare); and, waiting for more favourable conditions to arise (defensive warfare). Clausewitz believed that where the political initiative lies with the smaller power the offensive should be taken, although, 'if the smaller state is quite certain its enemy will attack, it can and should stand on the defensive' as waiting accrues no disadvantage to the defender.<sup>81</sup> Under the above

---

<sup>80</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 726-27.

conditions the enemy is required to extend themselves and consequently become weaker or poorer. As it happened, when Rabaul, Timor and Ambon fell into Japanese hands during early 1942 this is what took place, as Australia was forced to adopt defensive warfare principles as described above by Clausewitz anyway.

Sturdee's approach to limiting losses in defence of the Islands by dissipating the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in the face of overwhelming odds runs counter to Clausewitz's principles. The object of defensive war is aimed at frustrating the enemies plans, undermining their will to fight and exploiting any weaknesses in their military and political objectives while concentrating and preserving your own forces and political ends in anticipation of a decisive moment followed by offensive action.<sup>82</sup> Clausewitz believed here that defence was stronger than offence where it was better to wait and hope that conditions might become more favourable while preparing for battle.

In light of the achievement of the Singapore conference policy to induce the Dutch to fight, the apparent failure of the War Cabinet to review its policy once this was achieved, and the disconnect between the War Cabinet and Sturdee when he formed an independent policy to provide smaller task forces to the Islands without gaining War Cabinet's fully informed approval, it seems clear that the War Cabinet's processes in formulating grand strategy were made dysfunctional. Sturdee's instinctive reluctance to send his troops against probable defeat and his adjustments to reduce the losses was probably correct, but his failure to openly disclose what he was doing and his failure to involve the War Cabinet in those decisions was ill-considered where he could have been

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-13.

conserving those forces. Under these conditions, it seems clear why Sturdee could not or would not explain to Lind the limitations he had imposed on the Gull and Sparrow forces.

Around the same time Sturdee and Lind were working through the concerns of inadequate defence for the Islands, Germany launched an all-out assault against Russia on 22 June 1941. Germany's attack gave Japan the opportunity to reconsider its policies on China as well as its ambitions in the Far East. The German attack forced the Soviet Union to move between 18 and 20 of its Siberian divisions to the West to face the German offensive and save Moscow. This had the effect of lessening Japan's anxiety over Russian intervention in Manchuria and allowed Japanese authorities to accelerate long held plans of moving troops into Indochina and other Southeast Asian countries.

Japan's Minister of War, Tojo, believed that this opportunity needed to be exploited before the end of 1941 or else the option for a Greater East Asia CO-Prosperity Sphere would have to be abandoned. Foreign Minister Matsuoka and the President of the Privy Council, Hara, both disagreed and favoured attacking north to exploit the German-Soviet situation. They thought that if Japan took the southern option it could provoke war with America and Britain. These ministers tried to persuade the Japanese Cabinet to strike north while the Russians remained preoccupied in the West. Nevertheless, emperor Hirohito chose the southern option and set aside war in northern China pending the effects of the German-Soviet situation.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ike, N., ed., *Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), pp. 56, 77-90.

Within a week of the Japanese Imperial conference decision, American authorities intercepted secret transmissions that disclosed Japanese intentions of moving into Southern Indochina. On 9 July, RG Casey, Australia's Minister to the United States, notified Menzies that the Japanese were pressing Germany to compel the Vichy French government to allow Japanese troops to occupy naval and air bases in southern Indochina. Sumner Welles, the American Under Secretary of State, told Casey secret information had suggested that, 'the known concentration of Japanese forces make it evident that the Japanese have decided on a southward expedition [into Indochina] probably in the next fortnight', with, or without Germany's agreement to pressure the Vichy French.<sup>84</sup>

As a result the Australian War Cabinet invited their chiefs of the naval and air staffs, as well as the DCGS, Sydney Rowell, to outline their views on precautions that the Government should consider. Regarding Ambon and Kupang, Rowell explained that although war equipment was already arriving on the Islands it was proving difficult to find ships to transport the task forces to their allocated destinations. Burnett also expressed his concerns about delays in sending RAAF advance parties to Ambon and Kupang. The War Cabinet decided to notify the British Government that Australian troops were ready for dispatch to the Islands. In the meantime, the War Cabinet asked Admiral Colvin to get hold of the Dutch troopships that Berenschot had offered for transporting Gull and Sparrow Forces to Ambon and Kupang.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, Cable, Casey to Menzies, 9 July 1941, Vol. V, No. 507.

<sup>85</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 1176, 10 July 1941.

That day Menzies cabled Caldecote's replacement, Viscount Cranborne, asking whether Britain could persuade the Netherlands government-in-exile to allow the transfer of AIF troops, or at the least some advance parties in uniform, to the Islands immediately after Japan moved into Indochina. He used this opportunity to remind Cranborne of Britain's assurance that they would return RAN ships to Australian waters 'on, or shortly after, the outbreak of war with Japan'.<sup>86</sup>

Cranborne's response came on 7 August:

We have not so far taken any action to approach the Netherlands Government further in this matter since we had felt that it would be useless to approach them with a specific proposal on the question of reinforcement of Ambon and Koepang unless we were in a position to deal with a counter request from the Dutch which they would no doubt make for some assurance of support in the event of their territory in the Far East being attacked.<sup>87</sup>

Menzies received further advice from Cranborne on 14 June regarding the delay in sending Australian troops to Ambon and Kupang. Cranborne wrote:

Further consideration has been given to question whether move of Australian forces to Koepang and Ambon could take place prior to outbreak of hostilities with Japan. Apart from whether Netherlands Government would agree in the absence of definite assurance of British support in the event of Japanese attack on the Netherlands East Indies, such a move would be regarded in Japan as a challenge in present circumstances. As immediate measure therefore it is undesirable. We do not necessarily go so far, however, as to preclude it until hostilities break out. A change in the general situation might conceivably occur before this, which would provide necessary opening without present objections. In the meantime we fully agree that all preparations for reception of Australian forces should be made unobtrusively in advance with the Netherlands authorities.<sup>88</sup>

With this advice, the Australian government could do little other than agree to this policy, because Britain feared overextending its commitments to the NEI.

---

<sup>86</sup> DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, Cable, Menzies to Cranborne, 10 July 1941, Vol. V, No. 430.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4n.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Cable, Cranborne to Menzies, 14 June 1941, Vol. IV, No. 504.

This arrangement proved problematic for the Australian authorities. The Australian Naval Office was drafting a report at the time relating to requirements for the establishment of advanced bases at Ambon and Kupang. Commander Salm of the Royal Netherlands Navy attended the meeting as liaison officer to organise transport ships for taking Australian supplies and troops to the Islands. The meeting concluded that there would be an unsatisfactory delay of at least three weeks in transporting troops and equipment to Ambon and Kupang on the outbreak of war.

Fearing to the potential Japanese threat of entering the war and menacing sea communications, the meeting agreed to send advance troops, vehicles and equipment when practicable. Notwithstanding the potential of upsetting Japan, the meeting decided to transfer more equipment to the Islands immediately in the company of a small contingent of technical staff whose job it was to secure the materials and to await the arrival of Gull Force.<sup>89</sup> This arrangement was later endorsed by the War Cabinet in July and maintenance parties of seven men each were sent to Ambon and Kupang with instructions to maintain the vehicles, guns, ammunition and stores already on the Islands and to receive the rest of the of supplies that were expected to arrive during August.

Because the Dutch wanted to avoid provoking Japan they were reluctant to permit AIF troops to be moved to the Islands before war began, nevertheless, this did not stop the Australian Government from maintaining pressure on Britain in the months ahead to

---

<sup>89</sup> National Archives of Australia, Advanced Bases Koepang and Ambon, MP1185/8, 2026/12/193, 1941-1941, p. 71.



have at least two parties of 100 uniformed soldiers each and two smaller groups of uniformed RAAF personnel sent to Ambon and Kupang.<sup>90</sup> In December 1941 the Dutch finally agreed to additional advance parties for the Islands, but it was left too late to act before Japan finally launched its attacks.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, in October 1941, the Labour Party took over Government and John Curtin became Prime Minister. Curtin at first continued the war policies of the Menzies government because he was a sitting member of the Advisory War Council. Curtin had led his party in the formation of a bilateral policy with the Menzies Government *vis-à-vis* the War Advisory Council and a change in government did little to affect the continuance of the original Darwin-Ambon-Timor policies. Consequently, between 6 and 12 October, Col Veale<sup>92</sup> and other officers from the 7<sup>th</sup> Military District HQ carried out another reconnaissance of Ambon and Kupang.<sup>93</sup>

After six days of reconnaissance Lind updated his views to AHQ regarding the current situation on the Islands. He informed Sturdee 'my principle impression after reading the reports is that the amount of work done since my previous recce in May last is far from

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Robertson, J. and McCarthy, J., *Australian War Strategy 1939-1945* University of Queensland Press, 1986) p. 173n.

<sup>92</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945* p. 69n. Veale replaced Scriven after he died in a motor vehicle accident at Kupang on 30 June 1941.

<sup>93</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] "Sparrow Force", Tactical Report by C.O. 2/40 Infantry Battalion 14/10/1941. Report by Major AJM Wilson O.C., 2/1 Battery on Fixed Defences, Koepang 14/10/1941. Reconnaissance Report from 6-12/10/1941, Ambon and Timor by Major Jw Fletcher B.M. 23rd Infantry Brigade - 7 M.D. Report by Colonel WCD Veale C.R.A.E. - Report by Major Williamson C.O. 2/11 Field Coy on Field Engineer Facilities and Requirements at Ambon and Timor, Report by Captain Ransom 14/10/1941 on Reconnaissance Battery Site and Fortress Engineer Problem, AWM54, 573/6/6, 1941-1941, p. 3.

satisfactory'.<sup>94</sup> Lind complained that the construction of accommodation for his troops was behind schedule at both Ambon and Kupang and strongly recommended that 'no part of our forces should be committed in either TIMOR or AMBON until the Dutch show by results that they attach as much importance to the well-being and safety of our troops as we do'.<sup>95</sup> He explained to Sturdee that Australian soldiers were in no position to speed up construction schedules at either place because the 'coolie' labour came under Dutch control.

As he had done in May, Lind again asked AHQ to reinforce Gull Force with field or mountain artillery. For Ambon, he explained 'it is dangerous to rely on having the support of Dutch artillery - it seems already to be allotted to several alternative roles which would together be beyond its capacity to fulfil'.<sup>96</sup> He added that Timor was in a worse situation than Ambon because it had no Dutch artillery at all, apart from the two 6-inch coastal guns that Australia had supplied to Kupang. Lind also argued 'that to send these forces abroad without supplying artillery when they expect to have to fight a well-equipped enemy would be grossly unfair to the troops'.<sup>97</sup>

He reiterated that AHQ should supply Bren carriers to both Gull and Sparrow forces. In justifying this request, he explained that although both islands were unsuitable for cross-country movement of vehicles, the carriers would become vital for rapid movement along roads susceptible to small arms fire. He urged AHQ to supply a full

---

<sup>94</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Gull and Sparrow Force Outline Plans of Commanders for Defence of Ambon and Timor - Reconnaissance Reports, Including Reports on Combined H.Q. Koepang and Ambon, 1941, AWM54, 573/6/4, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

complement of Bren carriers in conformity with full war equipment scales to improve the mobility of the 2/21<sup>st</sup> and 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bns and to safeguard both the troops and the airfields they were being asked to protect. He also asked AHQ to appoint a staff officer at Melbourne AHQ to liaise with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and other AHQ staff officers responsible for managing Gull and Sparrow Force operations and material requirements.

Finally, Lind asked AHQ for permission to go to Melbourne to discuss in person the issues of equipping Gull and Sparrow Forces, as he thought that the 'many questions involved cannot be satisfactorily dealt with on paper'.<sup>98</sup> It seems Lind wanted to see Sturdee in person to discuss the inadequacy of armaments for his units as well as to find AHQ's true objectives for Ambon.<sup>99</sup> Sturdee refused to agree with Lind's request. He also overlooked Lind's other recommendations in upgrading the number forces and artillery for the Gull and Sparrow Force operations.

Adding to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's concerns, Lind removed Youl from command of the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn on 7 November. Youl had taken command of the battalion in mid 1940 following a political push by the then Tasmanian premier Sir Robert Cosgrove to raise an exclusive Tasmanian 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF battalion. Following lengthy representations by Cosgrove to the federal government, the CGS informed the premier that Menzies had approved the request to raise a Tasmanian battalion.

---

<sup>98</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Administration:] Sparrow and Gull Force - Timor and Ambon, Reports and Maps on Defence - Plans, Stores Requirements, and Local Conditions, October 1941, AWM54, 571/3/4, 1941-1941, pp. 57-58.

<sup>99</sup> National Archives of Australia, 2nd Australian Imperial Force and Commonwealth Military Forces Unit Diaries, 1939-1945 War, AWM52, 8/2/23, 23rd Infantry Brigade, May-June 1942, p. 1.

Henning explained that this arrangement had caused Lind problems with the formation of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade:

Under circumstances where battalions were recruited from within one State, as was the norm, it had been usual procedure for their commanders to be responsible for the selection of senior officers. In the case of the 2/40 Battalion this did not happen. The issue, from Lind's point of view, was to gain as much control as possible over the development of the 2/40 Battalion into an efficient fighting unit and as an integral part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. Obviously, he would have preferred his whole command to be drawn from Victoria, trained in Victoria and staffed with senior officers whom he knew. Once Youl, whom Lind did not know, was appointed as one of his three battalion commanders, against competition from another Tasmanian militia officer and some Victorian lieutenant colonels, and once it was determined that the 2/40th be trained at Brighton, Lind was determined to ensure that he retained some influence in the battalion's development. But then the decision to create a completely Tasmanian unit was a further blow to Lind's capacity to oversee his whole brigade. He lost the opportunity for close communication with three companies of the 2/40th that he would have been able to establish at Seymour. Bass Strait was an overwhelming and frustrating obstacle to Lind's role and Youl was an unknown quantity.<sup>100</sup>

Lind resolved the problem by posting Victorian officers of his choice to the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn, but it resulted in creating some resentment in Youl and probably the Tasmanian officers who had to make way for the newly appointed Victorian officers.<sup>101</sup> Although these arrangements did not fully suit Lind, Youl or the Tasmanian officers concerned, it is unknown whether this setback had any later bearing on Lind's decision to dismiss Youl.

Nevertheless, Lind clearly did not begin making a case against Youl until August 1941, when he questioned Youl's military knowledge, methods and application of tactical principles. Lind concluded that Youl's attributes as a Lt-Col commanding a battalion were not up to standard, especially when that battalion was expected to be in a 'detached position far removed from any advice or control by senior officers'.<sup>102</sup> Clearly, Lind had developed reservations about Youl's ability to work alone and especially in the case where Sparrow Force would become isolated far from 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade control at Kupang.

---

<sup>100</sup> Henning, *Doomed Battalion*, p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> National Archives of Australia, Re; Lt. Col. G.A.D. Youl. M.C. Ex 2/40th Bn. A.I.F., MP508/1, 251/751/1834, 1941-1942, p. 46.

To resolve the issue Lind wrote to Gen Gordon Bennett, General Officer Commanding (GOC) the 8<sup>th</sup> Division in Malaya, requesting that Major WW Leggatt MC, now second in command of the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Bn in Rabaul, replace Youl. Bennett upheld Lind's recommendations but the Adjutant-General later advised against the decision on the basis that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was no longer under Bennett's control; it now came under the 7<sup>th</sup> Military District's Northern Territory command. The Adjutant-General advised Lind that if he wished to continue with the complaint he must notify Youl of the decision and have him initial any adverse report made against him.<sup>103</sup>

On 19 September, Lind wrote a negative report against Youl and had him initial the document. Unfortunately for Youl in initialling the report he had undermined any future appeal that he could make against Lind's accusations, because in effect it demonstrated Youl had accepted Lind's assessment. Youl later complained to Brigadier DVJ Blake, Commandant of 7<sup>th</sup> Military District, that he initialled the report but had not immediately lodged a protest about the accusations because he was 'so taken aback' by the unexpected nature of the charges presented against him. Even so, Youl did complain to the Military Board that Lind was prejudiced against his command, rude to him, had interfered in the selection of officers for the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn against his will, had made it difficult for him to obtain the full value of tactical training and that the circumstances surrounding his dismissal were defamatory.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-31.

Youl had had a right to complain about the lack of tactical training accorded to him.

Garth Pratten, in his book *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*, explained that it was 1943 before the Army realised that battalion commanders needed tactical training to supplement their battlefield experience. It was only then that the Land Headquarters Tactical School was set up near Brisbane.<sup>105</sup> This information, however, does not dispel the reality that without proper tactical knowledge Youl remained a risk to his command and that Lind had little choice other than to remove him from command of Sparrow Force.

Blake accepted that Lind had made his decision based on 'mature consideration'. He supported Lind's recommendations to remove Youl and agreed to the recommendation to have Leggatt transferred to the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn.<sup>106</sup> On 21 October, the 8<sup>th</sup> Military District HQ in Rabaul and the 7<sup>th</sup> Military District HQ in Darwin were informed that ministerial approval had been given to end Youl's command (as well as his secondment to the 12/50<sup>th</sup> Bn in Tasmania) and approved Leggatt's transfer. Youl left the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn on 7 November and was transferred to the Reserve of Officers List 6<sup>th</sup> Military District in Tasmania.

After Youl was relieved of command, Lind wrote to Blake of his reasons for the decision:

It was with great regret that I recommended the removal from command an officer for whom I have, as a man, the greatest possible regard. Lt-Col YOUL has, as I stated earlier, been at all times loyal and cooperative and it has only been in the interests of the Unit and the Bde as

---

<sup>105</sup> Pratten, G., *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 199.

<sup>106</sup> National Archives of Australia, Re; Lt. Col. G.A.D. Youl. M.C. Ex 2/40th Bn. A.I.F., MP508/1, 251/751/1834, p. 45.

a fighting force, that I have been forced to take this action, and see no reason to alter my recommendation.<sup>107</sup>

Despite what Lind may have thought of Youl, his actions ended Youl's standing as an officer and his career in the military. Following these events, on 7 November Leggatt transferred from the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Bn in Rabaul to the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bn in Darwin and became a Lt-Col in command of Sparrow Force.

Leggatt, like his contemporaries, was also a World War I veteran. Before the War, he had accepted a scholarship from the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to study for the ministry, but suspended his theological studies in August 1915 to enlist in the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF. After serving in Egypt, he went to the Western Front in France where he became a Lieutenant in 1917. On 8 August 1918, while serving as a signal officer with the 60<sup>th</sup> Bn at Villers Bretonneux, he received the Military Cross for maintaining open telegraphic lines under heavy enemy shellfire. On 27 September 1918, after transferring to the 59<sup>th</sup> Bn, he received a severe wound to his arm and returned to Australia. He then studied law to become a member of the Victorian Bar in 1921. In 1934, he rejoined the AMF and in July 1940 became a major in the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF.<sup>108</sup> After taking command from Youl in November 1941 Leggett had less than a month to become familiar with his duties as the commander of Sparrow Force before the war with Japan began.

Meanwhile, the Military Board busied itself making preparations to move Gull and Sparrow Forces to the Islands. During November it had become clear to the allies that the Japanese were making preparations for war in the 'Southern Area, and some

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>108</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Online: National Centre of Biography, William Watt Leggatt.

knowledge of these [preparations], coupled with the general deterioration of the political situation in the Far East, led to some deployment of American and Dutch naval forces in the Western Pacific'.<sup>109</sup> With concerns increasing over Japanese intentions, the Dutch finally opened the way for Australia to send advance parties to the Islands.

The Military Board authorised Lind to send one hundred and seven men each to Ambon and Kupang. Within thirteen days of making the decision, however, Sturdee revised the commitment back to a thirty-man group for Kupang alone. The expectation was that the uniformed party, including their personal arms, equipment and thirty days rations would board the *Marella* and sail for Kupang from Darwin Harbour on 13 December.<sup>110</sup> But on 6 December the Navy Board informed the Dutch that the advance party would be delayed until the next day and that it would embark aboard the *Zealandia* in convoy with the *Westralia*.<sup>111</sup>

Then on 5 November, the Japanese Imperial Conference met to discuss preparations for war against the United States, Britain and the NEI. General Tojo explained to Hirohito that his government was ready for war if diplomatic relations with the US broke down over sanctions. Hirohito acknowledged this, but asked Tojo to make every effort to resolve Japan's differences with the US through diplomatic channels before declaring war.<sup>112</sup> On 6 November, while awaiting the outcome of the talks, Japan's Imperial

---

<sup>109</sup> Gill, G. H., *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, vol. 1, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, p. 473.

<sup>110</sup> National Archives of Australia, Army Headquarters Operation Instruction No.15 (Advanced Copy) and Raising of Units 1941-1942 Gull and Sparrow Force, AWM54, 571/4/46, 1941-1942, p. 44; National Archives of Australia, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Operations:] Sparrow and Gull Force, Timor and Ambon, Establishment and Order of Battle, 1941-1942, AWM54, 571/4/35, 1941-1942, p. 55.

<sup>111</sup> Gill, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945* p. 474.

<sup>112</sup> Ike, ed., *Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences*, pp. 208-9.



General Headquarters began mobilising its forces and preparing its grand strategy for seizing the whole of the Far East and Southwest Pacific Areas.

The Imperial GHQ ordered the Southern AHQ of General Juichi Terauchi to prepare for war in the Southwest Pacific Area. The objectives set for the Southern Army, in cooperation with the Imperial Navy, were to assemble its forces in Indochina, South-China, Formosa (Taiwan), the Southwest Islands and various other South Sea Islands and prepare to attack Malaya, Thailand, the Philippines and the NEI. They were planning to attack American, British and Dutch strongholds in the Southeast Asian region, seize badly needed resources and secure the newly occupied territories.

Elsewhere, Vice-Admiral Nagumo's naval task force had orders to leave Hitokappu Bay in the Kuriles on 26 November to attack the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on 7 December local time.<sup>113</sup>

When diplomatic relations between Japan and the US failed to improve, the Imperial Conference met again on 1 December to reassess its options for war. Tojo told the meeting that he believed the United States had humiliated Japan and Hirohito by demanding an unconditional withdrawal of Japanese forces from China, a withdrawal from recognising the Nanking Government and a withdrawal from delivering on the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. Tojo replied to these demands in addressing the Imperial Conference. He said that:

---

<sup>113</sup> Japanese Monograph 24: Southern Army Operations Record, ed. United States Department of Army Office of Military History, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1963), pp. 3-4.

This not only belittled the dignity of our Empire and made it impossible for us to harvest the fruits of the China Incident, but also threatened the very existence of our Empire. ... Under the circumstances, our Empire has no alternative but to begin war against the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands in order to resolve the present crisis and assure [Japan's] survival.<sup>114</sup>

On 4 December, in deciding that peace with America could not be resolved through diplomatic means the Imperial Conference, in the presence of the Hirohito, decided it was better to risk declaring war on the US, Great Britain and the Netherlands than abandoning its gains in China and Indochina. In agreement with Tojo's demands (and contrary to the expectations of the Singapore conference's assumptions) the Japanese Government decided that it would declare war on the US, Britain and the NEI on or around 8 December 1941 Japanese local time.<sup>115</sup> According to that schedule the Japanese launched concurrent attacks against the Philippines, Pearl Harbor, Hong Kong, Borneo, Siam (Thailand) and Malaya on the morning of 8 December.

Later on the same morning, when the War Cabinet met to discuss Australia's response to the war with Japan, Sturdee proposed sending a reinforcement battalion to Port Moresby and Rabaul as well as immediately dispatching the previously arranged 2/21<sup>st</sup> and the 2/40<sup>th</sup> Bns to Ambon and Timor. When Curtin asked whether:

Men were being wasted by "scattering them",... Sturdee said that the battalion being deployed from Darwin to Timor would be replaced by another being sent from Adelaide. It was necessary to reinforce Rabaul in view of its importance to the United States as an airfield on the resupply route to the Philippines.<sup>116</sup>

Sturdee's seemingly cryptic response did not directly answer Curtin's concerns about wasting men and the matter was never raised again in later meetings.

---

<sup>114</sup> Ike, ed., *Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences*, p. 263.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>116</sup> Horner, D., *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia's War Effort*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996) p. 78; National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet/Advisory War Council Note Books, Chronological Series, A9240, 10 June 1941-19 January 1946, p. 772.

If Sturdee was reluctant to send troops to Rabaul, Ambon and Timor here was his opportunity to express them to Curtin. He had the opportunity to agree with Curtin's concerns that dissipating Australian forces and wasting men in the Island campaigns was clearly unprofitable and he could have recommended a review of the Islands policy when the War Cabinet met again on 13 December to discuss the Chiefs of Staff proposals for the defence of Rabaul and New Caledonia.

As the United States and Australia had already made plans to establish Rabaul as a future fleet base for both United States and British naval forces, the 13 December Cabinet meeting wanted to know how the plans were progressing. The Chiefs of Staff presented three options on Rabaul to. They were:

- (a) to reinforce the existing garrison up to the strength of a brigade group;
- (b) to withdraw the existing garrison and abandon Rabaul;
- (c) to retain the existing garrison.<sup>117</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff dismissed option (a) because they had been advised that the expansion of Rabaul into a US fleet base was unlikely to happen.<sup>118</sup> Their recommendation to the War cabinet was to retain Rabaul as an air operation base as originally planned and that 'on this basis we reject course (a), i.e., reinforcement' of Lark Force.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> National Archives of Australia, [1941 File - Yellow Tab] New Caledonia (&other Pacific Islands): Defence of, A3300, 218A, 1941-1942, p. 201; National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, p. 105.

<sup>118</sup> National Archives of Australia, [1941 File - Yellow Tab] New Caledonia (&other Pacific Islands): Defence of, A3300, 218A, p. 46.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

In discussing options (b) and (c), the Chiefs of Staff decided it was essential that Australia 'maintain an advanced observation line to give the earliest possible indication of an enemy move to the South'. Because of the dangers of sea travel to Rabaul the Chiefs of Staff argued that there should be no withdrawal from Rabaul to which the War Cabinet agreed. The Chiefs of Staff emphasised the importance of this decision by drawing attention to the negative psychological effect withdrawal would have on the Dutch and presumably British-Dutch cooperation in Malaya.<sup>120</sup>

It was only now that Sturdee warned the War Cabinet of the dangers inherent in maintaining the policy of garrisoning the Islands. Sturdee told the War Cabinet that:

In making this recommendation we desire to emphasise the fact that the scale of attack which can be brought against Rabaul from Bases in Japanese mandated islands is beyond the capacity of the small garrison to meet successfully. Notwithstanding this we consider it essential to maintain a forward air observation line as long as possible and to make the enemy fight for this line rather than abandon it at first threat.<sup>121</sup>

It is clear from this statement that Rabaul was doomed to remain and fight an overwhelming Japanese invasion force for the sake of forward observation and, by implication it seems, so were Timor and Ambon.

Without raising his concerns about wasting men as he did at the 8 December meeting, Curtin willingly accepted the Chiefs of Staffs recommendations. He subsequently wrote to President Roosevelt on 13 December 1941 to explain Australia's position:

As you are no doubt aware, we have land, sea and air forces in Malaya and in the Netherlands East Indies area ... However the changed naval situation has had such

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 201-202; National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, Minute 1107, 12 December 1941, p. 105.

<sup>121</sup> National Archives of Australia, [1941 File - Yellow Tab] New Caledonia (& other Pacific Islands): Defence of, A3300, 218A, p. 202.

repercussions on our local defence position and cooperation in overseas theatres that our military resources are insufficient to meet commitments for defence of Pacific Islands in which we are vitally interested. I am forwarding separately to the Australian Minister a review of the position as it has been put to us by our Service advisers ...<sup>122</sup>

The review also stated that Rabaul could not stand against a large-scale attack by the Japanese forces now based in the mandated islands.

Here, the decision to retain troops at Rabaul in the face of overwhelming odds was counter to strategic logic, which is supported in Liddell Hart's view where:

Strategy depends for success, first and most, on a sound calculation and co-ordination of the end and the means. The end must be proportional to the totals means, and the means used in gaining each intermediate end which contributes to the ultimate must be proportioned to the value and the needs of that immediate end—whether it be to gain an objective or to fulfil a contributory purpose. An excess may be as harmful as a deficiency.<sup>123</sup>

In other words, strategy is a cost benefit transaction where the means must be in proportion to the transaction that is taking place, or affordable, and the ends must be beneficial, or profitable. The stated policy for Rabaul was 'to maintain a forward air observation line as long as possible and to make the enemy fight for this line rather than abandon it at the first threat'. The available means were Lark Force consisting of 1400 men together with the 24<sup>th</sup> Squadron. The expected benefit was gaining intelligence on Japanese movements in the Rabaul area of operations. The cost was the abandonment of badly needed military resources at Rabaul (and later Ambon and Timor) to an unjustifiable operation.

For Australia at this time, where there were few trained and equipped forces to expend on unworthy projects, the Islands Strategy amounted to a large investment for limited

---

<sup>122</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 59.

<sup>123</sup> Liddell Hart, *The Classic Book on Military Strategy*, pp. 322-23.

gains in line observation and in position warfare. The costly expenditure of means clearly outweighed any limited short-term benefits associated with the line observation plan and this was especially the case where the RAN had already provided a coast-watching network to fulfil line observation throughout the Islands at a much cheaper price. If Clausewitz's maxim that 'the political aims [of war] are the business of government alone' is correct, then this chapter demonstrates the weakness of Australia's politicians in allowing Sturdee too much scope in driving war policy in the Islands.

The War Cabinet not only allowed Sturdee independently to negotiate with the Dutch on the policy of the combined air scheme formed at the Singapore conference, they carelessly allowed him to freely revise the scale of forces destined for Rabaul, Timor and Ambon. It was within Sturdee's area of responsibility to inform the government of the strategic weakness in the scheme, but he chose not to do that until the last moment. Curtin and the War Cabinet thus agreed to Sturdee's terms that Rabaul, and effectively Timor and Ambon, were to be left to their fate against overwhelming Japanese forces, without the hope of reinforcement, withdrawal or rescue and all for the sake of a desperate ill-considered and ill-prepared air observation policy that could have been carried out successfully by the RAAF alone.

Because the Australian War Cabinet was dysfunctional in properly performing its responsibilities to grand strategy it had developed what became redundant policy of line observation. In formulating policy for war well-conceived strategies need to closely connect threats, objectives, policies, tactics, forces and wider strategies. Unrealistic requirements and discontinuities within or between any of those categories cause risks

to soar and increase prospects for failure'.<sup>124</sup> The Rabaul-Timor-Ambon policy in this context represented a strategic mismatch where the discontinuities between War Cabinet and the CGS, policy and strategy, realistic objectives and likely success led to its failure. The costs benefit ratio in garrisoning the Islands was now bankrupt where the known costs of line observation outweighed any known benefits. These decisions would later lead to a wastage of human resources where they failed to observe the first principle of war - economy of force.

---

<sup>124</sup> Collins, J., *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives*, (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2002), p. 65.

## Chapter Two: Ambon: The Position and Line Holding Strategy

The best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, and then at the decisive point. Apart from the effort needed to create military strength, which does not always emanate from the general, there is no higher and simpler law of strategy than that of keeping one's forces concentrated. No force should ever be dispatched from the main body unless the need is definite and urgent. We hold fast to this principle, and regard it as a reliable guide. In the course of our analysis, we shall learn in what circumstances dividing one's forces may be justified. We shall also learn that the principle of concentration will not have the same results in every war, but that those will change in accordance with the means and ends.

Incredible though it sounds, it is a fact that armies have been divided and separated countless times, without the commander having any clear reason for it, simply because he vaguely felt that this was the way things ought to be done.

This folly can be avoided completely, and a great many unsound reasons for dividing one's forces never be proposed, as soon as concentration of force is recognised as the norm, and every separation and split as an exception that has to be justified.<sup>125</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz

In strategy, Clausewitz believed that defence was stronger than offence and that it was better to withdraw and concentrate forces to face a stronger opponent at a time and place better suited to the campaign. He learned this principle from his mentor General Gerhard von Scharnhorst after Napoleon defeated Prussia at the battle of Jena in 1806 and after the Russians defeated Napoleon in 1812-13.

Regarding Jena, the Prussian generals held conflicting theories about how they should approach the threat of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*. In the mistaken belief that Napoleon would stand on the defensive, the Prussian generals and military advisors decided to take up the offensive and attack Napoleon's army at Fraconian Saale or on the Main River. At the time, Prussia, dominated by seventy and eighty year old military policy advisors, had an inflexible moribund military system that relied heavily on antiquated weaponry, large cumbersome methods of supply that were dependent on fixed

---

<sup>125</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 240.



magazines and food depots that were organised into supporting highly rigid linear warfare systems that discouraged initiative. Notwithstanding the state of the military's organisation the Prussian army remained proud, highly disciplined and bold, however in Clausewitz's words, 'behind the fine facade all was mildewed'.<sup>126</sup> The weakness of the Prussian army lay not in its soldiers but its leadership and organisation.

The chiefs of the general staff, Generals Phull, Scharnhorst and Colonel Massenbach, led their 250,000 troops in developing Prussia's military strategy and campaigns. This group of three dominated a poorly organised divisional chain of command that had no corps headquarters. Chambers described this system where:

Orders issued from general headquarters therefore had to go into fantastic detail, giving ample scope for delay, miscomprehension and confusion on the part of subordinate commanders, and generals frequently found it necessary to brief their regiments commanders in person. Such an army, under such a leadership, bore little comparison to Napoleon's finely geared and ruthlessly efficient war machine.<sup>127</sup>

Adding to the confusion, as a result of personal ambition, the Chiefs of Staff were often at variance with each other and found it difficult to agree on the Prussian Army's strategic military organisation and war strategies.

For example, in 1806 the Prussian military advisors identified three courses of action to use against Napoleon's armies; Hohenlohe's plan to concentrate at Erfurt or Hof and outflank the *Grande Armée*; Brunswick's plan to attack in force towards Stuttgart and threaten Napoleon's communications with the Rhine and France and attack the French in detail; or, as Scharnhorst suggested, wait and fight delaying action along the rivers

---

<sup>126</sup> Chandler, D., *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), p. 454.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 455.

Elbe and Oder until further support could be obtained from Count Bennigsen's 50,000 to 68000 strong Russian army then assembling at Bresc and concentrate their forces for a counterattack.<sup>128</sup>

On learning of the Prussian intention to fight, however, Napoleon cautiously pre-empted their plans, gained the initiative and mobilised for an attack while forcing the Prussian generals to readjust their plans. Under the influence of the Chiefs of Staffs incompetent lack of continuity, ambitious pride and determination to adhere to an agreed strategy, their plans fell into disarray. When the two armies finally met at Jena, and after a succession of battles, Napoleon succeeded in subjecting the Prussians to humiliating defeat.

Clausewitz learned from the Jena campaign that it would have been better if Prussia had followed Scharnhorst's advice and avoided battle where it was facing Napoleon's superior forces. Clausewitz believed Scharnhorst's plan to concentrate elsewhere and counter attack in force at a time and place more favourable to the Prussians seemed the best course of action to follow, even if that meant forfeiting all national territory and retreating onto foreign soil.<sup>129</sup>

Clausewitz further developed his principle that defence is stronger than offence from observing Napoleon's 1812 Russian campaign. He gained direct experience from

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 456-458.

<sup>129</sup> Sumida, T., *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to on War*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), p. 89.

resisting the *Grande Armée*'s invasion of Russia as advisor to the Russian army's general staff where he witnessed the destruction of Napoleon's army. The lessons he learned were two fold; the extent of disproportionate losses suffered by an attacker when advancing; and, the forceful exploitation of those overextended forces through aggressive counter attack.<sup>130</sup>

Clausewitz observed that the Russian army became stronger as it folded back into its rear echelons. The retreating army fed itself from supply depots located in the provincial towns and the countryside as it withdrew. Their supply train was able to subsist on rural produce to feed its draft animals as they shortened their lines of communications in retreating towards Moscow. Clausewitz wrote that

The retreat from Witebsk to Moscow was in fact an uninterrupted movement, and from Smolensko the point of direction lay always tolerably straight to the rear, the entire retreat was a very simple operation, which partook very little manoeuvre and in which no attempt of the enemy at manoeuvre was much to be feared. When an army always gives way and retires continually in a direct line, it is very difficult for the pursuer to outflank it or press it away from its course ... every soldier must know from experience that in a retreat this simplicity economises the powers of men and horses.<sup>131</sup>

The baggage trains in retreating to the rear left the roads open for the undivided columns to march freely towards Moscow. Apart from casualties of 70,000 suffered in the withdrawal, the only difficulties the Russians experienced came from; sourcing potable water as the wells dried up over the summer months; and, the pressure put on the rear guard's horses, which remained saddled throughout most of the retreat.

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>131</sup> von Clausewitz, C., *The Campaign of 1812*, trans. Francis Egerton, (London: John Murray, 1843), pp. 175-76.

For the *Grande Armée* the reverse was true. Clausewitz observed that in general:

The subsistence of an advancing army and pursuing is always a matter of difficulty, inasmuch as before the magazines are collected, the army has always moved on a little, and a mass of carriages becomes necessary. These difficulties increase as population and culture decrease. The advancing army has but two resources for relief. It now and then captures a magazine of the enemy, and is not obliged to keep together in large masses in the same degree; can divide itself more, and live better on the inhabitants.<sup>132</sup>

For the *Grande Armée*, however, these generalities failed where Russian troops carried out a scorched earth policy in setting fire to its abandoned magazines and towns after withdrawing the townspeople. This forced Napoleon's troops and cavalry to subsist on its supply chain and the scant resources they could find as the army advanced, and like the Russians, the *Grande Armée* also suffered for lack of water. In possessing knowledge of their own countryside the Russians were able to forage widely for water, whereas the *Grande Armée*, without maps and not having a local population to consult, remained more or less fixed to the tail of the retreating Russian army.

The Russians also destroyed bridges and removed signposts to further delay and confuse the French. In the end, measures taken by the Russians against the overextended French army weakened Napoleon's forces and delayed the *Grande Armée's* progress. It took Napoleon 12 weeks to advance the 115 miles to Moscow and, by Clausewitz's account; his troops were reduced from 280,000 to 90,000. In the final reckoning the Russians expended less than fifty per cent of its force in retreat while Napoleon expended almost seventy percent of his diminishing force on garrisoning occupied territory, privation, weariness, disease and casualties without achieving his ends through decisive battle; a wastage ratio of 2.7 to 1 in Russia's favour balanced on Clausewitz's description of events.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 177-78

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

Clausewitz summed up the first stage of the 1812 campaign when he wrote that:

The French army reached Moscow already too much weakened for the attainment of the end of its enterprise. For the facts that one third of its force had been wasted before reaching Smolensko, and another before Moscow, could not fail to make an impression on the Russian officers in command, the Emperor, and the ministry, which put an end to all notion of peace and concession.<sup>134</sup>

The Russian adoption of the Fabian strategy of attrition and avoiding decisive battle to wear down the enemy forces bought time for more favourable conditions to develop in defeating Napoleon. The weakened state of *Grande Armée* allowed Tsar Alexander to ignore Napoleon's demands for negotiation on his terms, while the Russian advance guard under Kutusov used its time to become stronger and to harass the French lines of communications and its battalions. These conditions forced Napoleon to face the reality that his weakened army could not remain in Moscow indefinitely and prevailed upon him to withdraw first to Kaluga and then in a change of direction from the River Lusha to Mojaisk after he was nearly captured at that crossing point.

Chandler described the significance of this turning point after the battle at the River Lusha.

Not only did the decision remove all pressure on Kutusov [to block Napoleon's move to Kaluga and Smolensk] and throw away the hard-won fruits of Maloyaroslavets, it also wasted a precious week of comparatively fine weather. In the opinion of General Wilson, an English observer of the campaign: "Napoleon's star no longer guided his course, for after the (Russian) rear guard retired, had any, even the smallest reconnaissance, advanced to the brow of the hill over the ravine—had the slightest demonstration of a continued offensive movement been made—Napoleon would have obtained a free passage for his army on the Kaluga or Medinj roads, through a fertile and rich country to the Dnieper; for Kutusov, resolved on falling back behind the Oka, had actually issued orders to retire in case the enemy's approach to his new position".<sup>135</sup>

There is no evidence explaining the 'uncustomary slowness, irresolution and excessive caution' of Napoleon's decision. It effectively led, however, to the demoralisation of his

---

<sup>134</sup> Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to on War*, p. 100.

<sup>135</sup> Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 823.

army and its eventual destruction. Of the more than 655,000 French troops that crossed the Vistula on its way to Moscow in 1812, Napoleon returned to Poland in 1813 with an army of around 85,000; down by a formidable estimate of 560,000 soldiers.<sup>136</sup>

Notwithstanding that these events happened in an era of horse drawn carts, the action of extending the lines of an army beyond its logistical capabilities remained important to the strategies of mechanised armies during the Second World War. Despite Napoleon's logistical efforts to meet the challenges of advancing to Moscow, he overextended the army and it became weaker the further it reached into Russia. Conversely, the Russian army became stronger as it withdrew on its base and Moscow. It was in this context Clausewitz formed the principle that defence is stronger than offence.

Clausewitz's observations on the Prussian and the Russian campaigns led him to the conclusion that a weaker country could frustrate the intentions of an invading army in terms of a cost a benefit ratio where the risks remain incommensurate with the gains:

The result of the campaign, which at its commencement could only have been conjectured by a man of extended views, clear understanding, and rare greatness of mind, was now so near the eye as to be easily embraced by one of ordinary acuteness. Buonaparte had involved himself in so difficult a transaction, that things began of themselves to work for the Russians, and a good result was inevitable without much exertion on their part.<sup>137</sup>

Napoleon was 'a man of clear understanding' in his awareness that attacking Russia was 'a difficult transaction', for which he planned accordingly:

He knew he would meet large Russian armies operating over a vast theater, where the roads were at best poor, the food resources practically nonexistent, and the climate prone to extremes of heat and cold, but he probably miscalculated the difficulties to be faced.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 852-53.

<sup>137</sup> von Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812*, pp. 141-42.

<sup>138</sup> Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 753.

However, Napoleon had gambled on high stakes in attempting to bring Tsar Alexander to heel, but nevertheless failed to obtain that end. His army was superior to the Russian army but the war demonstrated to Clausewitz that the extent of disproportionate losses suffered by an attacker in advancing and the forceful exploitation of those overextended forces through aggressive counter attack supported the notion that a weaker country can overcome a stronger aggressor by employing the defensive.

Clausewitz came to the conclusion that:

If then the negative purpose, that is the concentration of all the means into a state of pure resistance, affords a superiority in the contest, and if this advantage is sufficient to *balance* whatever superiority in numbers the adversary may have, then the mere *duration* of the contest will suffice gradually to bring the loss of force on the part of the adversary to a point at which the political object can no longer be an equivalent, a point at which, therefore, he must give up the contest. We see then that this class of means, the wearying out of the enemy, includes the great number of cases in which the weaker resists the stronger.<sup>139</sup>

This is what Clausewitz meant where he stated that ‘the best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, and then at the decisive point. Apart from the effort needed to create military strength, which does not always emanate from the general, there is no higher and simpler law of strategy than that of keeping one’s forces concentrated’.

Sturdee was aware of this principle of strategy when it came to concentrating forces in war, but he failed to recognise Clausewitz’s principle where it concerned the examples of the Prussian and Russian campaigns. At Sydney in 1933, as director of military operations and intelligence, he gave a lecture to senior staff officers on the hypothetical plan of concentration. The lectures aimed to provide senior officers with knowledge, the gathering and testing of information and applying them to the plan of concentration

---

<sup>139</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Colonel JJ Graham, p. 18.

under Australian conditions, which presaged the coming war with Japan. The scenario focused on Japan as a potential enemy of Australia where, should the British Empire be engaged in a war in Europe, the Japanese would expand its influence throughout the Western Pacific.<sup>140</sup>

The scenario supposed that:

Should Japan desire to impose her will on Australia she would seek to take action that would give her a rapid decision, as she can never be certain how long the pre-occupation of the British Main Fleet would last or whether the U.S.A. might not intervene after a time. Japan must therefore seize some area in Australia which is vital to the continuance of our economic life, and the loss of which would cripple our war effort. Mere raids cannot gain a rapid decision. Some authorities such as Admiral Richmond hold the view that the Japanese Fleet by blockade alone can bring Australia to her knees by stopping our exports and imports and our coast shipping and without a single Japanese soldier having been landed.<sup>141</sup>

In preparing this scenario, Sturdee supposed that Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle were the most important strategic areas to protect because of their economic and industrial power. All other cities in Australia were deemed less important in this hypothetical war scenario, because it would have required the dissipation of troops from the Melbourne-Sydney-Newcastle theatre.

Sturdee had estimated that Japan could provide twenty-three divisions for an attack on Australia but that it lacked the shipping requirement to lift more than three divisions at a time. This meant that the Japanese transports would have a return journey to Australia of two months in bringing a further three divisions and its supplies. Not only that, it was supposed that the USA and Britain might intervene in the mean time. His plan was to use six Australian militia divisions against any Japanese attack based on the principle of

---

<sup>140</sup> National Archives of Australia, Lecture on the Plan of Concentration by Lieut-Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, D.S.O., O.B.E. Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, AWM54, 243/6/150, 1933, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.



the concentration of force to protect vital areas along the east coast. Although this was an exercise to acquaint senior staff officers with the principle of concentration, it demonstrated that Sturdee was aware of the principle of concentration, the consequences inherent in the dissipation of forces, the danger to Japan in overextending itself in a war with Australia and that time was on Australia's side.<sup>142</sup>

This exercise provides insight into Sturdee's strategic thinking. His plan seemed to reflect fixed regional lines and position warfare similar to that carried out during the First World War. This was a strategy of holding a position along a line and of wearing down the enemy's strength in lives, materials and treasure, which led the European nations involved towards bankruptcy. Liddell Hart was highly critical of a strategy adhering to 'the simple idea of a concentrated stroke by a concentrated force'. He pointed out that this kind of warfare existed in the eighteenth century where 'a physically concentrated advance, both strategic (to the battle field) and tactical (on the battle field) was the rule' whereas 'under the new conditions of warfare, the cumulative effect of partial success, or even mere threat, at a number of points may be greater than the effect of complete success at one point'. Liddell Hart's doctrine supports the idea of 'permeating and dominating areas rather than capturing lines; at the practicable object of paralysing the enemy's action rather than the theoretical object of crushing his forces. Fluidity of force may succeed where concentration of force merely entails perilous rigidity'.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>143</sup> Liddell Hart, *The Classic Book on Military Strategy*, pp. 332-33.

Sturdee's exercise on the concentration of force indicates a limited area of operations within New South Wales and southern Queensland, an offensive in moving all forces to the battlefield and on the battlefield to crush the enemies forces, a rigidly based linear defence along natural barriers such as rivers and geographical features rather than on fluidity of movement and withdrawal, attacking the enemy's strategy and paralysing their movement. This exercise was offensive strategy in defence where he planned to move the reserve to the battlefield rather than withdraw into the reserve. Although Sturdee left the exercise open to adjustment, its object remained rigidly based on offensive linear and position holding type warfare.<sup>144</sup>

Vernon Ashton Hobart Sturdee KBE CB DSO was born in 1890 to Alfred Sturdee and his wife Laura (nee Merrett). Alfred was a doctor who served with the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance at Gallipoli. Sturdee's uncles also had long standing military careers. His uncle, Sir Donovan Sturdee GCB KCMG CVO, served in the British Royal Navy (RN) and rose through the ranks to become an Admiral of the Fleet. Another uncle, Sir Charles Merrett, served for forty years with the military and rose through the ranks to become a Lt-Col with the Australian Light Horse, but could not serve with the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF at Gallipoli because of his age. He became better known for his services to agriculture through the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria for which he received his knighthood.

---

<sup>144</sup> National Archives of Australia, Lecture on the Plan of Concentration by Lieut-Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, D.S.O., O.B.E. Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, AWM54, 243/6/150, p. 10.

Sturdee attended Melbourne Church of England Grammar School (Melbourne Grammar School) and subsequently became an apprentice engineer with Jaques Bros. in Richmond Victoria. He joined the Corps of Australian Engineers in 1908 and after three years service as a sapper in the engineers he became a Lieutenant with the Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) in the Permanent Military Forces. In 1912 he was posted to Brisbane's 1<sup>st</sup> Military District for staff duties. He returned to Melbourne in 1913 and married Edith Robins at the St Luke's Church of England in North Fitzroy.

The army promoted Sturdee to Captain in the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF on 25 August 1914 and transferred him to Egypt that October. He was among the first to disembark to the shores of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, where he served as adjutant with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Engineers for three months until he was medically evacuated with influenza. In September he returned to Gallipoli as Captain in command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Field Coy 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of Engineers and then the 8<sup>th</sup> Division of Engineers until Gallipoli was evacuated.

In June 1916, Sturdee transferred to Armentieres in France acting in command of the Royal Engineers. He was recognised for his service at Gallipoli and France during 1915-1916 and received the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). In 1917 Sturdee was promoted temporary Lt-Col in command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Pioneer (Pnr) Bn and for the next nine months supervised road maintenance, camp construction, cable laying and the digging of communication trenches. In November 1917 he was given command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division RAE and following his promotion to General Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> grade he served with the British GHQ. He returned to Australia with a DSO, two mentions in despatches and later received an Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1919.

After the war Sturdee returned to staff officer duties at AHQ in Melbourne until 1922 when he was sent to Staff College at Quetta for a year. He spent the following year at the Royal Military College Duntroon as an instructor in engineering and survey and from 1925 to 1929 served as a staff officer with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. In 1929 he was posted on exchange to the British War Office in London with the Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence (DMOI). In 1931 he attended the Imperial Defence College and then transferred to the Australian High Commission as its military representative.

On returning from London in 1933, Sturdee took up the post of director of military operations at AHQ in Melbourne. In 1935, along with his duties at AHQ, he became an assistant secretary (military) and temporary Colonel with the Council of Defence until 1937 when his rank was confirmed at Colonel. Sturdee's attention was focused on raising formations for overseas service and operations planning. In 1938 he became the First Director of Staff Duties and received a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for his services with the staff at AHQ.

When the Second World War began in 1939, Sturdee was promoted to temporary Lt-Gen and appointed head of Eastern Command as well as commander the 2<sup>nd</sup> Military District. He became responsible for raising, training and equipping the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF in New South Wales. In July 1940 he accepted a demotion to Major General (Maj-Gen) so that he could take command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division. One month later he succeeded Sir Brudenell White CGS after he was killed in a plane crash.<sup>145</sup> Sturdee was reappointed to the rank

---

<sup>145</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Online: National Centre of Biography, Sturdee, Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart (1890–1966).

of Lt-Gen and became CGS. Lt-Gen Sydney Rowell recalled Sturdee's role in that office:

To those working with him then, Sturdee displayed those characteristics, which he retained all his life. He had a very precise mind and a great sense of the need for priorities—he saw the problem very clearly. He was able to give orders that left no-one in doubt as to what was wanted and he then left people to get on with the job. When it came to the answer he was kindly and constructive in criticism ... Almost immediately the Government changed (John Curtin became Prime Minister on 7 October 1941). This change of government meant an additional worry for the CGS, who had to accustom himself to a different set of political masters who had been in opposition for nine years. And what a dreadful strategic situation faced them! The first major issue was that of the relief of the 9th division in Tobruk. Sturdee's view was sought in this matter and he said, with some justification, that the recommendation of the man on the spot (that is Blamey) should be accepted and that a relief should take place. I didn't go along with this view, but he was the CGS and that was that. The further worsening of the situation in view of Japan's attitude was a constant worry in spite of the most unwarranted optimism in some political and departmental circles. There were two related problems: first; the defence of Malaya and the island chain and, second, the improvement in the Home Defence area. Sturdee steadfastly re-fused [sic] to agree to a complete concentration of the 8th Division in Malaya, and held a brigade back at Darwin.<sup>146</sup>

Unfortunately, Sturdee did not afford the same kindly characteristics towards Lind and Roach as he did for Blamey. His priorities involved withholding the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade from the 8<sup>th</sup> division in Malaya to service a poorly conceived forward observation line strategy, ignoring Roach's advice as the 'man on the spot', refusing relief for the Island outposts, withholding crucial information from Lind and Roach about the role of Gull Force and sacking Roach for his constructive criticism in pointing out the inadequacies of defending Ambon.

As far as Rabaul, Timor and Ambon were concerned, these were never a priority for Sturdee after the 12 December war cabinet meeting had decided these tasks forces were doomed even before they were embarked for Timor and Ambon. Sturdee was not concerned with the concentration of forces on the Islands; his motivation was to dissipate his forces based on his definite and urgent policy of 'demonstrating support for the Dutch', even though this attitude was now of secondary importance to the official

---

<sup>146</sup> Rowell, S., "General Sturdee and the Australian Army," Australian Army Journal, Aug 1966), p. 281.

policy of forward line observation. In Ambon's case, notwithstanding the lack of resources afforded to the Island garrison, the misconception of the principle of the concentration of force by AHQ contributed to the ease in which the Japanese finally took Ambon.

When Gull Force arrived at Ambon on 17 December 1941, the 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn and its ancillary units it consisted of:

- Gull Force Headquarters
- The 2/21 Bn.
- C Troop of the 18th Australian Tank A Battery
- 1 Section of the 2/11th Australian Field Company
- A Detachment of the 23rd Australian Infantry Brigade Signals Section
- An Australian Army Service Corp Section Gull Force
- A Detachment 2/12th Australian field Ambulance
- The 23rd Australian Dental Unit
- The 104th Australian Light Aid Detachment
- A Detachment of the Canteens Services
- A Detachment of the Intelligence Corps

On 20 January 1941, with the later arrival of one officer and a few other ranks from Australia, the number of troops on Ambon came to an approximate total of 1,131 men.<sup>147</sup>

For some inexplicable reason Roach received no orders providing the objectives of Gull Force. Despite AHQ Operational Instruction No. 15 being in existence from March 1941, neither Roach nor Lind received any substantive orders before or after Gull Force

---

<sup>147</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, 1939-45, p. 5; *Gull Force Association Battalion History*, (Gull Force Association Web Page, [cited 15/08 2010]); available from [http://www.gullforce.org.au/Battalion\\_History.html](http://www.gullforce.org.au/Battalion_History.html)

embarked from Darwin for Ambon. In fact, when the Army transferred Lind to the Reserve of Officers in 1942 he complained in a memorandum on Ambon and Timor to AHQ and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade diaries that:

No instructions, no information, no orders were received by Comds. 2/21 and 2/40 Bns. - before or on embarkation - from A.H.Q. In case of 2/21 Bn. very brief instructions were received by signal about 14 days after disembarkation at Ambon while A.H.Q. Op. Instr. No. 15 of 6 Dec. 1941 implementing the move was received by this Unit 28 days after disembarkation at its destination. Date of receipt of orders and A.H.Q. Op. Instr. No. 15 of 6 Dec. 41 implementing the move by 2/40 Bn. is unknown. No copy of orders for these forces or of Op. Instr. No. 15 of 6 Dec. 41 were received by H.Q. 23 Aust. Inf. Bde.<sup>148</sup>

Lind's concern about AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15 seems odd, however, as Allied command Halong sent a message to AHQ Melbourne on 13 January acknowledging the receipt of the orders.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, both Lind and Roach deny ever having received them. It is possible, however, that the orders were sent by AHQ but not passed on to Roach by the mixed Australian and Dutch Staff HQ at Halong.

Without a prearranged command structure being set in place before Gull Force's arrival and not having written orders Roach faced a difficult task in establishing a working relationship with Col Kapitz, commander of the Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indische Leger Ambon (Royal Netherlands-Indies Army or KNIL), to coordinate the defences on Ambon. Lt McBride<sup>150</sup> later explained that 'relations between the two commanders, although cordial, could not have really effective results, because of the attitude of the Dutch Force on the method of defence adopted'.<sup>151</sup> This statement was borne out when, two weeks before the Japanese attacked Ambon, the Australian and Dutch military

---

<sup>148</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Reports from Gull Force to General Sir Archibald Wavell Re Fall Ambonia to Japanese - Reports on Bombing Raid on Ambon by Japanese, 7 Jan 1942, AWM54, 573/6/8, 1941-1942, p. 16.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Lt Ian H McBride OBE, Officer Commanding 12 Platoon B Company 2/21 Battalion AIF.

<sup>151</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, 1942, p. 3.

forces divided because of Kapitz's ostensible belief that Australian troops could not work with Indonesian soldiers because of language barriers.

In coming to grips with the situation on Ambon, Roach carried out another reconnaissance of the Island to assess the KNIL dispositions. The aggregate strength of Dutch NEI forces under Kapitz's command numbered around 2,600.<sup>152</sup> The organisational structure of Dutch forces was 5 companies of 1,044 mixed European and Indonesian troops; one company of 100 European militia troops; 1 home guard with 650-mixed European and Indonesian troops; 1 MG Coy of 250 mixed European and Indonesian troops; a depot battalion of 300 Indonesian Ambonese militia; and, a detachment of 60 Indonesian troops from Bula Village on the neighbouring island of Ceram.

The Dutch artillery amounted to 1 battery of (four) 6 in. fixed guns, 3 batteries of 3 in. mobile guns, 1 section of 3 in. fixed guns, 2 sections of 2.75 in. mobile guns, 2 sections of 1.576 in. mobile Bofors AA guns, 1 section of 1.45 in. mobile AA guns and 3 sections of .5 in. AAMGs with attached searchlight units. Kapitz also had four Brewster Buffalo fighters (two unserviceable) stationed at Laha as well as nine Catalina flying boats based at Halong. The American Navy also had Catalina flying boats stationed at Halong. The RAAF's 13 Squadron supplemented the Dutch and Americans flying boats with two flights of Hudsons operating out of the Darwin.

---

<sup>152</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, 1942 -1942, p. 4.



However, supplies required for the ground support of the Hudson squadron at Ambon were found wanting. GP-CAPT Scherger RAAF reported to his commander after visiting Ambon in early December that as far as Laha was concerned:

The supply service had failed; stocks of ammunition and fuel were quite inadequate, maintenance facilities were negligible, and dispersal for aircraft at Laha ... was very poor ... Equipment issued to Hudson crews was insufficient and there were no spare engines for their aircraft, although spares and equipment had been ordered in September.<sup>153</sup>

Exacerbating this situation was the fact that 13 Squadron had begun using fuel supplies and losing planes during photographic reconnaissance and bombing attacks on Japanese forces at Tobi Island from as early as 10 December.<sup>154</sup>

Kapitz's total maritime forces on Ambon amounted to two armed harbourmaster motorboats, which were given the desperate task of guarding the entrance to Ambon Bay against warships. Kapitz covered the other potential landing sites at Baguala Bay, Seri Bay and Waai Bay with booms made of logs and sea mines.<sup>155</sup> He also knew that his forces could not simultaneously man the whole island at the potential beach landing points with the troops he then had available. In fact, all his units were under strength and each had inadequate numbers of officers and NCOs available to command the KNIL troops. Nevertheless, Kapitz had established solid defensive positions at the most probable landing sites long before the Japanese arrived.

Working from a centralised base at Paso, Kapitz planned his system of defence in three basic phases: first, to hold Paso as the main base, distribute selected units into prepared

---

<sup>153</sup> Gillison, D., *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942: Series Two (Navy) Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1962), p. 242.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, pp. 5, 7.

positions close to obvious landing sites and staff the defences at Laha airfield; second, to withdraw inland on Paso after fighting delaying actions against the Japanese landings; and finally, to fall back into positions held by the general reserve in the hinterland and holdup the Japanese advance from reaching Paso. He called this his 'Reedefront' (ready front) plan. It was a flexible plan in nature which allowed him to respond to known Japanese landing points when they arrived while also providing the freedom to manoeuvre troops as required.<sup>156</sup>

Kapitz located his main force at Paso where the isthmus between the Hitu and Laitimor peninsulas created a bottleneck to large military forces, as he expected the main Japanese landings would arrive at Baguala Bay. He had also prepared Latuhalat and Eri as the defensive positions for the southwestern coastal sector on the Laitimor Peninsular in case the Japanese tried a beachhead landing at the entrance to Ambon Bay. A Bren gun carrier and one platoon were later allocated to Latuhalat for fighting delaying actions back to Eri. Kapitz gave orders to hold the Eri positions to the utmost, or at least until subjected to encirclement, and then to withdraw to Amahusu and defend it at all costs. Amahusu was a crucial defensive point linked to the defences on Mount Nona and Mount Seri where Kapitz had hoped to guard his southern flanks.<sup>157</sup>

In the southeastern sector of Laitimor Peninsular Kapitz prepared the coastal defence positions at Sojadiatas and Waru to support the main group above the potential landing site at Rutung. Kapitz decided to assign one company to occupy these villages. At the

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 5-6.

start, one platoon occupied the prepared positions at Sojadiatas and Waru and two platoons occupied the forward positions at Rutung to engage any Japanese landings as well as to fight delaying actions back through the mountain positions to Ambon Town. Other platoons defended the access routes through Leahari and Ema back to Sojadiatas. Kapitz decided that these defensive positions would cover the principle approaches to Ambon Town, and the rear of Paso, from the southeast coast. Kapitz considered these arrangements sound based on his belief that the narrow jungle tracks made it too difficult for other than small forces like his own to penetrate across the mountains.<sup>158</sup> (See disposition map in Appendix 1)

In the Hitu peninsula sectors, Kapitz chose to defend the potential landing sites at Hitulama on the north coast as well as Waai and Tolehu on the east coast. The role of the troops at Hitulama was to protect the northern approaches to Laha and Paso by repelling Japanese landings on the beaches and, failing that, to fight delaying actions back through prepared positions from Mount Helat to Paso. The positions at Waai and Tolehu also had the same role of resisting any Japanese landings and withdrawing back to Paso. However, their task was two-part; a fighting withdrawal from Waai to the Tolehu positions, or, if the Japanese took Hitulama making the Waai-Tolehu positions untenable, a withdrawal back to Paso.<sup>159</sup> As Roach had not received AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15 explaining the command structure on Ambon and the fact that Kapitz claimed general command for the defence of Ambon, Roach worked within the limits of the above plan.

---

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7; National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 15.

<sup>159</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, pp. 6-7.

When Roach inspected Kapitz's plan he found that, although the KNIL forces were adequate in quality, the prepared defences, pillboxes and defended posts were disproportionate to men, machine guns and equipment available to make the plan practicable. He noted that Kapitz could not effectively occupy all the posts along the coast because of a lack of personnel and equipment. Roach thought it would be too time-consuming and impracticable to withdraw troops from superfluous posts with their equipment to strengthen the many other posts if called for.<sup>160</sup> Adding to Roach's concern was 'that Dutch strength and dispositions were always difficult to obtain' from Kapitz.<sup>161</sup> For example, Roach's incomplete information of Kapitz's resources at the time was demonstrated by his lack of knowledge about two 6-inch coastal guns that were located in bunkers on the hills behind Paso facing Baguala Bay.<sup>162</sup>

On 4 January 1942, Roach had A, B, and D Companies plus their support units encamped at Tantui and C Coy encamped at Laha. Initially 'Roach, with his Indian Army experience in mind, wanted to put his troops among the KNIL's Indonesian companies and planned his dispositions accordingly, with one company at Laha, one to go to Paso and one held in mobile reserve'.<sup>163</sup> Roach wanted to withhold at least one company from Kapitz's plan to use as a mobile counter attacking force when the time came and he kept A, B and D Companies plus their support units at Tantui.

After the first series of Japanese air raids over Ambon on 7 January, Capt Gabriel reported that the:

---

<sup>160</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, p. 2.

<sup>161</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 19.

<sup>162</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 424.

N.E.I. troops at LAHA remained cool and unperturbed and elsewhere the effect on them seems to be the reverse on what the JAPS would doubtless desire. A.I.F. and R.A.A.F. troops behaved in exemplary manner, particularly at LAHA where the attack was primarily directed.<sup>164</sup>

As the weeks progressed, however, the Japanese carried out more air raids that forced Roach to amend his plans and spread his companies away from Tantui to avoid the bombing. Roach kept one platoon of B Coy, B Echelon, the RAP and Gull Force Infantry Bn HQ at Tantui; D Coy moved to Amahusu; one pioneer platoon moved to the Mount Nona observation post; and, A Coy moved to Paso. Roach also moved the stores to Kudamati and had them and the ammunition dumps camouflaged to protect them from air raids.<sup>165</sup>

Following the move the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Field Coy, working in liaison with a Dutch engineer officer, began preparations for the demolition of hangers, bridges, wharves, fuel storage and other major assets deemed useful to the Japanese. C Coy remained at Laha airfield together with small detachments from the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Field Coy, 2/12<sup>th</sup> Ambulance, Signals and AASC, as well as 4 Bren Carriers and 3 Mortars.<sup>166</sup> Over the following weeks Japanese planes maintained their attacks against Laha airfield. The objective of the raids was to render the airfield unserviceable and to destroy any Allied planes remaining on the runway abutments. In one raid, thirty bombers under fighter escorts dropped 114 heavy bombs along the runway, but Australian and Dutch troops were able to repair the damage by the following day. After this raid ended the soldiers at Laha were evacuated from their huts and dispersed to the hilly ground to the north of the airfield where they

---

<sup>164</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Reports from Gull Force to General Sir Archibald Wavell Re Fall Ambonia to Japanese - Reports on Bombing Raid on Ambon by Japanese, 7 Jan 1942, AWM54, 573/6/8, p. 12.

<sup>165</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 44.

<sup>166</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, p. 7; National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 17.

were left exposed to unsheltered jungle conditions and malarial mosquitoes where many men soon contracted malaria.<sup>167</sup>

On 10 January 1942, Kapitz called Roach to Territorial Command HQ at Halong to discuss the combined forces dispositions. As Roach was ill, Major Macrae took his place at the meeting. Kapitz told Macrae that his company commanders had complained that they could not work with Australian troops. Kapitz based this claim on existing language difficulties between the Dutch/Indonesian troops and the Australian troops. He offered Macrae two alternatives; either the Australians take over the sector between Hitulama and Paso or take over the sector containing Mount Nona-the Coal Wharf-Laha. Macrae told Kapitz that, subject to Roach's approval, the Australians would take the second option because it took in Laha airfield, which was apparently the Australian force's principle reason for being at Ambon. Roach confirmed the decision and issued orders to put the new plan in train and repositioned his troops the next day. By 15 January, the division of responsibilities and the new dispositions of the Dutch and Australian troops had begun to shift, with the Dutch holding Paso and covering potential coastal landing sites while the Australians covered Laha as well as the southwest sector of the Laitimor Peninsular.<sup>168</sup>

In early January, Kapitz discovered that the Japanese had assembled a large convoy at Manado with the probable aim of attacking Ambon and he withdrew his KNIL units back from Laha to concentrate his forces at Paso. This move effectively separated the

---

<sup>167</sup> National Archives of Australia, Australian Troops at Rabaul, Java, Timor and Ambon. Question of Relief and Maintenance of Contact, A5954, 532/, 1942-1943, p. 45.

<sup>168</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Administration:] from G3 Journal before 5th April 1942. Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service, the Battle for Ambon, January-February 1942, AWM54, 573/4/2, 1942-1944, p. 3.

Dutch defences in the eastern sectors of Ambon from the Australian sectors in the West. From that time forward the Australian and Dutch forces acted independently of one another. The effect of the decision was the separation of the Allied forces, leaving Roach's companies divided by Ambon Bay at Laha and the southwest sector of Laitimor Peninsular, which covered Kudamati, Amahusu and Eri while Kapitz's forces remained concentrated at Paso. The consequences of this move were a hindrance to the concentration of force in cooperation with the Australians at any given time or place while providing the potential for all three isolated forces to be wedged and attacked in detail by the Japanese landing forces.<sup>169</sup>

In responding to Kapitz's new order of battle Roach removed A and D Companies plus one platoon of B Coy from Paso and Tantui to Eri and Amahusu. B Coy (less one platoon) was sent to join C Coy at Laha. Roach organised A and D Companies to act in mobile reserve with all their company trucks loaded and ready to move. Under these arrangements Roach decided that if the Japanese landed in small scale at either Latuhalat or Ambon Bay, D Coy could reinforce A Coy with one or two platoons and counter attack.

If large-scale landings happened at Latuhalat or Ambon Bay, A Coy was to withdraw to the Amahusu line and, in proximity to D Coy, occupy the Ambon Road facing back from Amahusu Village and Gull Force Bn HQ. If landings took place elsewhere, Roach wanted to hold Amahusu, the Benteng Barracks and the heights of Mount Nona.

Because the Mount Nona position protected the left flank, Roach positioned a pioneer

---

<sup>169</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, p. 3.

platoon as an observation post on top of the mountain and armed it with three automatic weapons in case Japanese paratroops landed on the position.<sup>170</sup>

From 10 until 15 January Roach had his troops moving water, stores, ammunition and other supplies up the trenches and along the ridges of the Amahusu Line leading to the top of Mount Nona. These troops became busy occupying and revetting the existing Dutch trenches that ran from the sea on a gradient of one-in-six up the mountainside for 2560 metres. The Dutch had already constructed at least thirteen concrete pillboxes along this line and the trenches and wire defences were already in place. Nevertheless, D Coy soldiers had to carry all their supplies along this steep route on foot. Roach respectively located his Bn HQ and the regimental aid post (RAP) at a school and church belonging to the Amahusu village.<sup>171</sup>

A Coy concurrently spent its time occupying the Eri Line farther to the West. This line climbed along the edge of a precipitous gorge leading up from the sea to the Tjenke plateau, which rests above Eri. Similar to the Amahusu line, the Eri line also consisted of concrete pillboxes, trenches and defensive works, only here the pillboxes were found to be too conspicuous for use. A Coy was required to build new and more suitably camouflaged medium machine gun posts in their stead.

---

<sup>170</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, 1950-1950, p. 9.

<sup>171</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, p. 19.



The Eri line was steeper and longer than the Amahusu line and men on foot had to supply these lines also. Although the Tjenke plateau was vulnerable along its left flank, Kapitz planned to supply a company of KNIL troops to bolster the Australians by occupying the gap. At Eri, Roach allocated two platoons from A Coy to occupy selected positions along the beach.<sup>172</sup> Even though the Dutch administration had supplied Ambonese labour as carriers for both A and D companies, the soldiers became exhausted over the next two weeks after repeatedly climbing the steep ridges and carrying supplies to their positions under the tropical sun.

Meanwhile, back in December and after examining the Dutch dispositions on Ambon, Roach became concerned about the weakness of the Island's defences and began corresponding with AHQ in Melbourne asking for reinforcements. On 17 and again on 23 December, Roach sent a number of cables to Lt-Col Scott, General Staff Officer Grade 1 (GSO 1), asking for additional artillery guns, machine guns and a further field troop. On 24 December Roach cabled AHQ again to warn them that Ambon could hold out for one or two days only 'against a determined attack from more than one direction simultaneously'. Roach wrote that:

To be of any appreciable value we consider imperative have following additional forthwith. 2 troops field artillery preferable carriage 2 troops anti-tanks 6 mortars 4 medium machine guns all with personnel 2 rifle companies fully equipped. Requisite ammunition food for all on liberal scale also bush nets and medical (supplies?) few anti-aircraft guns would be useful as ([sic]it is unreasonable anticipate? Bofors not arrived. Carriers not arrived. Owing to enemy strategy now employed indications are this position will be precarious even with above additional if adequate support services other services not provided. Would appreciate indication proposed policy.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], MP742/1, R/2/1803, 1942 -1947, p. 108.

This cable makes it clear that Roach had little idea what AHQ's policy for Ambon was even though he understood the dangerous position that he and his troops were placed in without further reinforcement and especially without naval and substantial air support coming from Australia or elsewhere.

Roach reported that our 'position [here] is not as strong as it sounds on paper. This has caused me considerable concern, particularly as I am in complete ignorance at present of the policy so far as holding this position is concerned'.<sup>174</sup> He went on to ask 'whether it is worth losing the whole force for a few days resistance to the enemy'.<sup>175</sup> Scott did not accept Roach's concern and noted to the side of this sentence 'well worth it - what's the force there for'. As far as the food supplies were concerned, Roach reported to AHQ on 24 December that rations needed topping up by 33% above the original stores landed at Ambon. He pointed out that frozen mutton, potatoes and onions had not arrived, that rations stocks were less than had been intended and that this had exacerbated the situation at Ambon because army rations were being shared with RAAF personnel. Somewhat desperately he added that 'we have acquired an ex enemy lugger in the hope that we may be able to supplement our supplies' with fish.<sup>176</sup>

Two days later Roach received a terse reply from Rowell showing concern that ammunition and food reserves at Ambon were needed when enough supplies, in his opinion, had already been shipped to Ambon. He told Roach that Bren carriers had been

---

<sup>174</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Gull and Sparrow Dates of Disembarkation, Information Regarding Rations - Petrol Supply and Ammunition, Correspondence between Col Scott and Lt Col J Roach Re Equipment, 1941, AWM54, 573/6/3, 1941-1942, p. 63.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-3.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

shipped to Ambon and would arrive in the first week of January. As for the reinforcements Roach had requested, Rowell informed him that there were no additional units available.<sup>177</sup> Concerning AHQ policy in the defence of Ambon, Rowell simply recorded 'your job in cooperation with local Dutch forces is to put up the best defence possible with the resources you have at your disposal'.<sup>178</sup> Roach replied, 'Additional requested would make immeasurable difference this strategically important centre as feel confident enemy will waver before Australian fire and bayonets. Almost eager administer salutary punishment'.<sup>179</sup>

Concerning Rowell's cable the Dutch KPM transport vessel *SS Bantam* and the anti submarine escort sloop *HMAS Swan* arrived at Ambon on 10 January with ten Bren carriers, an ambulance, two 15-hundredweight vans, two motorcycles, 180 days of ration stores, mortar bombs and additional ammunition for Gull Force. As expected, no substantial reinforcements arrived with the *Bantam*. When *HMAS Swan* embarked for Darwin, it evacuated Dutch women and children, severe medical cases and three soldiers facing court-martial.<sup>180</sup>

In responding to Rowell's cable Roach wrote of his true concerns to Scott at AHQ. William John Rendell Scott was an interesting character. He began his career as an insurance broker before enlisting in the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF during the First World War. Scott served with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Bns in France and received a DSO for his service at Flers during

---

<sup>177</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], p. 107.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 422.

<sup>180</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 20.

1916. On his return to Australia in 1918 he set up the brokerage firm Scott & Board.

Scott was interesting because in the period between the First and Second World Wars he had become a leader in an ultra conservative organisation called the 'White Army', a Japanese foreign office collaborator, a member of the Australia-Japan Society, a spy for military intelligence and an advocate for Japanese foreign policy, which included his support for Japan's policy on the occupation of Manchuria.

Scott was an anti-unionist reactionary, was fervently anti-socialist and helped organise returned soldiers from the First World War into the 'White Army' to act as strongmen in threatening socialist meetings and even governments of the time. By 1931, Scott was the Chief of Staff of a 30,000 strong organisation. The White Army was a subversive secret army sworn to uphold civil government, but ironically played a role in the dismissal of Premier Jack Lang by intimidating governor Phillip Game with the prospect of facing 'violent action' if Lang remained in government. Although the White Army disbanded in August 1932, diehard Scott continued to hold meetings in his brokerage office with a group of the White Army's past leaders. In 1932 Scott helped Eric Campbell form a new ultra conservative group called the 'New Guard'.<sup>181</sup>

During this time Scott began taking an interest in Japanese business and trade. Between 1932 and 1935 he wrote articles and letters to the Sydney Morning Herald for the Japanese consulate's propaganda machine in supporting Japanese industry and foreign policy and especially pertaining to Manchuria where he acted on an official invitation

---

<sup>181</sup> Campbell, E., *The Rallying Point: My Story of the New Guard*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965), pp. 30-34.

from the Japanese to explore the prospects for wool production in Manchuria. On returning to Australia, Scott remained active in the Australian militia and became a military intelligence officer running a civilian spy network linked to the New South Wales police force. In 1939, his role turned to spying on Sydney's Japanese community and resolving differences between military and civil intelligence agencies. Although somewhat successful in his role in intelligence, Scott's colleagues viewed him as an arrogant highhanded intriguer.

In June 1940, Scott joined the general staff in Melbourne to direct the Australian Independent Company guerrilla warfare school at Wilson's promontory. After returning to GHQ in May 1941, he became GSO1 operations and liaison officer to Gull Force. Ultimately, Scott's eclectic mixture of peculiar affiliations did not hamper his rise to the rank of Lt-Col at AHQ.<sup>182</sup> Roach was probably ignorant of the above history when he naively placed his personal trust in Scott's hands. He wrote two letters to Scott on 1 January 1942, one secret and personal and the other official, asking for Scott's support in gaining a satisfactory response from AHQ on the issue of supplying adequate materials and reinforcements needed for the defence of Ambon.

In the secret and personal letter Roach spoke his mind to Scott complaining:

I find it difficult to overcome a feeling of disgust, and more than a little concern at the way in which we have seemingly been “dumped” at this outpost position, in the first place without any instructions whatever ... and in the second place with (so far) a flat refusal to consider any increase in fire power and the number of tps., whilst the co-operation and assistance from the other two arms of the Service must be of very limited value indeed ... After all, I am for the time being the “man on the spot”, and even from the earliest and very brief recce I made, I said that more fire power than that at present allowed me is necessary to

---

<sup>182</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Online: National Centre of Biography, Sturdee, Sir Vernon Ashton Hobart (1890–1966).

successfully hold this position. After a more thorough recce., I find this even more necessary than I at first thought. It seems to me (and it seems to other experienced Offrs. here) that unless such fighter and augmented bomber support can be given, together with some naval assistance, then the garrison here must inevitably suffer the same fate as HONG KONG, the only difference being that with a determined attack on a large scale from several directions simultaneously, we may be able to hold out for two, or perhaps three days.<sup>183</sup>

Roach vented his frustration regarding the Gull Force situation and demonstrated he was not alone in his assessment that Ambon required additional support. He told Scott that he had spoken to the heads of other services on Ambon and they had confirmed Roach's appreciation that more air and naval support would be required to hold the Island.<sup>184</sup>

Roach went on to criticise AHQ's strategy for the defence of Ambon:

It is beyond my comprehension to understand - and I am not alone in this - why this policy of a dissipation of strength, which is not adequately supported, is allowed to continue. There have already been salutary [sic] lessons in this regard in this war, and although I thoroughly appreciate the enormous importance of time, and delaying action, I cannot be convinced that the throwing away of a Force like this, and that of Leggett's [on Timor], for the sake of anything up to three days delay to the enemy, is worth the sacrifice of so many valuable lives, and valuable material. Perhaps the same thing obtains with Carr [at Rabaul], but I do not know enough about the circumstances there, to discuss it.<sup>185</sup>

It is understandable that Roach could not comprehend AHQ's approach when he had not been told that the war cabinet and the service chiefs had already decided to abandon the Islands under their grand strategy of line observation on 12 December 1941. It seems little wonder that after Carr's Lark Force fell to the Japanese at Rabaul on 23 January 1942, Rowell was reported to comment that 'it's not the first time a few thousand men have been thrown away and it won't be the last', after all this what was expected by

---

<sup>183</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Messages Exchanged between Gull Force and AHQ, Relative to Criticism of the Means to Defend Ambon. The Policy Being Employed and the Subsequent Relief of Command of Lieutenant Colonel L N Roach by Lieutenant Colonel J W R Scott, January 1942 [Reference Copy], AWM54, 573/6/10B, 1942 -1943, p. 48.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

Curtin, the war cabinet and the three service chiefs.<sup>186</sup> Clearly, in this context, AHQ could ignore Roach's appeal regarding the sacrifice of his men and materials at Ambon while they pursued a policy of limiting additional losses in resources to the Japanese.

Unaware of the above policy, Roach went on to reason that AHQ's strategy was either to hold the Islands in the North to protect Australia, or not. He argued that, if the policy was to hold the Islands, then adequate means were needed to do that. On the other hand, if AHQ intended to abandon the Islands, then the commanders needed to know so that they could arrange to hold the Islands up to a point and then evacuate to concentrate elsewhere. Roach, probably assuming AHQ was seriously committed to defending Ambon, wrote that 'the policy of sitting down and waiting to be encircled, which unfortunately has happened on more than one occasion, is doomed to failure'.<sup>187</sup>

The premise of Roach's argument was that, without knowing the objective of AHQ's policy, many lives could be lost while the commanders on the Islands were unaware of the actual situation. Underscoring his concern, Roach asked Scott whether it was the intention of AHQ 'to continue the policy of allowing small Forces, inadequately equipped for their task, to be spread over a vast area, so that they can be defeated in detail?' He put it to Scott that it would be better to 'cut the loss' and concentrate all American, Dutch and Australian forces farther to the South in preparation for a later and more decisive action. In his appeal to Scott, Roach asked that he provide a copy of the

---

<sup>186</sup> Horner, D., *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-1943*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), p. 36.

<sup>187</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Messages Exchanged between Gull Force and AHQ, Relative to Criticism of the Means to Defend Ambon. The Policy Being Employed and the Subsequent Relief of Command of Lieutenant Colonel L N Roach by Lieutenant Colonel J W R Scott, January 1942 [Reference Copy], AWM54, 573/6/10B, p. 49.

letter to the minister of the army to help' in his words prevent further 'avoidable catastrophes'.<sup>188</sup>

In his official letter to Scott, Roach claimed he was ignorant of his battalion's role at Ambon. He formally complained that:

All I knew about our detachment from Bde. was that my Brigadier, just prior to my leaving, said, 'Very sorry you are to leave my Command, but you now come under AHQ direct and will have nothing further to do with this Bde. Neither will you have anything further to do with 7 MD [Military District] except that they form the advance portion of your L of C [lines of communications]. You will be empowered to appoint two additional Offrs., one as GSO 3, and the other as "I" Offr. for your Force HQ". - and this is all I know.<sup>189</sup>

He pointed out to Scott that a request had been made through official channels for operational orders, but he had received nothing other than an obtuse message that stated 'Co-operation with the Local D[utch] was to put up best defence possible with the resources at my disposal'.<sup>190</sup> In reading the content of these letters, it appears Roach had come to the conclusion that Rowell's message of putting up the 'best defence possible' meant that Gull Force would be sacrificed, albeit for hitherto unknown reasons.

Despite the secret and personal nature of the personal letter, Scott betrayed Roach's trust and passed it and all other cables from him to Rowell, but not to the Minister concerned as requested by Roach. The motivation for Scott's duplicity soon became apparent. Scott wrote to Rowell on 11 January angling for command of Gull Force. As Scott put it, 'I should be proud indeed to be allowed to move by the quickest means available to Ambon and take over from the C.O. Gull Force'.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p 50.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



He expressed his ill informed opinion that the political implications involved in putting up a strong resistance to the Japanese at Ambon, regardless of the outcome, would help clinch Dutch cooperation, demonstrate to the USA that Australia was prepared to fight and heighten morale in Australia, Malaya and elsewhere. Here Scott demonstrated he was unaware that the true policy for the Islands was one of line observation. The only qualification Scott offered to Rowell for assuming command at Ambon was his professed promise that 'I have no particular belief in my ability but I have a definite belief in my ability to inspire confidence in men and to lead them'.<sup>192</sup>

After the war Scott justified his moves against Roach when he wrote:

On 11th Jan a lengthy, and what might be described as an hysterical cipher cable, was received at AHQ Melbourne from the C.O. (Lt-Col Roach) of Gull Force, Ambon. Previous cables and letters from this officer to AHQ had been couched in similar terms, those of defeatism and entire lack of morale. As GSO 1 Operations, AHQ, I wrote a minute to the DMO calling attention to the cable of 11th Jan and previous correspondence in similar terms, at the same time recommending Lt-Col Roach's recall and the appointment of a new commanding officer. I offered my own services if this was thought desirable.<sup>193</sup>

It seems Scott had either overreacted or at least exaggerated Roach's concerns regarding the conditions on Ambon to serve his own interests in obtaining command for himself.

Scott may have chosen this moment to make Rowell and Sturdee aware of his perceived concerns about Roach's abilities to maintain the morale of his troops while simultaneously angling to take over command of Gull Force. He had based his argument on the cables that Roach had sent to AHQ on 11 January where he informed Scott that:

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 2, AWM54, 573/6/1B, Part 2, 1939-45, p. 4.

Am very disturbed at complete absence of response in view of latest positions ... can we rely immediately adequate support ... if not the result must be inevitable as predicted. We are all completely in the dark and failing any information from your end prospects are gloomy. At present time (safety?) apparently is 12 hours.<sup>194</sup>

Followed by:

Japanese now established Manado and Kema 359 miles from Ambon bases. Anticipate concentrated bombing from flying boats based Lake Tondana as preliminary to invasion of Ambon. With present equipment Ambon could not resist for 1 day forces equal to those which took Manado Kenadri [sic] Kema. Again urgently request immediate reinforcements by fighters and dive bombers ... Enemy has definite sea control as well as air superiority and therefore situation far worse than instances such as Greece. Intelligence report allies supply line through Torres Strait and Darwin will be cut within 1 week of capture of Ambon.<sup>195</sup>

Roach's last cable that day was to request a conference at Darwin with Leggett to discuss the present situation.

In support of these concerns Capt Tanner, an intelligence officer at Ambon, also sent two cables to AHQ on 13 January giving his assessment of the situation. He wrote that 'I have read this secret and personal communication addressed to you by C.O. "Gull" Force and I entirely agree with his description of the position as it affects "Gull" Force'. He went on that he was 'aware of the joint views of the respective commanders of all forces including NEI concerning trim of local position'.<sup>196</sup> Tanner recommended that AHQ evacuate Ambon, adding that any delay would result in disaster.<sup>197</sup> He followed up later with another cable stating the 'present strength of combined forces here can only offer short resistance [sic] to expected attack. Can I advise that reinforcements if necessary will be provided or that evacuation will be attempted'.<sup>198</sup> These letters

---

<sup>194</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], MP742/1, R/2/1803, p. 91.

<sup>195</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Messages Exchanged between Gull Force and AHQ, Relative to Criticism of the Means to Defend Ambon. The Policy Being Employed and the Subsequent Relief of Command of Lieutenant Colonel L N Roach by Lieutenant Colonel J W R Scott, January 1942 [Reference Copy], AWM54, 573/6/10B, p. 43.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>198</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], MP742/1, R/2/1803, p. 36.

demonstrated that although very concerned, Roach was not panicking. Rather it shows that he was responsibly, albeit frustratedly, trying to convince an unresponsive AHQ of the true position on Ambon and that he had the support of his fellow officers.

Rowell's reply was blunt, threatening and unproductive, but it provided a glimpse into Gull Force's true objective despite a definite lack of detail:

We are completely aware of the enemy situation as represented in your series of messages. These should cease at once and your attention be given to carrying out my instructions contained last paragraph my MC 4060 26 Dec. Your situation is being closely watched. Your staunch defence will have important effect especially in regard to future Australia Dutch co-operation.<sup>199</sup>

This was the first time that AHQ had informed Roach of any policy regarding the defence of Ambon, although it was only partially true where Rowell attached it to Dutch cooperation, because AHQ knew that Gull Force was doomed to carryout a redundant policy of line observation with no ends and that it had kept that information from Roach. Rather than fully inform Roach of the true situation, Rowell threatened to remove him from command if he continued to cable AHQ asking for reinforcements; Roach stopped doing so. Nevertheless, Scott had undermined Roach's credibility and Sturdee took up on his offer to replace Roach. In Scott Sturdee had found a willing marionette that would serve AHQ policies without officially complaining about the inadequacies of the Ambon operation.

Nevertheless, Roach's cables had affected Sturdee. He began writing letters that ostensibly addressed Roaches concerns, but he retained in files unsent. In filing these

---

<sup>199</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Messages Exchanged between Gull Force and AHQ, Relative to Criticism of the Means to Defend Ambon. The Policy Being Employed and the Subsequent Relief of Command of Lieutenant Colonel L N Roach by Lieutenant Colonel J W R Scott, January 1942 [Reference Copy], AWM54, 573/6/10B, p. 32.

letters, it suggests that Sturdee was either prevaricating or otherwise seeking to protect himself from any future enquiry into his conduct in controlling the Ambon operations, as they contradicted his policy of not throwing away resources to a lost cause in the Islands strategy. For example, on 13 January, Sturdee wrote a letter to Darwin HQ to arrange for Lt-Col Veale to inspect Gull Force and the Ambon defences. Sturdee explained to Lind that Roach was becoming alarmist and was asking for reinforcements that AHQ was unable to fulfil.

The main basis for Sturdee's concern was Scott's misconceived assessment of Roach's influence on the morale of Gull Force and its possible effect on relations between Australian and Dutch forces. Veale was to report whether, with the present resources, the defence of Ambon was adequate; whether Roach had undermined the state of morale of the Australian and the Dutch forces; and, whether Roach was continuing to undermine the morale of the forces on Ambon.<sup>200</sup> Sturdee stressed the importance of Gull Force remaining at Ambon to bolster Australian-Dutch relations. Apparently, the nature of the letter demonstrated Sturdee's responsiveness to Roach's concerns, but it was never delivered.

In a second unsent letter, Sturdee wrote to the Minister for the Army, Frank Forde, explaining that the AIF unit commanders at Ambon and Timor had both stressed the need for additional field artillery. Sturdee wrote:

Although it was known from previous reconnaissances [sic] that field artillery has a limited scope owing to the nature of the terrain, it is now felt that these battalions should have some close artillery support against the types of landings being made by the Japanese. A definite

---

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

role exists for 18 pounder guns, firstly for beach defence against military landing craft, and secondly against armoured fighting vehicles after they have come ashore.<sup>201</sup>

Sturdee explained to Forde that the AIF had no available artillery units to send to Timor and Ambon and requested permission to enlist an AMF independent field artillery troop into the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF for despatch to the Islands in two separate sections. The success of his proposal rested on persuading AMF troops, which were bound to the mainland defence of Australia only, to take-up overseas service by enlisting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF at short notice to reinforce Gull Force. Sturdee must have known, however, that the Japanese were close to attacking the Island and time was against such a plan.

In a final example, Sturdee wrote to Forde of his 'regret' for having to dismiss Roach from Gull Force command. He explained:

Since his arrival in AMBON Lieutenant-Colonel Roach has given evidence, in a series of letters and signals, of a rapid deterioration of morale. It has become increasingly clear from his messages that not only is he, personally, unfitted to lead the defence of this island with the necessary resolution, but that the morale of all forces in the area is rapidly being lowered as a result of Lieutenant-Colonel Roach's lack of spirit.<sup>202</sup>

This assertion over morale would later prove untrue when Scott arrived at Ambon.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that Sturdee believed this was the case, or at least believed it was good cause to remove Roach from command.

Sturdee demonstrated that he thought he could mislead Forde by claiming:

The force provided, in co-operation with N.E.I. forces, is considered sufficient to retain the island against attempted occupation on a light scale. To provide sufficient forces to withstand a major attack is entirely beyond our means. Great value should accrue, however, if the enemy is denied the island except by the employment of overwhelming forces.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

This was misleading because AHQ had already informed Roach that 'we are completely aware of the enemy situation', which indicated Sturdee knew an overwhelming Japanese force was on the way to Ambon and that, should they attack, it was beyond the means of Gull Force to hold the Island. Sturdee seems to have also forgotten that Forde attended the 12 December war cabinet meeting where it was decided to abandon Rabaul and presumably Timor and Ambon to similar fates.

Notwithstanding the above, Sturdee's real intentions in the letter became apparent where he attempted to undermine Roach's expressed concerns about the inadequate numbers of Australian forces and equipment at Ambon. Sturdee tried to ameliorate his position by convincing Forde that, as Ambon now came under Sir Archibald Wavell as C-in-C American-British-Dutch-Australia Command (ABDACOM), 'resources in support of the defence of Ambon, if it is attacked, are likely to be considerable'. This was a nonsensical suggestion, as the reinforcement of the relatively insignificant outpost at Ambon 2,294 km away from Bandung in Java was unlikely to have been high on Wavell's agenda at a time when Singapore was gravely threatened. On this point, the facts overruled Sturdee's suggestion.

For example, Wavell's responsibilities covered the defence of Singapore, India, Burma, the Philippines, the NEI and northern Australia. His task was to protect the 5,632 kilometre long "Malay Barrier", which stretched from Thailand to the southern coast of New Guinea and including northern Australia. The problem Wavell faced was that ABDACOM formed too late to develop any effective defence along such broad lines with the too few military forces available to him at the time. As it was, ABDACOM

lacked unity of purpose with conflicting political demands regarding Britain's interests in saving Singapore, MacArthur's aims in defending the Philippines, Dutch needs in defending the NEI and Australian calls for the defence of Australia.<sup>204</sup>

Wavell's instructions stated that he could not exercise authority over any forces except through his government and the commanders appointed by their respective governments.<sup>205</sup> For example, the Dutch and American commanders concerned with the forward Allied bases at Sabang, Balikpapan, Kendari and Ambon had asked Wavell that he reinforce the isolated outposts, but Wavell replied that the risk of dissipating further forces was too risky.<sup>206</sup> Even if Wavell wanted to or could have sent reinforcements to Ambon, it was an unlikely prospect owing to time constraints and the above military and political demands on ABDACOM. In other words, Sturdee was stretching his imagination (especially when he should have been aware of the restrictions placed on ABDACOM) if he truly thought Wavell would, or could, send military resources to the relatively unimportant island of Ambon.

It seems Sturdee was concerned that Forde should come by Roach's complaints by some means other than AHQ. He ended his withheld letter by feigning concern for Roach's position where he wrote:

Although, for Lieutenant-Colonel Roach's sake it is most desirable that this matter should remain confidential, in view of his latest appeals which request reference to yourself, I feel it

---

<sup>204</sup> Shepard, S. B., "American, British, Dutch, and Australian Coalition: Unsuccessful Band of Brothers" (University of Virginia, 1990), p. 202.

<sup>205</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, pp. 646-49.

<sup>206</sup> Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942: Series Two (Navy) Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 369.

is possible that Lieutenant-Colonel Roach may be inclined to ventilate his views and that you should be advised of the situation.<sup>207</sup>

The truth is Sturdee could not have cared less about Roach. He wrote after the War that:

He was a squealer from the moment he got to Darwin ... From the time that he arrived at Ambon he never let up. His final message was demanding that ships be sent to Ambon to take the force out ... Not only did he send a message to me but he repeated it to Wavell at ABDACOM HQ (a channel he was not authorized to use) indicating to me that he had lost his punch. As it turned out I should have left him there to go into the [Japanese] bag and saved a good man like Scott for further useful service.<sup>208</sup>

In drafting the letter, Sturdee was probably attempting to forestall any attempt by Roach to inform Forde on his opinion regarding the state of affairs surrounding Ambon outside the chain of command. Although Sturdee never sent the letters, they provide an insight into his then motivations and state of mind. In filing withheld dispatches coeval with the day, it seems the letters were possibly a contrivance used by Sturdee to influence history in his handling of the Ambon operations over the long term, as they could not possibly serve any other useful purpose locked away in a filing cabinet.

Notwithstanding the above, Sturdee cabled Wavell on 14 January that he had lost confidence in Roach and that Scott would travel to Ambon and replace him on 16 or 17 January. Sturdee reported his opinion that Roach did not have the 'spirit to conduct a resolute defence if [Ambon was] attacked'. He told Wavell that he was replacing Roach in command of Australian forces at Ambon on the basis that morale of all troops on Ambon had probably deteriorated beyond which the new commander could 'improve rapidly'.<sup>209</sup> Under the circumstances, Wavell concurred with Sturdee and replied 'in any

---

<sup>207</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Messages Exchanged between Gull Force and AHQ, Relative to Criticism of the Means to Defend Ambon. The Policy Being Employed and the Subsequent Relief of Command of Lieutenant Colonel L N Roach by Lieutenant Colonel J W R Scott, January 1942 [Reference Copy], AWM54, 573/6/10B, p. 15.

<sup>208</sup> National Archives of Australia, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, p. 6.

<sup>209</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], MP742/1, R/2/1803, p.86.



case I am opposed to handing out important objectives to enemy without making them fight for it. Quite appreciate feelings of lonely garrison but am sure Australians will put up stout fight whatever happens. No doubt it is wise to change commander'.<sup>210</sup> Wavell later wrote that he 'was unable to see how with our very limited resources we could afford to reinforce' Ambon, Kendari, Celebes, Kupang in Timor, Samarinda in North Borneo and Sebang in North Sumatra that 'had only weak garrisons [that would be] unable to resist a Japanese attack in force'. In agreement with Roach's conclusions, Wavell felt that it would have been better if the outposts had been withdrawn and concentrated further back.<sup>211</sup>

After Wavell had concurred with Sturdee's proposal to dismiss Roach, Scott was inducted into the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF and appointed in command of Gull Force on 14 January. Arrangements were made for Scott to travel the next day to Darwin and then on to Ambon. He took with him Operation Orders 29 and 30 to give to Roach when he arrived at Ambon. Rowell addressed operation Order 29 to Roach, which read:

It is apparent from messages received at Army Headquarters since your arrival at AMBON and from letters written by you to Lt.-Col. W.J.R. Scott, that you have not the necessary confidence in your ability to conduct a resolute defence of AMBON in co-operation with the local Dutch forces. Your task was explicitly laid down in A.H.Q. Message ... of 26 Dec.41, in which it was also made clear that reinforcing units you requested were not available ... You have since persisted in repeating requests for these units and have given the impression that you have accepted defeat as inevitable ... Under these circumstance, it has been decided to relieve you at once of your command which you will hand over to Lt.-Col. Scott.<sup>212</sup>

Considering Scott's analysis of Roach's letters, Sturdee and Rowell were right to act against any real or imagined influence Roach might have had on Gull Force morale, as

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>211</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Publication] Dispatch by the Supreme Commander of the ABDA Area to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in the South West Pacific, A5954, 1979/85, 1942-1942, p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], MP742/1, R/2/1803, p. 172.

they had a duty to maintain the discipline of Gull Force and especially where those concerns could not be assessed independently and proved unsound.

Sturdee issued Operation Order 29 after communicating to Wavell and Forde that Roach was not fit to command Gull Force because of his alarmist influence on the morale of the forces at Ambon. Resulting from Sturdee and Rowell's misperceptions, AHQ gained both Wavell and Forde's official approval to replace Roach. Operation Order 30 officially appointed Scott commander of Gull Force and instructed him to seek out Tanner and to take any action he saw fit in either removing him with Roach or allowing him to remain at Ambon. This order was derived from Tanner's assessment that Ambon could not hold out and that AHQ should evacuate Gull Force. Scott was authorised to replace Tanner with an intelligence officer of his choice. AHQ also ordered Scott to arrange Roach's, and possibly Tanner's, return to Melbourne for disposal, but as it was Tanner remained at Ambon. Scott also received the same orders that Roach had received from Rowell; 'you will make all preparations for the best possible defence of AMBON in cooperation with local N.E.I. Force, and with the means at your disposal'.<sup>213</sup>

On the morning of 16 January, the day that Scott was to arrive at Ambon, a Japanese air raid attacked Laha killing two Australian riflemen and two signallers. The Dutch sent up their two remaining operational aircraft, which were soon shot down by Japanese fighters. The Japanese damaged the airfield, a number of fuel dumps and six Lockheed aircraft in the bombing. These bombings imposed on the remaining American air personal to evacuate Ambon and abandoned their damaged Catalina flying boats.

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

Troops from Laha later removed the Browning and Vickers machine guns from the flying boats and took them to Laha to use in anti-aircraft defence.<sup>214</sup>

Scott arrived on Ambon that night at 2100 hours to face even greater difficulties than Roach had done when he had arrived at Ambon. Time was against him as he was unacquainted with his subordinate commanders, the dispositions of the Dutch and Australian forces, the geography of the Island and faced the imminent arrival of the Japanese. He later described his first encounter with his new command:

There had been a heavy air raid over Ambon during the afternoon and as the Force Headquarters were in tents no lights were allowed and I was introduced to Lt-Col Roach and a number of officers in the dark at approximately 2230hrs. During the interval between the afternoon of 13 Jan and the night of arrival 16 Jan, I had had little sleep or food and was somewhat fatigued. I was given some tinned cherries to eat in the dark, and in this atmosphere and not knowing who the officers were with Lt-Col Roach, I handed him his papers of recall. I gave him the option of returning to Darwin at 5 AM the following morning in the returning RAAF plane or waiting the chance of another plane to Darwin later. Lt-Col Roach decided to leave by plane at 5 AM next morning, or less than 7 hours after my arrival and those 7 hours darkness. I had no opportunity of any discussion or handover and in the morning I found myself in command of a force of officers and men who were all entirely unknown to me.<sup>215</sup>

It is difficult to understand, however, how Scott imagined it would be any different. He had no grounds to complain about Roach's quick return to Darwin when Roach had orders to 'afford Lt-Col Scott all necessary facilities to ensure that he is properly informed as to the local situation' if requested and it was in his power to retain Roach on Ambon to receive a full briefing on Gull Force's dispositions before allowing him to return to Darwin.<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 2, AWM54, 573/6/1B, Part 2, p. 4.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> National Archives of Australia, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach], MP742/1, R/2/1803, p. 172.

On the afternoon 17 January AHQ received cables from Scott, Wavell and the Dutch Allied land forces commander at ABDACOM Bandung, General Ter Pooten, making a mockery of Scott's unsubstantiated fears over poor morale at Ambon that had led to Roach's unjustified dismissal. The cables contradicted Scott's initial claims about morale at Ambon and demonstrated his misconceived appraisal of Roach's real concerns about the situation on the Island. Scott had passed on his concerns to Rowell that Roach was being alarmist and that he had undermined the morale of troops at Ambon. Rowell had to take Scott's tenuous concerns seriously and put into train Roach's removal from command of Gull Force. This made it clear that Scott had been mistaken in his assessment of Roach, especially where he was now forced to contradict his earlier assertions.

Scott wrote to AHQ that he was impressed by Kapitz and entirely satisfied with the morale of the Australian and Dutch troops at Ambon. Wavell concurred that he was also satisfied with the morale of troops at Ambon. He wrote 'IMPRESSED WITH COLONEL KAPITZ COMMANDING N.E.I. TROOPS. HIS MORAL ALSO HIS TROOPS MORAL COULD NOT BE HIGHER'. Ter Pooten confirmed the morale on Ambon and relayed Kapitz's report to AHQ that the morale of the NEI troops at Ambon was high. He wrote 'THERE IS NO QUESTION OF ANY DETERIORATION MORAL N.E.I. TROOPS'.<sup>217</sup> Both Scott and ABDACOM signed off "no worries". Unfortunately for Roach this information was delivered too late to save his reputation at AHQ and he was returned to Melbourne to be retired to the reserve officers' list.

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-82

After meeting Kapitz, Scott began his inspection of the Australian defences. Major Newbury, officer commanding (OC) HQ Coy, his adjutant Capt Hooke and intelligence officer Gabriel, visited the Amahusu Line. Capt Newnham, officer in charge (OIC) of D Coy, explained to Scott Roach's plans for the dispositions and roles of the company and attached troops on the Amahusu line. Newnham explained that if small landings occurred at either Latuhalat or Ambon Bay to the West, D Coy was to move forward one or two platoons in support of major Westley's A Coy near Eri Bay. If large-scale landings happened at Latuhalat or Eri Bay, A Coy would withdraw to Bn HQ in Amahusu village and face back along the road to Eri.<sup>218</sup>

Scott questioned this plan where it only allowed for a landing at Eri or Latuhalat.

Newnham explained to Scott that Roach had addressed this problem by allocating D Coy in the role of mobile in reserve at Amahusu, where transport trucks were loaded and ready for the company to move in support of A Coy at Eri or to move to Benteng Hill artillery barracks to face any attack from the East.<sup>219</sup> Roach's intention had been to commit as few of his forces as possible and use them for counter attack purposes only, but the continuing Japanese air raids had forced the dispersal of his units from Tantui.<sup>220</sup>

When Scott questioned the vulnerability of the left flank on Mount Nona, Newnham explained that Roach had prepared the 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pioneers (pl Prn/s) under Jenkins command with automatic weapons at Mount Nona to cover the Amahusu Line from the top of the mountain.

---

<sup>218</sup> National Archives of Australia, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, p. 9.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 2, AWM54, 573/6/1B, Part 2, p. 1.

Newnham explained to Scott that the companies down to platoon level were training in reconnaissance and movement through the mountains. Newnham also told Scott that training in night occupations of trenches had not yet been arranged. Scott was anxious that a Japanese attack could come at any time and ordered Newnham to carry out an exercise that night to see how long it took for the company to occupy their positions. He did this on the basis that they must be ready to move into positions by day or night.

When Scott's inspection party returned to D Coy HQ, he explained to his officers that 'this plan for withdrawal does not appeal to me and you can assume that there will be no movement of [A Coy] and that positions will be held, also that the occupation of the "Amahusu Line" would be [Newnham's] role'.<sup>221</sup> This directive effectively fixed D Coy in their positions rising above Amahusu to Mount Nona and A Coy in their positions rising above Eri to the Tjenke plateau. Scott countermanded Roach's plans for D Coy's movement to Benteng Hill leaving that approach open to the Japanese if they landed unexpectedly to the East and in Gull Force's rear.

Apart from fixing A and D companies in their trenches, Scott followed Kapitz's original plan on the occupation of positions across the Laitimor Peninsular. In Macrae's words, 'Col Scott immediately inspected all positions including Laha and decided to make no alterations in dispositions. He issued an operational order stating that all positions would be held'.<sup>222</sup> Because Ambon was on alert in case of imminent Japanese attack, it would have been dangerous for Scott to attempt a reshuffle of troops and acquaint them

---

<sup>221</sup> National Archives of Australia, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, p. 9.

<sup>222</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 2, AWM54, 573/6/1B, Appendix B, p. 6.

with new and unfamiliar dispositions, wherever they may be, when an attack was expected at any time. On the other hand, Scott's decision had fixed the companies in isolation from C and B Coy (less one platoon) at Laha and from the KNIL positions at Paso.

The problem of fixing his defensive positions at Laha, Amahusu and Eri was that the Japanese had the advantage in choosing where and how to conduct the attack.

Clausewitz noted that under conditions favouring the enemy 'a position is turned in relation to its front, and this is either to attack it from the flank, or even the rear, or to cut its lines of communication'.<sup>223</sup> Scott's positions were vulnerable to these tactics. For example, Laha was isolated, weak in numbers, its lines of communications with the main body of the battalion were extremely vulnerable and there was a possibility that the Japanese could outflank Laha by infiltrating through the jungle.

Amahusu and Eri were similar in geographical terms where the companies in these positions could be turned from the heights of Mount Nona. If the Japanese attacked from the rear the supply dumps at Kudamati would be cut off from Amahusu and Eri, there was no space to manoeuvre except back into the sea and the nature of the mountainous terrain across the peninsular made it too difficult to simultaneously employ A and D Coy forces in combination. Scott's fixed dispositions cancelled out the full movement and concentration of force at any place other than where they stood while his crowded positions became open to the potential of envelopment from the rear. Under these difficult circumstances the place of battle was practically predetermined.

---

<sup>223</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret p. 486.

Up to 28 January, Scott occupied A and D Coy in carting additional stores, water and ammunition up the trenches, setting up food dumps, and revetting the trench systems above Amahusu and Eri. On 23 January, Scott issued operation orders designating the roles and dispositions for all units of Gull Force. He instructed each company commander to store 18 days of water and rations at positions all along the lines. While this work continued the engineers setup water points and laid explosives and antitank mines. These tasks had wearied the men of Gull Force as they continued carrying supplies up the lines.<sup>224</sup>

Meanwhile, Air Commodore Wilson, commanding the newly formed north-western Command Area, became increasingly unhappy with the RAAF situation at Ambon and pushed for the withdrawal 13 Squadron from Laha back to Darwin. He asked Burnett to authorise the withdrawal, but was told to seek permission from ABDACOM at Bandung, as Ambon had now been put under its command. Wing Commander Dallas Scott and Squadron Leader Ryland flew to Bandung to report to General Brett. Scott told Brett that 'if adequate strength in fighter aircraft and antiaircraft artillery (AAA) could not be provided, all but small parties to maintain refuelling and rearming facilities should be withdrawn from Laha and Namlea to Darwin'.<sup>225</sup> Because there were no reinforcements available, Brett concurred with Scott's argument and authorised the withdrawal of 13 Squadron from Ambon and Namlea to Darwin. When Brett gave his permission 13 Squadron began its preparations to abandon Ambon.

---

<sup>224</sup> National Archives of Australia, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, p. 10.

<sup>225</sup> Gillison, Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942: Series Two (Navy) Australia in the War of 1939-1945, p. 373.



At 1500 hours, two days before the RAAF evacuation, 13 Squadron sighted Japanese warships off the Celebes north coast. One reconnaissance flight reported 22 ships in convoy, including 13 transports, 1 heavy cruiser, 3 light cruisers and 5 destroyers, heading on a southeasterly course past Manado.<sup>226</sup> Considering these reports, and the supposition that the convoy was heading to Ambon, the last of the RAAF Hudsons and most of the squadron's ground crews evacuated Ambon on 28 January.<sup>227</sup> Two days later, Jinkins' 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s at Mount Nona observed the Japanese fleet as it approached. At 1700 hours, Jinkins reported that 17 warships and 11 transport ships were heading to the Southwest of the Ambon. Later he reported to Bn HQ that the ships were standing offshore at around 21 kilometres to the south of the Island, but that they did not appear to be moving.<sup>228</sup>

Jinkins recorded the incident as follows:

I saw 17 ships of war and 11 transports out to the southeast, proceeding south-west. I communicated with Area Command H.Q. by phone and told them what I had seen. These vessels appeared to be standing off some 12 or 15 miles and did not appear to be attempting to come in. ... The following morning, 31st January, we observed these ships about 0700 hours. The ships of war dispersed and all the transports [were] standing in to the shore off HOEKOERILLA. They were transporting what we believed to be troops ashore in motor landing craft. ... At dawn on the 1st February a further 8 Naval vessels, mainly destroyers, and 3 small merchant craft arrived and commenced landing operations at the same place. A Naval Force consisting of some heavy cruisers and destroyers kept up a constant patrol during the 31st January and 1st February to the South and West of the island and across the harbour mouth.<sup>229</sup>

Jinkins could not see exactly where the landings took place because of the mountains that rested between his position and the beaches, but his report was nevertheless

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>227</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 427.

<sup>228</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, 1942-1942, p. 54.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

accurate. At 0300 hours 31 January, Kapitz also alerted Scott that the Japanese had started landings at Hukurila.<sup>230</sup>

Gull Force now faced an overwhelming Japanese task force of more than 25,000 men supported by transport ships, battle ships, aircraft carriers and aircraft. The Curtin government's inexperienced, or at least misled, war cabinet in accepting Sturdee's antiquated First World War strategy had placed Roach and then Scott in an unenviable, unprofitable and unobtainable position of holding Ambon against an overwhelming force without a hope of achieving any substantive ends. If Clausewitz's observations 'that armies have been divided and separated countless times, without the commander having any clear reason for it, simply because he vaguely felt that this was the way things ought to be done' is correct, then the forward observation line policy for Ambon seems to fit that adage. Sturdee had dissipated the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, and especially Gull and Sparrow forces, on the spurious basis that the right thing to do was to demonstrate Australian support to the NEI, to hold the line on observation and to make the Japanese fight for their gains.

Based on a cost benefit ratio, Sturdee's rigid strategy of dissipating, fixing and isolating his insufficient task forces on far-flung islands without a plan for supply, reinforcement or withdrawal makes little sense. The basic principle of formulating strategy is to meet a profitable end in proportion to the expected costs. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's task forces had no prospect of decisively disrupting the Japanese plans and the costs would be great in

---

<sup>230</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 21.

terms of expending the badly needed men and equipment on the Islands when the Australian mandated territories and mainland was now in need of these resources.

In the realm of *Realpolitik*, there was no longer any justification for demonstrating support for the Dutch after Van Kleffens had broadcast to the world that the NEI would fight in support of Malaya and when the RAN had prepared a cost effective line observation network of coast watchers. Unlike Hong Kong, where the British sacrificed their island to overwhelming Japanese forces in December 1941, Ambon and Timor were not Australian sovereign territory. Where no other justification existed in the garrisoning of the Dutch Islands it seems Sturdee had exceeded his level of competence in planning, commanding and following through on an antiquated strategy of holding a forward line that led to achieving no higher purpose other than simply making the Japanese fight for Ambon at the cost of Gull Force and especially after he was apprised of the danger in following that path by his subordinates.

Roach, Tanner and Lind each in turn had recognised that the better policy for Ambon, and many of the other isolated outposts, was to withdraw the garrisons and concentrate them further back. Whether knowingly or unwittingly, these officers had evoked Clausewitz's principle that defence is stronger than offence and that the concentration of forces is more powerful than their dissipation. Japan had created a situation for itself similar to that which Napoleon faced in attacking far into Russia. The Japanese policy was one of establishing a greater co-prosperity sphere throughout Southeast Asia and Southwest Pacific regions and to achieve this it was required to weaken itself by

extending its front and dissipating its finite resources in the hope of consolidating its objectives before the allies could counter attack.

Furthermore, Wavell, while at a conference at Singapore on 28 January 1942, recognised that Ambon was not considered a crucial position to hold when he advised on the best course of action to take in defending important objectives in the face of the Japanese:

All I can do in the immediate future (said Wavell) is to check enemy by such offensive action by sea and air as limited resources allow and to secure most important objectives which I conceive to be Singapore, air bases in central and southern Sumatra, naval base at Surabaya, aerodrome at Koepang. Picture looks gloomy but enemy is at full strength, is suffering severe losses, and cannot replace his losses in aircraft as we can. Things will improve eventually as we keep on fighting but may be worse first.<sup>231</sup>

When the War Advisory Council read Wavell's report it found that Ambon was not on the list of those objectives and they questioned the Chiefs of Staff whether it would be better to withdraw Gull Force. The War Advisory Council minutes note that:

A discussion took place as to the possibility of holding Ambon in the event of a Japanese attack in force. It was noted that General Wavell had expressed the view that all that could be done in the immediate future was to secure the most important objectives which included the aerodrome at Koepang but not Ambon. The view was expressed by the Chiefs of Staff that withdrawal from Ambon would be a very difficult operation and in any event it was important to hold Ambon as long as possible in order to deny it to the enemy.<sup>232</sup>

While it is agreed that it would have been a difficult operation to carry out by this time, history nevertheless demonstrates that Ambon should not have been considered a strategic point needing to be defended at all costs. The irony is that it was Wavell who had highlighted the lack of objective value of Ambon to the War Advisory Council where Sturdee had not, especially as Sturdee was aware of what Gull Force was up against. It seems clear from this example that if the government had known what

---

<sup>231</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 272.

<sup>232</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Advisory War Council Minutes (Original Set) Chronological Series*, Minute 724, 30 January, 1942, p. 440.

Sturdee was holding back, there was a possibility that Gull Force would have been retained for a more advantageous objective. Nevertheless, it was only after Singapore fell that Sturdee overcame his rigid approach to position warfare and grasped Clausewitz's idea of defensive warfare, a point that is discussed further in Chapter Five below.

## Chapter Three -The Japanese Grand Strategy, Strategy and Tactics on Ambon

[Strategy] is the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war. Though strategy in itself is concerned only with engagements, the theory of strategy must also consider its chief means of execution, the fighting force. It must consider these in their own right and in their relation to other factors, for they shape the engagement and it is in turn on them that the effect of the engagement first makes itself felt. Strategic theory must therefore study the engagement in terms of its possible results and of the moral and psychological forces that largely determine its course.

Strategy is the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war. The strategist must therefore define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose. In other words, he will draft the plan of the war, and the aim will determine the series of actions intended to achieve it: he will, in fact, shape the individual campaigns and, within these, decide on the individual engagements. Since most of these matters have to be based on assumptions that may not prove to be correct, while other, more detailed orders cannot be determined in advance at all, it follows that the strategist must go on campaign himself. Detailed orders can then be given on the spot, allowing the general plan to be adjusted to modifications that are continuously required. The strategist, in short, must maintain control throughout.<sup>233</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz

The Japanese grand strategy of the Second World War was to obtain secure access to resources independently of those supplied by the western nations. The Americans and British had imposed embargoes on trade with Japan because of their occupation of China. It had been a long held dream of the Japanese navy to colonise the Far East and South West Pacific areas under an economic greater East Asia co-prosperity complex. From June 1941 forward Japan began serious negotiations with the USA to lift the embargoes. However on 6 November, in case the ongoing diplomatic negotiations with the United States should fail, the Japanese Imperial GHQ ordered its southern army area commander, General Juichi Terauchi, to prepare his forces for the seizure of strategic areas in the Far East and Southwest Pacific areas. In cooperation with the navy, Terauchi was required to assemble his armed forces in Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos), South China, Formosa (Taiwan), the southwest islands of the Pacific and South Seas.

---

<sup>233</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 207.

The overall operational objectives for the Southern Army were, in cooperation with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fleet, the seizure of Hong Kong, Malaya, British Borneo, the Philippines, North Sumatra, Java and Burma. The imperative was to seize resource rich areas before the incumbent sovereign forces could destroy them. The Japanese justification for these measures was the economic self-defence of Japan. Japanese politicians took this initiative to circumvent American embargoes on trade through war and to establish a Greater East Asia CO-prosperity Sphere throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific from which it could independently obtain those resources.<sup>234</sup>

The Japanese 16<sup>th</sup> Army was given the task of securing Dutch oilfield infrastructure and oil reserves in the NEI before March 1942 even if this entailed some sacrifice. To achieve these objectives Imperial GHQ deemed it necessary to first neutralise the NEI, Philippines and Malayan areas.<sup>235</sup> The planned attack on Java was scheduled along five lines of advance:

1. The Sakaguchi Mixed Brigade will first invade Davao on Mindanao, then, after handing over to the Honma Army, will occupy the oil regions of Tarakan and Balikpapan on Borneo. After handing those over to the navy, the brigade will occupy Bandjermasin city in southern Borneo, then advance on to Java.
2. The Eastern Detachment (the Ito Detachment) will sortie from Hong Kong in mid-January and, in cooperation with the navy, invade Ambon from the seas to the east of the Celebes, then move on to invade Timor.
3. The Sano Division (38th Division - missing the Ito Detachment and the Shoji Detachment) will sail from Camrahn Bay on 11 February and invade the area of Palembang, centre of many oilfields, in southern Sumatra.
4. The Tsuchihashi Division (48th Division) will invade Surabaya in eastern Java.
5. The army commander will lead army headquarters and direct army units, as well as the 2nd Division and the Shoji Regiment, and attack the area of the capital Batavia (present-day Jakarta) in western Java.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Japanese Monograph 24: Southern Army Operations Record, p. 7.

<sup>235</sup> Japanese Monograph 101: Naval Operations in the Invasion of Netherlands East Indies, Dec. 1941 - Mar. 1942, ed. United States Department of Army Office of Military History, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1962), p. 1-2.

<sup>236</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 1.

The Imperial Japanese Navy's (IJN) troop transport escorts for these tasks were 1 cruiser and 32 destroyers. Terauchi continued to prepare the Imperial Japanese Army's (IJA) task forces throughout November 1941 and moved them to their respective stepping off points ready for the attack.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Army's 16<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Divisions, the 65<sup>th</sup> Independent Brigade and the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Division assembled at stations in Formosa, Amamiyoshima and Palau ready to attack the Philippines. The 15<sup>th</sup> Army's 33<sup>rd</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Divisions (less one Infantry regiment) assembled in Indochina for the attack on Thailand and Burma. The 25<sup>th</sup> Army's 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Imperial Guard and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division assembled in Indochina, Hainan Island and Japan for the attack on Malaya. The 16<sup>th</sup> Army's 2<sup>nd</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup> Divisions and the 56<sup>th</sup> Regimental Group assembled in South China and Palau for the attack on the NEI.

All troop transports and IJN escorts for the Southern Army came under the command of Vice Admiral Kondo's Combined Southern Naval Force. It contained the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (two 14 inch battleships) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle Squadron, the 4<sup>th</sup> Carrier Squadron (2 light fleet carriers), the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadrons (eleven 8-inch and 3 light cruisers), the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotillas (4 light cruisers and 52 destroyers), the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotillas (eight submarines). These forces were organised to attack Malaya on 8 December at 1245 hours local time, Singora in Thailand at 0230 hours local time and Hong Kong 0800 hours local time.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>237</sup> Japanese Monograph 16: Ambon and Timor Operations, ed. United States Department of Army Office of Military History, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1963), p. 1; Kirby, W., Addis, C. T., Meiklejohn, J. F. et al., History of the Second World War: The War against Japan, ed. J.R.M. Butler, vol. 1, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), pp. 96, 492.



At 1245 hours on 8 December, General Yamashita's forces landed at Kota Bharu in Malaya and at Singora in Thailand. At 0800 hours local time, after receiving news that the attack on Malaya had begun, the Japanese 16<sup>th</sup> Army started its assault on Hong Kong. On 26 December, and after 17 days of fighting, Hong Kong surrendered. Following the campaign on Hong Kong, the 16<sup>th</sup> Army reorganised for the attack on Java. The 38<sup>th</sup> Division, under Maj-Gen Takeo Ito, formed up the Eastern Detachment division and organised its move to Manado to take Ambon and Timor. Ito took personal command of the 228<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment together with its elements of engineers, mountain artillery, medical, transport and other supporting units that he had assembled for the attacks. The Kure 1<sup>st</sup> Special Naval Landing Force (1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF), which was chosen to support the Ambon offensive at Hitulama, remained under the command of Rear Admiral Kouichiro Hatakeyama.<sup>238</sup>

### **Organisation of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division Detachment**

Major General Takeo Ito, Commander of the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

Group Headquarters (38th Division)	Engineer Company (less 1 platoon)
228th Infantry Regiment	1 Independent Engineer Company
Light Tank Unit	1 Transport platoon
1 Signal Unit element	Water Supply and Purification Unit
Half of a Field Hospital	1 Anchorage Headquarters Element
Anti-Tank Gun Unit	1 Imperial Guards element
March Casualty Collection Unit	Howitzer Battery Unit
1 Division Veterinary Hospital element	1st Mountain Artillery
2 Anti-Aircraft Batteries	

A total of: 5300 personnel, 400 horses and 110 vehicles

The Eastern Detachment's objectives were 'to cut the lines of communications between Australia and Java, isolate the latter, and facilitate ... [the] invasion of Java [by seizing]

---

<sup>238</sup> Japanese Monograph 16: Ambon and Timor Operations, pp. 93, 535; National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Invasion of Ambon and Timor, 1942, AWM54, 573/6/16, 1942 -1947, p. 2.

air and naval bases there and to form a defensive line against an anticipated enemy counteroffensive from the Darwin area'.<sup>239</sup>

In the opening phases of these operations the IJN air forces stood-by until Davao, Jolo and other islands in the Mindanao area were secured. After Borneo and the Celebes fell, the IJN's air force from that area moved further eastward to extend its air power over the Davao and Jolo precincts in preparation for moves against Kendari in the Celebes and then Ambon. A two-carrier division of the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Fleet, returning from operations at Pearl Harbor, had the task of supporting the land-based operations against Ambon. Its objectives were to provide air superiority over the region and to support the capture of Kendari, Ambon, Timor and eventually Java.<sup>240</sup>

On 12 January Ito's Eastern Detachment embarked from Hong Kong aboard the transport ships *Miike Maru*, *Africa Maru*, *Ryoyo Maru*, *Zenyo Maru* and the *Yamaura Maru* for Davao under escort of a full destroyer flotilla. The Imperial General Headquarters ordered Rear Admiral Tanaka Raizo and his 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet to also support the naval operations at Manado, Kendari, Ambon and Timor. Drawing from these naval resources for Ambon, Raizo organised the flagship *Jintsu*, the 11<sup>th</sup> Seaplane Tender Division's *Chitose*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Destroyer Squadron (including the 8<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Division minus one section (2 ships) and the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Divisions (8 ships)),<sup>241</sup> the 21<sup>st</sup> Minesweeper Division (nos. W7, W9, and W12) and two ships of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sub-chaser

---

<sup>239</sup> Japanese Monograph 16: Ambon and Timor Operations, p. 2.

<sup>240</sup> Japanese Monograph 101: Naval Operations in the Invasion of Netherlands East Indies, Dec. 1941 - Mar. 1942, p. 3.

<sup>241</sup> The destroyers *Asashio*, *Oshio*, *Natsushio*, *Kuroshio*, *Oyashio*, *Hayashio*, *Amatsukaze*, *Hatsukaze* and *Tokitsukaze* respectively.

Division (nos. Ch-1 and Ch-2) in convoy with the *Soryu* and *Hiryu* from the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Fleet's Carrier Division to carry out these tasks.<sup>242</sup>

## Organisation List of the Ito Detachment

### 1. Eastern Detachment

#### *Miike Maru*

Eastern Detachment commander, Maj Gen Ito  
Senior adjutant, Lt Col Matsumoto  
Attached staff officer, Maj Tosaka  
Reserve and direct command units  
7th Company, Light Armoured Car  
38th Artillery Regiment 1st Battalion (main strength), Maj Asano  
Engineer Company (minus elements)  
Supply and transport, medical units (part strength)  
2nd Field Hospital (half strength)

#### *Africa Maru*

Left Flank commander, Col Doi  
4th Company, direct command company (main strength)  
Left front-line Battalion  
3rd Battalion (minus 10th Company), Maj Nishiyama  
Rapid-fire Gun platoon

#### *Zen'yo Maru*

Left front-line battalion  
1st Battalion (minus the 4th Company), Maj Hayakawa  
Infantry Artillery Unit main (main strength, minus some elements)  
Engineer Unit, Wireless Squad, others

#### *Yamaura Maru*

Right Attack Unit  
2nd Battalion (minus 7th Company), Major Kimura  
Mountain Artillery Unit (one platoon)  
Engineer Unit, Wireless Squad, others

#### *Ryoyo Maru*

Naval landing party cooperating  
10th Company (Machine Gun platoon, Engineer squad attached),  
Lt Wakabayashi

### 2. Naval Marines

Kure 1st Special Naval Landing Party, Naval Cdr Iemoto Yoshiyuki (attached)

### 3. Escort Fleet

2nd Torpedo Squadron, Rear Adm Tanaka Raizo  
(Flagship) light cruiser *Jintsu*, one submarine chaser  
8th Destroyer Squadron, 4 destroyers  
15th Destroyer Squadron, 4 destroyers  
21st Minesweeper Flotilla, 5 minesweepers  
Support Group  
2nd Air Flotilla (2 vessels)  
Aircraft Carriers (*Soryu*, *Hiryu*)<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>243</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, pp. 2-3.

In implementing the first phase of operations, Imperial GHQ allocated the 16<sup>th</sup> Army's Sakaguchi Mixed Brigade and the Miura Detachment to take Davao on the Philippine Island of Mindanao. At dawn on 8 December, as a prelude to the invasion, the Japanese carrier-based aircraft stationed at Palau raided Mindanao, attacked the US seaplane support tender base at Davao and destroyed all the American PBVs anchored in the bay.<sup>244</sup> In the second phase of their operations, the Eastern Detachment made landfall at Davao to reorganise itself in preparation for the attack on Ambon. The Eastern Detachment arrived at Davao Bay on 18 January and witnessed the Miura and Sakaguchi Detachments assault the town.

At 0400 hours on 19 January, the Miura and Sakaguchi detachments respectively landed their forces to the north and south of Davao. The following day, these combined forces routed the Philippine army and took Davao. After Davao fell, Ito rearranged the ship loadings, formulated tactical plans and carried out sea-borne rehearsals for the attack on Ambon Island.<sup>245</sup> In planning the attack over the next ten days, Ito collected information from current, albeit cloud obscured, naval aircraft survey photographs of Ambon. He determined that Ambon Town and the airfield at Laha were his most important objectives. Although Ito was unable to completely establish Allied strengths and dispositions, he nevertheless correctly estimated that the main opposing forces were concentrated on the southwest end of Laitimor Peninsular, in the central east position at Paso and at Laha on the Hitu Peninsular.

---

<sup>244</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 132.

<sup>245</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] *Invasion of Ambon and Timor, 1942*, AWM54, 573/6/16, p. 3.

Ito estimated that the Australian and KNIL forces could not cover all potential coastal landing sites at any one time, as they were committed to defending their fixed positions at Laha, Amahusu and Paso.<sup>246</sup> Taking the initiative, Ito planned to carry out simultaneous seaborne landings on the beaches at Hitulama and at Hutumuri/Rutung at precisely 0100 hours on the morning of 31 January 1942. The 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF and the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy Wakabayashi Unit 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn (Det.) would land at Hitulama and attack south towards the Laha airfield on Ambon Bay while the 228<sup>th</sup> Regiment would land in the bay of Hutumuri and Rutung to execute a three-pronged attack towards Paso, Ambon and the main Australian defences located at Amahusu and Eri.<sup>247</sup> The objective of this operation was to isolate the Dutch forces at Paso from the Australian forces at Amahusu and Laha.

Considering British intelligence reports of September 1941, which were supplied to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade<sup>248</sup> to illustrate how the Japanese carried out their seaborne landing tactics in China, clearly Ito chose landing sites on Ambon that were vulnerable to attack from the sea and open to rapid lodgement with adequate bridgeheads from which to break out. These Japanese seaborne operations worked on the principle of launching the landing craft on a moonless night with the rising tide, embarking troops and grouping the landing craft for a predawn surprise attack. The coordination of these operations required landing craft to approach the beaches on a wide front while allowing a major landing force to concentrate on any strongly defended positions. The Japanese tacticians calculated that the success of these seaborne landings were dependent on surprise, the

---

<sup>246</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 427.

<sup>247</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Australian War Memorial, 2nd Australian Imperial Force and Commonwealth Military Forces Unit War Diaries, 1939-45 War, 23rd Brigade*, p. 55.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

concentration of force as well as the use of pincer formations to outflank and weaken any opposition on the beaches.<sup>249</sup>

The Australian intelligence branch reported these tactics to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade with the advice that:

This method of procedure has a greater chance of success than a landing at one single point. However it does necessitate the putting into action of a first echelon of considerable size. In any case it obliges the defense to scatter its forces to various points at each of which they are faced by strong opposition, and are, at the same time, uncertain where to launch an effective counter attack.<sup>250</sup>

The key to Ito's plan was that his force was a division in size; he had sufficient transport ships and special landing craft, strong air and naval support and highly experienced well-trained troops to carry out the Ambon landing operations. Unlike Sturdee's unprofitable approach of holding Ambon for as long as possible to demonstrate a commitment to the Dutch and to delay the Japanese for a few days only, Ito was committed to seizing Ambon and holding it; to assure that success he had rehearsed his units at Davao and made them familiar with their respective tasks and schedules well before approaching Ambon.<sup>251</sup>

Before the Eastern Detachment sailed for Davao from Hong Kong, Japanese aircraft stationed at Palau began to raid and soften up Ambon from the air. On 7 January 1942, Japanese aircraft attacked Laha airfield for the first time dropping up to 50 antipersonnel bombs over the airfield, albeit without causing any casualties among the Australian or Dutch defenders. On 16 January Japanese fighters shot down the two

---

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-62.

remaining serviceable MLKNIL's fighters, destroyed some Hudson aircraft parked along the runway as well as killing four Australian soldiers.<sup>252</sup> After the bombing raids, Kapitz, except for the AAA crews that he left behind, withdrew his infantry company from Laha to reinforce Paso. This left the AIF's B Coy (less one pl) and C Coy, two Bren carriers, 3 mortars, a detachment of the 2/12<sup>th</sup> field ambulance, a detachment from the service corps, a signal detachment and Dutch Bofors and the AAA to defend the airfield.

Over the ensuing weeks, Japanese twin-engine bombers and Zero fighters continued to raid Ambon on an almost daily basis to destroy any planes left sitting on the ground, the seaplanes at Halong and to harass the Allied positions. On 16 January, following the previous air raids at Halong on 15 January, in which two of the nine US navy's Patrol Wing 10 (PW10) Catalina PBVs were damaged, the remaining American and Dutch flying boats and their crews evacuated Ambon.<sup>253</sup> On 28 January all remaining RAAF aircraft and their crews at Ambon also evacuated the area and withdrew to Darwin leaving the remaining Australian and Dutch land forces to continue without any air support.

On 27 January, following the bombing of Ambon by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Flotilla, the Kanoya Air Unit, the Toko Air Group Detachment, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Group and the Eastern Detachment flotilla departed from Davao for Ambon.<sup>254</sup> At 1700 hours on the afternoon

---

<sup>252</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 426.

<sup>253</sup> van Fraassen, C. F., *Bronen Betreffende De Midden-Mulukken 1900-1942*, trans. David A Evans, (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1997), p. 632n.

<sup>254</sup> Japanese Monograph 101: *Naval Operations in the Invasion of Netherlands East Indies*, Dec. 1941 - Mar. 1942, p. 14.

of 30 January, the fleet arrived off the coast of Ambon, but it continued to sail south in what turned out to be a poorly organised ploy at deceiving the allies.<sup>255</sup> Between 0030 and 0100 hours on 31 January, the southern force transport ships, lead by the *Yamaura Maru*, then the *Africa Maru*, the *Zenyo Maru* and finally the *Miike Maru*, returned to Ambon Island and entered the bay fronting the villages of Rutung and Hutumuri. After anchoring in the bay, the marine engineers lowered landing craft into the water and the Eastern Detachment troops began descending rope ladders into the boats. Once underway the landing parties faced no opposition and, according to both Japanese and Dutch sources, no casualties occurred during the landings.<sup>256</sup>

At 0130 hours, the assault elements of the three battalions simultaneously landed along the bay:<sup>257</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn commander, Major Hayakawa, disembarked his troops from the *Zenyo Maru* and landed on the left beach near Rutung; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn commander Col Doi disembarked his troops from the *Africa Maru* and landed on the centre beach between Rutung and Hutumuri; and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn commander, Major Kimura, disembarked his troops from the *Yamaura Maru* and landed on the right beach adjacent to Hutumuri.

The second and third waves followed the initial landings in 30-minute intervals. Once ashore all landing parties were required to carry their own ammunition and food supplies until rations could be obtained from supply ships at Ambon Town after it was captured.<sup>258</sup> At 0250 hours, the main landings less the mountain artillery were

---

<sup>255</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 64.

<sup>256</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 64.

<sup>257</sup> Japanese Monograph 16: Ambon and Timor Operations, p. 7.

<sup>258</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Invasion of Ambon and Timor, 1942, AWM54, 573/6/16, p. 4.



completed. In the third landings artillery guns, transport horses, an ammunition platoon and hospital units arrived on the beach. On 1 February the *Ryoyo Maru*, which had delivered the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy Wakabayashi Unit 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn (Det.) and a machine gun platoon to Hitulama, arrived in the bay to offload the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountain Battery.<sup>259</sup>

From the Rutung/Hutumuri beachhead, Ito ordered the 228<sup>th</sup> Regiment's 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> (less the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy) battalions to move off to their respective objectives. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bn marched Southwest towards Ema to cross the Island through Sojadiatas to Ambon Town, where it was to cut off the southwest sector of the Laitimor Peninsular and the Australians. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn marched Northeast along the coast towards the Dutch positions at Paso. Their aims were first to isolate and then attack the Dutch positions at Paso before taking the seaplane base at Halong. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn marched across the centre of the Laitimor Peninsular towards Ambon Town to converge with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, to take the town and to isolate the Australians at Amahusu.<sup>260</sup> Ito's plan was to drive a wedge between the Australian and Dutch forces on the Laitimor Peninsular and attack them in detail.

Concurrent with the southern landings, the northern force consisting of the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn (Det.), a machine gun platoon and the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF respectively disembarked at 0130 hours from the *Ryoyo Maru* and *Jintsu* at Hitulama. According to Japanese sources the northern landings met with little resistance from the Dutch defenders other than about 20 mortar rounds being fired from the hills above Hitulama. The Japanese forces

---

<sup>259</sup> National Archives of Australia, Personal Records Colonel W.J.R. Scott, War of 1939-45, AWM67, 3/353, 1954-1960, p. 64.

<sup>260</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Invasion of Ambon and Timor, 1942, AWM54, 573/6/16, p. 2.

took the beachhead without much effort and marched off towards their objective at Laha airfield.<sup>261</sup>

### **Operations at Hitulama and Laha - Kure 1<sup>st</sup> Special Naval Landing Force and 10<sup>th</sup> Company (3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion detached) Northern Assault Unit (Laha Airfield)**

#### **31 January – 3 February 1942**

The transports ships *Jintsu*, with provisional naval commander Iemoto Yoshiyuki's and his 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF made up of 579 officers and men,<sup>262</sup> and the *Ryoyo Maru*, transporting Lt Wakabayashi's 10<sup>th</sup> Coy, anchored off the beaches at Hitulama on the north coast of Ambon at 0130 hours. The 1<sup>st</sup> pl 4<sup>th</sup> Coy KNIL together with the 1<sup>st</sup> M23 MG pl KNIL and two sections of mortars engaged the Japanese after they landed on the beaches. The KNIL tentatively attacked the Japanese landing parties at Hitulama with mortar and machine gun fire, but the Japanese were able to ignore the ineffective Dutch fire until after their northern assault units had been consolidated on the beachhead at 0320 hours. At 0630 hours Wakabayashi's 10<sup>th</sup> Coy leading the breakout to the high ground at Mount Helat, contacted the KNIL units and overran their defensive positions after two hours.<sup>263</sup> The Japanese reported that the KNIL units had dropped their equipment and rapidly withdrew into the hinterland.<sup>264</sup>

The KNIL infantry units withdrew into the jungle to the west of Mount Helat after sending the mortar platoon back down the road to Paso by way of Dorianpatah. The 1<sup>st</sup>

---

<sup>261</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, p. 5.

<sup>262</sup> Japanese Monograph 16: Ambon and Timor Operations, p. 3.

<sup>263</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, pp. 12-13.

<sup>264</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports Concerning Laha Battles -1942 Australian Prisoners of War captured at Ambon Japanese Statements -: List of Japanese who may be either eye witness to cognisant of, or connected with Laha Massacres 1945, AWM54, 573/6/2, pp. 6, 61.

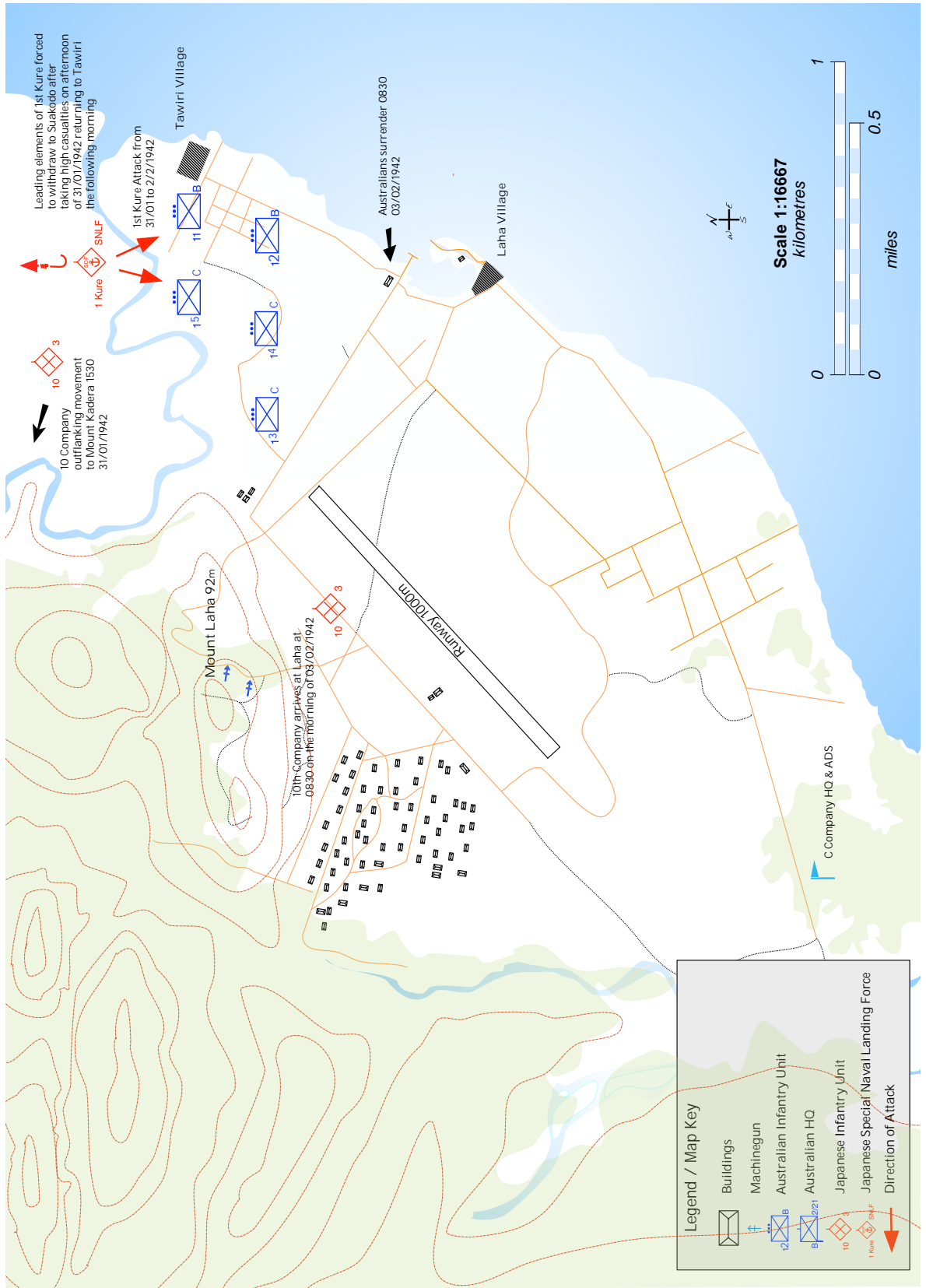
Kure SNLF and 10<sup>th</sup> Coy, with three armoured vehicles and troops riding bicycles along the road, headed for Dorianpatah to the South where they soon overran and captured the retreating mortar platoon. Because the 1<sup>st</sup> pl KNIL had failed to demolish the bridges along the Hitulama/Dorianpatah Road as ordered, the Japanese were able to make a rapid advance.<sup>265</sup> On reaching Dorianpatah at 1200 hours, the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF and the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy secured the village and turned towards their objective at Laha. On reaching Suakodo at 1530 hours that afternoon, a 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF advance party went forward to Laha where they met with heavy resistance from Australian forces on the west bank of the Lawa River at Tawiri village. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF advance party engaged the Australians it took heavy casualties and was forced to withdraw back to Suakodo where it regrouped over night and prepared for a more concentrated attack on Tawiri the next morning.<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, p. 12.

<sup>266</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports Concerning Laha Battles -1942 Australian Prisoners of War captured at Ambon Japanese Statements -: List of Japanese who may be either eye witness to cognisant of, or connected with Laha Massacres 1945, AWM54, 573/6/2, p. 58.

# Laha Battle Map



The following morning, the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy sent out a reconnaissance party into the hills to the rear of Laha airfield to find a way around the Australian defences. On receiving a favourable report from the reconnaissance party, Wakabayashi directed the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy to march north and come around to outflank the airfield. Wakabayashi's company infiltrated the jungle and spent all night and the next day manoeuvring to the north and to the rear of the airfield. After reaching Mount Kadera the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy turned South towards Laha where they claimed to have engaged and destroyed a machine gun post. At 1330 hours on 2 February, the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy reached a position to within walking distance of the airfield but they were forced to call a halt and rest for the night.<sup>267</sup> Despite the effort involved in the outflanking manoeuvre the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy had little effect on the outcome of the Laha battle because they had arrived too late to threaten the Laha positions or to engage in the fighting.

On the afternoon of 31 February, the 1st Kure SNLF began its attack at Tawiri in an area to the front of Lt Seabrook's 11<sup>th</sup> pl B Coy, but owing to the narrow one kilometre front and its barbed wire entanglements, the nature of the terrain along the Tawiri River and the combined resistance of the 11<sup>th</sup> pl B Coy and the 15<sup>th</sup> pl C Coy the Japanese advance was quickly stalled.<sup>268</sup> The Australian's C Coy pls came forward in support of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> pls at 1600 hours and the battle continued in stalemate. Meanwhile, to the rear of the action Lt McBride's 12<sup>th</sup> pl B Coy and Lt Calder's 14<sup>th</sup> pl C Coy remained in reserve formation along the beach near Laha village and to the rear of the fighting.<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>268</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 76, 88, 99.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

At around 2300 hours on 1 February, McBride's platoon was moved to the northeast approaches of the airfield to block an expected attack from the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF in that area. At 0100 hours the next morning, and after infiltrating between the Australian positions, elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF contacted McBride's platoon with bayonets, automatic weapons and mortar fire. During the hand-to-hand fighting that ensued, McBride and some men of the 12<sup>th</sup> pl were wounded and had to withdraw back to C Coy's advanced dressing station (ADS) at the western end of the airfield.

According to McBride:

The enemy were located, because of their habit of talking and calling out in a high tone to each other. They were armed with rifles, tommy [sic] guns and light machine-guns. This fighting took place in an area covered by tall grass and the number of enemy force could not be correctly arrived at. The enemy failed to make use of the natural cover afforded them and seemed to be poorly trained in night fighting.<sup>270</sup>

Because of their careless tactics in moving forward, the infiltrating Japanese troops were unable to penetrate the Australian lines any further that night. After C Coy HQ received the news about the breach, the headquarters units, reinforcements from the 13<sup>th</sup> pl C Coy and the remaining members of the 11<sup>th</sup> pl counterattacked to close the gap and impose further heavy casualties on the infiltrating Japanese force.<sup>271</sup> The next day the battle at Tawiri continued into deadlock until 1430 hours when all shooting suddenly ceased. Although Japanese planes flew overhead they also suddenly refrained from attacking the airfield.<sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>270</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, p. 3.

<sup>271</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports Concerning Laha Battles -1942 Australian Prisoners of War captured at Ambon Japanese Statements -: List of Japanese who may be either eye witness to cognisant of, or connected with Laha Massacres 1945, AWM54, 573/6/2, p. 61.

<sup>272</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 166-17

The reason for the cease-fire may have been owing to the capture of Major Newbury's surrender party. It seems that sometime on the afternoon of 2 February, Newbury led a party of about ten men under a flag of truce through the Japanese lines. They were taken to Japanese HQ at Suakodo for interrogation where Newbury explained that he was heading a surrender mission on behalf of the Australians. Because the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF had been almost wiped out in the fighting, Capt Hatakeyama was reluctant to allow Newbury to return to his lines to affect the surrender in case he took advantage of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF's weakened state and recommenced the battle.<sup>273</sup> The Japanese detained Newbury and his attendants in the Suakodo school under a Japanese piquet. When Capt Hatakeyama returned from the fighting at Laha to talk with the Australian, it is likely that he called a halt to the fighting in case Newbury was in fact representing a surrender party and perhaps to preserve what remained of his company.

On the morning of 3 February, Capt Hatakeyama's party went forward to investigate Newbury's claims and they approached the Australian lines under a white flag. The group's interpreter, Ikeuchi, called out for the Australians to surrender but there was no reply. Capt Hatakeyama then took Ikeuchi and three other soldiers to the airstrip to see if they could find the Australians. On passing through the lines it became clear to Hatakeyama that the Australians had abandoned their defences. Capt Hatakeyama's party eventually found the Australians, Dutch and some Ambonese troops gathered at the Laha jetty under a white flag where a surrender was effected. According to Takada,

---

<sup>273</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports Concerning Laha Battles -1942 Australian Prisoners of War captured at Ambon Japanese Statements -: List of Japanese who may be either eye witness to cognisant of, or connected with Laha Massacres 1945, AWM54, 573/6/2, p. 85.

who was with Capt Hatakeyama's party at the time, they captured around 150 Australians, 2 or 3 Dutchmen and 2 or 3 Ambonese troops.<sup>274</sup>

On the morning of the surrender McBride, still at the undetected ADS, ordered a small party to reconnoitre the airfield. The party reported back to McBride that Japanese troops were walking around freely, no Australian troops were visible, the Japanese flag was flying over the aerodrome and that it was clear the Japanese were in control of Laha. On hearing the report, McBride made the decision to attempt an escape from Ambon. Apart from Capt White of the 2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and his medical orderlies who volunteered to remain behind with the seriously wounded, McBride gathered around 20 of the sick and walking wounded and followed a creek leading to the north of the Island. After arriving at Lima on the north coast, McBride learned from the villages that wing commander Scott and ten other RAAF personnel had some time earlier attempted an escape by sea, but that a Japanese patrol boat had captured them. After hiding on the north coast of Hitu Peninsular for next nine days, McBride's party was forced to split-up because of a lack of sufficient food supplies. McBride and his party of 8 men eventually requisitioned a native perahu (small boat) and escaped to Kurumba Island from where they sailed it back to Australia.<sup>275</sup>

Meanwhile, sometime between 3 and 6 February, Rear Admiral (R-Adm.) Hatakayama gave the order to execute all Australian and Dutch POWs on the Hitu Peninsular. Patsy Adam-Smith wrote that R-Adm. Hatakayama had the POWs at Suakodo executed

---

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-71.

<sup>275</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, p. 3-4.



because they were a drag on his movement.<sup>276</sup> This is unlikely, as the murders did not take place until 6 February, three days following the surrender. Beaumont also noted that some individuals believed the Australians were executed for being unruly and prone to escape or otherwise killed for revenge.<sup>277</sup> A later war crimes investigation concluded that R-Adm Hatakayama had executed the POWs for decimating his 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF force during the Lawa River battle. This is supported by the fact that Hatakayama had also executed Dutch KNIL prisoners in revenge for the 130 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF soldiers that were killed in the fighting at Kema and Manado. It is believed R-Adm. Hatakayama ordered Capt Hatakayama to carry out the executions at Tawiri and Suakodo and that Capt Hatakayama had passed the order on to Lt Nakagawa.<sup>278</sup>

Forty Japanese volunteers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF's Yamashita and Yosiwara platoons carried out the first massacre under the command of Nakagawa at Suakodo on 6 February. Between 1300 and 1500 hours Major Newbury and forty-five others were marched into the hills behind Suakodo and either bayoneted to death or beheaded by their Japanese executioners. On the same day Wing Commander Scott and another 59 mixed RAAF personnel and Dutch POWs were executed near the Lawa River at Tawiri, probably under the command of Capt Hatakayama and WO Sasaki Kakitare, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure Machine Gun Coy. The third massacre of two Australian POWs occurred on 7 or 8 February after a patrol to the Allang village where they were acting as guides to Sub-Lt Fukuda. The names of the perpetrators who carried out these executions remain unknown.

---

<sup>276</sup> Adam-Smith, P., *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea*, (Collingwood: Ken Fin Books, 1998) p. 412.

<sup>277</sup> Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941-1945* p. 55.

<sup>278</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports Concerning Laha Battles -1942 Australian Prisoners of War captured at Ambon Japanese Statements -: List of Japanese who may be either eye witness to cognisant of, or connected with Laha Massacres 1945, AWM54, 573/6/2, p. 208.

The fourth lot of killings took place to the southwest of Tawiri village at approximately 1200 hours on 15 February, where the Japanese executed another 135 Australian POWs. It is believed the survivors of the No. 9 Minesweeper, which had struck a mine and sank in Ambon Bay, had carried out these executions. The final murders of around 60 to 70 Australian POWs was carried out between 1100 and 1300 hours on 20 February at a site also located near Tawiri village.<sup>279</sup>

The war crimes commission charged Naval-Lt Ken-ichi Nakagawa for assisting in the murders. In evidence given at the war crimes trials in Japan after the war, Nakagawa described what had happened at one of the massacre sites:

We dug holes in a place in a coconut forest at Tauli [sic]; this new place is a different position from that of the previous murder, being 140 or 150 metres away from it, and was about two hundred metres off the headquarters of the Laha detachment. I divided ninety men into nine groups: two groups for bloody killing, three groups for watching the prisoners of war on their way to the killing place, two groups for sending prisoners of war out of the barracks; one group for guard on the spot of the killings, the last one for emergency. The prisoners of war were on foot from the Detachment building to the spot of the killing. The same way of the killing was adopted as in the previous case; to have them kneel down with bandage over their eyes and to kill them with sword or bayonet. The poor victims numbered about 220 in all including a few Australian officers.<sup>280</sup>

Despite the SNLF's commission of these atrocities, the Japanese military overlooked this brutality and awarded the SNLF a commendation for the Battle of Laha.

---

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-3

<sup>280</sup> Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea*, p. 415.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF received its commendation on 9 December 1942, which stated:

Blasting stubborn resistance put up by the enemy, a special landing unit carried out a landing in the face of the enemy on Hitoelama Beach on the Island of Amboina on 31/1/42. Cutting through thick jungles and over bad roads, the unit then attacked Laha, whereby they repeated their daring assaults against a numerically superior enemy entrenched in a stronghold. There the unit finally crushed the enemy and finally captured an airfield on February 3rd. The military services rendered in the above operations are distinguished. Wherefore a citation is hereby granted.<sup>281</sup>

Although the citation's declarations about the capture of Laha were overstated (for example, 600 Australian troops, five tanks and two large armoured cars)<sup>282</sup> it provided an insight into the respect the Japanese had gained for the Australian defenders. In a sense the citation also recognised the bravery of the Australian troops for their stoic resistance against the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF attacks at Laha (The 2/21<sup>st</sup> Bn was also later recognised in the Australian Army Battle Honours for their efforts at Laha).<sup>283</sup>

Understandably, the massacres at Laha were never mentioned in the Japanese citation. Admiral Yamamoto, however, later wrote of the Australian defence at Ambon stating that '... the desperate resistance of the Australians after the breakthrough of the Japanese death band was not to be despised'.<sup>284</sup>

## **Operations Paso - 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Right Assault Unit (minus the 7<sup>th</sup> Company)**

### **31 January - 1 February 1942**

At the same time as the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Bn landings, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn under the command of Major Kimura, beached its forces to the east of Hutumuri village at 0130 hours on 31 February. Ito had organised the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn as the Right Assault Unit responsible for taking Paso and Halong. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn formation was the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> companies (minus the 7<sup>th</sup> Coy) in complete tactical order. The 5<sup>th</sup> Coy acted as the advance guard as the battalion

---

<sup>281</sup> National Archives of Australia, Personal Records Colonel W.J.R. Scott, War of 1939-45, AWM67, 3/353, p. 67.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Maitland, M.-G. G. L., *The Second World War and Its Australian Army Battle Honours*, (East Roseville: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 46.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

set off towards its objectives at Paso in the North. Almost immediately after leaving the beachhead the lead platoon came into contact with and dispersed a KNIL home guard observation post. Following this incident, a Japanese platoon commander seized some local Ambonese and forced them to guide the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn safely through the jungle trails to Baguala bay and Paso.<sup>285</sup>

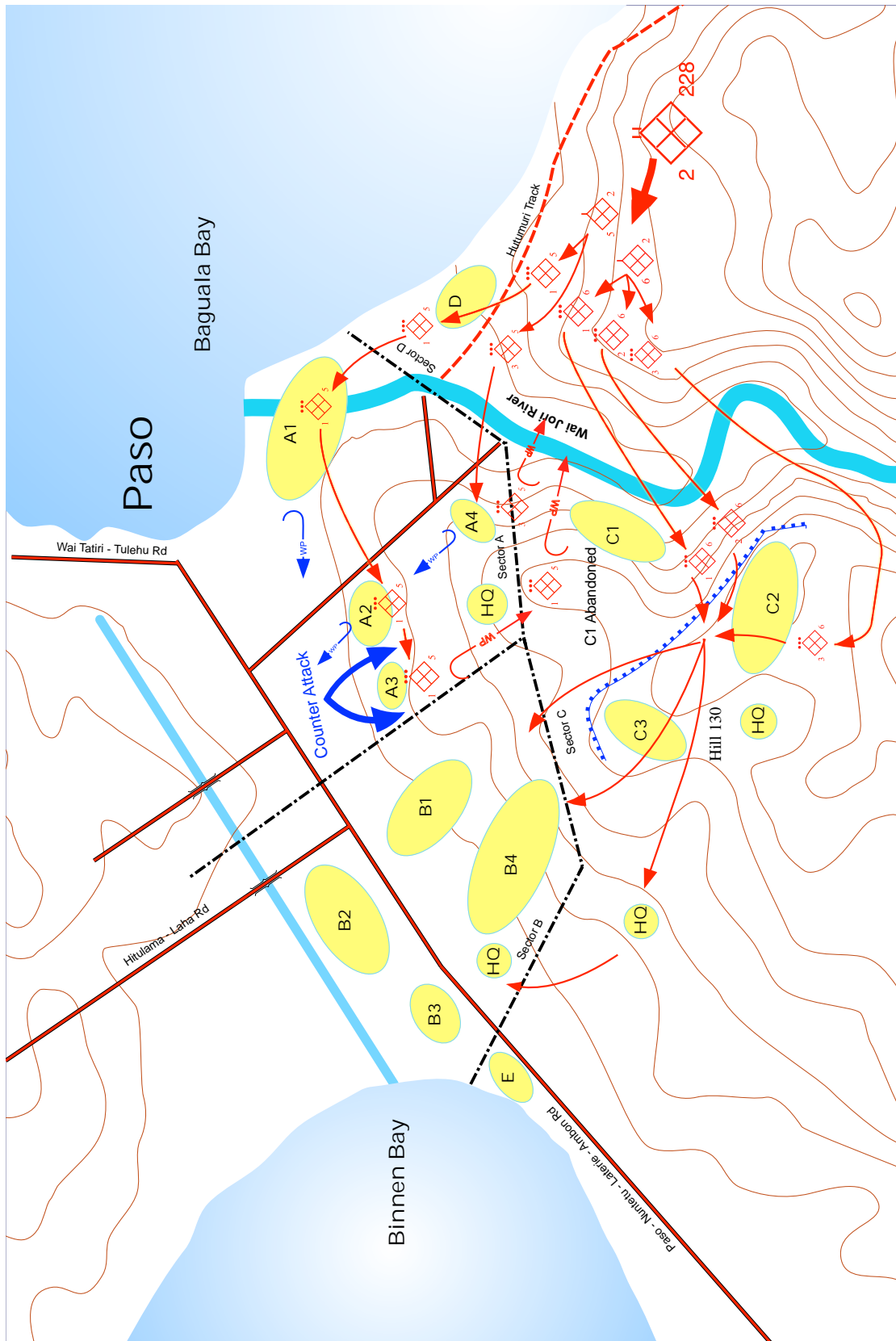
Here Kapitiz had located the Dutch positions to the southwest of Paso, facing Northeast to the village itself and east towards Baguala Bay. The defences were organised into five sectors. The 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Coy occupied sector A to the north of the Wai Jori River next to Baguala Bay. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy occupied sector B to the southwest near the Paso-Halong Road and shared its boundaries with sector A to the East and with sector C to the South. The 1<sup>st</sup> Coy occupied sector C to the north of the Wai Jori River below sector B. Two platoons and a machine gun section occupied sector D between the Wai Jori River and Batugong village and three groups of European militia occupied sector E to the northwest of sector B on the Paso-Halong Road. In support of these companies were two six inch naval guns dug into concrete bunkers under the ridges of Hill 130 to cover the littoral approaches to Paso and two 7cm infantry guns and one 7.5 cm gun in sector B, one 7.5 cm gun in sector E, four Stokes Brant mortars in sector A and two artillery sections of two 7 cm guns (one section each stationed at the Halong and Lateri villages in support of the Paso lines).<sup>286</sup>

---

<sup>285</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>286</sup> National Archives of Australia, Personal Records Colonel W.J.R. Scott, War of 1939-45, AWM67, 3/353, p. 74.

# Paso Battle Map



At 0600 hours on 31 February, the Japanese 5<sup>th</sup> Coy's vanguard approached the high ground to the south of the Wai Jori River. The company was ambushed here by two platoons of the KNIL's 1<sup>st</sup> Coy and by a machine gun section positioned to the Japanese right near Batugong village in sector D, where many Japanese were killed. Lt Adachi ordered his 1<sup>st</sup> pl to take the position, but the Dutch held on with heavy automatic fire. Unable to carry the attack forward, the 1<sup>st</sup> pl discharged smoke grenades and moved off to dead ground to reorganise its attack. Concurrently, Adachi's 3<sup>rd</sup> pl attacked to the left of the 1<sup>st</sup> pl and it managed to break through the barbed-wire entanglements to occupy the position. This attack dislodged the Dutch from position A1 in sector A.<sup>287</sup> By 0700 hours the Japanese had gained control their right flank, which allowed the 5<sup>th</sup> Coy to probe further into the undergrowth towards the Dutch front-lines in sectors A and B.

Meanwhile, on the Japanese left front the KNIL's 1<sup>st</sup> Coy seven man machine gun section abandoned its post in position C1 to withdraw into position C2 where they left a further gap in the Dutch lines for the Japanese to exploit.<sup>288</sup> The Japanese 6<sup>th</sup> Coy then attacked forwards towards the southern end of the Dutch first and second lines to exploit their flanks. The Japanese 6<sup>th</sup> Coy's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pls approached these flanks by advancing along the southern side of the Wai Jori River. During this move they received spasmodic fire from the KNIL 1<sup>st</sup> Coy in sector C, but the shooting was ineffective because the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy had trouble finding their targets as the Japanese platoons advanced along the riverbank under the cover of the thick jungle.

---

<sup>287</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, pp. 9-10.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

At 0830 hours, Major Tieland, Commanding Officer of the KNIL companies at Paso, came forward to take control of the fighting. At 0900 hours the Japanese 5<sup>th</sup> Coy began to attack the first line of the KNIL's 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy in sector B. Despite the heavy fighting, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy managed to hold off the Japanese with machine gun fire from position B1 and with artillery fire from position B2. At midday, and owing to heavy resistance in this sector, the Japanese were forced to abandon their frontal attacks and to withdraw back on the Wai Jori River.<sup>289</sup>

While the Dutch 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy held the positions at B1 and B2, the reserve platoon from position B4 tried unsuccessfully to counter attack the Japanese in sector A at position A4. The result of this effort came to a standstill in the face of heavy automatic fire. The reserve platoon had lost the initiative because the Japanese were able to hold off the attack from their newly posts at position C1 and because Capt Uckerman's 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Coy in sector A had failed to support the counter attack despite being ordered to do so. Following this action the KNIL's B Coy reserve was forced to withdraw to their original positions in sector B.<sup>290</sup>

Meanwhile, Kimura ordered Major Tsuruta's 6<sup>th</sup> Coy's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pls and a machine gun unit to attack towards the rear of the Dutch positions. They attacked up a ridge-line of Hill 130 towards the KNIL pillboxes and barracks area, however, although the Dutch troops were forced to withdraw a short distance they successfully maintained their positions on the hill by firing at close range down into the advancing Japanese platoons.

---

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., pp.75-6.

Here the 6<sup>th</sup> Coy took heavy casualties and were momentarily stalled. Tsuruta was then forced to change the angle of attack and he ordered Lt Ota's 3<sup>rd</sup> pl 6<sup>th</sup> Coy to attack further around to the rear of the Dutch positions and create a diversion.<sup>291</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> pl used the thick jungle along the banks of the Wai Jori River for cover and attacked to the rear of the KNIL barracks under the support of sniper fire and grenade-launchers. At this time the Japanese 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn artillery arrived at the Wai Jori from Hutumuri and began pounding the ridge-line on Hill 130 to destroy the Dutch pillboxes and to dislodge the infantry. The 3<sup>rd</sup> pl continued its attack against the Dutch rear into the evening. Eventually, engineers from the 8<sup>th</sup> Coy came forward to reinforce the 2<sup>nd</sup> pl and they attacked up the slopes to overrun a section of the Dutch second-line.

While Kimura's troops attacked the ridge-line, Kapitz ordered a counter attack to retake sector C. The company commanders, however, found that they were unable to attack across the low terrain of the first line because it was being fired on from the hills above. Kapitz then ordered the commanders from sectors B, C3, and E to fill a gap between B1 and C3 with an ambush party. This order was also rejected after it was found that small detachments on the right wing of position B1 had abandoned their posts and left those flanks exposed. Running out of options Kapitz ordered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy to alter its defences and form two strong posts in position B2. Kapitz and Tieland then inexplicably abandoned their HQ position and, with their staff officers in tow, withdrew to Nuntetu

---

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



without notifying their company commanders.<sup>292</sup> Notwithstanding the disappearance of Kapitz, the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy troops occupied their designated positions in B2 at 1745 hours.

Within fifteen minutes of moving to position B2, Lts van Ravenswaaji Claasen and de Jong drove by on a motorcycle sidecar trying to contact the Japanese to negotiate a Dutch surrender. On seeing the lieutenants driving across his front with a white flag and attempting to reach the Japanese, Capt Uckerman ordered a cease-fire. The Japanese also stopped firing, but Claasen and de Jong were unable to reach the Japanese and they returned to Tulehu to report to Kapitz. On the way back de Jong told the other Dutch commanders that it was over.<sup>293</sup>

After waiting for an hour and without receiving instructions from Kapitz, the company commanders ordered their troops to lay down their arms and assemble on the Paso-Halong Road for rest and food. At 2000 hours Tieland returned to Paso and ordered the troops to take up their arms again as Kapitz had not yet been able to arrange a surrender.<sup>294</sup> After deliberating over these instructions with his officers Tieland agreed to suspend the order and took Uckerman and Capt Schouten back to talk with Kapitz who was now at the Lateri battery.

Following a discussion with his officers Kapitz stood by his order for troops to remain armed and ready. Kapitz justified his stand on the following grounds:

---

<sup>292</sup> National Archives of Australia, Personal Records Colonel W.J.R. Scott, War of 1939-45, AWM67, 3/353, pp. 76-7.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

1. He... [said he] was deceived by the reports of the proceedings, given to him by his officers and it appeared to him, that the situation was much less serious, than he thought it to be at the time, that he decided to show the white flag. He considered that his sub-commandants had been intimidated by the very bold acting of a handful of “snipers”, penetrated into our lines; this consideration deducted from the fact, that (according to him) only a few casualties had been suffered. He felt ashamed and not able to account for giving up fighting so soon.
2. According to [Kapitz] showing of the white flag did not imply “surrender”, but only the indication of the desire to open negotiations, to which the enemy apparently was not inclined., shown by the fact, that the officers, bearing the white flag, had been driving several times to and fro, not succeeding in contacting the enemy. When however, Capt. Schouten hereupon had brought forward the seriousness of some fighting-actions, of which he had knowledge at that moment, because some units of his troops had participated in these actions, the Territorial Commander [Kapitz] altered his order in so far, that fighting would not be taken up again, but that a waiting and prepared for action attitude should be assumed in the last occupied positions in B Sector, not to be left defenceless against possible ruthlessness of the Asiatic enemy. Against the thus worded order both coy commanders declared to have no objections.<sup>295</sup>

Considering this quote it seems Kapitz wanted to have some negotiating power when it came to surrendering his troops to the Japanese. Nevertheless, the discussions were in vain because after Tieland, Uckerman and Schouten returned to Paso at 2130 hours to pass on Kapitz’s orders they found that the Japanese had already captured their troops while they were away meeting with Kapitz. All three of the officers were then taken prisoner. Finally, at 0300 hours on 1 February, as the Japanese advanced through the Lateri battery towards their objective at Halong they captured Kapitz.<sup>296</sup>

Kimura's 5<sup>th</sup> Coy secured Paso and Halong the next morning. He then assembled the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun companies at the Halong pier to await naval water transport to Laha. He had decided to send the battalion to Laha in support of the Kure 1<sup>st</sup> SNLF and the 10<sup>th</sup> Coy as they struggled in their attack on the airfield, but owing to sea mines in the bay it was deemed too dangerous to ferry the troops across to the airfield. Kimura finally ordered his units to march to Laha but they arrived too late to take part in the battle, as the Australians had already surrendered. On 6 February, the

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-8.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

10<sup>th</sup> Coy and Kumura's battalion both returned to Ambon and without having participated in the Laha massacres.<sup>297</sup>

### **Operations Rutung, Leahari, Hukurila, Ema and Sojadiatas - 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Left Assault Unit**

#### **31 January – 1 February 1942**

Maj. Hayakawa's 1<sup>st</sup> Bn (minus the 4<sup>th</sup> Coy) advance guard and the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy (Omasu Unit) departed Rutung at 0250 hours for Ambon via the villages of Leahari, Hukurila, Ema and Sojadiatas. Their objectives were first Ambon and then the Australian forces entrenched at Amahusu. Including the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy, the force consisted of its Bn HQ, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy (Kanbe Unit) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy (Kosaki Unit), a MG Coy, a mountain artillery unit and other assorted units.

The lead platoon moved to Hukurila where it entered a narrow track in single file during its advance to Ema, but the horses were unable to follow because the track was too narrow. This made it difficult for the artillery troops who depended on horse transport to carry their guns. In the end they had to dismount their guns and to carry them through the jungle by hand. When they reached Leahari the artillery unit was engaged by a KNIL platoon, which they drove off. Because this incident held up the artillery unit it fell behind the main force and was later unable to support its the main force in its attack on the village of Sojadiatas and Mount Serimau.<sup>298</sup>

---

<sup>297</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

After reaching Ema, the 1<sup>st</sup> pl met with steep ravines and cliffs sloping down from the western face of Mount Serimau. As the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy advanced towards Sojadiatas it was apparently attacked by the Australian observation post on Mount Nona, by concealed KNIL positions on Mount Serimau and by two Dutch artillery guns sited near Mount Nona. Nakamoto's men found it difficult to continue through to Sojadiatas because the firing, the cramped hill trail, high cliffs and gorges restricted the platoon's movement. During this phase of the assault, the 1<sup>st</sup> pl 1<sup>st</sup> Coy lost half of its troops under the withering Allied crossfire fire. The weight of this assault temporarily stalled the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy's advance. Hayakawa eventually deployed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy to the left flank to reinforce the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy and was only then able to recommence the advance towards Sojadiatas.<sup>299</sup>

As the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy began to move forward, Lt Omasu sent an officer patrol under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Agriga Yu to reconnoitre the western slopes of Mount Serimau near Sojadiatas. At 1640 hours Agriga was killed by KNIL machine gun fire as his patrol approached the village. Omasu then ordered WO Yamada to lead the 2<sup>nd</sup> pl in a night attack on the Ambonese militia positions at Sojadiatas, however, this assault also went awry when the KNIL fired flares, laid down a blanket of light arms and machine gun fire and continuously counterattacked and the 2<sup>nd</sup> pl's progress. Finally, Omasu ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy to move behind the KNIL positions and carryout a night attack to the rear of Sojadiatas from Mount Serimau. Omasu's tactics succeeded and he managed to take the Dutch positions at Mount Serimau and to overrun the Sojadiatas stronghold sometime in the early hours of 1 February.<sup>300</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> National Archives of Australia, Personal Records Colonel W.J.R. Scott, War of 1939-45, AWM67, 3/353, p. 8.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., pp. 8, 17.

At 0800 hours on 1 February, Hayakawa's 1<sup>st</sup> Coy 1<sup>st</sup> Bn vanguard moved down from Sojadiatas towards the southeast sector of Ambon Town. After fending off further minor attacks along the Sojadiatas Road the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy reached the outskirts of Ambon Town that afternoon. Hayakawa then ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn to form up for a night attack on Mt Nona. Omasu's 1<sup>st</sup> Coy (with machine guns attached) took the right front line, Kanbe's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy the left front line and Kosaki's 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy remained in reserve. After moving along a ridgeline plateau towards the Australian rear at Mount Nona, the 1<sup>st</sup> Coy contacted and drove off a small Australian reconnaissance party that had been moving down from the mountain towards Kudamati.<sup>301</sup>

The attack on the Australian 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer pl's positions on Mount Nona began later that night at 2200 hours. Fuma's 2<sup>nd</sup> pl came to within 80 metres of the defences at Mount Nona before the Australians finally engaged them. Fuma attempted to infiltrate the camp with his troops but they were quickly discovered and he lost the initiative. The Australians counterattacked Fuma's party and drove them back to where they were unable to make any further ground. To breach the Mount Nona defences, Omasu ordered the 3<sup>rd</sup> pl to attack the summit, however, the Australians threw down hand grenades into the 3<sup>rd</sup> pl until it too was driven back. As the above engagements were taking place, Kosaki moved his 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy in to attack the pioneer platoon's rear in the Southwest while Kanbe had his 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy attack forward to put further pressure on the Australian flanks, however, these manoeuvres also failed to make ground.<sup>302</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

The Australians meanwhile regrouped 400 metres to the West and held that position until 0130 hours on 2 February when they were finally forced to evacuate Mount Nona. According to the Japanese account of the battle the fighting had continued until 0300 hours ending only after the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn took Mount Nona by force. This account by the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, however, was clearly an exaggeration where it was claimed that 'the position was quickly cleared, with the result that two artillery guns were captured, 50 enemy troops were killed, and 15 officers and other ranks taken prisoner'.<sup>303</sup>

Lt Jenkins' 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s later reported that they had left the mountain at 0130 hours leaving one dead and taking with them three wounded, five sick, twelve still fit together with another unscathed section that had not taken part in the engagements.<sup>304</sup> It is possible, however, that the officers of the 1st Bn exaggerated the facts to hide from their superiors their inability to defeat a relatively small Australian platoon. Nevertheless, on the morning of 2 February, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn now controlled the high ground above the Amahusu and directly threatened D Coy's left flank on the slopes below.

### **Operations Rutung, Ambon and Amahusu Line - 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Central Assault Unit (minus the 10<sup>th</sup> Company)**

#### **31 January – 3 February 1942**

Col Doi's 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn landed to the east of Rutung at 0100 hours on 31 January. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn set out at 0530 hours to follow the centre line Northwest across the Laitimor Peninsular to Ambon. The 11<sup>th</sup> Coy's commander, Capt Fukada, ordered his troops to advance up a steep narrow jungle track behind the village to advance across the Island to Ambon

---

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, p. 56.

Town. The order of advance was the 11<sup>th</sup> Coy with Lt Kosuda's infantry and machine gun platoons in the lead, the command squad in the centre with Lts Abe's and Kawano's 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> pls respectively. The remaining 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Companies brought up the rear of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn with its horse transport and mountain artillery in train.

At dawn and within 30 minutes of leaving the beaches, Kosuda's vanguard arrived at a small U-shaped plateau resting 255 meters above Rutung village. Here the lead platoon met with a skilfully camouflaged network of KNIL pillboxes set back into the jungle overlooking an open killing ground that was protected by anti-grenade nets, barbed wire entanglements and antipersonnel mines.<sup>305</sup> On entering the plateau Kosuda's advance guard immediately met with a hail of machine gun fire from the KNIL's pillbox network. From the Japanese perspective:

The enemy, with the advantage of the terrain on this U-shaped formation, had constructed a network of permanent pillboxes on the summit and slopes. They had secured themselves in this position for some time, and with much training, were now prepared for the attack. When they recognised an attack from our forces, a hail of machine-gun fire rained down from each of the pillboxes. In an instant, the battlefield became a scene of carnage. Bullets came down like rain. The company were completely bogged down within the enemy's field of fire. The casualties within the advance guard platoon continued to mount, and calls for medics were clearly heard.<sup>306</sup>

In response to the ambush Capt Fukada ordered Kosuda's 2<sup>nd</sup> pl to attack along the main track, Abe's 1<sup>st</sup> pl to attack along the right front and Kawano's 3<sup>rd</sup> pl to attack along the left front.<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>305</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 20.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., pp. 5, 20.

Abe gave the order and his platoon rushed forward across the land-mine field and barbed wire entanglements towards the pillbox positions on the right. At the same time, Major Nishiyama ordered another platoon from his 12<sup>th</sup> Coy to assist Abe's platoon in attacking the right of the forward line. Capt Kobayashi passed the order to Lt Kawase's 1<sup>st</sup> pl 12<sup>th</sup> Coy to fire on the pillboxes with machine gun fire, teargas and rifle fire. Kosuda's 2<sup>nd</sup> pl 11<sup>th</sup> Coy, which was trapped behind barbed wire entanglements taking heavy casualties from machine gun fire, rose together with Abe, Kawano and Kawase's platoons, attacked forward and somehow managed to dislodge the Dutch pillbox positions. Despite the initial success of clearing the pillboxes, the Japanese platoons continued to receive fire from the KNIL's main barracks position some thirty metres further up Hill 255.<sup>308</sup>

The KNIL platoon held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn at bay for a further one and a half hours until it became clear to them that they were becoming vulnerable to encirclement. The KNIL platoon assembled to the rear of Hill 255 at 0735 hours and withdrew to Karang Panjang village where they joined forces with Kapitz's Staff HQ and the Boela detachment, which was moving up from Ambon Town to Rutung to help block the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn advance. Nevertheless, after contacting the Japanese advance parties the Boela detachment were also forced to withdraw back to Karang Panjang and regroup.<sup>309</sup>

After hearing that the Japanese were on their way to Karang Panjang, Kapitz transferred his Staff HQ to the headquarters position overlooking Paso at Hill 130. The remaining

---

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>309</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, p. 11.



KNIL units were able to hold Karang Panjang against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn until 1230 hours when they too were ordered to return to Paso. On their way to Paso the Boela detachment came into continual contact with other Japanese units and believing that Paso had been lost, and except for two infantry sections under the command of a sergeant, they deserted *en masse*. On nearing Paso the two remaining sections learned that the Japanese 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn had already captured Paso and they in turn fled through the jungle to the coast from where they escaped Ambon to Australia.<sup>310</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn advanced through Karang Panjang and arrived on the outskirts of Ambon Town at 1500 hours. Doi positioned the mountain artillery on the heights of Batumerah to provide support for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn advance on Ambon Town and to shell the Benteng artillery barracks farther to the West. On reaching Ambon Town, Nishiyama organised the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Companies together with the 4<sup>th</sup> Coy 1<sup>st</sup> Bn (Det.), which was supporting the left flank, to form up and clear the town. Under the cover of the mountain artillery guns the Japanese forces entered Ambon Town at 1700 hours and quickly forced all remaining resistance from the town. That evening the Japanese had occupied Ambon Town to as far west as the Sanatorium, which was perched above Ambon Town across from the Australian positions above Kudamati village.<sup>311</sup>

On the morning of 1 February, the 9<sup>th</sup> Coy was split-up for the attack on the Australian B Echelon lines at Kudamati. Lt Kawake's 1<sup>st</sup> pl remained in reserve in the City while Lt Koseki's 2<sup>nd</sup> pl and Lt Muto's 3<sup>rd</sup> pl together with the 11<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Companies moved

---

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 6.

southwest along the coastline of Ambon Bay towards the Dutch artillery barracks at Benteng. In the morning, using captured Australian ambulances as transport, Japanese mortar units surreptitiously occupied the sanatorium. Under the cover of mountain guns and mortar fire the 4<sup>th</sup> Coy attacked up through the Kudamati cemetery towards the Australian positions, but were held back by heavy machine gun, small arms and rifle-grenade fire. Because of the fierce resistance put up by the Dutch and Australian soldiers at Kudamati the Japanese decided to block the position and bypass B Echelon for Benteng.

At 1000 hours, the 4<sup>th</sup> Coy redirected its attack onto the Benteng barracks farther to the West along the Ambon-Amahusu Road. The Japanese attacked through two lines of entanglements at Benteng and infiltrated the KNIL's rearward positions to capture the two 6 inch coastal gun emplacements. The guns had been employed in firing at the 1<sup>st</sup> Kure SNLF at Tawiri, but the KNIL artillery officers set fire to the guns at 0900 hours before withdrawing to Karang Panjang when it became clear that Benteng was threatened. Nevertheless, the barracks remained protected by KNIL infantry who remained in their mortar and machine gun positions to stall the 4<sup>th</sup> Coy's advance.<sup>312</sup>

While the 4<sup>th</sup> Coy was attacking Benteng, Nishiyama's 9<sup>th</sup> Coy 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn attempted to advance along the coast road to contact the Australian lines at Amahusu, but they were also stalled by KNIL mortar and machine gun fire coming from the Benteng barracks positions.

---

<sup>312</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, p. 12.



Ambon Town Battle Map

At 1300 hours, after four hours of attempting to bypass the barracks, Nishiyama decided to wait until after dark and carry out a full battalion attack on the position. An unknown Japanese officer present at the battle later wrote:

How to pursue the operations against the Dutch and Australians still dispersed within the narrow peninsular could invite higher than acceptable casualties - like the proverb states,... [a cornered rat will bite the cat]. Based on a determination to rest the main strength of his force for later operations, the commander blockaded the peninsular with a portion of his force and rested the majority of the forces personnel and had them prepare for future operations. The 4th Company, which had secured the slopes of Hill 514 [at Benteng Barracks on Hill 317], was appointed to blockade the peninsular.<sup>313</sup>

Nishiyama also decided that a daylight attack against the Australians was too dangerous to contemplate and withdrew his troops to a rest area to recuperate in preparation for a night attack.<sup>314</sup> This attack ended at 2000 hours and after three hours of fighting when Nishiyama's battalion finally dislodged the KNIL, who then broke up their heavy weapons to withdraw back through to the Australian lines at Amahusu. The success of this action allowed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn to launch an attack on the Amahusu line.<sup>315</sup>

At 2000 hours Nishiyama ordered all the companies to advance on the Amahusu positions where he succeeded in taking the Amahusu line after the Australians withdrew. A Japanese officer later explained that 'By around 2300 hours, the enemy positions had been breached. The enemy stoutly defended their existing camp, but could not resist the fierce onslaught and hand to hand combat, retreating to the tip of the peninsular after breaking up their heavy weapons'.<sup>316</sup> In agreement with the Japanese story, Scott had given the order to withdraw D Coy from the line as early as 2030 hours that night. Scott

---

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Bullard, S., Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area: New Britain and the Papua Campaigns, 1942-43, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2007), p. 6.

had left rearguard platoons at Amahusu to cover the withdrawal and they arrived back at Eri early in the early morning hours of 2 February.

When the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn entered the Australian lines the next morning they found the trenches were protected by two lines of barbed wire that faced back to Eri rather than towards the Japanese main line of attack. The 4<sup>th</sup> Coy was ordered to halt its advance at Amahusu and await negotiations for an Australian surrender. Nishiyama decided to preserve the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn and blockaded the Australian forces at Eri and on 3 February Scott, with no room for manoeuvre and suffering from inadequate food and water supplies for his troops, surrendered his forces to the Japanese and they were marched back to their old camp at Tantai as POWs.

## Chapter Four - The Australian Story

Pure defence ... would be completely contrary to the idea of war, since it would mean that only one side was waging it. Therefore, defence in war can only be relative, and the characteristic feature of waiting should be applied only to the basic concept, not all of its components. A partial engagement is defensive if we await the advance, the charge of the enemy. A battle is defensive if we await the attack – await, that is, the appearance of the enemy in front of our lines and within range. A campaign is defensive if we wait for our theatre of operations to be invaded. In each of these cases the characteristic of waiting and parrying is germane to the general idea without being in conflict with the concept of war; for we may find it advantageous to await the charge against our bayonets and the attack on our position and theatre of operations. But if we are really waging war, we must return the enemy's blows; and these offensive acts in a defensive war come under the heading of 'defence' – in other words, our offensive takes place within our own positions or theatre of operations. Thus, a defensive campaign can be fought with offensive battles, and in a defensive battle, we can employ our divisions offensively. Even in a defensive position awaiting the enemy assault, our bullets take the offensive. So the defensive form of war is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows.<sup>317</sup>

Carl Von Clausewitz

The principles of war help to guide the strategist in considering the valid national interests above all others. The Principle of Security is directed at preserving power, reducing the threat of attack by foreign nations, protecting the people, husbanding resources and the economy as well as conserving the armed forces for their role in physically protecting the national interests. The minimum aim of war therefore is the continuation of the nation. In this context strategists also need to consider the Principle of Purpose, which is aimed at formulating a decisive war strategy in balance with its attainable political objectives and the military's complementary capabilities in directing those defensive or offensive operations.<sup>318</sup> Clearly, under the prevailing circumstances of 1941, where the Japanese had the initiative in how, when and where it would attack, Malaya, Singapore, the NEI, the Philippines and Australia were countries placed on the defensive in waiting for their theatres of operations to be invaded.

---

<sup>317</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 427.

<sup>318</sup> Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives*, pp. 83, 85.

Notwithstanding Clausewitz's recommendation that 'the defensive form of war is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows', the imperative lay in the principle that any offensive action in defence must be in proportion to the means available and that they be achievable. The implication is that the Chiefs of Staff of any nation must know or at least tacitly understand these fundamental principles in advising a government on the practise of defensive military strategy. In the case of the Islands strategy, the Australian Chiefs of Staff failed to utilise these principles, or at least the will to advise the government, on the inefficacy of isolating and expending its troops in unsustainable far flung outposts. The policy of simply fighting for the sake of fighting or fighting because it seems the right thing to do is the antithesis to rational strategic thinking. Nevertheless, it was under these circumstances that the Australian government and the Chiefs of Staffs had placed Gull Force.

The objectives Sturdee gave to Scott for Ambon were simple; to demonstrate Australian support to the NEI with the available resources under his command. The practicalities of carrying out this policy entailed the protection Laha airfield, the occupation of the fixed trenches at Amahusu and Eri and delaying the Japanese for as long as possible at Ambon on their southward advance.<sup>319</sup> By now Australia's military intelligence and AHQ were aware that the Japanese 38<sup>th</sup> Detachment's division was currently at Manado and that Ambon was likely to be their next target. The series of air raids from 7 January 1942 onward at Laha and Halong seemed to confirm that assumption.

---

<sup>319</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 5.

Because Roach had received no orders for the role of Gull Force he was forced to fall in line with Kapitz's plan and he relocated his forces from Tantui to the Amahusu and the Eri lines, albeit while holding D Coy resting in mobile reserve. On taking over and contrary to Roach's plan to maintain his troops on a mobile basis, Scott determined to tactically fix his lines of defence where they remained and began occupying positions that the Dutch had already prepared at Amahusu and Eri. This was to prove a problematic decision for Scott, as the position on Mount Nona held by a platoon only, was vulnerable to turning by a decisive attack from the rear. If this happened, the whole Amahusu line would have to counter attack or face a risky withdrawal into Eri. Scott's awkward situation derived from placing too much faith in Kapitz, suspending Roach's mobile defence plan and fixing his defences at Amahusu and Eri based Kapitz's assessment that the Japanese would most likely land at Latuhalat or on Ambon Bay.

Scott's misapprehension on this point resulted from a conference on 16 January at Halong, where Kapitz had assured Scott that the Japanese were most likely to effect landings at Eri Bay, at Paso or at both. Kapitz dismissed any assumption that the Japanese would land at Hukurila to the southeast because of the forbidding mountainous terrain and narrow jungle tracks between the south coast and Ambon Town. According to his assessment, Kudamati would be a safe area at the rear of any expected attack from the West. It was on this advice that Scott positioned Gull Force's stores and ammunition dumps at Kudamati. It was not until 30 January that Kapitz's assumption proved incorrect after Jenkins reported from Mount Nona that the Japanese fleet was approaching towards the southeast of the Island off the coast at Hukurila.<sup>320</sup>

---

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



Under Scott's orders A and D Companies had occupied their defensive positions, trenches and pillboxes at Amahusu and Eri while B Echelon occupied the rear positions and stores dumps at Kudamati.<sup>321</sup> The positioning of B Echelon at Kudamati demonstrated Scott had accepted Kapitz's assumption that the Japanese would most likely attempt a landing at Latuhalat or Eri. The above dispositions and the decision to hold these positions demonstrated that Scott had made no contingency for an attack from the rear. In practice, the Australian fixed positions would remain static shields lacking the flexibility to repel anything other than the predicted Japanese landings at Latuhalat or Eri.

### **The Japanese Attacks at Kudamati and Mount Nona**

On 31 January, after receiving reports of Japanese landings to the Southeast, the quartermaster and officer in charge of B Echelon, Capt Miskin, ordered the motor transports, the 104<sup>th</sup> LAD, elements of the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Field Coy, the bulk of the AASC as well as a section of the 2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance to move from their location at Galala to Kudamati. The 2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) took up separate positions to B Echelon and waited along the Ambon Amahusu Road to the west of Kudamati.<sup>322</sup>

Following Jenkins' report at 0900 hours on 31 January that the Japanese were landing at Hukurila, and after Kapitz confirmed to Scott that the Japanese were landing in the Southeast, Kapitz asked Scott to send a company to reinforce B Echelon at Kudamati.

---

<sup>321</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report by Lt W.T. Jenkins on Japanese Attack on Ambon 30th Jan 1942 to 3rd Feb 1942. Details of Prison Camp, and Japanese Dispositions - Map of Tan Toey Camp 1942, AWM54, 573/6/12, 1942-1942, p. 1.

<sup>322</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, pp. 18-19.

When Scott told Maj. Macrae of the request it seems he believed that Kapitz had meant the Australian D Coy:

“We can't do that”, ... [Scott] said “that's what I think too”. My reasons were - the Japanese addiction to feint landings; the difficulty of extracting a Coy on an extended front in precipitous country with its attached heavy weapons; the exhaustion factor, the probability that we would inflict heavier damage by remaining in one strong position; the close watch kept by enemy recon planes making any secret daylight move impossible and his ability to make new landings at will; supplies and water for seven days were in these positions, also adequate ammunition. In the wisdom vouchsafed after the events I would have moved A Coy from Eri rather than D Coy from AMAHOESOE as the ERI position was an excrescence [sic] as things turned out and the ground was not essential to the enemy.<sup>323</sup>

Scott's decision to fix his positions at Amahusu and Eri had now affected the security of his B Echelon forces and his supplies at Kudamati to his rear, which was now his front, but he made gave no orders to readjust to the situation other than turn D Coy to face the new direction of attack.

If Scott had maintained his companies in mobile reserve, as Roach had planned, he may have been able to respond to Kapitz's request to reinforce B Echelon with D Coy and without many of the encumbrances Macrae had envisaged. As Macrae explained later, the option of reinforcing B Echelon was lost and both A and D Companies remained in position. With Scott's refusal to act on the request, Kapitz ordered Bouman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy KNIL from its positions at Eri back to Kudamati.

Considering the evidence it seems Kapitz was anticipating that A Coy would move back to Kudamati from Eri and not D Coy from Amahusu. Because of this confusion Kapitz became obliged to instead move Bouman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy to Kudamati in support of B Echelon.<sup>324</sup> At the time the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy KNIL reached Kudamati the Japanese were thought

---

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., p 21.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85.

already to have entered Ambon cutting off all communications between the Australians and the Dutch. This report was later proved wrong as according to the Japanese reports the attack against Ambon Town did not begin until 1700 hours that afternoon.<sup>325</sup>

The reason that communications had ceased between the Australians and the Dutch was that Kapitz had moved his headquarters to Karang Panjang to the east of Ambon Town to avoid the Japanese troops that were now approaching from Sojadiatas in the South. This move may have contributed to the breakdown in communications between the Australian and Dutch commanders as he did not tell Scott he was moving. Lt Russell later confirmed to Scott that Kaptiz had abandoned the staff offices in Ambon Town before 1100 hours leaving maps lying around and the phones intact. Russell reported that he had destroyed the phone lines and maps before returning to Bn HQ.<sup>326</sup> Unfortunately it seems, Russell may have inadvertently destroyed a main telephone junction, as it was from this time forward that all communications had ceased.

Meanwhile, at 0800 hours and before Bouman moved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy KNIL to Kudamati, Scott ordered Capt Turner, second in command of A Coy, to take over as officer commanding B Echelon from Miskin. On inspecting of the position Turner decided his force was too weak to cover both the Ambon-Eri Road and Mount Nona. He therefore organised B Echelon into positions on the hill overlooking Kudamati to prevent the Japanese from approaching the heights of Mount Nona. He placed the transport

---

<sup>325</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Prisoners of War and Internees - Escapes:] Interrogation of Escapees New Ireland - Interview with Evacuees - Escape of AIF and Dutch Officers from Amboina - Reports from an Officer who Escaped from the Island of Ambon - Lieutenant W A M Chapman, Lieutenant Jinkins 2/21 Battalion Lieutenant I McBride - on Japanese Attack on Ambon, 30 January to 3 February 1942, AWM54, 779/10/7, 1942, p. 33; National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>326</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 22.

personnel on the southwest front facing Ambon Town; the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Engineers held the north front and the recruit reinforcements detachment, the 104<sup>th</sup> LAD, the AASC detachment and Quartermaster details occupied the northeast position.<sup>327</sup>

When Bouman arrived, Turner had the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy KNIL occupy the ground in front of the Australian positions facing Ambon to 'the southernmost extended and dangerous part of the hill range' facing Ambon Town.<sup>328</sup> Unsatisfied with the position Bouman moved the company along the southeast front to form an arc behind the cover of a nearby ravine. Three of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy's machine gun sections were dispersed among the Australian lines at Turner's request because B Echelon had had one light machine gun only with which to defend its positions. While Bouman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy occupied its positions, the 3<sup>rd</sup> pl 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy arrived at Kudamati, but unfortunately the Australian troops policing the road failed to intercept one of the sections and it continued towards Ambon Town to be, presumably, captured or killed by the Japanese.

Bouman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy went into position under the supervision of Lieutenant Prins.

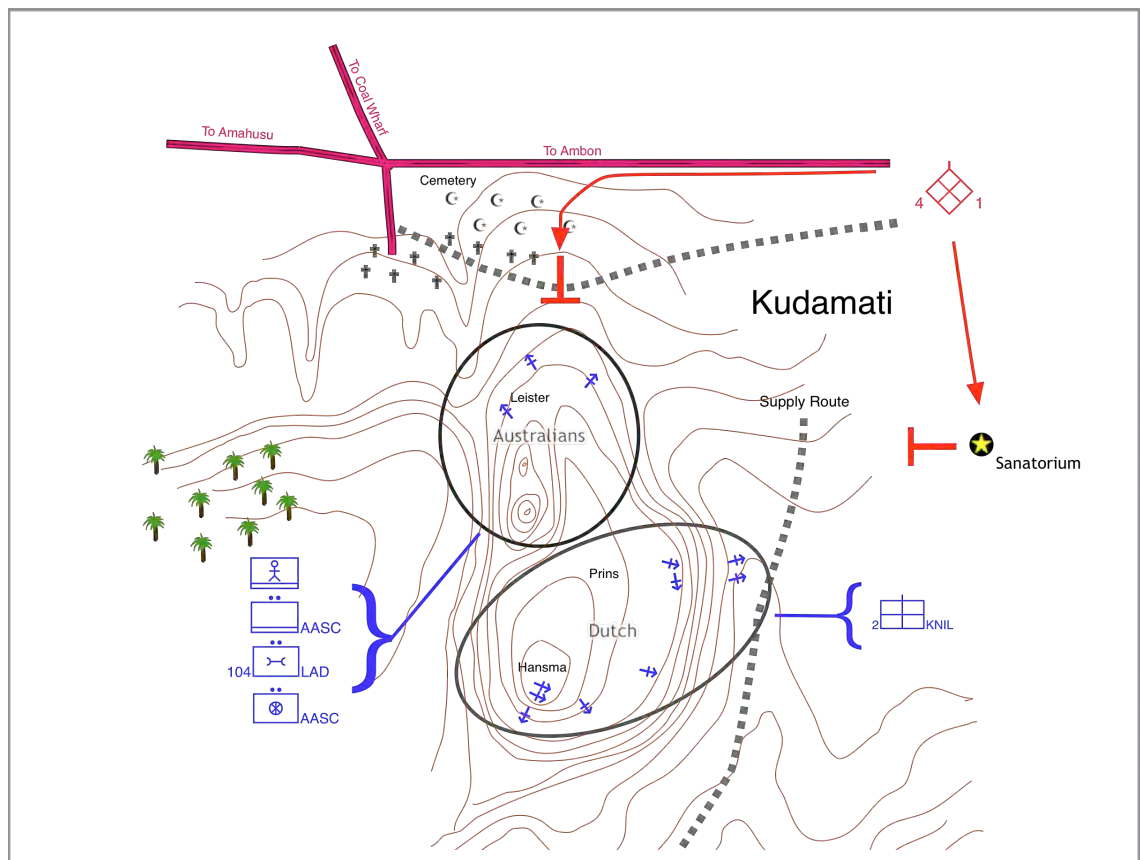
Bouman's preparations in moving ammunition up to the lines were complete by 1600 hours, even though the Dutch troops had become movement exhausted in the move from Eri to Kudamati. Because there had been a lack of transport to bring Bouman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy food supplies and backpacks forward, the Australian troops issued rations of corned beef and biscuits to feed some of the KNIL troops. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Company kitchen had arrived at 1630 hours, but it was unable to finish feeding most of the troops because

---

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., pp. 24, 85.

the cooks were required to suspend their work after dark to avoid the detection of their cooking fires by Japanese air patrols.



### **Kudamati Battle Map**

At 1700 hours Lieutenant Van der Wijder arrived at the Kudamati with 30 soldiers to report that the Japanese had taken Karang Panjang and were now approaching Ambon Town.<sup>329</sup> B Echelon first met with enemy troops when the Japanese occupied the Sanatorium 2 kilometres east of the Kudamati position. B Echelon attempted to fire on the Japanese soldiers but with little effect owing to the limited range of their weapons.

Early the next morning an Australian reconnaissance patrol consisting of transport personnel went forward to reconnoitre Kudamati village only to find that the Japanese 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn had already moved into the area. When the Japanese troops approached the patrol

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-86.

in the village, Private Thomas Doolan chose to remain behind to single handedly engage the enemy while the rest of the patrol returned to their positions above Kudamati. Armed with six grenades, a rifle and pistol Doolan hid in the undergrowth and held off the Japanese until he was killed.<sup>330</sup>

After taking the village more Japanese Army vehicles and two captured Australian CCS ambulances moved up to the Sanatorium and disembarked troops and mortars from the vehicles. Soon after the vehicles arrived the Australian CCS personnel, who had been located on the Ambon-Amahusu Road, were marched into the Sanatorium as prisoners of war. B Echelon tried to engage the Japanese at the Sanatorium a second time but the hospital grounds remained outside the effective range of their fire.<sup>331</sup>

Between 0700 and 0800 hours on the morning of 1 February the Japanese 4<sup>th</sup> Coy 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn advanced Southwest from Ambon Town and up through Cemetery Hill to attack the Kudamati positions, but were driven back by B Echelon. At 1000 hours the Japanese regrouped to carry out a flanking movement in the same area in the hope of driving a wedge between the Kudamati positions and the Benteng Barracks, which was situated farther to the West along the Ambon-Amahusu Road. At around 1130 hours, the Japanese 3<sup>rd</sup> pl 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn attacked the side of the Kudamati positions, overran and occupied a crucial corner of the Australian positions.<sup>332</sup>

---

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., p. 24; Memorial, A. W., *Fall of Ambon: Driver Doolan* (Australian War Memorial, 29 July 2009 [cited]); available from [www.ww2australia.gov.au/japadvance/doolan.html](http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/japadvance/doolan.html) RELAWM30745.

<sup>331</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 24.

<sup>332</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, p. 6.

Turner ordered WO2 Ryan to intercept the enemy action but it was discovered that most of his command had disappeared, either by leaving their posts or being killed by artillery and mortar fire. Turner then asked Bouman to take up the position on 'Coconut Ridge' to prevent the Japanese from making further gains. Bouman, like Ryan, had lost most of his force to mountain artillery and mortar fire as well as to his men leaving their posts. Bouman nevertheless acted on the order to cover the ridge with the few men he had available and stopped the Japanese from advancing further up into the Kudamati positions. Having secured a corner of Kudamati the main force of the Japanese 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn redirected the artillery fire onto the Benteng Barracks, then isolated and bypassed B Echelon at Kudamati, overran the 6-inch guns at the Benteng artillery barracks from the rear and captured the position.

Unknown to the Japanese at the time the Dutch had already destroyed the guns at 0900 hours that morning. This was important because the guns had deterred the war ships from entering the bay. After taking Benteng, the Japanese 9<sup>th</sup> Coy 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn moved forward from the artillery barracks to contact the Australian lines at Amahusu. After taking heavy mortar fire from the Australian lines the 9<sup>th</sup> Coy halted its advance and was forced to wait until it could carry forward a night attack. Later that night, at 2000 hours, the 9<sup>th</sup> Coy made further gains towards the Australian lines.<sup>333</sup>

Meanwhile, after the Japanese attacked Kudamati on the morning of 1 February, Jinkins sent a reconnaissance patrol to the northeast plateau from Mount Nona to find out what was happening to B Echelon. The patrol reported back that they heard LMG fire coming

---

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

from the direction of Kudamati where B Echelon was positioned. Jinkins also received a report from Corporal Porter by field telephone at Kudamati informing him that B Echelon were evacuating their position and withdrawing up the slopes to Mount Nona. Unsure of the circumstances at Kudamati, Jinkins sent forward two more patrols that afternoon to reach B Echelon and facilitate their withdrawal.

During the reconnaissance, the patrols at first saw no Japanese near the B Echelon area even though heavy mortar fire was falling on the position. Elements of the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, however, later engaged one of the patrols two kilometres to the front of the Mount Nona observation post on the plateau running to the East from the mountain.<sup>334</sup> The Australian patrol scattered and three men of the section became pinned down by Japanese fire. Nevertheless, Jinkins sent forward another section forward to extricate the men and they all returned safely to Mount Nona.<sup>335</sup>

Ultimately, the Japanese advance on Amahusu had left B Echelon surrounded and isolated. Lt Rudder of the AASC later wrote of the final stages of the engagement at Kudamati:

The Japanese did not come near us again, but went around the hill to our left. We were 100 strong, and we could not move, owing to the vigilance of the air craft above, and also by reason of the fact that we were not strong enough numerically to tackle the Japanese ... In the meantime, we were kept busy by mountain gun fire and mortar fire on our positions. We

---

<sup>334</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 54-55.

<sup>335</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Administration:] from G3 Journal before 5th April 1942. Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service, the Battle for Ambon, January-February 1942, AWM54, 573/4/2, p. 5; National Archives of Australia, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, p. 31.



stayed in those positions until late that day when we were completely exhausted, and until we could not hear any firing at all.<sup>336</sup>

After the Benteng Barracks fell, Ambon Bay became vulnerable to Japanese destroyers and cruisers that were patrolling the entrance of the Bay. From then on and until the surrender, the Japanese continued to harass the Kudamati positions during the daylight hours with artillery fire from Batumerah and this action helped pin down B Echelon in their positions.

At 1200 hours, B Echelon observed 300 Japanese troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Companies 1<sup>st</sup> Bn (with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Coy in reserve) moving Southwest up the northeastern slopes to Mount Nona.<sup>337</sup> At 1800 hours, Jinkins reported to Scott at Bn HQ that the Japanese were moving up to attack his position. As a result of this report, it appears that Jinkins' platoon became accidentally responsible for a friendly fire incident involving Lt Anderson's 18<sup>th</sup> pl B Coy. Scott had ordered Anderson's platoon up to reinforce Jinkins on Mount Nona. Anderson tried to enlist the support of some Javanese soldiers but they had refused to accompany him. Taking his twenty-strong platoon (less one section), Anderson led the patrol through the 17<sup>th</sup> pl positions across the flying ridge to the top of Mount Nona.<sup>338</sup>

When Anderson's platoon arrived at Mount Nona events became hectic as depicted by

Jinkins' account:

---

<sup>336</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 63-64.

<sup>337</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 25.

<sup>338</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 55, 96.

The Japanese, about 40 or 50 strong, attacked at approximately 1945 [around the time Anderson was expected] and had approached to within 30 yards before being challenged. When challenged they called out “Ambonese”. We immediately opened fire, where upon the Japs withdrew to dead ground. The Japs immediately re-formed and, uttering what was apparently a war cry, rushed our positions. The rush was stopped by tommy-gun [sic] fire and hand grenades. The enemy then with-drew [sic] to about 100 yards and went to ground. Rifle grenade fire then drove them back a further 100 yards.<sup>339</sup>

Following this contact with the 'Japanese', Jinkins called out to warn Anderson's platoon that the Japanese were close to their line of approach. Anderson replied that he was wounded.

By contrast Private Alexander Chew's sworn statement later given at a Court of Inquiry in Australia in May that year provided a different account of what he thought happened.

Chew told the court that:

I heard someone yell out “Ambon”, and after that I found it was Mr Anderson. I did not see any more of 17 platoon, except when Mr Jinkins and a couple of other chaps went down and brought Mr Anderson in. Until that time, the Japanese had not attacked our post on the hill. I was in the same post as Mr Jinkins.<sup>340</sup>

What is interesting about these conflicting reports is that Jinkins and Chew were together and they both heard someone call out 'Ambonese' or 'Ambon'. The testimonies diverge where Jinkins heard what he believed to be the Japanese calling out whereas Chew said he heard Anderson. It appears that Jinkins' platoon may have overreacted and unintentionally engaged Anderson's platoon with grenades, rifle and Tommy gun fire before wounding him.

---

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

Pte Keith Ashton also supported this version of the event in evidence given at the inquiry where he explained:

I went up on to Mount Nona with Lieutenant Anderson and No.18 platoon. When we went up on mount Nona there was not much fighting. It was a moonlight night. Mount Nona is the highest peak on Amboina. Lieut. Anderson was leading and I was not far behind him. ... We got on top of the Mount. and heard a lot of squealing and screaming. Lieut. Anderson said to us "Boys I do not think these can be Japanese screaming and squealing like this. They must be Javanese or Ambonese troops who are with us gone panicky." We did not know whether they were Javanese, or Ambonese, or whether they were Japanese, so we got out towards them, and Lieut. Anderson said "Australians here, Ambon." He was talking to them as best he could. Of course, I did not understand much of their language, like he did. Anyhow they tossed a hand grenade over and hit him in the legs, and he went over. He said "Carry on, boys; I am done." That was all he said.<sup>341</sup>

Cpl Land took over the patrol and the 18<sup>th</sup> pl withdrew some distance to return fire on the 'Japanese', or possibly, the 5<sup>th</sup> pl.

Furthermore, the Japanese evidence supports the assumption that it was a friendly fire incident where the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Commander claimed he did not contact the Australians at Mount Nona until 2200 hours that night, two hours after the Anderson incident.<sup>342</sup>

Jinkins' evidence also confirms that the Japanese attacked his position on both flanks at 2200 hours, He explained:

These operations lasted until 2300 hours when the enemy apparently withdrew. This was possibly caused by JAP heavy Mortars which opened up on our position at approx. 2200 hours and which probably caused some casualties to their own forces. Mortar fire ceased at approx 2330 hours.<sup>343</sup>

Following this incident, Jinkins moved his platoon 360 metres to the West and abandoned the observation post. The timing of the incident, the fact that Anderson had called out 'Ambon', (which was heard by both Jinkins, Chew and corroborated by Ashton), that Anderson was speaking Malay, the events surrounding the exchange of

---

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., pp. 96-97.

<sup>342</sup> National Archives of Australia, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007, pp. 17-18.

<sup>343</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report by Lt W.T. Jinkins on Japanese Attack on Ambon 30th Jan 1942 to 3rd Feb 1942. Details of Prison Camp, and Japanese Dispositions - Map of Tan Toey Camp 1942, AWM54, 573/6/12, p. 2.

fire and that the Japanese were not yet in the area all point to a 'friendly fire' incident occurring between Anderson's and Jinkins' platoon. This point was not lost on the Court of Inquiry recorders. The official summary edited out sections of Private Chew's testimony and deemed him an unreliable witness. Because Chew was an Australian born Chinese this may have been a factor in influencing their decision. Nevertheless, Chew later proved reliable enough to become a Warrant Officer (WO.) in Australia's elite clandestine organisation Z Special Force.<sup>344</sup>

Notwithstanding the confusion, the importance of the Anderson incident was that it created a turning point in the battle for the Amahusu Line. Had Anderson's platoon been able to join Jinkins in the battle for Mount Nona it may have allowed D Coy to further hold-up the Japanese advance. Mount Nona was the highest point on the D Coy line and was critically important to holding the flanks of the Amahusu line'. Under the circumstances the 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s were forced to face Hayakawa's 1<sup>st</sup> Bn assault on Mount Nona alone and once Mount Nona was taken the Amahusu Line was lost also.

On the morning of 2 February, Jinkins attempted to and failed to contact D Coy at Amahusu because it had already withdrawn to Eri during the night. Unsure of the current circumstances the 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s hid on the slopes of Mount Nona while runners were sent to Bn HQ to obtain further orders. While awaiting their return, some volunteers carried Anderson and two malaria cases through the Japanese lines to Benteng barracks to get medical treatment. When the reconnaissance party failed to

---

<sup>344</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 4, 111; Sturma, M., *Death at a Distance: The Loss of the Legendary USS Harder*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), p. 76.

return from Bn HQ, Jinkins moved his platoon down the mountain towards Eri by way of Amahusu to rejoin the companies. On the way down Jinkins met some Ambonese who told him that the Australians were pinned down on the extreme southwest end of the Island. On hearing this Jinkins decided to hide near Amahusu with his platoon until they could find an opportunity to escape from Ambon.<sup>345</sup>

While the 5<sup>th</sup> pl waited, Pte Lewis decided to walk back to the RAP to get his wounds dressed. Jinkins explained:

On the way to the RAP he met a Dutch officer who had a letter from the Dutch Commander to say that he had given in three days earlier. There was also a note on the letter by the Japanese to say they had ceased hostilities until 12 o'clock next day, to allow the Australian Commander to give in also. This letter was not given to the Australian Commander, the Dutch officer returning to the Amahusu line where he was held as a prisoner of war without delivering the message. Pte. Lewis came into bush at Amahusu Village and informed me of this letter.<sup>346</sup>

Considering this information Jinkins discovered that the Australian units were still intact and positioned around Eri and he decided to leave Amahusu for Eri the next morning. On the morning of 3 February, Jinkins changed his mind and contacted the Japanese to obtain another letter from Kapitz to give to Scott.

Jinkins put a white handkerchief around his sleeve and walked to the Japanese line. He was taken to Benteng Barracks and then on to the resident's house in Ambon to meet

---

<sup>345</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, p. 56; Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 432.

<sup>346</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, p. 57.

Kapitz. Jenkins recalled that:

It was explained to me [by the Japanese] that fighting would cease until 1800 hours that day ... then I was taken back to the AMAHUSU Line by car, and there told by the Japanese that the C.O. had until 1800 hours to decide. Otherwise we would be pushed off the end of the Island. I set out for ERI, and found that my batman had contacted the C.O. to tell him what I had done. I met the C.O., and ascertained that he had already contacted the Japanese at Amahusu through our M.O. [Medical Officer]. The C.O. informed me that he was marching the Battalion into the Japanese.<sup>347</sup>

### **The Dispositions of Gull Force on the Laitimor Peninsular and the Japanese Attack at Amahusu (See Ambon Dispositions Map in Appendix One)**

Roach had located the Bn HQ in a school building at Amahusu and the RAP was set up in a church in this area 50 meters to the west of the Bn HQ. Newnham established his D Coy headquarters in caves along the shoreline below the entrenchments that ran up the side of Mount Nona. The 16<sup>th</sup> pl D Coy and 4B pl were allocated to protect Newnham's headquarters at the caves HQ.

The 10<sup>th</sup> pl D Coy secured the lower section of the Amahusu line leading up to Mount Nona and the 17<sup>th</sup> pl D Coy took up positions in the entrenchments further up in an area called the 'Flying Ridge'. Jenkins' 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s occupied Mount Nona above the flying ridge to act as flank protection armed and were with some light automatic weapons. At the eight-kilometre point between Amahusu and Eri Newnham positioned the 18<sup>th</sup> pl B Coy Det. and a detachment of engineers to defend the littoral approaches along the shores of Ambon Bay. D Coy had at its disposal an antitank section, 2 carriers with machine guns, 2 mortars and a detachment from the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Field Coy.

---

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

Maj. Westley's A Coy occupied the positions along the Eri Line. Complimenting A Coy were one section of an antitank troop, four carriers (two with machine guns mounted), 2 mortars and a detachment of the 2/11<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. Lt Chaplin's 10<sup>th</sup> pl A Coy together with two carriers stationed at Batuanjut. Capt Bouman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy KNIL less one platoon was located above Eri to reinforce A Coy's left flank. One rifle section, the 2/11<sup>th</sup> engineer detachment and an armoured carrier occupied a position at Latuhalat to cover the southern beaches from Japanese marine landings. Their task was to resist any landings, to destroy the bridge at Latuhalat and withdraw to Eri if required.

At 1400 hours on 30 January, after receiving reports of the Japanese landings, Scott ordered the companies to rest as much as they could before the battle started. The Dutch began exploding their stores dumps in the town, the petrol dumps at the coal wharf as well as other infrastructure while at the same time evacuating their troops from Laha. These actions dampened the morale of the Australians and 'tended to cause a feeling of temporary depression in the t[roops]'. Newnham told his platoon commanders to pass on the message that 'this was a precautionary measure and not much significance was to be attached to it'.<sup>348</sup>

At 0200 hours, Scott informed Newnham the Japanese had landed at Leahari, Hitulama, and Paso and that some troop transports had been seen sailing in the direction of Seri Bay. At 0400 hours Newnham ordered D Coy to stand-to in anticipation of the approaching Japanese attack. D Coy stood-to until around 1100 hours, but no enemy

---

<sup>348</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 11.

contact occurred that night. After discovering that the Japanese had landed to the Australian rear and to the south of the Island Newnham moved his headquarters out of the caves along the shoreline to higher ground that provided better all round observation to the East.<sup>349</sup>

At 1400 hours on 31 January Scott received a report that Japanese troops had entered Ambon Town. Macrae went forward to Batumerah with a patrol of transport personal to verify the report. The patrol saw no Japanese troops but did hear LMG fire coming from the Dutch Recruit Coy, which had intercepted the Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> Bn on the Sojadiatas Road leading down to Ambon Town.<sup>350</sup> After Macrae reported the situation to Scott it was decided to move the Bn HQ back to the Eri line. Scott set up the new headquarters near Eri at around 2000 hours that evening while leaving the battalion's intelligence section and the RAP at Amahusu.

At 1600 hours, Macrae reported to Newnham that he had just returned from a patrol to Ambon Town without seeing any Japanese after checking rumours that they had taken the town. Macrae also told Newnham that he had heard shooting coming from the hills above Ambon. Following Macrae's report Newnham decided to place 4B pl between his position and the approaches from Ambon Town.<sup>351</sup> At 0900 hours on 1 February, Jinkins' platoon reported to Bn HQ that B Echelon at Kudamati was taking heavy fire

---

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>350</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 22.

<sup>351</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 12.



from Japanese mortars and artillery. Newnham tried reaching B Echelon by field telephone to find out what was happening but he could not make contact.<sup>352</sup>

As the attack was developing at Kudamati on 1 February it became obvious to D Coy headquarters that the Amahusu line, instead of being in the rear, had now become the front. Newnham adjusted his lines and moved the 18<sup>th</sup> pl together with a MMG section at the 8 kilometre line back into the vicinity of D Coy HQ to strengthen the Amahusu line and to cover the road leading from Ambon Town. At 1100 hours the 16<sup>th</sup> pl and 2 Bren carriers went forward in an attempt to contact B Echelon. As the patrol moved forward it met with the advance guard of the Japanese 9<sup>th</sup> Coy 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn coming from Benteng barracks on bicycles and in commandeered vehicles. The patrol opened up on the Japanese at 200 meters with small arms fire and a Vickers machine gun as a runner was sent back with coordinates for the mortars to use in engaging the enemy. After receiving three casualties the 16<sup>th</sup> pl was forced to break contact with the Japanese and withdraw back to the Amahusu line.<sup>353</sup>

When Macrae received a report at Bn HQ about the contact at Amahusu, he went forward from Batuanjut, ordered the dismounting of MMGs from two of the Bren carriers there and had them moved to the Amahusu line to cover the road. The MMGs and the 16<sup>th</sup> pl subsequently held up the Japanese advance despite receiving further casualties from grenade attacks. The mortar section, assisted by rifle grenadiers on the Amahusu line above, came into action, rained down bombs on the Japanese 3<sup>rd</sup> pl 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn

---

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

and forced it to withdraw. Mortar and LMG fire and sniping from the Amahusu Line continued for the rest of the day and held the Japanese forces at bay.<sup>354</sup>

Mortar fire continued to be directed along the road until 1430 hours when the Japanese were seen advancing along a facing ridge. Using automatic weapons and mortar fire the Japanese began filtering through the jungle cover to a position opposite D Coy's HQ. From here the Japanese directed heavy fire against the 2<sup>nd</sup> pl, the 16<sup>th</sup> pl and D Coy HQ, which were located in fire positions overlooking the Tuhametan creek. Sgt Martin's 2<sup>nd</sup> pl detachment challenged the Japanese with rifle-grenade fire as they advanced further up the ridge into the cover of coconut palms. Once under cover of the palm trees Japanese snipers began shooting at the mortar detachment positions and D Coy HQ. D Coy HQ and the 2<sup>nd</sup> pl returned fire with Tommy gun and light machine gun fire until mortar fire could be directed against the area to displace the snipers.<sup>355</sup>

At 1600 hours Macrae advised Newnham that he was sending the 10<sup>th</sup> pl from Batuanjut to relieve Martin's detachment on the front. At the same time some Dutch and Ambonese soldiers began 'drifting' back through the lines from Kudamati, Batumerah and from as far away as Paso. Newnham estimated that during the next two hours at least 100 KNIL troops passed through his lines. The withdrawing KNIL troops, some panicking, caused confusion as they filtered through the firing positions. The anxious troops were ordered through the lines back to Eri while the others were placed into firing positions at D Coy HQ.<sup>356</sup> Two hours later Newnham decided to rearrange his

---

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14; National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 27.

troop dispositions for the night, as they had become mixed during the day's fighting. He called a conference with his platoon commanders and Macrae. Here it was decided to reorganise the platoon positions to protect the front and rear of the Amahusu line and to relieve those engaged in the days fighting.

At 1830 Jinkins reported to Scott that approximately 300 Japanese troops were massing below Mount Nona and advancing on his position. Scott ordered Newnham to send a platoon up to reinforce Jinkins' position. The 18<sup>th</sup> pl under Lt Anderson was immediately sent to assist Jinkins. Lightly armed with three Tommy gun sections and a grenade section (1 officer and 21 other ranks) the 18<sup>th</sup> pl passed through the 17<sup>th</sup> pl position to Mount Nona at approximately 2000 hours. Around hours later the 18<sup>th</sup> pl returned and Corporal Land reported to headquarters that Anderson had been killed in an ambush up at the 'Banana plantation'.<sup>357</sup>

At 2000 hours further reports came in that the Japanese troops were chopping down trees to the front of the 2<sup>nd</sup> pl's positions. It was assumed they were clearing the area for tracks or at least for the placement of mortars. Sgt Foley was appointed to cover the area and control the sector and he was joined by Dutch and Ambonese troops. At 2100, Sgt Smith's mortar detachment reported that Japanese troops had been seen forming up in a gully two ridges away to the front of the Amahusu line and next to the Ambon Road.

---

<sup>357</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 14.

This report was supported by Ambonese troops in the area who had also seen that the Japanese were concentrating nearby. Newnham believed that this indicated the Japanese were preparing for an attack on the line that night. Lt Green of the 17<sup>th</sup> pl later reported to headquarters that Japanese troops could be seen ‘moving on the skyline in the direction’ of the Nona positions. He asked Lt Pullen to lay down mortar fire on the ‘Banana plantation’ in support of the 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s, but Pullen was unable to comply as the designated position was out of his mortar section’s range.<sup>358</sup>

Back at Bn HQ Scott, Westley and Macrae discussed the D Coy’s situation at Amahusu. The group discussed the option of counter attacking the Japanese on the following morning with troops from A Coy. This was rejected, however, on the basis that an attack on the Amahusu line would cost too many lives against the small hope of making any gains. Then inexplicably, based on optimism that Australian air and or naval support would be arriving the next day to save Ambon, Scott contacted Newnham by field telephone at 2230 hours to ask his opinion about withdrawing D Coy back from Amahusu to the Eri Line.<sup>359</sup> What made Scott believe that relief was on its way from Australia is very difficult to understand, as he had participated in the isolation of Roach when he was making demands for adequate support and equipment at Ambon and where he knew he was expected to remain and to hold the Island until it was taken. It seems here that Scott was either very tired, losing his grip on reality or had made the story up in an attempt to bolster morale.

---

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>359</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 28.

Nevertheless, when Scott contacted Newnham he said:

I have a suggestion to make to you which I would like you to think over and your decision will be dependent on circumstances, conditions of the tr[oo]ps etc. at your end. It appears that the enemy are in possession of "Nona" and therefore dominate the line. It is that all t[roo]ps at "A[mahusu]" withdraw to "E[ri]" where the unit could make a stand for two or three days. I will give you ½ hour to think it over if your care to and cannot stress strongly enough how very careful you would have to be in order not to give any idea to the enemy as to what is taking place. Transport details I will be able to give you when you let me know your decision.<sup>360</sup>

When asked, Scott assured Newnham there was a sufficient supply of both water and food for his troops at Eri.<sup>361</sup>

Newnham called Captains Major and Gabriel, Lts Chapman, Pullen, Mellor and van Nooten to his position headquarters to discuss the question of withdrawal from Amahusu. He told the assembled officers what Scott had asked of him regarding the situation. The officers asked Newnham what rations at Amahusu should be taken back to Eri. Newnham explained that Scott had assured him there were ample stores at Eri to support both A and D companies and the transport of extra stores from Amahusu was abandoned. Considering the outcome of these discussions Newnham informed Scott at 2300 hours of his decision to withdraw to Eri.<sup>362</sup>

Scott immediately organised for road transport from Eri to be assembled at the Amahusu rest area. Scott was concerned about the Bn HQ personnel still at Amahusu and enquired about plans for their movement back to Eri. Newnham assured Scott that they would be on the first transports leaving Amahusu. Capt Hooke then passed onto

---

<sup>360</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 15.

<sup>361</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 28; National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 15.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

Newnham information regarding the transport arrangements for the withdrawal.

Newnham in turn passed the message along to all his unit commanders along the

Amahusu line.<sup>363</sup>

Capt Hooke organised the withdrawal back to Eri in three stages:

First Stage The three sections of 18 pl at that time attached to 17 pl (having returned from the patrol to 'Nona'). 17 pl – Bn HQ Personal from centre sector – Sgt Martin's Det from reserve position, left flank.

Second Stage VD HQ [D Company Headquarters] at position 3 – Sgt Foley's attachments including Dutch and Ambonese - Remainder of 18 pl – Sgt Smith's Mortar Det – 2 pl from centre sector – 16 pl from left (thinning out two sections).

Third Stage 7 pl vicinity 'Position HQ' – Cpl Winnell's Mortar Det – 10 pl from left – 4B pl who were to cover withdrawal to the road and if necessary a truck would be sent up to pick up the guns and crews.<sup>364</sup>

Newnham placed Capt Gabriel in charge of embussing the troops from the Amahusu rest area. Major, Corporal McKellar and two signals orderlies at position headquarters organised the timing of and the checking out of each unit. After the 18<sup>th</sup> pl had passed through the positions, Newnham took control of withdrawing troops from the base of the Amahusu line and directed them to the bussing point. He also liaised with Gabriel to control any adjustments that needed to be made in case the Japanese moved against the Ambon Road positions and created any holdups in the withdrawal.<sup>365</sup> Using all available A and D Coy trucks and antitank motor transports Newnham began withdrawing D Coy to the Eri Line at midnight. The RAP was the first to move and it was relocated to a Church at Eri. The 10<sup>th</sup> pl remained in the most vital section of the Amahusu left flank line to block the Japanese until all other troops could safely withdraw to Eri.

---

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

As the 10<sup>th</sup> pl prepared to withdraw, one section became embroiled in a close range exchange of hand grenades with the leading elements of the Japanese 9<sup>th</sup> Coy and one Australian soldier was killed. On breaking contact and withdrawing, the 10<sup>th</sup> pl and the 17<sup>th</sup> pl climbed aboard the waiting trucks and escaped to Eri. Major, together with a motley party of personnel, having missed the transports owing to difficulties in organising the Ambonese soldiers, walked back from Amahusu and reached Eri the next morning. The Indonesian troops brought confirmation with them to Scott that Kapitiz had in fact surrendered his forces at Paso.<sup>366</sup>

When the troops arrived Capt Hooke crowded D Coy amongst the A Coy lines. The dispositions on the Eri line now became:

- (a) In a platoon's trench nearest to Amahusu - 17 pl (Green) A/Tk Tp (Rowland) plus some Q detail; this formed the right beach position).
- (b) Left beach position 16 pl (Stewart)
- (c) Central pl position about halfway up Eri Hill covering the road as it crossed the bridge from Latoehalat. Bn HQ, A Coy HQ, Q and other HQ Coy detail, 2 carriers on beach road.
- (d) Left pl position covering Tjenke plateau 9 pl (McCutcheon).
- (e) In positions making a perimeter on round Bn HQ 18 pln 8 pl and D Coy HQ.
- (f) About MMG position on ridge covering road approach and beach landings, 4 MMGs, 2 mortars.
- (g) In "Cocos" [under the command of Gabriel] - A trench system dug to cover the exposed flank 7 pl (van Hooten) 2 pln (Mellor).<sup>367</sup>

On the morning of 2 February, Macrae attempted to readjust the overcrowded Eri positions. He moved a standing patrol under Lt Russell forward to a position on a ridge above the dead ground to give warning of any approaching Japanese patrols. Russell's orders were to withdraw if the enemy approached towards Eri and to report the move to

---

<sup>366</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 29; National Archives of Australia, [Prisoners of War and Internees - Escapes:] Interrogation of Escapees New Ireland - Interview with Evacuees - Escape of AIF and Dutch Officers from Amboina - Reports from an Officer who Escaped from the Island of Ambon - Lieutenant W A M Chapman, Lieutenant Jinkins 2/21 Battalion Lieutenant I McBride - on Japanese Attack on Ambon, 30 January to 3 February 1942, AWM54, 779/10/7, p. 34.

<sup>367</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, pp. 29-30.

headquarters. Later in the day Lt Chaplin's 10<sup>th</sup> pl was sent up and it relieved Russell's position.<sup>368</sup>

At 0900 hours, Chaplin observed a Japanese reconnaissance patrol advancing towards the lines. The 10<sup>th</sup> pl and the 7<sup>th</sup> pl KNIL under van Hooten, engaged the Japanese with machine gun, mortar and rifle fire and forced the patrol to withdraw. Following this engagement Macrae moved two MMGs to the Ambon Bay side of Eri hill. At 1200 hours, after repositioning the MMGs, Macrae witnessed five to six destroyers and two cruisers steaming into Ambon Bay.<sup>369</sup> The destruction of the 6-inch guns at Benteng the day before had opened the bay for the Japanese warships to enter and they began bombarding the Australian positions at Eri. As the ships arrived, three Japanese seaplanes flew over Eri to help direct the naval shelling while nine aircraft carried out bombing and strafing runs on the Eri positions. One of the destroyers and a minesweeper struck sea mines laid in Ambon Bay and sank to the bottom while taking most of their crews with them.<sup>370</sup>

The shelling from the destroyers continued through the day and set fire to the Eri slopes.

The fire forced the withdrawal of troops from the west of the Eri line back for two-

kilometres.<sup>371</sup> The Australian forces were now in a precarious crowded conditions that

---

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 30; National Archives of Australia, [Prisoners of War and Internees - Escapes:] Interrogation of Escapees New Ireland - Interview with Evacuees - Escape of AIF and Dutch Officers from Amboina - Reports from an Officer who Escaped from the Island of Ambon - Lieutenant W A M Chapman, Lieutenant Jinkins 2/21 Battalion Lieutenant I McBride - on Japanese Attack on Ambon, 30 January to 3 February 1942, AWM54, 779/10/7, p. 34.

<sup>369</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 25.

<sup>370</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Administration:] from G3 Journal before 5th April 1942. Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service, the Battle for Ambon, January-February 1942, AWM54, 573/4/2, p. 25.

<sup>371</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, p. 65.



left no room for further withdrawal. The situation was now becoming hopeless as water, food rations and ammunition stocks on the Eri slopes had been abandoned to the fire leaving the troops hungry, thirsty and exhausted. This situation began causing unrest among the quartermaster staff. It was reported that:

On the evidence of CQMS [Company Quarter Master Sergeant] Nugent (HQ Coy) and Sgt Finn ... (WO II Ryan) addressed a group of "Q" personnel and others and urged them to "toss it in", Nugent says Ryan was without a rifle and asked Nugent how he could be expected to fight without one. Nugent got him a rifle and told him if he left the position he would report him immediately.

Ryan may have been close to mutiny but it demonstrated he had a good appreciation of the situation. As it happened this was the same Ryan who had earlier deserted his post at Kudamati.

Nevertheless, Ryan was not the only soldier voicing concerns about their position, for at this time Scott's handling of the battle began drawing criticism from some of the Australian troops. Noticing the drop in morale Scott, Hooke and Macrae walked among the men and had those that were wandering about return to their positions. Many of the men amongst A and D companies complained to Scott that 'there had been too much "sitting down and taking it", they wanted to "get stuck into" the Japanese. When Macrae returned to the RAP he found another group that had left the line. He was forced to fire his pistol above their heads and order them back to their posts.<sup>372</sup>

At 2000 hours on 2 February, Scott held a conference with Macrae, Newnham and Westley to plan what to do next, to discuss the acute lack of food and water at Eri and to discuss the option of counter attacking the Japanese early the next morning. Macrae put

---

<sup>372</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 32.

it to the meeting that despite some incidents morale was still high among the companies and he suggested counterattacking the Japanese forces. He argued that to make a stand at Eri would be fruitless as water was scarce, the Japanese ships and planes were attacking the Eri positions with impunity and the area was overcrowded. He suggested that the troops would be better served if they were used to attack towards Amahusu. This suggestion, however, was rejected by the group because of the supply issues at Eri, the nature of the terrain, the exhaustion of the troops and there being little hope of profiting from such an attack.<sup>373</sup>

Owing to the insurmountable problems discussed above the issue of capitulation was finally raised. Macrae maintained his resolve in opposing capitulation because the troops had suffered few casualties, A Coy had yet to participate in battle and to stay where they were without the ability to retaliate would be futile. Considering his assessment of the troops he said they would be delighted to make a thrust towards the Japanese. Scott agreed that he too would be 'delighted' if an attack could be thrown against the Japanese but he failed to make any arrangement for an attack that night.<sup>374</sup>

A factor contributing to the lack of resolve in attacking the Japanese was the exhausted state of the officers present at the meeting. Newnham later wrote:

It was apparent that all commanders and officers present were nearing exhaustion and on two occasions a senior officer dropped off to sleep through sheer fatigue. The conference lacked a definite spirit and I can recall saying to the C.O. that in the present condition, having only had four hours' [sic] (approx.) sleep since Thursday, 29 January (it was then 8 p.m. on Monday) it was difficult to think along offensive lines.<sup>375</sup>

---

<sup>373</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 32.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>375</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 433.

Following the conference, Macrae received a report that the Japanese were landing at Latuhalat. At 0100 hours on 3 February, he led a fighting patrol of 23 volunteers in three sections towards Latuhalat to check out the report. After patrolling for three hours the group could find no trace of Japanese landings. Macrae then decided to stand down the patrol and rest until the next day. The next morning he became ill after eating wild berries and was forced to return for medical attention at the RAP. Before leaving he gave his consent for the patrol to attempt an escape from Ambon under the leadership of Lt Chapman. Chapman's party took advantage of the offer and somehow managed to escape to Palau Emu and eventually made it back to Australia.<sup>376</sup>

Meanwhile, at around 2200 hours Gabriel identified a gap in the Eri line at the Cocos position and recognised there was a danger that a Japanese patrol could infiltrate the line between that point and Bn HQ. Westley gave Gabriel permission to withdraw the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> pls from their positions to fill the gap. Before Gabriel withdrew the platoons from their positions, he asked Westley whether the company had been made aware of the move. Westley assured Gabriel that they had. This was important, as Gabriel was required to bring the 7<sup>th</sup> pl across the 8<sup>th</sup> pl's front to reach Cocos.

As Gabriel led the 7<sup>th</sup> pl back towards the lines and after cresting the skyline, an 8<sup>th</sup> pl machine gunner opened fire on the group killing private 'Snowy' Balcomb, who took three rounds through the head. Another private threw Gabriel into a ditch as Balcomb fell to the ground beside him. An unknown witness remarked after the incident that:

---

<sup>376</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, pp. 68, 72; Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, p. 443.

Snowy Balcomb was shot earlier in the night, through criminal neglect ... During the morning I saw where two bullets had struck the rim of young Inksters tin hat, one going through it and the other leaving a large dent. Guess that bears out the idea of the fatal bullet, for he was next to Balcomb who was killed when he took four bullets in the head.<sup>377</sup>

As it transpired the 8<sup>th</sup> pl was not warned of the move and following the incident

Gabriel questioned Westley on why his patrol had been fired on. Westley simply replied that 'the information had not got down to the company'.<sup>378</sup> Macrae later wrote that

Gabriel:

Was given permission to withdraw and did so using a different route for each of 2 and 7 pls. As far as I can see 7 pl should not have crossed any platoon's line of fire but in actual fact it did cross that of 8 pl AWL. MG of 8 pl opened fire and a Pte of 7 pl was mortally wounded. 8 pl had not been informed of the movement ...<sup>379</sup>

Although Macrae was correct in saying that a platoon should not cross another platoon's line of fire, it was Westley who gave permission for the move and it was he who had failed to inform the 8<sup>th</sup> pl of Gabriel's intentions to move across its front.

On the morning of 3 February, a Japanese flag was observed flying above Laha and as no further sounds of battle could be heard it became apparent to Scott that the Japanese had taken the airfield. Then between 0800 and 0930 hours two Japanese transport ships were seen entering Ambon Bay where they anchored near Eri. Landing craft were put in the water and they headed towards Ambon Town as well as the Laha airfield. Scott surmised that they were going to Laha to repair the recently taken airfield.<sup>380</sup>

---

<sup>377</sup> National Archives of Australia, Battle Laitimor Peninsular Ambon 1942. Extracts from a Letter Written by Unknown Member of 2/21 Australian Infantry Battalion, AWM54, 573/6/15, pp. 6-7.

<sup>378</sup> Email correspondence from Major Alex Gabriel, son of Captain R.C. Gabriel, father's oral account of the incident, 15 September 2009.

<sup>379</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 34.

<sup>380</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 18.

Around this time it was reported that Ryan, by now a recidivist deserter and trouble maker, had organised a surrender party of his own before marching off towards Amahusu with a white flag. When Scott heard of Ryan's actions and the possibility of mutiny he decided to surrender. According to Newnham at the time; 'parties carrying white flags moved towards Amahoesoe. Meanwhile the C.O. hearing of these desertions decided there was nothing left but to surrender. He come down to the RAP and sent the Doctor in an Ambulance to the Japanese.<sup>381</sup> On the way to Amahusu Aitken met with Ryan's surrender party. Aitken ordered Ryan to remain where he was. Ryan explained to Aitken that 'he was going to Amahusu because he believed the battalion had already surrendered'. This turned out to be untrue on Ryan's account as the party were found at Amahusu after the surrender despite being told by Aitken to remain where they were as no surrender had occurred. McBride later found Ryan to be a deserter after convening a court of inquiry at the Tantui POW camp following the surrender. McBride concluded that '... I have small doubt in my mind that RYAN deliberately moved back without orders'.<sup>382</sup>

At 1030 hours Scott ordered Capt Hooke to deliver the order that all weapons, compasses, binoculars and any objects of use to the Japanese were to be destroyed. Thirty minutes later the platoons were ordered to form up for the move to Amahusu. When Newnham reported to Scott he was told 'this is a very humiliating business. I hope these fellows realise what surrender means, but I don't think I could have rallied the unit and made a further stand'.<sup>383</sup> It is fair to say Scott had a right to be humiliated owing to the role he played in Gull Force remaining at Ambon in the first place and for

---

<sup>381</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 34.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>383</sup> National Archives of Australia, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, p. 18.

undermining Roach's appreciation of Gull Force's dangerous position on Ambon for the purpose of usurping his command in the second.

When the companies marched into Amahusu they picked up members of the 5<sup>th</sup> pl Pnr/s from Mt Nona and Ryan's surrender party. At Amahusu the Australians were put under guard but were allowed to swim in the bay and clean up before camping in the village overnight. At 0800 hours 4 February, around 803 Australian POWs marched off to be interned in their barracks back at Tantui. When they arrived they found that B Escalon had also surrendered the previous day. As it transpired, at 1200 hours on 2 February, Turner had sent Capt Rose to contact the Japanese headquarters to negotiate the surrender of B Escalon. Rose returned two hours later to inform Turner that the Japanese had accepted their surrender and that B Escalon was to disarm and march into Ambon Town. The remnants of the 100 AASC, engineers and transport personnel duly complied and were marched into the Tantui barracks.

## Chapter Five - Incompetence in Command

It sometimes happens of course that someone who made his reputation in one rank carries it with him when he is promoted, without really deserving to. If not much is demanded of him, and he can avoid exposing his incompetence, it is difficult to decide what reputation he really deserves. Such cases often cause one to hold in low estimate soldiers who in less responsible positions might do excellent work.

Appropriate talent is needed at all levels if distinguished service is to be performed. But history and posterity reserve the name of 'genius' for those who have excelled in the highest positions – as commander-in-chief – since here the demands for intellectual and moral powers are vastly greater.<sup>384</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz

In the case of Ambon, Sturdee expected defeat not only at Ambon but at Rabaul and Kupang also. He sent small ill-equipped task forces to defend isolated island outposts without the required support in military aircraft, ships, reinforcement or the prospect of withdrawal while having knowledge beforehand that overwhelming Japanese forces were expected to attack these garrisons. Sturdee's default position was sending small ill-equipped forces to isolated islands to be swept up by the advancing Japanese divisions. The point of concern here is not that Sturdee and the War Cabinet were irresponsible enthusiasts playing a game of chance, but rational, responsible planners of high strategy who had planned and carried out what seems to be an irrational, or at least, an incompetent military campaign of line observation and position fighting theory within the designated operational areas of the Malay Barrier.

In war, a military sacrifice is a strategic or tactical act of giving up a unit, space, time or object in the hope of deriving more important and worthy gains that are calculated at a price commensurate with the losses. Clausewitz believed that 'war is no act of blind passion, but is dominated over by the political object, therefore the value of that object

---

<sup>384</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 129.

determines the measure of the sacrifices by which it is to be purchased'.<sup>385</sup> These principles seem to have been abused by Sturdee where his formulation of strategy for garrisoning the islands was not worth the sacrifice of forces balanced against what would be the limited gains of just a few days delay to the Japanese advance. In other words, when Australia faced a possible Japanese invasion, Sturdee was sacrificing the last of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF's 8<sup>th</sup> Division brigades for a few days delay to the Japanese, an incommensurate transaction in relation to Australia's military capabilities at the time.

It seems that Sturdee derived his formulaic strategy of forward observation for Ambon from Clausewitz's chapters seven and eight in Book Five of *On War*, which together discuss the advance guard and the operational use of advanced corps in eighteenth century warfare. These chapters of *On War* were written for relatively antiquated seventeenth and eighteenth century warfare where armies were limited to advancing on foot or by horse, not by sea or air. In Clausewitz's time when 'a troop's range of vision [did] not usually extend much beyond the range of fire' the purpose of advanced guards and outposts in land warfare were to act as the eyes for an army 'to detect and reconnoiter the enemy's approach before it [came] into view' and to avoid surprises.<sup>386</sup> Clausewitz advised the reader that the use of outposts was dependent on 'the extent, time and place, circumstances and the type of war being conducted'. Clearly Sturdee overlooked or ignored these contingencies at Ambon where wireless telegraphy, ships and aircraft now acted as instruments in modern warfare on land, air and sea for reconnoitring the enemy's approach long before they came into view of a main force.

---

<sup>385</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Colonel JJ Graham, p. 16.

<sup>386</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, p. 359.



The grand strategy laid down by the War Council and Sturdee on 12 December 1941 was archaic and flawed when applied to line observation and fighting at Ambon, because it was derived from antiquated principles of warfare, especially where they had failed properly to consider the type of warfare being conducted. In this case, Gull Force was isolated from its main body through an inappropriate subdivision of force, a lack of secure supply routes, a lack security to its rear, a lack of ability to shield the main body in gaining time and a lack of ability to withdraw into the main body once the enemy had overcome any resistance. At the time of the Ambon campaign RAAF aircraft alone could have fulfilled this role where they had the mobility and scope to withdraw once threatened, as they actually did when the Japanese fleet approached Ambon in January 1942.<sup>387</sup>

Furthermore, other than acting as observation posts, advanced guard posts are often used as points of resistance to give the main force time to prepare for battle or to withdraw to another more advantageous position if required or to act as rear guards to the main force during a withdrawal. The size of the advance guard units and outposts are therefore configured according to whether the main body requires more time to prepare or not and if action is required to delay the enemy.<sup>388</sup> Sturdee's claim that he was sending troops to delay the enemy at Ambon was overstated, from a Clausewitzian perspective, when Gull Force was expected to holdup a Japanese division for no more than a few days. In the context and scope of the Pacific War a delay on this scale was unlikely to achieve any practicable gains. In any case, as far as advanced guards and outposts were concerned, Clausewitz was focusing on large armies moving across the

---

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

fields of Europe with divisional sized advance guards, not small ill-equipped detachments sitting in isolated outposts on far-flung islands.

Clausewitz explained that the operational use of advanced corps 'is to observe the enemy and slow down his advance'.<sup>389</sup> He made it clear that their role is to influence the enemy into revealing its size and objectives and then delaying their advance before falling back. In the era of Clausewitz's study these tactics were possible, because an advance guard on the fields of Europe ostensibly had space to fall back into. In the case of Ambon, however, Gull Force had no space to fall back into apart from the sea. Clausewitz also advised that the requirements of an advance guard to resist attack is dependent on the nature of the terrain and the proximity of support. Because Ambon was completely isolated from the main support force it had only one of the above requirements for the security of an advance guard and that was mountainous jungle terrain. Nevertheless, in this case the terrain at Ambon worked against Gull Force because it is a small island where there was no room to manoeuvre troops effectively, a fact pointed out to Sturdee in Scriven's report.

Furthermore, Clausewitz maintained that defensive fighting by an advanced guard rarely has any great consequence in itself, because such a minor engagement, in his words, 'rarely gains enough time'. The gains of using advanced guards therefore are dependent on making the enemy more cautious, extending the duration of resistance and using the withdrawal itself to slow down the enemy's advance and to make time for preparing for a more decisive battle. Clausewitz advised that;

---

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

The withdrawal must be made as slowly as safety will permit. Any good natural position that is available should be used. It will compel the enemy to work out fresh attacks and turning-movements, and so gain more time. Even a real engagement may prove acceptable in a new position. It will be obvious that the delaying action is closely linked to the withdrawal. The frequency of the engagements will have to make up for the shortness of their duration. This is the way an advance corps can resist. Its effectiveness depends primarily on its own numerical strength and the terrain; also on the distances it has to cover, and the support and protection it receives.<sup>390</sup>

When Gull force is considered in this context it was placed in an untenable position; its isolation limited its capacity to resist; its numerical and material strength was weak; it was subject to a decisive blow by a larger force; it had no room to manoeuvre; it could not withdraw; there were no means for its support; and consequently, there was no effective means for resisting the Japanese at Ambon for more than a few days.

Clausewitz's conclusion on the operational use of the advanced guard was that:

An advance guard derives its operational value more from its presence than from its efforts; from the engagements it might offer rather than from those it actually fights. It is never intended to stop the enemy's movements, but rather, like the weight of a pendulum, to moderate and regulate them so as to make them calculable.<sup>391</sup>

This statement may be true, but it must be taken in the context in which it was offered and the particular circumstances of the operations being considered. The advice given above by Clausewitz relates to operations on land only and was never presented as formulae or scientific law; rather it was advice given in the context of the battles studied by Clausewitz where advanced guards were the size of divisions and where they had room to safely manoeuvre and fall back. Of course Gull Force and the presence of the RAAF would have regulated the Japanese advance to some degree simply by the nature of its position. The price of moderation, however, in adjusting an enemy's movement must be weighed in proportion to any gains accrued in delaying their advance.

---

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., pp. 368-69.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., pp. 370-80.

Clausewitz also held that:

11. These isolated posts serve in large operations partly as outposts, in which case they serve not as absolute defense but only as a delay to the enemy, and partly to hold points which are important for the combinations we have planned for our army. Also it is often necessary to hold on to a remote point in order to gain time for the development of active measures of defense which we may have planned. But, if a point is remote, it is *ipso facto* isolated.

12. Two more observations about isolated obstacles are necessary. The first is that we must keep troops ready behind them to receive detachments that have been thrown back. The second is that whoever includes such isolated obstacles in his defensive combinations should never count on them too much, no matter how strong the obstacle may be. On the other hand, the military leader to whom the defense of the obstacle has been entrusted must always try to hold out, even under the most adverse circumstances. For this there is needed a spirit of determination and self-sacrifice, which finds its source only in ambition and enthusiasm. We must, therefore, choose men for this mission who are not lacking in these noble qualities.<sup>392</sup>

Clausewitz advises here that an outpost should have support to fall back into and that

they should not be considered as immovable objects placed in the path of the enemy.

The expectation is that they would put up strong resistance in proportion to their

strength and then tactically withdraw. Clausewitz never condoned the unnecessary

sacrifice of such detachments especially where there was no other planned combinations

for the Army in train as in the case of Ambon. Frederick the Great, Clausewitz's Prussian

predecessor in the art of war, denounced this kind of folly when he observed that as far

as detachments were concerned 'It would afford fine amusement to the enemy, if they

were able on these occasions to attack us to our disadvantage, and it would certainly

happen, but for the well-chosen situation of our camp'.<sup>393</sup> In other words, outposts and

main camps are mutually supportive of each other and should not be allowed to be

isolated from each other to the point that they can be defeated in isolation.

---

<sup>392</sup> von Clausewitz, C., *Principles of War*, trans. Hans W Gatzke, (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1942), p. 12.

<sup>393</sup> *der Grosse King of Prussia Friedrich II, Military Instruction from the Late King of Prussia to His Generals*, trans. Lt-Col Foster, 5th ed., (London: J. Cruttwell, 1818), p. 34.

It is plausible, however, that Sturdee was applying these desperate measures to the island's strategies in the hope that the American Navy would suddenly arrive to reinforce the garrisons and occupy the bases. The Chiefs of Staff's appreciations of December 1941 seems to demonstrate that Sturdee was optimistic, or at least hopeful, that this would happen if Rabaul could be held long enough. The recommended measures were:

That the joint United States-Australian proposals for strengthening Rabaul to make it a well fortified Naval base should be reinforced to provide an Army Brigade. An Air Force General Purpose Squadron also be stationed there. Should these proposals not be proceeded with, it is still necessary to reinforce the existing garrison in the manner indicated to prevent the acquisition of Rabaul as a base from which an attack upon Port Moresby and the Australian mainland could be isolated.<sup>394</sup>

Arguably, Rabaul was a strategic outpost that should have been reinforced if for no other reason than it was a mandated Australian territory important to the morale of the Australian people and that attacks could be launched from there against Australia by the enemy after it was taken. It was also the key to approaching New Guinea and it was strategically critical for Australia in maintaining its links with the US, especially when the Chiefs of Staff were now beginning to build up Australia's defence resources with American aid against a possible Japanese invasion.<sup>395</sup>

The strategic and tactical principles standing against the deployment of Gull Force to Ambon, however, were that Sturdee did not have the resources properly to secure the garrison with a sufficient balance of troops, aircraft or naval forces. Ambon was not Australian territory and Gull Force was still in Australia when the above decision was being made to despatch it to Ambon after war broke out. In holding such concerns over

---

<sup>394</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Agendum - No 418/1941 and Supplement 1 - Defence of Australia and Adjacent area - Chiefs of Staff Appreciation - December 1941, A2671, p. 61.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., Appendix "D" .

Rabaul, there was just cause for Sturdee to postpone the sending of Gull and Sparrow Forces to their respective garrisons in case they were required at Rabaul or perhaps to protect Australia against any later perceived threat to its mainland from New Guinea or Timor.

As it was, Lind, Tanner and Roach had all reported the above shortcomings of garrisoning Ambon to AHQ in Melbourne, but they were either ignored, threatened or removed from command. In the Clausewitzian context above, Sturdee's ill-considered strategy of forward observation and fighting was clearly unworthy of him. He had the training and knowledge provided to him commensurate with his position as Director of Military Operations and Intelligence (DMOI) at AHQ throughout the 1930s and yet in his role as CGS he had planned and executed Operational Instruction No. 15 with an inexplicably stubborn determination in breach of contemporaneous strategic principles. Where there was no positive outcome for Australia in garrisoning Ambon, it seems the only rational sacrifice that should have been made was Ambon itself.

Sturdee was no fool and there is much evidence in support of his qualifications as Australia's CGS. Sturdee's son-in-law, Colonel John Buckley, held him in high praise when relating to his roles in the military as Chief of the General Staff leading into the Pacific War, the officer delegated to the Australian Military Mission at Washington in 1942, as Commander of the First Australian Army in 1944, as acting Commander in Chief in 1945 and as Chief of the General Staff again in 1946. Bearing witness to Sturdee's character, Buckley explained that 'when the Burma show opened up Sturdee was absolutely horrified, because he realised that if Australian troops did go there

without equipment or anything else, and no air support, it would be an absolute disaster of the first order'.<sup>396</sup> According to Buckley's unsubstantiated claim, Sturdee threatened to resign at the 18 February 1942 War Cabinet meeting if the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF troops were not brought back to Australia.

Rowell similarly praised Sturdee's attributes as CGS. He considered Sturdee a 'realist of the highest degree'. In his 1966 *Australian Army Journal* article on the early war years, Rowell highlighted Sturdee's role as DMOI and his contribution to the War Book, to Australia's overall strategic plan for raising overseas units, the strategic concentration of force in Australia, the build up of the home based militia, the equipping of those forces with modern weapons on a limited budget and coastal defence and training. Rowell further praised Sturdee for his precise mind, his problem solving ability, his clarity of thought and his willingness to delegate to junior officers.<sup>397</sup> In other words, Rowell considered Sturdee sharp, intelligent, well educated and a practised military organiser and strategist of the highest order.

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* also admits that Sturdee was a competent well-educated and experienced military officer. It lists his prodigious accomplishments in the Australian army from the time of his commission in 1908 until his retirement as a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1951. According to this biographical account;

---

<sup>396</sup> Buckley, J., "Verbatim Transcript of an Interview with John Buckley 1913-1996: John Curtin from 1938", (Bentley: John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, 1995), pp. 6-7. Buckley's claim seems to be hearsay only and remains unverifiable.

<sup>397</sup> Rowell, "General Sturdee and the Australian Army," pp. 3-10.

Sturdee's sheer professionalism earned him the trust of politicians of all parties. His steadfastness in the anxious months that followed Japan's entry into the war had won him widespread admiration, and he was described as 'the rock on which the army, and indeed the government rested during the weeks of panic in early 1942'. His resolute insistence that the A.I.F. divisions intended for operations in the Far East should be returned to Australia helped ensure that troops were available to halt the Japanese advance in Papua.<sup>398</sup>

From the above descriptions it is clear Sturdee's peers considered him an excellent general, one who was on top of the game and unlikely to compromise his principles if he thought the security of Australia was at risk. He was a general of clear mind, had a purposeful character and was a planner capable of weighing up the probable consequences of military action.

According to the above examples, Sturdee clearly had the knowledge and experience to be fully cognisant of the risks involved in sending undersized, under-equipped and under-supported troops to isolated island outposts like Ambon, Timor and Rabaul. This was demonstrated by his horrified reaction to the prospect of Australian troops being sent to Burma, a lesson he perhaps learned earlier from the debacle of the Greece campaign or from the failed operations at Rabaul, Ambon and Timor.<sup>399</sup>

It would be unfair to Sturdee to expect that he could see a year into the future to determine that would be the case in February 1941. Even so, the fact remains that he was aware of the unfolding circumstances of the Pacific War by December 1941 and in the time before he had embarked Gull and Sparrow forces to Ambon and Timor respectively. This was confirmed by his discussions with Curtin at the War Cabinet on 8 December 1941 and by Curtin's letter to Roosevelt on 13 December 1941, which stated

---

<sup>398</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Online: National Centre of Biography, p. 3.

<sup>399</sup> Buckley, "Verbatim Transcript of an Interview with John Buckley 1913-1996: John Curtin from 1938", pp. 6-7.



that Rabaul was in a hopeless situation and was facing a Japanese scale of attack too large for the garrison to defend. Curtin explained to Roosevelt that the naval situation in Australia had ruled out any support for Rabaul and by implication Ambon and Timor. In any case, Sturdee had predicted at the War Cabinet meeting that Timor would likely face a Japanese division and clearly if that was so it applied to Ambon also, as it lay between the Japanese advance and its objective at Timor.<sup>400</sup>

Rowell later attempted to dismiss the Rabaul debacle as the unanticipated consequence of war. He is reported to have remarked that ‘they [the ‘*they*’ being Sturdee and Rowell] had the scale of attack all wrong. The Japanese employed a division against a battalion. It was bad luck for the [Lark Force] battalion that the Japanese intended making Rabaul their main base’.<sup>401</sup> This account was patently misleading as Sturdee had earlier forecast that the Japanese would use such a division in its attack on Rabaul. Military historian David Horner, to whom Rowell had written the above, was scathing of this remark. He wrote;

One is left with the impression that this token contribution [at Rabaul] to forward defence, and it was repeated in Ambon, Timor and New Ireland, was merely grasping at straws. Army Headquarters must be indicted for failing to assess realistically the chances of these garrisons ... Furthermore, it is clear that Army Headquarters was not organised to control operations. There was confusion over orders, roles and equipment, leading, in the case of Ambon, to the replacement of the commander.<sup>402</sup>

Clearly, Horner’s remarks condemn Rowell’s and Sturdee’s competencies and abilities regarding their direction of the Islands operations.

---

<sup>400</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Agendum - No 418/1941 and Supplement 1 - Defence of Australia and Adjacent area - Chiefs of Staff Appreciation - December 1941, A2671, p. 59.

<sup>401</sup> Horner, *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-1943*, p. 36.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

Colonel EG Keogh in his book *The South West Pacific 1941-45* raised similar concerns as those of Horner regarding the competency of AHQ in the execution of their island operations:

Taking the prevailing circumstances into full account, it is hard to justify the detachments at Ambon and Rabaul. Neither place was a vital link in the defences or communications. Certainly it was highly desirable to deny the enemy access to them, but once command of the sea had been lost any forces stationed at those places could not be supported until the navy situation had been restored. In neither case was the force anything like strong enough to survive for the required length of time, or even to impose delay on the powerful forces the enemy was employing. It is true that the arrangements for the despatch of these forces were made before Japan struck, before the strength of the blows she would deliver had been appreciated. But after her probable course of action and her methods had been amply demonstrated there was still time to reconsider the situation. Despite this demonstration, it would appear that Army Headquarters persisted in believing that these lone battalions could impose delay on the enemy. Consequently the maxim, enunciated by one of the early Pharaohs, operated in full— “Detachments beyond effective supporting distance usually get their heads cut off.” There are, of course, occasions when something worthwhile can be gained by the sacrifice of a detachment. This was not one of them.<sup>403</sup>

As both Horner and Keogh suggest, the Chiefs of Staff could have realistically assessed the efficacy of setting up and maintaining garrisons in the islands and could have perhaps reserved the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade for later service in Australia or New Guinea.<sup>404</sup> This should have been Sturdee’s goal when considering the defence of Australia at a time when he was building up the Australian militia forces to oppose the Japanese threat and when troops and equipment were badly needed on Australia’s mainland.

History demonstrates, however, that this did not happen in the case of Ambon, Timor or Rabaul despite the discussions of 13 December regarding the consequences attached to the possible fall of Singapore. Under the circumstances there seemed to be little excuse for Sturdee to send Gull and Sparrow Forces to Ambon and Timor respectively or for Lark Force to remain at Rabaul without hope of support or withdrawal, but he did this. From as early as 8 December Sturdee had had time to re-evaluate the strategic situation.

---

<sup>403</sup> Keogh, E., *The South West Pacific 1941-45*, (Melbourne: Gey Flower Productions, 1965), p.131.

<sup>404</sup> Horner, *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-1943*, p. 36.

He had had the support of Curtin in not dissipating troops to Ambon and Timor in December 1941 should he have required it, yet he ignored these opportunities. At the time of this decision Sturdee was aware of the dangers of sending inadequate troops to the islands, yet he seems to have done so regardless of the consequences.

This was never a case of overlooking unforeseen consequences; it was a deliberate decision by Sturdee when he knew that Gull and Sparrow forces, before their departure from Australia, faced the probability of opposing overwhelming Japanese forces in the islands. He nevertheless sent Gull and Sparrow Forces to the islands without any hope of enduring such conditions. Sturdee later admitted his mistake in his paper the *Future Employment of AIF* on 15 February 1942. He had had to admit that his sloppy approach to the Malay Barrier had failed, which he acknowledged after receiving Lieutenant General John Lavarack's and General Wavell's appreciations on the situation in Sumatra and Java at 0750 and 2050 hours respectively on 14 February.

Lavarack and his staff had arrived from the Middle East at ABDACOM HQ in Bandung on 27 January 1942 as advance party for the returning I Australian Corps. Lavarack had been appointed acting GOC AIF ABDA Area until Blamey could arrive in Java from the Middle East. Lavarack's job was to assess the situation in the NEI before the proposed Australian reinforcements arrived. Accordingly, between 1 to 9 February Lavarack and his GSO, Brigadier Frank Berryman, toured areas of southern Sumatra and central Java to prepare situation reports on the defence of the NEI.

On 2 February, while Lavarack toured Sumatra and Java, his senior intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel KA Wills, prepared a paper that predicted the Japanese would attack:

(a) Timor (thus to cut air communications between Java and Australia) and (b) the Sumatra airfields and refineries; and that the enemy could attain these objectives by 2 March. Java would then be isolated ... and the small Dutch Garrison, 'split up into pennypackets throughout the island' and of problematical fighting value, would not hold out for long.<sup>405</sup>

Wills calculated that the returning AIF convoys from the Middle East could not arrive in time to counter the Japanese attacks on Sumatra let alone Java. He pointed out that 'On the information available, the leading Australian divisions could not be ready for action in the NEI before 15th March at the earliest'.<sup>406</sup> The conclusions were that the Australian divisions did not have time to prepare for battle at Sumatra and Java; that they were at risk of being lost piecemeal; and, that this eventuality would jeopardise Australia's own defence.

On 13 February, with Rabaul and Ambon captured and Singapore facing imminent defeat, Lavarack prepared an appreciation of his own to send to Curtin by way of Sturdee. Lavarack stated that in 'My opinion in event of fall of Singapore completely new situation results. Major element of this situation would be loss of approximately three imperial divisions and release of Japanese forces Malaya for further ventures'.<sup>407</sup>

Lavarack estimated that:

- (a) The Japanese would be free to take both north and south Sumatra without much resistance.
- (b) The Japanese could take Sumatra before the full complement of 7th Division arrived.

---

<sup>405</sup> Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, pp. 443.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>407</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Agendum - No 106/1942 and Supplements 1-3 Future Employment of the AIF, A2671, 106/1942, 1942, Appendix C.

- (c) One Australian division and all Dutch troops on Sumatra combined could not stop the Japanese taking the island for long.
- (d) The loss of 7th Division equipment and personnel to such an expedition could not be justified.
- (e) Dutch forces were unlikely to put up a strong resistance to Japanese attacks.
- (f) The addition of 6th Division AIF would not prolong the land defence of Java.
- (g) The defence of the NEI under the above circumstances did not warrant the sacrifice of I Australian Corps when it could not make any useful gains.
- (h) Employing this strategy would demonstrate to the Japanese that I Australian Corps was the only viable land striking force remaining in the Far East.
- (i) That 6 Division would not be ready for full scale operations until middle of April.<sup>408</sup>

He concluded that under these conditions and if Singapore fell it would be necessary to reconsider the future role of I Australian Corps in the NEI.

On reading the appreciation, Wavell asked Lavarack to delay sending the report so that he too could present a similar appreciation to the British Combined Chiefs of Staff and the War Office in Britain. In concert with Lavarack's report Wavell concluded that:

1. Singapore was likely to fall and release substantial Japanese forces to fight in Burma as well as to move south, making southern Sumatra untenable.
2. It was unlikely Australian forces from the Middle East could arrive in time to secure southern Java let alone Sumatra.
3. Sumatra was essential to the defence of Java
4. Air force resources available to the ABDA area were insufficient to repel Japanese advance on Sumatra and Java.
5. That Java was untenable if Sumatra fell, that an attempt to hold Sumatra should be given serious consideration unless it was found useless to do so and that further consideration should be given to diverting the Australian convoys away from the NEI if this was found to be the case.
6. Under these circumstances it would be better strategically if Australian convoys were diverted to Burma or Australia.
7. That the fall of Singapore would require the complete reorganisation of plans.<sup>409</sup>

---

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., Appendix B.

Sturdee's full report of 15 February followed the same views as those put by Lavarack and Wavell:

PAPER BY THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF ON FUTURE  
EMPLOYMENT OF A.I.F.

In view of the present position in the S.W. Pacific Area and of information which has just come to my knowledge, I consider that the future employment of the A.I.F. requires immediate reconsideration by War Cabinet.

2. At the present moment we are in the process of transferring 64,000 troops of Aust. Corps from M.E. to the ABDA Area. The first flight of 17,800 is now in Bombay being restowed into smaller ships for disembarkation in the N.E.I. If any change is to be made, action must be taken immediately.
3. So far in this war against Japan we have violated the principle of concentration of forces in our efforts to hold numerous small localities with totally inadequate forces which are progressively overwhelmed by vastly superior numbers. These small garrisons alone without adequate reinforcement or support never appeared to have any prospect of withstanding even a moderate scale of attack. In my opinion, the present policy of trying to hold isolated islands with inadequate resources needs review.
4. Our object at the present time should be to ensure the holding of some continental area from which we can eventually launch an offensive in the Pacific when American aid can be fully developed. This postulates the necessity for keeping open the sea and if possible the air reinforcing routes from U.S.A. This area to be held must be large enough so that, if we are pressed seriously by the Japanese, we will have room to manoeuvre our defending forces and not get them locked up in series of small localities, eg. islands, where the garrisons are overwhelmed piecemeal and are consequently lost as fighting resources for the duration of the war. Sacrifices of this nature can only be justified if the delay occasioned to the enemy's advance is such that the time gained enables effective measures to be organised for taking the offensive.
5. Present indications are that in the near future the only portion of N.E.I. that is likely to remain in Allied hands is Java. The Dutch Military Forces there amount to some 55,000 organised into two divs (according to information dated Nov 1941), concentrated in two groups around Batavia and Surabaya. The centre of the island is devoid of troops except a few small posts. These forces consist of a small proportion of Dutch whites, the remainder being native. They are entirely immobile in the sense that they cannot fight out of the area in which they are at present located, as they rely very largely on civil resources for their supply, transport, repair, signals, provost and other services. In fact, they should be regarded more as well equipped Home Guards than an Army capable of undertaking active operations in the field according to the developments of the strategic situation .
6. The Dutch themselves will probably fight well, but are inexperienced and probably not highly trained. The rank and file are natives whose fighting qualities are doubtful under conditions of modern warfare. It is unlikely that they are as good as British Indians, who so far have not been very successful against the Japanese.
7. General Wavell's present plan is to distribute the A.I.F. and the accompanying British Armoured Bde as follows:—

South Sumatra: 7 Div and some Corps Troops.

Central Java: 6 Div and balance of Corps Troops. British Armoured Bde.

South Central Java: Depots and Base Units.

The prospects of 7 Div being able to reach South Sumatra in time seem doubtful even at the best estimate. If they are unable to go to Sumatra, it seems probable the whole Corps would be located in Central Java. Assuming that the move of the A.I.F. can be completed in time, the defence of the whole of Java would then depend on Aust Corps of two

divisions, one British Armoured Bde and two inadequately organised and immobile Dutch divs tied by lack of maintenance services to Batavia and Surabaya respectively.

8. Java is some 600 miles long with an average width of about 100 miles. It is highly developed with internal communications (roads and railways) and possesses few of the topographical obstacles encountered in Malaya. Its natural resources are well distributed and very favourable to Japanese forces living on the country. With the present command of the sea enjoyed by the Japanese and the local air superiority they can concentrate, landings can be effected in any portion or portions of the island they choose.
9. It is known that Japan has several divisions in reserve in addition to those that could be spared from Malaya and the Philippines. Her limitations therefore appear to be shipping, her losses of which to date are comparatively small.

The prospects of the successful defence of Java are therefore far from encouraging.

10. Even assuming the successful defence of Java, this island does not provide us with a continental base from which we could build up Allied strength to take the offensive. It would be open to continuous attack from the Japanese naval and air forces from near-by bases.

Valuable as the holding of Java would impede the Japanese advance southwards, it cannot provide a strategic base upon which Allied strength can build up owing to its comparatively small size, the long sea route from the U.S.A. and the uncertainty of keeping such a route open for the enormous quantity of shipping needed to develop U.S.A. resources in manpower and fighting equipment.

An equally important factor is that, if Timor is lost, we are unable to ferry fighter and medium bomber aircraft by air to Java from their assembly bases in Australia.

11. The most suitable location for such a strategic base is Australia. It has the shortest sea route with U.S.A. of any considerable area of continuous land. Its extent is such that it cannot be completely overrun by the Japanese if we concentrate our available resources for its immediate protection whilst American strength is arriving. It has an indigenous white population which provides considerable fighting forces. It has sufficient industrial development to form a good basis for rapid expansion with American aid. Its northern shores are sufficiently close to Japanese occupied territory to make a good "jumping off" area for offensive operations, whilst its southern areas are sufficiently far from Japanese bases to ensure a reasonable degree of immunity from continuous sea and air bombardment bearing in mind the growing strength of U.S.A. Naval and Air forces.

It can therefore be accepted that Australia meets the requirements of a strategic base from which to develop our ultimate and decisive offensive.

12. The only other alternatives seem to be India and its neighbour Burma. The latter is already in the frontline, more difficult of access even than Java, and possesses insufficient development to be capable of rapid expansion. It is, however, most important to keep the Burma Road open to retain China in the war. India is a long sea route from U.S.A. and approaches via the Bay of Bengal will probably be difficult to access. It is a "black" country, and the attitude of its population is likely to be uncertain if the whole of the N.E.I. falls into Japanese hands in addition to Malaya and Singapore.

Therefore, Australia provides the logical answer.

13. Our immediate problem is how best to assure the security of this country pending the arrival of sufficient American forces not only to safeguard this strategic base, but also to develop the offensive against Japan.

The A.M.F. is progressively being built up to some 300,000 but it lacks much of its essential fighting equipment and is inadequately trained at present. Having regard to the size of the continent, it is inadequate against a maximum scale of attack by Japan. The cream of its trained and experienced officers have gone abroad with the A.I.F. and large

numbers of its other ranks are in the elementary stages of training. Even when fully trained, a matter of many months, its numbers are inadequate to defend vital areas within the 12,000 miles of coastline.

14. It is therefore very evident that considerable risks are at present being taken with the security of this country, which appears to be the only practicable base from which the offensive can ultimately be launched. The return of the available A.I.F. from abroad, some 100,000 trained and war experienced troops, complete with war equipment and trained staffs, would in my opinion more than double the present security of this country.

15. To hold Java (if this is practicable) and to lose Australia would be little solace to Australia, the British Empire or the Allied cause.

Alternatively, if Australia is held and Java lost together with over three-fifths of the Australian Corps, the Australian potential for providing its quota of military forces for the eventual offensive would be very greatly reduced.

16. In view of the foregoing, I have no alternative but strongly to recommend that the Govt give immediate consideration of:—

(a) The diversion to Australia of:—

(i) that portion of the A.I.F. now at Bombay and en route to Java;

(ii) the British Armoured Bde in the same convoy.

(b) The diversion of the remaining two flights to Australia.

(c) Recall of 9 Aust Div and remaining A.I.F. in M.E. at an early date.

17. Since the above was written, a cable has been received from General Lavarack (copy attached) which endorses the basis of the views I have expressed. He refers therein to an appreciation by General Wavell. This is not available to me.

(Sgd) V. A. H. Sturdee  
Lieutenant-General,  
Chief of the General Staff.

15 Feb. 42

Addendum by Chief of the General Staff:

General Wavell's appreciation just received, which only confirms the views submitted.  
(init'd) V.A.H.S. <sup>410</sup>

This paper marked a turning point in Sturdee's approach to strategy in the Pacific War and his conduct as CGS. The paper revealed a clear contrast between how Sturdee had planned and executed the islands strategy and how he approached the new and developing situation regarding the imminent fall of Singapore and the further advance of the Japanese. The seriousness of the Singapore situation, and thus the direct threat of

---

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., Appendix D, Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Appendix 5.



Japan to Australia's defence, seems to have motivated Sturdee to adjust his strategic thinking.

From the beginning Sturdee was adamant that the island strategy be adhered to up-to the point that he ignored Lind, threatened Tanner and removed Roach from command. In his above paper Sturdee acknowledged that he had violated the principle of concentration by sending inadequate forces to hold numerous isolated islands to be progressively overtaken by vastly superior numbers. He revealed that Gull, Sparrow and Lark forces had had little prospect of holding out against even a moderate attack without adequate reinforcement or support and that his policy now required review.

Sturdee had now come to the conclusion that a defensive attitude to the war was the better strategy. He recommended that a new approach to the situation demanded the consideration of mainland Australia as a defensive base from which to prepare for later offensive action against the Japanese forces. He condemned the piecemeal sacrifice of small garrisons in the islands where there was no gain in delaying the enemy without a coordinated plan to exploit those delays. The consequence of such action, he noted, was that those fighting units would be lost for the duration of the war. The best strategy then was to keep the sea lanes and air routes from the USA to Australia open, to concentrate Australia's 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF and AMF forces on the mainland and to use Australia's vast areas for manoeuvring troops to prevent them from becoming pinned down should the Japanese launch an attack on Australia. Under this arrangement Sturdee recommended the abandonment of dispersing the returning elements of I Australian Corps to Burma, Sumatra and Java and insisted that they should be returned to Australia.

These events also seem to have crystallised Curtin's mind in reacting to the threat of the Japanese overrunning Singapore. He cabled Churchill on 15 February to explain the effect that the loss of Singapore would have on Australia's strategic plans and on the recall of I Australian Corps to Australia. Curtin's summary contained echoes of Clausewitz's lessons on defence being stronger than offence, as was explained at the beginning of Chapter Two. Curtin summed it up in this way:

12. It can be argued that it is good defensive-offensive tactics to meet the enemy as far afield as possible and withdraw whilst inflicting losses on him, though suffering losses oneself. The enemy is ultimately driven back by a counter-offensive from a suitable base by forces drawn from the main reservoirs of strength or, if the enemy is dependent on remote sources of reinforcement and supply, his lines of communication may be cut.
  13. It is however risky to hazard one's main base and largest reservoir in the theatre of operations by stringing out the resources of this reservoir along the line of the enemy's advance where, owing to superior sea power, air power and greater military strength, he can bring stronger forces to bear. This strategy invites progressive defeat along the line and ultimately imperils the capacity to defend the main base through the dispersion of forces.
- (ix) The conclusions expressed above are fully co-operative. Their purpose is to ensure as far as possible the certainty of ultimate victory by defending Australia as a base, even though ground may be given to the enemy. We avoid a "penny packet" distribution of our limited forces and their defeat in detail. When we are ready for a counter-offensive, superior sea power and the accumulation of American Forces in this country will enable the A.I.F. again to join in clearing the enemy from adjacent territories he has occupied.<sup>411</sup>

This disclosure to Churchill was in effect a repudiation of Sturdee's Forward Observation Line campaign strategy. There is little doubt that Sturdee was advising Curtin on the new approach to Australia's defence and it demonstrates that Sturdee fully understood the principles as explained in Curtin's cable, principles that were not applied to the earlier Islands campaign.

Demonstrably, Sturdee's knowledge of strategy is confirmed here and underlines the question of why he allowed the Malay Barrier Strategy, under his personal command, to continue to the point that Australia's last remaining brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF was thrown

---

<sup>411</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Cabinet Agendum - No 106/1942 and Supplements 1-3 Future Employment of the AIF, A2671, 106/1942, Appendix A.

away piecemeal at places like Rabaul, Timor and Ambon when Japanese raids threatened Australia. He had had the grace of time to consider his plans for almost ten months before the opening of the Pacific War, yet he allowed the Malay Barrier Strategy to stagnate until he abandoned the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to its fate during the months of December 1941 to February 1942. Sturdee's actions cannot be explained away by the argument that the islands fell owing to unforeseen circumstances according to the laws of probability in war as explained by Clausewitz.

Clausewitz stated that, 'from the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affairs and his general situation, each side, using the laws of probability, forms an estimate of its opponents likely course and acts accordingly'. This is what Sturdee failed to do in embarking Australian troops to Ambon and Timor and in abandoning Lark Force at Rabaul as war broke out with Japan. Sturdee was aware of the Japanese character, their institutions, their state of affairs and their general situation toward the Southwest Pacific. He was aware of the laws of probability and the likely outcome of a Japanese thrust towards the NEI and possibly Australia, yet he chose to ignore the likely outcome by dissipating soldiers to isolated outposts in the face of overwhelming Japanese forces.

Notwithstanding the above, it seems Sturdee had inextricably bound himself to the Malay Barrier Strategy despite a probable outcome that the islands would inevitably fall to the Japanese under such conditions. The planning, logistics and follow-through of the Malay Barrier strategy in the islands lay with Sturdee and clearly he had expected the islands to fall. He had held executive control over the island strategy and the battalions

involved. He had ignored Curtin's question over his wasting men by scattering them throughout the islands. He had never threatened to resign over his failures at Rabaul, Ambon or Timor, as he apparently had when requesting the recall of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF, nor did he seek to or was asked to explain his role in planning the disasters *post-bellum* (he destroyed his personal papers in 1951 commenting 'I have done my job. It is over'). He embarked Gull Force to Ambon without instructions and it was not until two weeks before the Japanese attacked that Gull Force supposedly received AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15 regarding the defence of Ambon.

These were the well thought-out actions of a clear minded general who had expected the islands to fall to the Japanese, so much so that he did not even bother to send operating instructions until the last minute. It seems possible that in exchange for his commitments to the Dutch, the Singapore Strategy and the Malay Barrier Strategy, Sturdee had sacrificed military prudence and duty of care for Australian troops to his self-determined commitment to expediency. After all, this justification of the sacrifice of Ambon and Timor contributed little to Australia's defence apart from putting on a show of resistance to the Japanese advance. However, this does not fully explain his actions.

A possible explanation of why an otherwise competent, intelligent well-educated general such as Sturdee continued with a questionable military strategy, which he must have known was bound to fail, seems to derive from his lack of competency in commanding operations in war. Currently, the question of whether Sturdee was incompetent in managing the Island strategy can now be evaluated by applying Norman Dixon's thesis *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*. Dixon served in the Royal

Engineers from 1940 to 1950 before leaving the Army to gain a first class degree in psychology. He received his Doctorate in Philosophy in 1956, a Doctorate of Science in 1972 and is a 1974 recipient of the University of London Carpenter Medal for his work in experimental psychology. Nixon's book *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* is currently considered a seminal study on military incompetence.

According to Dixon's theories, an explanation of Sturdee's failure as commander of the Islands strategy can be derived from his personality, the military culture in which he was imbued and his actions as commander of the island forces at Ambon, Timor and Rabaul. Dixon's thesis argues that military incompetence can be directly linked to systemic authoritarian culture combined with commanders possessing complementary personality traits, where that combination adversely influences otherwise seemingly competent generals to implement and carry through incompetent actions.<sup>412</sup>

He proposes that the traits of authoritarianism, dogmatism, rigidity and anal-obsession lies at the core of military organisation, which in turn predisposes officers who have acquired such personality traits in life towards military incompetence once they achieve high levels of command. Military organisations, according to Dixon, are 'inflexible machines' instilled with the processes 'of "bull", authoritarianism, codes of honour, anti-intellectualism, anti-effeminacy, sensitivity to criticism and fear of failure' which contribute to 'incompetence, both directly and indirectly ... because, since their primary object is control and constraint, they themselves tend to become inflexible and

---

<sup>412</sup> Dixon, N., *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, (Sydney: Pimlico, 1994), pp. 19-20.

unmodifiable'.<sup>413</sup> This suggests that placing an authoritarian, inflexible and unmodifiable personality type at the top of an inflexible authoritarian military hierarchy provides ripe conditions for incompetence.

Dixon therefore proposes that a strong correlation exists between the personalities of military commanders and military incompetence, where a contradistinction lies between autocratic behaviour, which allows the military to function in an orderly manner, and irrational authoritarianism, which can be linked to the personality traits of certain commanders where those traits lead towards incompetence (the first being functional the second psychopathological notwithstanding intellectual considerations). The distinction is that, 'the autocrat exercises tight control when the situation demands it, the authoritarian *is* himself tightly controlled [internally], *no matter what the external situation*'.<sup>414</sup>

Dixon proposes that:

Because organisations which are invested with the task of managing a nation's violence develop devices for controlling aggression, they will tend to attract into their ranks people with similar personal problems of control. Such people will tend to be conformists, conventional and over-controlled. They will also tend to seek approval, enjoy occupying a position in a dominance-submission hierarchy, and derive satisfaction from the provision of legitimate outlets for their normally repressed aggression. They are in short, authoritarian. But because the roots of authoritarianism lie far back in childhood such people also tend to manifest those other residues of early socialisation: orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy—the so called anal-obsessive triad. Finally, because such people are threatened by the possible breakthrough of instinctual impulses they tend to be over-controlled, rigid and possessed of 'closed' as opposed to 'open' minds. They like to be governed by rules and abhor what is spontaneous, flexible or unusual.

Clearly there is much in military organisations which might be expected to attract such people, and clearly their personality-traits will, because highly consistent with the needs and demands of the group, facilitate their promotion.<sup>415</sup>

---

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., pp. 285-86.

Accordingly, he found four extant characteristics in commanders that he believes directly contribute towards military incompetence. First, they will support, reinforce and preserve a restrictive approach towards militarism. Second, they lack empathy towards others, lack social leadership abilities and are prone to wasting human life. Third, they are antagonistic towards accepting unexpected or new information and hold fast to their previously held convictions. Finally, they become anxious on reaching a level of command to which they are unaccustomed and overcompensate by tightening control over their aggressive tendencies.<sup>416</sup>

Adding to above traits, Dixon listed fifteen other enduring characteristics that indicate incompetency as expressed by authoritarian military leaders:

1. *A serious wastage of human resources and failure to observe one of the first principles of war – economy of force.* This failure derives in part from an inability to make war swiftly. It also derives from certain attitudes of mind which we shall consider presently.
2. *A fundamental conservatism and clinging to outworn tradition, an inability to learn from past experience (owing in part to a refusal to admit past mistakes). It also involves a failure to use or tendency to misuse available technology.*
3. *A tendency to reject or ignore information* which is unpalatable or which conflicts with preconceptions.
4. *A tendency to underestimate the enemy* and over estimate the capabilities of one's own side.
5. *Indecisiveness* and a tendency to abdicate from the role of decision-maker.
6. *An obstinate persistence in a given task* despite strong contrary evidence.
7. *A failure to exploit a situation gained* and a tendency to 'pull punches' rather than push home an attack.
8. *A failure to make adequate reconnaissance.*
9. *A predilection for frontal assaults,* often against an enemy's strongest points.
10. *A belief in brute force* rather than clear ruse.
11. *A failure to make use of surprise* or deception.
12. *An undue readiness to find scapegoats* for military set-backs.
13. *A suppression or distortion of news* from the front, usually rationalized as necessary for morale or security.
14. *A belief in mystical forces – fate, bad luck, etc.*<sup>417</sup>

---

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-3.

Evidently, as the above narrative of events has shown, Sturdee's management of the Island campaign during the period between formulating Operation Instruction No. 15 in March 1941, implementing the plan in December 1941 and following it through into February 1942 he, at least at some level, expressed many of these characteristics.

Dixon's criteria will now be examined as they apply to Sturdee's actions in commanding the Forward Line Observation strategy, not to determine whether he was an authoritarian and obsessive *per se*, but to judge the competence of his actions as they apply to Dixon's criteria of incompetence. According to Dixon's standards Sturdee qualifies as an incompetent commander on several accounts.

Previous discussion has shown where Sturdee failed to adhere to the principle of economy of force. The principle of economy of force, according to the American Army's *Field Manual 3-0* is:

the reciprocal of mass. It requires accepting prudent risk in selected areas to achieve superiority—overwhelming effects—in the decisive operation. Economy of force involves the discriminating employment and distribution of forces. Commanders never leave any element without a purpose. When the time comes to execute, all elements should have tasks to perform.<sup>418</sup>

This maxim applies to what Clausewitz meant by 'The aim will then be to take in the greatest possible strength, either in order to get the upper hand, or at least in order to make sure that the enemy does not', where this relates to the full employment of the military services in fighting the war and to the superiority of that force at a decisive point.<sup>419</sup> This of course depends on having available forces for opposing an enemy. In Sturdee's case, he had only the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade with which he could oppose the Japanese as they attacked across the Southwest Pacific theatre towards Australia. Nevertheless, the

---

<sup>418</sup> United States, "Operations: Field Manual 3-0", (Washington DC: Headquarters Department of Army, 2001), [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/service\\_pubs/fm3\\_0a.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/service_pubs/fm3_0a.pdf), p. 4-13.

<sup>419</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Peter Paret, pp. 230-31.



Australian militia were eligible for service in the Australian mandated territories, an area of operations then under Australian control.

For example, while taking into account that he did not employ the superiority of force principle, Sturdee could have made use of available Australian forces to mass his troops and obtain relative superiority of force at an otherwise more decisive point. In other words, had he withheld the remnants of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade from Ambon and Timor he may have been able to make better use of them elsewhere, such as Rabaul or Port Moresby in New Guinea, where he had already recognized the need of reinforcements. At these places Sturdee could have also employed the Australia militia for reinforcing both Rabaul and Port Moresby, which happened in the latter case, as these areas were considered Australian mandated territory to which those forces could be sent. In doing this, rather than leaving militia troops idle on mainland Australia, Sturdee could have employed the principle of economy of force by using all available forces in opposing the Japanese at a more decisive location rather than leaving them idle in Australia, but he chose not to follow that path.

Nevertheless, Dixon was more focussed on the wastage of human life which resulted from not observing what he called the first principle of war, economy of force, rather than on how to apply it. He rated the 'second class' of human resources wastage as those actions 'involving casualties from enemy action as a result of the incompetent planning of senior military commanders'.<sup>420</sup> He argued that authoritarian personalities with anal obsessive traits, to varying degrees, lack the capacity to empathize with other

---

<sup>420</sup> Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, p. 154.

human beings, which in turn contributes to the unnecessary wastage of human resources.

Importantly, Dixon made a distinction between wasting human resources and the use of sacrificing troops to the greater good. He explained:

On the one hand it could be argued that senior commanders should 'hate' the enemy and not be squeamish about sacrificing the lives of their men for the sake of a greater good. Conversely it could be maintained that it is not hatred so much as understanding the enemy, and not a conscienceless squandering but a humane conserving of his own forces, which are the hallmarks of an efficient commander.

Perhaps, as with other aspects of authoritarianism, it is just a matter of degree. Certainly such great leaders as Wolfe, Wellington, Shaka, Lawrence, Monash, and Montgomery not only displayed a general absence of authoritarian traits but also showed a lively regard for the prime responsibility of a commander: conservation of his force and a concern for the psychological and physical welfare of his troops. ... in contrast to these highly competent commanders, many less talented military leaders have, along with other authoritarian traits, betrayed a singular disregard for the welfare of their troops and unnerving capacity to remain apparently unmoved by losses.<sup>421</sup>

According to this criterion, Sturdee resembles a commander who demonstrated a lack of empathy for the welfare for his troops by ignoring the principle of economy of force to Australia's north as he wasted his troops on isolated island outposts during 1941-1942.

In wasting his human resources, Sturdee dispatched Gull and Sparrow Forces to Ambon and Timor respectively to face a Japanese division at a time when those forces could have been withheld, because he knew they were undersized, had no lines of support, no naval protection, insufficient artillery and no chance of being withdrawn. This inaction rested in opposition to the role of a responsible commander under Dixon's criteria, where Sturdee acted contrary to the principle of conservation of his forces and where he demonstrated little concern for the psychological and physical welfare of his troops. He

---

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

went way beyond sacrificing the lives of his men to the greater good, especially where sending troops to Ambon and Timor could serve no good purpose. As discussed in Chapter One, the Dutch in NEI had already demonstrated their will to fight by announcing publicly in May 1941 that they would support the British at Singapore, a statement that effectively made the Ambon strategy redundant. The dissipation of forces and sending of troops to Ambon without a strategic purpose constituted a wastage of men and material in contravention of good military strategy and tactics.

Sturdee's lack of concern for his troops was compounded by his failure to ensure Gull and Sparrow forces were provided with AHQ Operations Instruction No. 15. These battalions were sent to their destinations with no information or orders with which to carry out their roles in the Islands. This failure to inform Gull Force alone on its role undermined the morale of Roach to the point where he was sacked for persistently asking AHQ for orders or at least an explanation of Gull Force's role at Ambon. The lack of orders for Gull Force also had the effect of undermining the working relationship between Roach and Kapitz to the point that the principle of unity of command broke down and Allied unit cooperation at Ambon faltered. In failing to provide orders and information for the role of Gull Force, in sacking Roach and in affecting the relationship between the Australian and Dutch commanders, Sturdee effectively demonstrated a complete disregard for the welfare of his forces.

When the Gull, Sparrow and Lark Forces were taken by the Japanese, Sturdee remained apparently unmoved by his losses. Rowell went some way to confirming AHQ's attitude in wasting human resources when he reportedly commented '*it's not the first time a few*

*thousand men have been thrown away and it won't be the last*'.<sup>422</sup> His statement confirms that Gull, Sparrow and Lark forces were wasted and infers that it was of no great consequence because thousands of men had been squandered by generals in the past. This uncaring approach expressed by AHQ to the wastage of what amounted to a brigade indicates both administrative and planning incompetence, where the effect of dissipating forces to the islands paid no account to the principle of concentration of force, the conservation of forces, the economy of force or the psychological and physical welfare of the troops.

Sturdee had also demonstrated his fundamental conservatism by clinging to outworn World War I traditions of line holding strategy and not learning from the past mistakes of that war. This type of fundamental conservatism applies to the old military history aphorism that generals always fight the last war. For example, Sturdee's 1933 exercise on the concentration of force in NSW demonstrated his tendency for planning outdated rigidly based linear and position holding type warfare that he had gained from his World War I experience. This point was demonstrated by the accepted Australian policy of the time, which stated that in the case of Rabaul, 'we [the government and the Chiefs of Staff] consider it essential to maintain a forward air observation line as long as possible and to make the enemy fight for this line rather than abandon it at first threat'.<sup>423</sup> It was not until later that Sturdee was forced to follow the lead of Lavarack and Wavell during February 1942, where they had outlined a plan for the returning 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF Divisions to bypass Sumatra and Java and go back to Australia, that he adopted a more vigorous approach to strategy.

---

<sup>422</sup> Horner, *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-1943*, p. 36.

<sup>423</sup> National Archives of Australia, [1941 File - Yellow Tab] New Caledonia (& other Pacific Islands): Defence of, A3300, 218A, p. 202.

He also demonstrated his tendency to reject or ignore unpalatable information which conflicted with his perceptions when despatching Gull Force to Ambon, where he ignored Lind's requests for an interview regarding concerns about the efficacy of sending Gull Force to Ambon without the required support and materials. It seems Sturdee was insecure about the fact that there were questions being raised about his plans. After Sturdee received cables from Lind and Roach pointing out the inadequacies in men, artillery, Bren carriers, stores, naval support, the inability to hold out for more than three days on the isolated outpost when there were no orders outlining the role of Gull Force and questioning whether he was there to hold the island or not (together with the request from Tanner to withdraw the task force), he reacted negatively by rejecting both Lind's and Roach's advice and ignoring the actual situation.

Dixon's explanation of why such conflicting tendencies may lead a subject into rejecting or ignoring any new or unpalatable information is that:

One particularly hazardous aspect of the relationship between information and decision processes concerns the revising of decisions. It seems that having gradually (and perhaps painfully) accumulated information in support of a decision people become progressively more loath to accept contrary evidence. As Edwards and his colleagues have shown, the greater the impact of the new information the more strenuously will it be resisted. There are several reasons for this dangerous conservatism. 'New' information has, by definition, high informational content, and therefore firstly it will require greater processing capacity, secondly it threatens a return to an earlier state of gnawing uncertainty, and thirdly it confronts the decision-maker with the nasty thought that he may have been wrong. No wonder he tends to turn a blind eye!<sup>424</sup>

Perhaps Sturdee was too stressed to handle difficult situations and became unwilling to review his work on Operation Instruction No. 15, because it required assessing new information and adjusting his plans; he felt threatened by his subordinates' questions about his plans; and, he chose to remain obstinate in proving his subordinates wrong.

---

<sup>424</sup> Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, pp. 30-31.

These tendencies to reject new information requiring a review of his plan were expressed by Sturdee when he sought to ignore the litany of questions being raised by both Lind and Roach about the efficacy of the Ambon operations. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Lind's and Roach's questioning of the plan had affected Sturdee's confidence to the point where he became indecisive about how to deal with the above issues as evidenced by his writing but not sending his letters.

In these letters Sturdee prevaricated about enlisting the militia artillery's 18 pounders and sending them to Ambon when he knew time went against such a plan. He admitted to Forde that Ambon required artillery but failed to act decisively in arranging to send it to the island. He prevaricated about sending Veale to assess both the military and morale situation at Ambon, but failed to follow through with the plan to carry out the required reconnaissance. Much like the proverbial phrase 'killing the messenger', his answer to addressing these concerns was to sack Roach and turn a blind eye to questions he had raised. The point is not that Sturdee was unaware of the situation at Ambon, but that he failed to act on Lind's and Roach's concerns responsibly. By not sending the letters, Sturdee demonstrated his indecisiveness and abdicated his responsibilities to Lind, Roach and the Army by not addressing the real situation being revealed to him.

Sturdee also demonstrated an obstinate persistence by holding to the Forward Line Observation strategy despite strong contrary evidence suggesting it was bound to fail. According to Dixon, this kind of dogmatic behaviour suggests incompetence where:

This distinction between an inherently efficient mechanism distorted by 'noise' and third-rate mechanism which is doing its best is also implied by contemporary studies of the military mind. Similar adjectives tend to recur in every case - 'over-controlled, aloof, rigid,' 'orderly,

frugal, obstinate,' 'predictable, punctual, prompt, decisive, rank-conscious, simplistic.' These occur in statements about personality, not intellect, about psychopathology, not cognitive disability. As one review of this work has said: "These "anal" characteristics ... would suggest restricted and rigid childhood training, a child who was expected to be seen and not heard, to conform without rebellion, to fit into the schedule prescribed by authority without question or wonder, in short the same sort of childhood training that has been found for authoritarian and dogmatic personalities."<sup>425</sup>

Sturdee was obstinate and over-controlling where he expected Roach to conform to his rigid plans in spite of the situation at Ambon and to carry out his orders without question. Sturdee's frugal approach had left Ambon, Timor and Rabaul without the artillery, support, men and materials required to make the plan workable and he was rank conscious where he saw Roach as a rebellious insubordinate who had to be removed from Ambon.

Another of Sturdee's traits was to ignore reconnaissance, which according to Dixon is 'the first duty of a commander'.<sup>426</sup> Sturdee's 'aversion to reconnaissance, however, coupled with a dislike of intelligence (in both senses of the word)<sup>427</sup> was demonstrated by his lack of it when formulating the Forward Observation Line strategy. He had never personally visited the Islands and had ignored the intelligence provided to him by Veale, Lind and Roach stating the Islands were undefendable with the means provided to them. Realistically, if Sturdee, acting as commander-in-chief of the Malay Barrier theatre of operations, was serious about defending the Islands to delay the enemy for any substantial time, he perhaps could have visited the Islands to assess the situation for himself and planned accordingly. If the expectation was that the Islands would be overrun, any reconnaissance was unnecessary because the battalions were already marked for defeat. Either way, it was unprofessional to throw away a brigade for a little

---

<sup>425</sup> Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, p. 287.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

time gained in delaying the Japanese forces when Australia was struggling to conserve its military personnel and materials for later engagements. As it turned out Sturdee's fallback position was that he could blame others for any military setback resulting from the loss of the Islands.

When Sturdee's military plans failed he used Air Chief Marshal Burnett and Roach as scapegoats for his military setbacks at Ambon. Sturdee wrote to Long on 8 February 1955 regarding the Forward Observation Line strategy claiming:

With regard to what you call the Chiefs of Staffs Forward Observation Line, you will realise that it was most important that we should have the earliest warning of the approach of Japanese Forces, and for this purpose air forces had to be established in the islands as far North as possible. However the Chief of the Air Staff declined to establish air forces there unless there were army garrisons to protect their air fields. With great reluctance I agreed to send a battalion group to each of Rabaul, Timor and Ambon (the last two could only be despatch- after the outbreak of war with Japan) This decision was made fairly early in 1941. I realised at the time that these forces would be would be swallowed up if the Japs made a determined attack in force, but these garrison were the smallest self-contained units then in existence ...

I think that you have let Roach off lightly, he was a squealer from the moment he got to Darwin and I was concerned with his effect on the fighting moral of his battalion.

From the time that he arrived at Ambon he never let up.

His final message was demanding that ships be sent to Ambon to take the force out, that was before the Japs arrived. Not only did he sent [sic] to me but he repeated it to Wavell at ABDACOM HQ (a channel he was not authorized to use) indicating to me that he had lost his punch. As it turned out I should have left him there to go in the bag and saved a man like Scott for further useful service.

Anyway I do not press for the case against Roach to be painted any blacker. I might say I did not receive any similar squeals from Timor or Rabaul.<sup>428</sup>

Arguably, in this letter to Long, Sturdee expresses Dixon's criteria that incompetents have 'an undue readiness to find scapegoats for military setbacks' and act-out in blaming others for their own setbacks.

---

<sup>428</sup> National Archives of Australia, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, pp. 5-6.



For example, in 1955 Sturdee suggested that, although he had been reluctant at the time, he was acting under pressure to accommodate Burnett's plan to send the garrisons to Ambon, Timor and Rabaul to protect the airfields. Burnett had conceived of this plan when meeting the Dutch Chiefs of Staffs on 21 February 1941 at Batavia and ratified it four days later at the Singapore Conference. After the delegates at Singapore accepted the proposal Burnett insisted that the army provide security forces for his airfields otherwise he was not prepared to further ratify the previously agreed to arrangements. Notwithstanding Burnett's insistence, Sturdee had the authority to reject the scheme if he felt it was not in the Army's interests or if it was strategically unsustainable and he had had ten months to reconsider that commitment before the war broke-out. The point is, Burnett suggested the Army should supply troops to provide security for his airfields in the Islands but Sturdee had the independent authority to accept or reject the plan and as CGS the final decision was his alone to make.

Misdirecting the blame for the Ambon disaster onto Roach was another example of Sturdee's reluctance to take responsibility for his own military setbacks. Roach was acting responsibly at the time in requesting information from AHQ for the role of Gull Force after Sturdee abnegated his responsibilities as nominal Commander-in-Chief of the island forces by failing to provide Operation Instruction No. 15 to his task forces. Sturdee's rejection of reports from Roach that the Island could not be held longer than a few days stemmed from his conservative tendency to ignore unpalatable information which conflicted with his own perceptions. Sturdee's answers to the problem were to ignore intelligence that conflicted with his plans, or threatened his authority, and to attack Roach rather than reassess the plan. Notwithstanding Roach's and Lind's

responsible approaches to rectifying a bad plan, it was Sturdee's decision to remain committed to the Forward Observation Line strategy despite the warnings of his subordinates. After the war Sturdee had found a convenient scapegoat in Roach, despite his recall from Ambon before it was lost to Ito's forces.

Sturdee's sending of troops to Ambon was incompetent where he sacrificed Australian troops ostensibly to obtain a few days of forward observation. This claim is upheld by Australian policy of the time which stated that, in the case of Rabaul, 'we [the government] consider it essential to maintain a forward air observation line as long as possible and to make the enemy fight for this line rather than abandon it at first threat'.<sup>429</sup> This policy was repeated by Rowel when he wrote to Roach that, 'your staunch defence [of Ambon] will have important effect especially in regard to future Australia Dutch cooperation'. Wavell also endorsed this policy when he wrote to Sturdee concerning Roach's imminent dismissal stating that, 'I am opposed to handing out important objectives [like Ambon] to enemy without making them fight for it'.

Even Scott believed that he was fighting at Ambon for the above reasons. He wrote that:

Gull is the first objective chosen by the enemy & where A.I.F. troops are assisting the Dutch! The repercussions likely to follow either a good or a bad show by Australia are going to be considerable & far reaching. A stubborn resistance and a good fight even against overwhelming odds now, must stiffen resistance everywhere and clinch our association with the N.E.I. not to mention the effect on the U.S.A. Withdrawal or a weak resistance will set the pace for future threats or worse, in the near Pacific Ocean area & Australia itself.<sup>430</sup>

And following the Ambon battle he expressed his opinion that:

---

<sup>429</sup> National Archives of Australia, [1941 File - Yellow Tab] New Caledonia (& other Pacific Islands): Defence of, A3300, 218A, p. 202.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

I desire to place on record my unalterable conviction that the task allotted to “Gull Force” which was a simple one, viz; “You will assist the Dutch Forces to defend the Island of Ambon with the object of delaying for as long as possible the southward advance of the enemy with the available troops and equipment under your command”, was entirely justified. “Gull Force” did in fact hold up a complete Japanese Division with its transports and adequate Naval and Air support for at least two weeks and inflicted heavy loss upon the enemy.<sup>431</sup>

Contrary to Scott’s claims, however, the putting up of resistance against overwhelming forces made little difference to the war effort and failed to delay the Japanese for more than a week or two as they advanced on schedule to take Ambon and eventually Java.

As it transpired, the Japanese had originally planned to take Ambon before 6 February to maintain their schedule for taking the larger prize of Java. The latest time Ambon needed to be taken before delaying the planned invasion of Java was 16 February. Ito’s regiment invaded Ambon within the allotted schedule on 31 January and had completed his objectives by 3 February; arguably there was no delay to the Japanese advance as claimed by Scott.<sup>432</sup> As for Scott’s further claim that the Ambon battle had ‘inflicted heavy loss upon the enemy’, it seems little consolation when compared with the larger picture where the overall Malay Barrier area of operations had cost Australia an entire brigade for no appreciable gains.

The suppression and distortion of news from the front rationalised as necessary for morale and or security also came under Sturdee’s control after the Australian public learned something of the loss of Rabaul, Ambon and eventually Dutch Timor. It was at this time that Sturdee and the Curtin Government faced a problem in controlling political fallout regarding the loss of the three battalions in the Islands. During this

---

<sup>431</sup> National Archives of Australia, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, p. 3.

<sup>432</sup> Japanese Monograph 101: Naval Operations in the Invasion of Netherlands East Indies, Dec. 1941 - Mar. 1942, p. 12.

period the government needed to conceal its military failures regarding the Malay Barrier. The first indication that the government was manipulating the press on this issue came on 28 January 1942 following a *Sydney Sun* newspaper article headline claiming the ‘*R.A.A.F. shocks Japs: Militia Holds Out in Rabaul; New Air Blows Likely*’. The article ended with the statement claiming ‘military experts believe that Rabaul garrison should be able to hold out until sufficient aid arrives, and thus prevent the Japanese from establishing an important base on New Britain’.<sup>433</sup>

The military expert in this instance must have been Sturdee, or someone approved by him, otherwise the story could not have been published owing to government imposed wartime censorship. From a position of hindsight, this was obviously propaganda put about by Sturdee to mitigate the loss of Rabaul, an island campaign that came directly under his command. The article was misleading because both the Government and Sturdee knew there would be no aid directed towards the garrison at Rabaul. The Government and Sturdee had misled the press where they were aware that there was no aid for Lark Force because there were no militia holding out at Rabaul.

The day after the article was published Sir Archdale Parkhill<sup>434</sup> wrote to Frank Forde, the Minister for the Army, raising concerns about his son, Lieutenant Bruce Parkhill, who was serving at Rabaul. He also raised several issues about the *Sydney Sun* story. Parkhill complained that when he asked the editor of the newspaper where he had

---

<sup>433</sup> National Archives of Australia, Court of Inquiry Vol 1, with Reference to the Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor and Ambon - Volume 1 - Reports Part 1, AWM113, MH1/121, p. 137.

<sup>434</sup> Sir Archdale Parkhill (1878-1947). Federal Member for Warringah elected 1927. Influential conservative United Australian Party politician and Minister for Defence 1934-1937. Traditionalist and strong supporter of Imperial Defence and the development of the Singapore Strategy. He lost his seat in 1937.

obtained his information for the Rabaul article, the editor at first claimed it had come from the Department of Information. Under further pressure from Parkhill, however, the editor confessed that AHQ had supplied the story. Accordingly, Parkhill complained to Forde that AHQ should refrain from publishing such stories as it had had an upsetting effect on the relatives of the soldiers involved, especially when there seemed to be no basis of truth in the article.<sup>435</sup>

If the *Sydney Sun* article was propaganda aimed at mollifying the Australian people it had the opposite effect. On 6 February, Forde wrote to Curtin explaining that he had received repeated requests for information from ‘parents, brothers and wives’, as well as from the public in general, about the troops at Rabaul and whether anything was being organised to relieve them. Forde informed Curtin that close relatives were becoming ‘bitter and hostile’ owing to the lack of information being distributed, especially where they harboured the perception that although the government had said something could be done to relieve Rabaul this was not happening.<sup>436</sup>

Reacting to the growing concerns of the public Forde wrote to Curtin that if the public became aware of how the matter of Rabaul was ‘being handled’ it would be a great shock to them. As it stood the government was not prepared to or could not do anything about relieving Rabaul under the prevailing circumstances. Forde feared the relatives of the men at Rabaul would make their concerns public and he warned Curtin that the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff must be asked to gather information about the situation

---

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

at Rabaul in case it got out of hand politically.<sup>437</sup> In the interim, Forde received an extract of a letter addressed to his attention from Rabaul, by way of Maurice Blackburn, condemning the state of the military dispositions at Rabaul before it was attacked.

Interestingly, the letter described similar concerns to those Roach had expressed for the defence of Ambon garrison and that Leggatt had held for the defence of Dutch Timor.<sup>438</sup> The anonymous writer of the letter described the military position at Rabaul as hopeless where there was a lack of adequate artillery, antiaircraft guns, antitank guns (there were two; one with a cracked breach block) and mortars, sickness was taking its toll on the troops and reinforcements were needed to bolster the garrison where it needed to cover over 65 kilometres of coastline. This letter served to undermine Sturdee's claim to Long in 1955 that there were no 'squealers' at Rabaul or Timor.<sup>439</sup> Nevertheless, the letter finished with the opinion that three battalions could barely hold the island if they did not obtain adequate field artillery and antiaircraft guns.<sup>440</sup>

On 3 February, RW Robson, the managing director of Pacific Publications had obtained information about the battle for Rabaul from people who had managed to escape to New Guinea. He mailed Forde a summary of the events and suggested to the minister that he should inform the Australian public of the whole truth behind the disaster. Forde's response was to assure Robson that, pending national security issues, he would provide

---

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Wray, *Timor 1942: Australian Commandos at War with the Japanese*, p. 36.

<sup>439</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384*, p. 6.

<sup>440</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Court of Inquiry Vol 1, with Reference to the Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor and Ambon - Volume 1 - Reports Part 1, AWM113, MH1/121*, p. 170.

information to the public when it became available.<sup>441</sup> However, Forde withheld the full extent of what happened at Rabaul from the public because of the potential political ramifications.

On 11 February, the Advisory War Council met again with the Chiefs of Staff to discuss the question of relief for the Rabaul garrison, or as far as possible, to make an official statement for the benefit of mollifying the relatives of those abandoned at Rabaul. Nothing recorded in the minutes suggests that any discussion took place on the subject of the relief of Rabaul. The Advisory War Council simply recommended that no public statement should be made on the basis that any information revealed to the Japanese could alter the dispositions of Japanese troops required to hold Rabaul.<sup>442</sup>

Following the above Advisory War Council meeting Percy Spender, member of the opposition United Australia Party and member of the Advisory War Council, wrote to Curtin regarding the decision of making no public statement about Rabaul. Oddly, Spender seemed to have misapprehended the Curtin/Sturdee policy of abandoning Rabaul to the Japanese when he was at the meeting. He wrote:

I thought much of this over-night together with the position of the A.I.F. at Ambon. There is no doubt whatever that there is a rising restlessness amongst the people whose sons and relatives are in those places and it is certain that the Government will, at some stage, have to satisfy the public that all means were taken to render succour to them ... with respect to the Australian Military Forces at Rabaul, there has been no news as to their fate since the time the Japanese entered Rabaul harbour. The views of the Chiefs of Staff is that no assistance can be sent to them as we have not the facilities available ... are we in danger ourselves of following with our limited resources the policy which you yourself described, in respect to other matters, as penny packet policy? We have but limited resources of our own, but I am sure that the Australian people will, at some stage, demand to know in what way we

---

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., pp. 149-55.

<sup>442</sup> National Archives of Australia, Advisory War Council Minutes (Original Set) Chronological Series, A5954, 812/1 to 815/2, Volume 4, Minute 749, 11 February 1942, p. 83.

discharged our duties to the men at these various scattered places and this is the time, it seems to me, when our minds should be crystallised upon it.<sup>443</sup>

Spender's prediction here would prove partially correct, as over the following two weeks pressure grew on the Government, and consequently Sturdee, to reveal to the public something of what they knew about the men and women abandoned at Rabaul.

Spender's concerns that the Australian Government would be required to justify the way it had discharged its duty to the men and women in the islands, however, did not happen and remained hidden behind secrecy regulations and media suppression for decades to come. Patsy Adam-Smith highlighted this point when she wrote:

Not until forty-seven years later was the official report on this matter released, and then it was scarcely mentioned in the news; some of the media believed it was too 'sensational' (not in the sense of disbelieving the facts but of 'titillating the senses of those no better than the perpetrators themselves'). Others believed that, as it happened almost fifty years ago, we should not "open up old wounds". Those victims still living, say, "Whose wounds?"<sup>444</sup>

Because of government secrecy and the media's suppression of the 'sensational' truth behind the Rabaul debacle, it not only helped to prevent the 'titillation' of the 'perpetrators' but also protected the reputations of those responsible for sending the troops to the islands from the beginning.

The conclusions drawn from the official inquiry into the Japanese landings at Rabaul, Timor and Ambon were a detailed look at what happened in the islands, not why the troops were sent there or whether it was a sensible grand strategy or military deployment. Sturdee escaped the scrutiny of the enquiry and any negative assessment of his management of the Islands strategy, as the inquiry never questioned his failed

---

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., pp. 163-65.

<sup>444</sup> Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea*, p. 363.



approach in disposing of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's battalions. Even after the war, when the effects of Japanese internment on Australian prisoners of war from the islands had become known, Sturdee's role in the islands debacle remained unapproachable.

This lack of accountability in Sturdee's case seems strange considering the ruthless way in which the military usually weeded out its weary or incompetent officers. As demonstrated in Chapter One, Lind sacked Youl because he felt he was not up to the standard of a lieutenant colonel commanding a battalion. Sturdee sacked Roach for his apparent undermining the morale of the Ambon garrison. After the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Sturdee instigated an inquiry against Bennett ostensibly because he had escaped to Australia and abandoned his troops. There seemed to be a double standard being applied to Sturdee after he had abandoned the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to his failed strategy. Garth Pratten's book *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War* demonstrated the pragmatism of the military in its disposal of many World War I vintage battalion commanders for younger better-experienced veterans with more recent Middle East service.<sup>445</sup> Pragmatism ruled in the disposal of Australian Army officers in the interest of military efficiency except, it seems, in the case of Sturdee.

Had there been an inquiry into Sturdee's management of the Malay Barrier debacle it would have been difficult for him to claim that the islands had fallen owing to bad luck. Roach, Tanner and Lind had all tried to warn Sturdee that the decision to send Gull Force to Ambon was loaded with the foreseeable consequences of failure. If Sturdee had claimed he did not anticipate the failure of the Ambon campaign he would have been

---

<sup>445</sup> Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*, Appendix 1, p. 312.

lying. He could not deny that Roach and the others had accurately aired their concerns about the potential fall of Ambon weeks or months before it happened. Sturdee had led what was arguably one of the great disasters in Australia's military history, yet he escaped the consequences of his ineffective leadership and the failure of the Malay Barrier strategy.

Ultimately, Australian men and women of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade paid dearly for Sturdee's incompetent approach to the Malay Barrier strategy and his eight months of inaction regarding the Forward Observation Line plan. His AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15 was drawn up as early as March 1941 and remained basically unaltered until it was supposedly issued to Ambon on 13 January 1942. Little if any consideration was given to preserving the 2/21<sup>st</sup> and 2/40<sup>th</sup> battalions on mainland Australia despite the protestations of Lind, Roach and Tanner to Sturdee that Ambon could not stand against a determined attack. This happened because of Sturdee's incompetence where he had held fast to the outdated Forward Observation Line strategy formulated at Singapore the year before. He understood the likely consequences of his decision to continue with sending troops to Ambon and Timor and with maintaining the Rabaul garrison. This point is underscored by Curtin's letter to Roosevelt explaining Australia's policy of abandoning its troops at Rabaul. It seems Sturdee ignored the consequences of his actions in the case of Ambon because his expectations were that it would not stand against a determined Japanese attack. In taking for granted that Ambon would fall it seems that weighing the effects of any future consequences were superfluous to Sturdee's considerations.

Under the circumstances it is not difficult to agree with Horner's assertion that AHQ should be indicted for its failure in military planning when it came to Rabaul, Ambon and Timor. In this case, Sturdee failed to listen to his commanders on the spot, ignored the principle of the concentration of forces, dissipated his troops to unsupported isolated outposts to be gathered up piecemeal by Japanese forces. He had sacrificed what amounted to be a brigade at a time when Australia was considered at its weakest and at a time of its greatest threat of hostile military invasion.

He allowed his torpor to continue until he was shaken out of it by the news that Singapore had fallen. It was on this day that he, albeit obliquely, admitted failing in his leadership by violating the principles of the concentration of forces by sending inadequate Australian troops against overwhelmingly stronger Japanese forces when he knew it would have been better to withhold them in Australia. He later admitted that the small garrisons to which he had sent the inadequate 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's battalions were incapable of withstanding even a moderate scale of attack. Under the prevailing circumstances Scott's persistent support of Sturdee's strategy was of little consolation. The fact remains that the Malay Barrier was a disaster of the highest magnitude in Australia's military history during the Second World War and Sturdee was its architect.

The final example according to Dixon's criteria is cognitive dissonance (*'belief in mystical-fate, bad luck etc'*). Neither the historical documents nor the inquiry evidence into the fall of Ambon, Timor and Rabaul following aftermath of the Islands campaign fully addressed Sturdee's responsibility for planning the campaign or its consequent failure. In representing AHQ, the nearest explanation Rowell could give was that it was

sheer bad luck that the scale of attack was all wrong, that the Japanese employed a division against a battalion and that the Japanese intended taking Ambon, Timor and in making Rabaul their main base. This example of cognitive dissonance, where people rationalise an irrational situation by inventing a comfortable illusion, further underscores the incompetence of AHQ at the time.

The facts are, the planning and execution of the Forward Observation Line strategy was not carried out by the hand of 'bad luck', but through the living agency of general military officers. Bad luck did not send understaffed, under resourced and unsupported battalions to Ambon, Timor and Rabaul; it was AHQ that carried out that role in the personages of Sturdee and Rowell. In explaining this phenomenon, Dixon suggested that, 'an inability to admit one has been in the wrong will be greater the more wrong one has been, and the more wrong one has been the more bizarre will be subsequent attempts to justify the unjustifiable'<sup>446</sup> and this certainly applies to Rowell in ascribing those events to bizarre bad luck.

Sturdee also demonstrated cognitive dissonance by ignoring conflicting intelligence provided to him by Lind and Roach. Once Sturdee had made the decision to occupy the Island garrisons he became fixed on that course of action. According to Dixon, that type of commitment changes the psychological situation decisively, because there becomes a situation where less emphasis is placed on objectivity and more on partiality and bias in the way in which the person views and evaluates any unpalatable alternatives.<sup>447</sup> The

---

<sup>446</sup> Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, p. 165.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

suggestion is that where the alternatives require too much effort to overcome the real risks involved, emotionally based cognitive dissonance behaviour takes over to negatively influence the subject from making the required adjustments and causes them to remain fixed to the original decision. It seems the more work that is required to rectify a bad decision the stronger the urge is to resist the uncomfortable alternatives. 'In other words, decision-making may well be followed by a period of mental activity that could be described as at the very least somewhat one-sided'.<sup>448</sup> The conclusion under this criteria is that the emotions of the anal obsessive exercises control over the intellect to the point of incompetence where the authoritarian personality possesses knowledge or beliefs which conflict with a decision they have made but are unable to adjust to the new situation.

The contrasts between Sturdee as the competent Chief of the General Staff and Sturdee as the incompetent nominal Commander-in-Chief of the Malay Barrier area of operations are stark when examined against Dixon's criteria of incompetence. As demonstrated above, Sturdee exhibited traits that correlate with Dixon's list of incompetence where he displayed a propensity as nominal Commander-in-Chief to:

1. Waste human resources and ignore the principle of economy of force.
2. Be conservative and cling to outworn tradition.
3. Ignore or reject information which conflicted with his preconceptions.
4. Indecisiveness and abdication of responsibilities when seriously challenged.
5. Obstinate persistence in the face of contrary evidence.
6. Not carry out reconnaissance when required.
7. Apportion blame for military setbacks onto scape goats.
8. Suppress or distort news from the front (ostensibly for morale or security).
9. Fail in overcoming cognitive dissonance by ignoring contrary evidence and attributing military setbacks to mystical forces such as bad luck.

---

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

The evidence that Sturdee was a great Chief of the General Staff is supported by the testimonials of his son-in-law Buckley as well as by Rowell and the biographical texts and remains uncontested. However, Sturdee's role as nominal Commander-in-Chief of the failed the Forward Observation Line strategy during 1941-1942 demonstrates his incompetence in that role.

Clearly, Sturdee's push to occupy the Islands under the prevailing circumstances was militarily unsound. As the man on the spot, Roach pointed out these shortcomings to Sturdee when he suggested the battalions on Timor and Ambon should not be wasted but withdrawn and concentrated to fight at another place where there was at least a better chance of delaying the Japanese advance more decisively. Arguably, Ambon was lost in the planning and follow through stages where the isolated outpost stood no chance of repelling the overwhelming Japanese forces expected to attack the Island. It is obvious that Ambon was a tragedy by design rather than by accident where battalions were intentionally placed in the path of a Japanese Divisions to be taken piecemeal. The responsibility for the fall of Ambon and the other Island garrisons at Timor and Rabaul lies with Sturdee's incompetent management as nominal commander-in-chief of the Forward Observation Line disaster.

## **Conclusion**

In August 1940, the British Chiefs of Staffs produced an appreciation outlining their plans to deter Japan from declaring war on British, Australian, Dutch NEI and American interests in the Far East and Southwest Pacific regions. Assumption 3 of the appreciation considered whether Far East Command should go to war with Japan should it attack the NEI in isolation. This question was raised at the October 1940 Singapore conference and resulted in a mutual air cooperation pact being agreed to five months later between Far East Command, the Netherlands East Indies and Australia on the basis that an attack on one would be considered an attack on all. Called the Malay Barrier strategy, the Far East and Southwest Pacific regions were divided into three areas of operations under British, Dutch and Australian commands. To compensate for the lack of a substantive fleet arriving at Singapore the strategy was formulated to dominate the region with nonexistent aircraft drawn from each domain. Having only 118 mostly outmoded aircraft available between the parties, however, the plan fell short of its projected needs by 1,153 aircraft. Far East Command informed the British Government of their projected requirements but were told they could expect no more than 336 aircraft to be made available to Singapore/Malaya before the end of 1941.

Because Far East Command feared the Dutch would not fight, the British Government asked Australia to help persuade the NEI Government to become partners under the scheme so that they could gain access to their aircraft. Owing to circumstances and despite having no more than one available brigade, Australia offered to provide one brigade group each and four squadrons of aircraft to defend the Dutch islands of Ambon and Timor. However, the garrisoning of Ambon with Australian troops later became

unnecessary after the Van Kleffens publicly broadcast in May 1941 the NEI's intentions to support Far East Command against Japanese aggression and after the NEI's Chiefs of Staffs demonstrated their willingness to reinforce Ambon with their own troops. These two events, in correlation with the weak military situation in Australia, should have triggered the Australian government to review its policy towards Ambon where it had too few military resources realistically to carry out its commitments to the NEI let alone protect mainland Australia. Notwithstanding these facts, Australian policy towards the Malay Barrier remained fixed and Sturdee carried through the plan to garrison Ambon with the last remaining battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF's 2/23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade then located at Darwin.

In March 1941, Sturdee, without prior War Cabinet approval, produced Operation Instruction No. 15 in which he unilaterally revised the Ambon operation down from one nonexistent brigade to one available battalion sized task force. The reduction of forces from a brigade group to a battalion proved necessary because the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was the last remaining 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF brigade in Australia. It was being divided for service at Rabaul, Timor and Ambon and the militia were understaffed, under trained, under resourced and could not be despatched for overseas military service. Sturdee was aware that Gull Force could not hold Ambon against even a moderate scale of attack and demonstrated this knowledge by intentionally withholding badly needed war materials from the task force to prevent them from being captured by the Japanese. The fact that the bulk of the RAN's ships were away serving in the Mediterranean further weakened the plan where no naval support could be made available to Gull Force in protecting its supply route, supporting the island against attack from the sea or withdrawing the troops if required.



Under these conditions Gull Force would be completely isolated and too weak to be expected to delay the Japanese advance for more than a few days.

This expectation had already been made clear to AHQ through successive reports, set down by Veale, Lind, Roach and Tanner, that Ambon could not be defended effectively for more than a few days with the military resources then being made available to Gull Force, if at all. Furthermore, no clear policy objective existed in sending Gull Force to Ambon, as ephemeral policies evolved from creating a mutual air force resources group to protect Singapore/Malaya to demonstrating solidarity with the Dutch to induce them to fight, protecting the RAAF airfield at Ambon, forward defence, demonstrating to the USA a willingness to fight in the hope they would enter the war and save Australia, the 'forward observation line' strategy and, finally, to delaying the Japanese advance for no more than a few days. Notwithstanding the overwhelming strategic evidence that Ambon could not withstand even a moderate attack, Sturdee ignored the risks and lack of a defined policy to press ahead with the plan regardless of the predicted outcome.

The Singapore Conference conclusions and Sturdee's acceptance of them seemed to result from men desperately imagining what could be done with requisite equipment rather than men desperately making do with what they had and planning accordingly. This was borne out by the fact that they were allocating nonexistent aircraft to defend Singapore and Malaya together with the allocation of nonexistent brigades to Timor and Ambon under the support of nonexistent naval resources being drawn from the Mediterranean or Britain. Despite the discrepancies in allocated resources for the Malay Barrier Forward Observation Line, the foreknowledge that Gull Force was too small to

hold out against even a moderate force and the stipulation that Australian troops could not land on Ambon until after war broke out, both Sturdee and Burnett were somehow able to convince the respective Menzies and Curtin War Cabinets that it was a sound strategy.

Even though it became increasingly apparent that the Japanese threat to peace and stability in the Far East region was increasing, Sturdee maintained his commitment to sending 'small penny packet garrisons' to the Islands. Never from March 1941 forward did he react to the changing strategic circumstances of the Southwest Pacific region and review his AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15. Even after war with Japan was declared, and after Curtin had questioned the strategy of scattering small garrisons to Australia's north, Sturdee remained committed to sending troops to Timor and Ambon and maintaining the garrison at Rabaul. Had Sturdee used this opportunity to request time to review AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15 it is possible that Curtin may have allowed it. Curtin's questioning of the Forward Observation Line strategy on 8 December 1941 certainly indicates that he was open to a review of AHQ Operation Instruction No. 15, however, it was Sturdee's stubborn commitment to the Malay Barrier strategy that finally sealed the fate of the men and women at Rabaul and consequently the task forces at Timor and Ambon.

Inexplicably, the War Cabinet had allowed Sturdee to continue with his policy of scattering penny packet garrisons to the islands insofar that if Rabaul were threatened it would not be reinforced or withdrawn but left to face certain capture by overwhelming Japanese forces. This policy was confirmed in a letter sent to Roosevelt by Curtin which

informed the President that Australia would abandon the Islands to the Japanese if they were attacked. Ostensibly, this decision was justified on the basis that a forward observation line was required to warn of enemy movement to the South and to put up a show for the USA of Australia's willingness to fight the Japanese at all costs. By implication this policy was applied to Timor and Ambon also. Sturdee had convinced the War Cabinet that Australia could afford to throw away an entire brigade group for forward observation even though it was beyond the capacity of the small garrisons to survive, against prevailing strategic military principles and at a time when the Australian mainland was being threatened with an attack.

That Australia found itself in this position stems from the fact that Sturdee seems to have obtained substantial influence over the Curtin Government regarding his role as CGS and in providing strategic advice. One example of that power and influence was demonstrated by Sturdee's refusal to send the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to rejoin the 8<sup>th</sup> Division at Singapore. Clearly Curtin held considerable trust in Sturdee's abilities and allowed him the room to maintain the terms of Australia's commitment in supporting the Malay Barrier. However, if the political aims of war are the business of government and one of those aims is to maintain its armies, then it seems Curtin was remiss in allowing Sturdee to unilaterally control the conditions under which the Australia/Dutch agreement would be implemented, especially as it meant throwing away an entire brigade group at a time when Japan was advancing on Australia's doorstep.

In the Ambon case, Sturdee clearly did not expect to repel the invading Japanese or to hold the island for more than a few days. He had provided enough resources to

demonstrate Australia's willingness to fight the Japanese without risking badly needed war materials. His motives should not be confused with those of a general who has planned a conventional campaign to win battles and conserve soldiers but fails to endure because of the unanticipated consequences of war. Sturdee expected defeat, which he demonstrated by planning to preserve as many military resources in Australia as he could while adhering to his penny packet policy in the Islands. Under these conditions it appears Sturdee could afford to ignore the 'unanticipated consequences' of war when he had already anticipated the probable outcome, that of defeat.

After Gull Force arrived at Ambon without any orders outlining its role, Roach attempted to inform AHQ that holding the island was untenable with the resources available to him. He pointed out that without further reinforcements in personnel, artillery, stores, weapons and naval support the Island could not hold for more than a few days. He, together with Tanner, requested the withdrawal of Gull Force to another place, such as Timor or mainland Australia, so that a more decisive defence could be put into effect against the advancing Japanese forces. Ostensibly fearing that Roach had 'lost his punch' and was undermining morale at Ambon, Sturdee had him replaced with Scott two weeks before the Japanese arrived. As predicted, the Japanese attacked Ambon with the equivalent of a division and took the island within three days after overwhelming Gull Force with superior military forces, aircraft and ships.

The outcome of the Ambon disaster brings into question Sturdee's competence as the ostensibly self-appointed nominal Commander-in-Chief of the Island forces, which he took under his personal command. Sturdee was demonstrably a highly qualified staff

general who possessed the knowledge to responsibly consider the consequences of sending a small under resourced task force to an isolated island without any hope of support against even a moderate attack by Japanese forces. Yet despite all his experience, Sturdee demonstrably failed to utilize his talents as CGS realistically to address the inadequacies inherent to the Malay Barrier strategy or to prevent its ultimate failure. In highlighting this incompetence in command, Clausewitz's principles were cited throughout this dissertation to demonstrate the inadequacies of the Malay Barrier strategy. Concerning Clausewitz it has been shown that in a democracy the responsibility for formulating policy lay with the government. This principle was served in the breach here where the Curtin Government failed to restrain Sturdee's tendencies to act ahead of government approval in the formulation of strategic policy; as happened where Sturdee negotiated with the Dutch NEI government to reduce the Australian commitment at Ambon and Timor respectively from one brigade to one battalion each and where he withheld crucial information from the War Cabinet that these forces could not effectively fulfill their roles until after the war with Japan had begun.

Sturdee later accepted that the Islands strategy was all wrong in his paper the *Future Employment of the AIF*, where he admitted that so far as the war against Japan was concerned he had violated the principle of concentration of forces by trying to hold numerous small localities with totally inadequate forces that had had little prospect of withstanding even a moderate scale attack; the principle of cost benefit ratios where the Islands campaign accrued no gains against the sacrifice of a brigade; the principle of economy of force where units were left idle in Australia or were wasted rather than conserved for future battle; the principle on not isolating outposts from the main body

as happened when he left the garrisons at Ambon, Timor and Rabaul without supplies, military support or the opportunity to fall back into the main force; the principle of reconnaissance where he ignored the reports of his subordinates Lind, Roach and Tanner even as they revealed the predictable loss of Ambon to incompetent strategy; and the principle of defence, where withdrawing to a more decisive point to deal out blows against an enemy at a more decisive point is considered wiser than losing units piecemeal in isolated positions.

The Malay Barrier strategy was flawed because it was based on imaginary aircraft numbers. It was principally aimed at obtaining Dutch air support for Singapore/Malaya and encouraging the Dutch to fight (a policy supporting the defence of Singapore/Malaya not Australia or the NEI). Once the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs M Van Kleffens broadcast the intentions of the Dutch NEI to fight alongside Far East Command the requirement to garrison Ambon became redundant, as far as Australian interests were concerned, where the object of the British policy had been achieved after the Dutch openly committed to militarily supporting Singapore/Malaya. Ambon was never on the Australian strategic agenda until the British Government asked for help in obtaining Dutch air support for Singapore/Malaya and after it was proposed to the Australian Singapore Conference delegates by the Dutch CGS at Bandung.

Clearly, Australia was never inextricably bound to the Malay Barrier strategy and could have rejected the garrisoning of Ambon. The Australian government had full independence to formulate military policy and strategy concerning its Malay Barrier area of responsibilities and to Australia's defence without fear of British and Dutch

influence, as was openly stated at the Singapore conferences. Nevertheless, it was mainly Sturdee acting in his role as strategic advisor to the War Cabinet who led the Australian government to bind itself to the ill advised policy of sending Gull Force to Ambon without the necessary requirements to satisfy the needs of such a strategy. The Ambon fiasco must rest on Sturdee's incompetence where he failed adequately to consider the military situation for what it was and where he failed to use that analysis to avoid the likely outcome.

# Appendix One – Ambon Dispositions Map

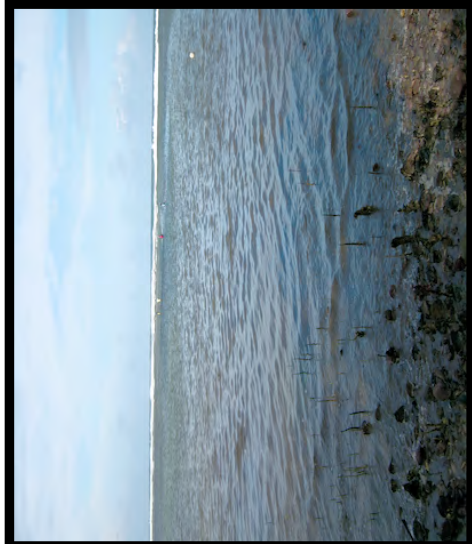




## Appendix Two - Ambon Photographs



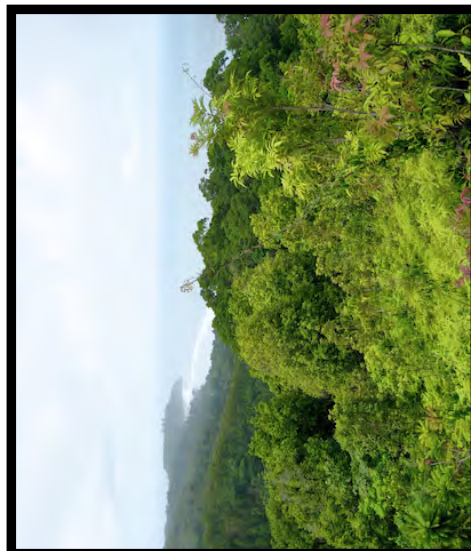
Landing approach of Japanese 1st Battalion



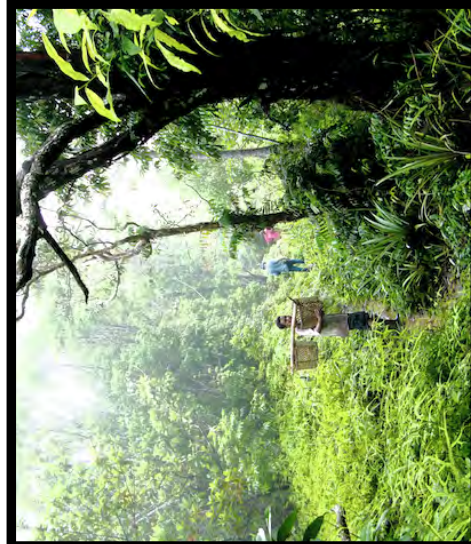
Landing approach of Japanese 3rd Battalion



Landing approach of Japanese 2nd Battalion



Landing site of Japanese 2nd Battalion near Hutumuri



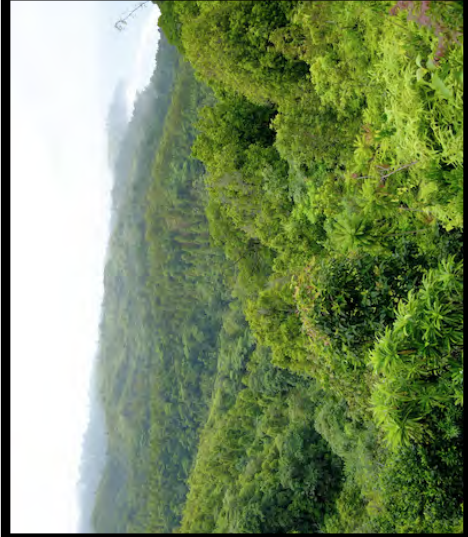
Horse track to Dutch Ambush above Rutung Village



Slopes leading up to Dutch ambush above Rutung Village



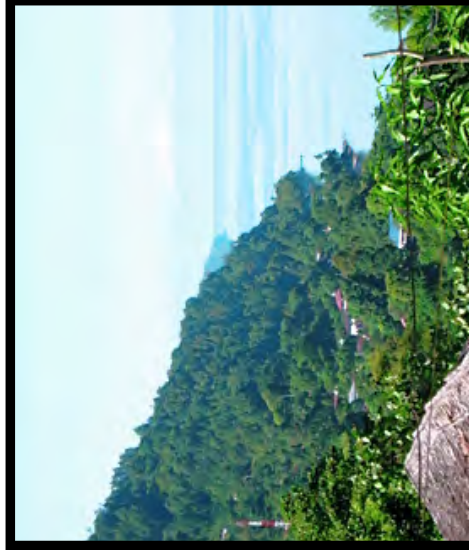
Regimental Aid Post at Amahusu



The slopes of Mt Nona looking west



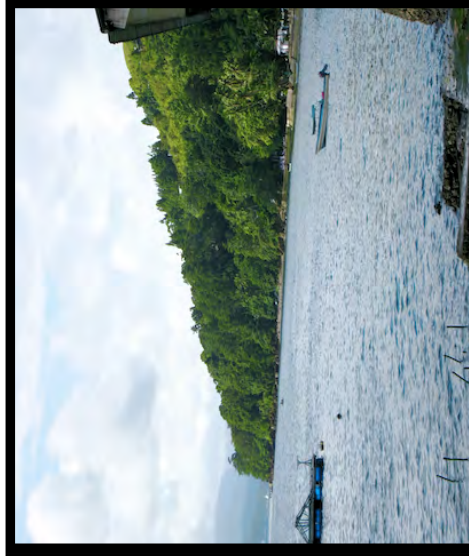
The mouth of Ambon Bay



Amahusu Village from Amahusu Line



Road to Ambon from Amahusu



The lower slopes of the Amahusu Line at Amahusu



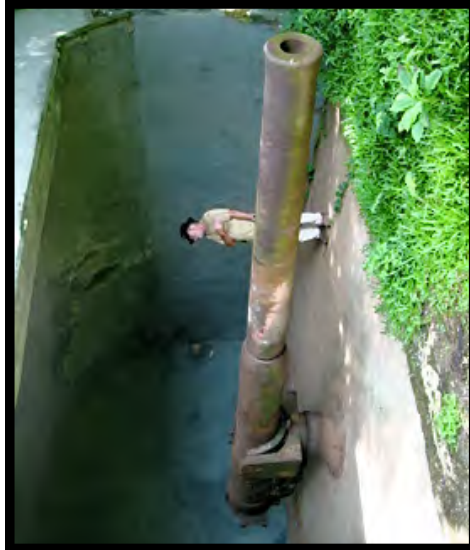
Pillbox on Amahusu Ambon road



D Company HQ cave at foot of Amahusu Line



D Company HQ cave at foot of Amahusu Line



Six inch Naval Gun in Benteng artillery bunker



Slopes of the Amahusu Line



The slopes of the Amahusu Line on Mt Nona



Six inch Naval Gun in Benteng artillery bunker



No. 2 Naval Gun bunker at Benteng



No. 1 Naval Gun bunker at Benteng



Children playing on pillbox at Hill 130 Paso



Paso plains below Hill 130



Dutch position on Hill 130 at Paso



Pillbox at Hill 130 Paso



Paso below Hill 130



Baguala Bay Paso



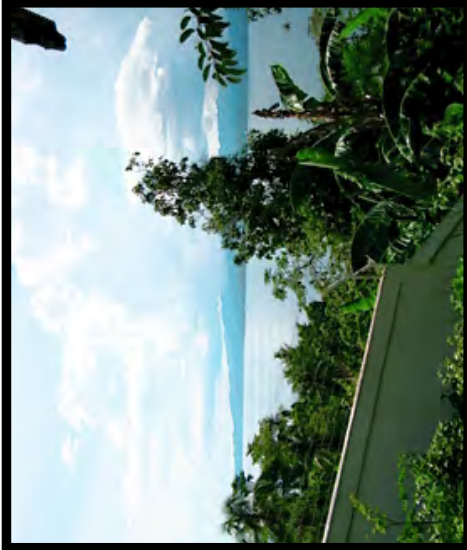
Pillbox on upper reaches of Amahusu Line facing west



Six inch Naval Gun in bunker on slopes of Hill 130



Coastal road from Hitumuri and Rutung Villages



View to mouth of Ambon bay from Benteng artillery bunkers



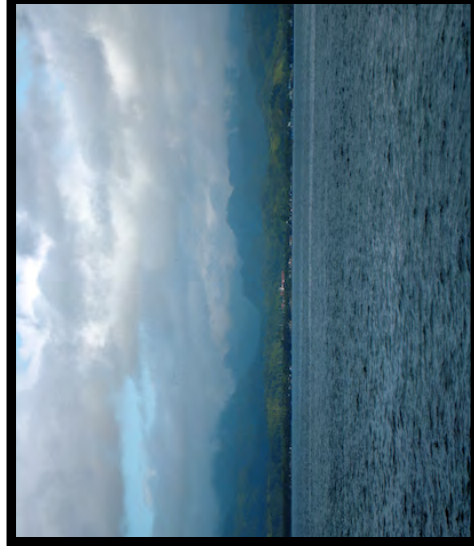
Pillbox on Amahusu Line



Upper reaches of Amahusu Line



Massacre Memorial site at Tawiri Village near Laha



Laha Airfield from Amahusu



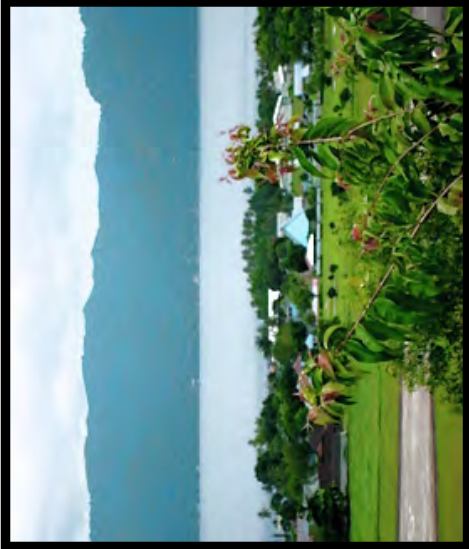
Laha from slopes of Mt Nona



A memorial marking a massacre site at Tawiri



Pillbox above Laha Airfield



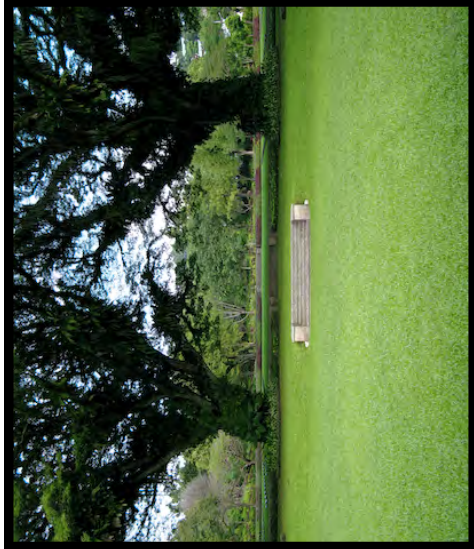
Amahusu from Laha Airfield



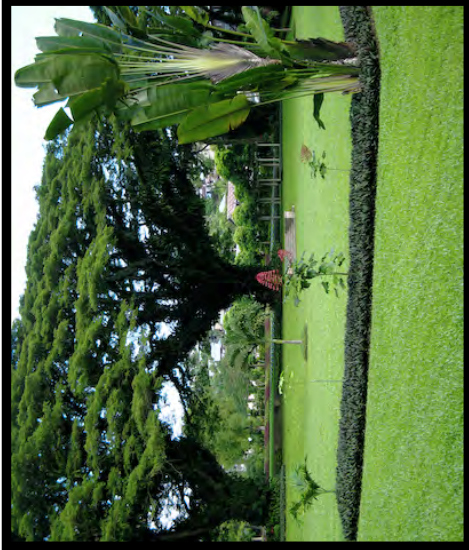
Eri from Laha Airfield



Gates to Tan Tui Cemetery



Entrance to Tan Tui War Graves



Tan Tui Cemetery



Tan Tui Cemetery



Tan Tui Cemetery



Headstone of unknown soldier at Tan Tui Cemetery

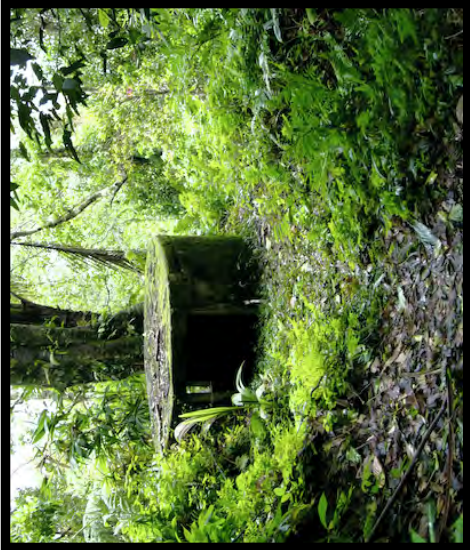


Memorial to the men of Gull Force at Tan Tui



Kudamati Memorial to people of Ambon from the RSL & RSSA





Pillbox at Mt Serimau



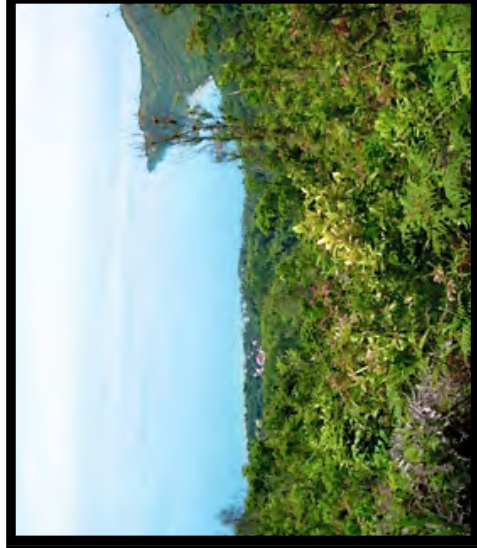
Pillbox at Mt Serimau



Dutch entrenchments at top of Mt Serimau



Latuhalat



Seri Village from Mt Seri



Iron Hat Peak with Mt Nona in the background

## Bibliography

### Archives (58)

National Archives of Australia, Combined Far Eastern Appreciation of Australian Chiefs of Staff, February 1941, A2671, 64/1941, 13 Feb 1941 - 18 Mar 1941

———, Policy- Far East Unified Command at Ambon, A5954, 561/10, April - May 1941

———, Operations A.B.D.A. Area. Defence of Ambon, A5954, 552/4, 1942 -1942,

———, War Cabinet/Advisory War Council Note Books, Chronological Series, A9240, 10 June 1941-19 January 1946,

———, Australian War Memorial, 2nd Australian Imperial Force and Commonwealth Military Forces Unit War Diaries, 1939-45 War, 23rd Brigade, AWM52, 8/2/23, May-June 1942

———, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Operations:] Sparrow and Gull Force, Timor and Ambon, Establishment and Order of Battle, 1941-1942, AWM54, 571/4/35, 1941-1942,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] "Sparrow Force", Tactical Report by C.O. 2/40 Infantry Battalion 14/10/1941. Report by Major AJM Wilson O.C., 2/1 Battery on Fixed Defences, Koepang 14/10/1941. Reconnaissance Report from 6-12/10/1941, Ambon and Timor by Major Jw Fletcher B.M. 23rd Infantry Brigade - 7 M.D. Report by Colonel WCD Veale C.R.A.E. - Report by Major Williamson C.O. 2/11 Field Coy on Field Engineer Facilities and Requirements at Ambon and Timor, Report by Captain Ransom 14/10/1941 on Reconnaissance Battery Site and Fortress Engineer Problem, AWM54, 573/6/6, 1941-1941,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Invasion of Ambon and Timor, 1942, AWM54, 573/6/16, 1942 -1947,

———, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Operations:], Army Headquarters Operation Instruction No 15, (Advanced Copy) and Raising of Units 1941-1942 "Gull and Sparrow" Forces, AWM54, 571/4/46, 1941-1942,

———, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Administration:] Sparrow and Gull Force - Timor and Ambon, Reports and Maps on Defence - Plans, Stores Requirements, and Local Conditions, October 1941, AWM54, 571/3/4, 1941-1941,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Copy of a Report by Lt Col E C B Scriven CRE 8th Division, on a Visit to Ambon, March 1941, AWM54, 573/6/11, 1941-1941,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Messages Exchanged between Gull Force and AHQ, Relative to Criticism of the Means to Defend Ambon. The Policy Being Employed and the Subsequent Relief of Command of Lieutenant Colonel L N Roach by Lieutenant Colonel J W R Scott, January 1942 [Reference Copy], AWM54, 573/6/10B, 1942 -1943,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Ambon and Timor. Proposed Dispatch of Troops to Netherlands East Indies, Tentative Draft of Probable Requirements for the Establishment of Advanced Bases at Koepang and Ambon, April - May 1941, AWM54, 573/6/5, 1941 -1941,

———, Army Headquarters Operation Instruction No.15 (Advanced Copy) and Raising of Units 1941-1942 Gull and Sparrow Force, AWM54, 571/4/46, 1941-1942,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Administration:] from G3 Journal before 5th April 1942. Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service, the Battle for Ambon, January-February 1942, AWM54, 573/4/2, 1942-1944,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Gull and Sparrow Dates of Disembarkation, Information Regarding Rations - Petrol Supply and Ammunition, Correspondence between Col Scott and Lt Col J Roach Re Equipment, 1941, AWM54, 573/6/3, 1941-1942,

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Administration:] Defence of Ambon Dec 1941 to Dec 1942, the Action in Timor, AWM54, 573/4/1, 1941-1942,

———, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 3 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 3 [Bound], Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 3, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 5, 1942-1942

———, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 1, AWM54, 576/6/1A, 1939-45,

———, Report on Ambon and Hainan Part 2, AWM54, 573/6/1B, Part 2, 1939-45,

———, Battle Laitimor Peninsular Ambon 1942. Extracts from a Letter Written by Unknown Member of 2/21 Australian Infantry Battalion, AWM54, 573/6/15,

———, [Court of Inquiry and Investigations - General:] Vol. 1 with Reference to Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor, Ambon, Volume 1, Evidence Re Timor and Ambon [Two Copies] Volume 1, AWM54, 229/1/7 PART 1, 1942-1942,

———, Personal Records Colonel W.J.R. Scott, War of 1939-45, AWM67, 3/353, 1954-1960,

———, Official History, 1939-45, War: Records of Gavin Long, AWM67, 3/384, 1953-1956,

———, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:]  
Newnham, CF, Capt, AWM67, 3/285, 1950-1950

———, Court of Inquiry Vol 1, with Reference to the Landing of Japanese Forces in  
New Britain, Timor and Ambon - Volume 1 - Reports Part 1, AWM113, MH1/121,  
1942-1942,

———, Ambon - Japanese Invasion 1942 - Battle for Ambon, B6121/3, 115A, 1942  
-1942,

———, Re; Lt. Col. G.A.D. Youl. M.C. Ex 2/40th Bn. A.I.F., MP508/1, 251/751/1834,  
1941-1942,

———, T419 Lt. Col. G.A.D. Youl, M.C., MP508/1, 251/82/222, 1942-1942,

———, Ambon - Cables Re Command Etc, MP729/7, 74/421/5, 1941 -1941,

———, Report on the Japanese Invasion of Ambon, MP729/7, 35/421/67, 1942,

———, Ambon & Timor: A.H.Q. Operation Instruction No.15, MP729/7, 37/421/373,  
1941-1941,

———, Timor - Ambon, MP729/7, 47/422/181, 1941-1942,

———, Command 2/21 Inf. Bn. [Ambon. Complaint by Lt. Col. L.N. Roach],  
MP742/1, R/2/1803, 1942 -1947,

———, Advanced Bases Koepang and Ambon, MP1185/8, 2026/12/193, 1941-1941,

———, Ambon Offensive Operation - History of Imperial Japanese Army Unit on  
Ambon, Second World War, MSS1912, 2007,

———, War Cabinet Agendum - No 106/1942 and Supplements 1-3 Future  
Employment of the AIF, A2671, 106/1942, 1942

———, Strategical Situation in Far East and Pacific Following the Fall of Singapore.  
Future Employment of AIF, A816, 52/302/142, 1942-1942

———, Lecture on the Plan of Concentration by Lieut-Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, D.S.O.,  
O.B.E. Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, AWM54, 243/6/150, 1933

———, 2nd Australian Imperial Force and Commonwealth Military Forces Unit  
Diaries, 1939-1945 War, AWM52, 8/2/23

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Reports from Gull Force to  
General Sir Archibald Wavell Re Fall Ambonia to Japanese - Reports on Bombing Raid  
on Ambon by Japanese, 7 Jan 1942, AWM54, 573/6/8, 1941-1942

———, Report by Lt W.T. Jinkins on Japanese Attack on Ambon 30th Jan 1942 to 3rd Feb 1942. Details of Prison Camp, and Japanese Dispositions - Map of Tan Toey Camp 1942, AWM54, 573/6/12, 1942-1942

———, [Prisoners of War and Internees - Escapes:] Interrogation of Escapees New Ireland - Interview with Evacuees - Escape of AIF and Dutch Officers from Amboina - Reports from an Officer who Escaped from the Island of Ambon - Lieutenant W A M Chapman, Lieutenant Jinkins 2/21 Battalion Lieutenant I McBride - on Japanese Attack on Ambon, 30 January to 3 February 1942, AWM54, 779/10/7, 1942

———, Court of Inquiry Vol 1, with Reference to the Landing of Japanese Forces in New Britain, Timor and Ambon - Volume 1 - Reports Part 2, AWM113, MH1/121, 1942-1942

———, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records of Gavin Long, General Editor:] Extract Book No 19 "Revision - Ambon" [Includes Notes and Correspondence Re Gull Force], AWM67, 5/19, 1950-1951

———, [1941 File - Yellow Tab] New Caledonia (& other Pacific Islands): Defence of, A3300, 218A, 1941-1942

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports Concerning Laha Battles -1942 Australian Prisoners of War captured at Ambon Japanese Statements -: List of Japanese who may be either eye witness to cognisant of, or connected with Laha Massacres 1945, AWM54, 573/6/2

———, [Official History, 1939-45 War: Records Gavin Long, General Editor:] Note Book No 46 (February 1944) - [Lt-Col T Mills, WM Hughes, Maj HV Howe, Lt-Col WEH Stanner], AWM67, 2/46, 1944-1944

———, [Publication] Dispatch by the Supreme Commander of the ABDA Area to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in the South West Pacific, A5954, 1979/85, 1942-1942

———, Australian Troops at Rabaul, Java, Timor and Ambon. Question of Relief and Maintenance of Contact, A5954, 532/, 1942-1943

———, War Records. Defence Staff Conversations with Netherlands East Indies Government. Singapore 1941 Batavia 1941, A981, DEF143, 1941 -1942

———, [Ambon (1941-1942) - (Gull Force) - Reports:] Gull and Sparrow Force Outline Plans of Commanders for Defence of Ambon and Timor - Reconnaissance Reports, Including Reports on Combined H.Q. Koepang and Ambon, 1941, AWM54, 573/6/4, 1941 -1941

———, [Timor (1941-1942) - (Sparrow Force and Lancer Force) - Operations:] Report on Operations of Australian Military Forces in Timor, Part 1 - Decision to Send Forces to Timor; Part 2 - Operations in Dutch Timor; Part 3 - Operations at Dilli; Part 4 - Operations in Portuguese Timor; Part 5 - Conclusion, AWM54, 571/4/55, 1943 -1943

———, Singapore Defence Conference, 1940. Report, British Staff Conversations with Officers from Netherlands East Indies 26th to 29th November, 1940. Combined Far Eastern Appreciation of Australian Chiefs of Staff. Feb 1941. Anglo - Dutch - Australian Conference, 22nd - 25th February 1941, A5954, 565/4, 1940-1941

———, Singapore Defence Conference, 1940, Review of Report by Australian Chiefs of Staff (War Cabinet Agendum No 254/1940), A5954, 565/2, 1940-1941

———, Advisory War Council Minutes (Original Set) Chronological Series, A5954, 812/1 to 815/2, 29 October 1940 to 30 August 1945

———, War Cabinet Minutes (Original) Chronological Series, A5954, 803/1 to 811/2, 27 September 1939 to 19 January 1946

———, War Cabinet Agendum - No 418/1941 and Supplement 1 - Defence of Australia and Adjacent area - Chiefs of Staff Appreciation - December 1941, A2671

### **Book (55)**

*Japanese Monograph 101: Naval Operations in the Invasion of Netherlands East Indies, Dec. 1941 - Mar. 1942*, Edited by United States Department of Army Office of Military History, *Japanese Monographs [Microform]* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1962).

*Japanese Monograph 24: Southern Army Operations Record*, Edited by United States Department of Army Office of Military History (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1963).

*Japanese Monograph 16: Ambon and Timor Operations*, Edited by United States Department of Army Office of Military History, *Japanese Monographs [Microform]* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1963).

Adam-Smith, Patsy, *Prisoners of War: From Gallipoli to Korea* (Collingwood: Ken Fin Books, 1998).

Australian Military Board, *Australian Edition of Manual of Military Law 1941: (Including Army Act and Rules of Procedure as Modified and Adapted by the Defence Act 1903-1939)* (Canberra: L.F. Johnston, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1941).

Beaumont, Joan, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941-1945* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

Bullard, Steven, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area: New Britain and the Papua Campaigns, 1942-43* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2007).

Callinan, Bernard J., *Independent Company: The 2/2 and 2/4 Australian Independent Companies in Portuguese Timor, 1941-1943* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1953).

Campbell, Archie, *The Double Reds of Timor* (Swanbourne: John Burridge Military Antiques, 1995).

Campbell, Eric, *The Rallying Point: My Story of the New Guard* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965).

Chandler, David, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966).

Churchill, Winston, *The Grand Alliance*. Vol. III, *The Second World War* (London: Cassell & Co, 1950).

Collins, John, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2002).

Dennis, Peter, Grey, Jefferey, Morris, Ewan, et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, 2nd ed (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008).

der Grosse King of Prussia Friedrich II, *Military Instruction from the Late King of Prussia to His Generals*, Translated by Lt-Col Foster, 5th ed (London: J. Cruttwell, 1818).

Dixon, Norman, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1994).

Doig, Colin D., *The History of the Second Independent Company* (Perth: Doig, 1986).

Ewer, Dr Peter, *Wounded Eagle: The Bombing of Darwin Harbour and Australia's Air Defence Scandal* (Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 2009).

Ford, Jack M, *Allies in a Bind: Australia and Netherlands East Indies in the Second World War* (Loganholme: Australian Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association, 1996).

Gamble, Bruce, *Darkest Hour: The True Story of Lark Force at Rabaul, Australia's Worst Military Disaster of World War II* (St Paul: Zenith Press, 2006).

Gill, G. Herman, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*. Vol. 1, *Series Two - Royal Australian Navy, 1939-42* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial).

Gillison, Douglas, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942: Series Two (Navy) Australia in the War of 1939-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1962).

Goto, Ken'ichi, *Tensions of Empire: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Colonial & Post Colonial World* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2003).

Hagan, Kenneth J, and Bickerton, Ian J, *Unintended Consequences: The United States at War* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).

Harper, Norman Denholm, Sissons, David, Australian Institute of International Affairs, et al., *Australia and the United Nations, National Studies on International Organization* (New York: Manhattan, 1959).

Harrison, Courtney T, *Ambon: Island of Mist - 2/21st Battalion AIF (Gull Force) Prisoners of War 1941-45* (North Geelong: TW & CT Harrison, 1988).

Hasluck, Paul, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941. Vol. 1, Series 4 (Civil)* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952).

Hayes, Grace Person, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War against Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982).

Henning, Peter, *Doomed Battalion* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995).

Horner, David, *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941-1943* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978).

———, *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century* (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

———, *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia's War Effort* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

Keane, Michael, *Dictionary of Modern Strategy and Tactics* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005).

Keogh, EG, *The South West Pacific 1941-45* (Melbourne: Gey Flower Productions, 1965).

Kirby, Woodburn, Addis, C.T., Meiklejohn, J.F., et al., *History of the Second World War: The War against Japan*, Edited by J.R.M. Butler. Vol. 1 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957).

Liddell Hart, B.H., *The Classic Book on Military Strategy*, 2nd ed (London: Meridian, 1991).

Machiavelli, Niccolo, *The Prince* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1995).

Maitland, Major-General Gordon L, *The Second World War and Its Australian Army Battle Honours* (East Roseville: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

Nelson, Hank, *P.O.W. Prisoners of War* (Sydney: ABC Enterprises, 2001).

Paret, Peter, *Understanding War: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).



Pratten, Garth, *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Prosser, John Tasman, *John Tasman Prosser: His Story* (Launceston: R.D. Price, 2004).

Robertson, John, and McCarthy, John, *Australian War Strategy 1939-1945: A Documentary History* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1986).

Rottman, Gordon L, *World War II Pacific Island Guide: A Geo-Military Study* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002).

Spencer Chapman, F, *The Jungle Is Neutral* (London: The Reprint Society, 1949).

Sturma, Michael, *Death at a Distance: The Loss of the Legendary USS Harder* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006).

Sumida, Tetsuro, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to on War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

Tohmatsu, Haruo, and Willmott, HP, *A Gathering Darkness: The Coming of War to the Far East and the Pacific, 1921-1942* (Lanham: SR Books, 2004).

van Fraassen, CH. F., *Bronen Betreffende De Midden-Mulukken 1900-1942*, Translated by David A Evans (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1997).

von Clausewitz, Carl, *The Campaign of 1812*, Translated by Francis Egerton (London: John Murray, 1843).

———, *On War*, Translated by Colonel JJ Graham (London: N Trubner, 1873).

———, *Principles of War*, Translated by Hans W Gatzke (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1942).

———, *On War*, Translated by Peter Paret, Edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

Wigmore, Lionel, *The Japanese Thrust: Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series One - Australia in the War of 1939-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957).

Wray, Christopher C.H., *Timor 1942: Australian Commandos at War with the Japanese* (Port Melbourne: Mandarin Australia, 1990).

**Edited Book** (1)

Ike, Nobutaka, ed. *Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967).

**Figure** (4)

Evans, David A, "Battle Guide for Paso," in *Ortelius*, ed. Paso Map Phd.pdf (Kojonup, 2010).

———, "Battle Guide for Kudamati," (2010).

———, "Malay Barrier 1941," (2010).

———, "Battle Guide for Ambon Town," (2010).

———, "Ambon Dispositions Map" (2010)

**Government Document** (1)

United States, "Operations: Field Manual 3-0", (Washington DC: Headquarters Department of Army, 2001) [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/service\\_pubs/fm3\\_0a.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/service_pubs/fm3_0a.pdf)

**Journal Article** (13)

Brooke-Popham, Robert, "Operations in the Far East," *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 22 January (1948)

Bussemaker, Herman, "Australian-Dutch Defence Co-Operation 1940-1941," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 29 (1996)

Christian, John I., and Ike, Nobutake, "Thailand in Japan's Foreign Relations," *Pacific Affairs*, 15, 2 (1942)

Copp, Terry, "The Defence of Hong Kong: December 1941," *Canadian Military History*, vol.10, issue 4 (2001)

De Booy, H. TH., "The Naval Arm of Diplomacy in the Pacific," *Pacific Affairs*, 8, 1 (1935)

Evans, Michael, "Developing Australia's Maritime Concept of Strategy: Lessons from the Ambon Disaster," *Land Warfare Centre Study Paper*, 303 (2000)

Jorgensen, Elizabeth, "The Far East in Periodical Literature. II: Japan," *Far East Survey*, 10, 15 (1941)

Magistretti, William, "Japan's New Order in the Pacific," *Pacific Affairs*, 14, 2 (1941)

Merton, Robert K, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposeful Social Action," *American Sociological Association*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Dec 1936), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2084615>.

Percival, AE, "Operations of Malaya Command," *Second Supplement to the London Gazette*, London (1948)

Rowell, Sydney, "General Sturdee and the Australian Army," *Australian Army Journal*, (Aug 1966)

Stone, Glen A, "The Official British Attitude to the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10, 4 (1975)

The Hague, "Arbitral Award Rendered in Execution of the Compromise Signed at the Hague, April 3, 1913, between the Netherlands and Portugal Concerning the Subject of the Boundary of a Part of Their Possessions in the Island of Timor," *The American Journal of International Law*, 9, 1 (1913)

#### **Manuscript** (2)

Allied Geographical Section. Southwest Pacific Area, "Area Study of Ambon Island", ([S.l.]: 1943).

Buckley, John, "Verbatim Transcript of an Interview with John Buckley 1913-1996: John Curtin from 1938", (Bentley: John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, 1995).

#### **Newspaper Article** (4)

"Stories of Atrocities in China: "Savage Oppression" By Japanese," *The Advertiser*, Monday 30 August 1937.

"Return Soldiers Protest," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 2 October 1937.

"Japanese Atrocities," *The Canberra Times*, Saturday 29 January 1938.

"Atrocities Alleged against Japanese: Death of Missionaries in Northern China," *The Argus*, Thursday 3 February 1938.

#### **Online Database** (3)

Australian Dictionary of Biography Online: National Centre of Biography, <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100099b.htm>.

DFAP, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-1945*, <<http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/info/historical/HistDocs.nsf/vWeb?OpenView>>.

Sissons, David C.S., *The Australian War Crimes Trials and Investigations (1942-51)*, <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~changmin/documents/Sissons%20Final%20War%20Crimes%20Text%2018-3-06.pdf>.

**Thesis (2)**

Horner, David, "The Evolution of Australian Higher Command Arrangements," Australian National University, 2002.

Shepard, Steven B., "American, British, Dutch, and Australian Coalition: Unsuccessful Band of Brothers," University of Virginia, 1990.

**Web Page (3)**

Gull Force Association Battalion History, In, Gull Force Association Web Page, [http://www.gullforce.org.au/Battalion\\_History.html](http://www.gullforce.org.au/Battalion_History.html) (accessed 15/08, 2010).

Australian War Memorial, Australian Military Units and Commanders, In, <http://www.awm.gov.au/units/ww2.asp> (accessed 12 December, 2007).

Memorial, Australian War, Fall of Ambon: Driver Doolan, In, Australian War Memorial, [www.ww2australia.gov.au/japadvance/doolan.html](http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/japadvance/doolan.html) (accessed).