

AUSTRALIANS' POSITION AT MILNE BAY BECOMES SERIOUS

Vital Battle Develops; Enemy Lands Reinforcements

From Our Special Correspondent.

OPERATIONAL BASE, Sunday.—The position of the A.I.F. and militia defenders at Milne Bay has become serious over the week-end.

Earlier reports of the fighting favoured the Allies, but any optimism now must be tempered with caution.

Under cover of appalling weather conditions, a strong Japanese naval force of one cruiser and eight destroyers entered Milne Bay last night, and landed reinforcements.

It is not known whether the Japanese warships have been withdrawn. It is possible that they may be using covering fire to help the ground forces.

With Japan in control of the seaways, the possibility of extensive reinforcements must now be considered a distinct probability.

The ferocity of the Japanese attacks in Milne Bay, coupled with sudden thrusts all along their line from Lae to Salamaua to Kokoda, indicates clearly that this is no minor skirmish, but may be an all-out attempt to make the capture of New Guinea compensate for the loss of Japanese positions in the Solomons.

Occupation by the Japanese of Milne Bay would give them strategic control of vital sea-ways, and a point from which to "blanket" the Solomons and attack Port Moresby, only 200 miles away, or the Australian mainland, only 420 miles distant.

Throughout the attack on Milne Bay, which began before dawn on Wednesday, the Japanese have operated under cover of a dense blanket of rain clouds and fog that have largely nullified our air striking power.

The enemy is making a determined effort to gain control of the Milne Bay area. They may keep on sending reinforcements, and so long as the weather remains bad their detection and bombing at sea will be difficult.

The Allied Air Force has been set an almost impossible task in attacking enemy shipping. This is indicated by the fact that out of the nine ships which entered Milne Bay on Saturday night, only one—a destroyer—was probably damaged. Over-confident reports at this stage are dangerous. The Allied land forces have an extremely difficult job, with the Air Forces hampered by the weather and the Navy still busy in the Solomons.

A decisive battle cannot be long delayed. The ability of the Allies to defeat the enemy's present strength before it can be reinforced

to defeat the enemy's present strength before it can be reinforced will depend on units commanded by an experienced officer. They are supported by Australian Kittyhawk fighter squadrons, and by many well-known pilots who have distinguished overseas records.

It is possible that the Japanese naval force which entered Milne Bay last night was diverted to New Guinea from the enemy fleet which was reported two days ago to have withdrawn from the Solomons battle.

Although details of the ground fighting are not yet known, there is evidence that the militia troops, already trained in the New Guinea jungles, have been fighting magnificently alongside seasoned A.I.F. veterans, who have won splendid reputations as shock troops in campaigns abroad, and have inflicted heavy casualties on some of Japan's best jungle fighters.

In the tangled, dripping wilderness of Milne Bay bloody fighting, almost from tree to tree, and with hand-to-hand clashes probably will continue for days.

Only sporadically have our fighters and bombers been able to operate effectively. Most of the time the weather conditions have been so appalling that our aircraft have been virtually useless. Some factors which have limited our air operations so terribly at a time when they were most needed enabled the Japanese Navy to slip in without loss with support for troops already landed.

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landed. No transports were observed in the naval force which arrived last night, and apparently troops were loaded aboard the warships to get them to the scene of battle swiftly and with maximum protection.

This method of using warships instead of transports was used by the Japanese successfully when they attacked and captured Kavieng on January 21—their first victory in the New Guinea war.

The increasing gravity of the situation, with another day still to run of August, justifies forecasts of observers here that this would be the month of crisis in the islands war.

Coinciding with the Milne Bay battle, Japanese forces at Lae, Salamaua, and Kokoda took the initiative and launched the heaviest attacks yet on Australian outpost lines.

At Kokoda the enemy advance was met and repulsed, but in the Lae and Salamaua sector clashes are still taking place.

The enemy naval force was sighted by our reconnaissance machines yesterday morning of the D'Entrecasteaux Islands. Air attacks were attempted, but the terrible weather foiled our pilots, and the warships were able to reach Milne Bay.

Our main defence against reinforcement of Japanese troops has been air power, but the terrible monsoonal storms of recent days have prevented our fighters and bombers from properly carrying out the task.

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There has been no mention of the Japanese moves being countered by the Allied Navy. It was previously reported that naval forces of General MacArthur's command were participating in the battle of the Solomons.

With Machiavellian skill Japanese have again shown their ability to move swiftly and by surprise. They have come into Milne Bay on the tail of a monsoon, sheltered by a screen of bad weather, just as they did in Malaya and Burma, and their methods of attack have been almost identical.

Ground fighting, which Allied headquarters says is "of bitter intensity," is taking place between crack troops of the A.I.F. and militia and Japan's picked "Tadoki," who have been specially trained in shock landings and jungle fighting.

In the fierce fighting, which is taking place in the tangled jungle and swamps feet deep in slimy black mud, no decision has yet been reached.

Pitched battles are taking place on the north shore of Milne Bay, where pilots of Australian fighter planes and American bombers are taking terrible risks in dreadful weather conditions to give support to our ground troops.

Already these planes have inflicted heavy casualties, and heavy damage on the enemy.

Flying Fortresses, which attacked Rabaul accounted for four Zeros for certain, and probably two others, and dropped 10 tons of bombs on buildings and aircraft

LOSSES ENORMOUS; JAPS. BEING ROLLED BACK IN EARNEST

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30.—Japanese losses in the Solomons were enormous, and the process of rolling the Japanese back had now begun in earnest, says Lieut. H. L. Merrillat, a Marine "combat-reporter," whose account of the Solomons battle has been released by the Navy Department.

The Navy Department has also released a communique giving details of the battle from the first operation to the present.

The Navy communique says—

"The position of our forces in the Guadalcanal and Tulagi area has been sufficiently well established to warrant the release of details of the action in the Solomons, which has been progressing since the early morning of August 7. The operation was carried out under the direction of Vice-Admiral Ghormley and the general direction of Admiral Nimitz. The amphibious landing force of Marines was under the immediate command of Major-General Van De Grift, the transport forces was commanded by Rear-Admiral Turner, and supporting ships were under the command of Vice-Admiral Fletcher.

"Our approach to the area of operations was accomplished under cover of overcast conditions, making aerial reconnaissance difficult. On the night of August 6 the weather cleared, and our transports and screening forces proceeded unopposed to their assigned positions. During the early morning of August 7, under strong protection of carrier-based aircraft

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"A complete surprise was effected, and 18 Japanese seaplanes and a small schooner were caught in the harbour and sunk. Our carrier planes covered the entire operation, divebombing shore batteries, supply stations and centres of enemy resistance while maintaining the alert against possible enemy air attack.

Beachheads Established

"Specially trained, fully equipped Marines were transported to the beaches in landing craft. Beachheads were soon established and varying degrees of resistance were encountered. By nightfall our troops were in possession of a strong beachhead in the Tenaru River region. Guadalcanal had been captured with most of Tulagi and all of Gavutu, and we had occupied a position at Halabou on Florida.

"During the night and early the following morning the island of Tanambogo, which is connected to Gavutu by a causeway, was taken in the face of strong opposition. Before, during, and after these attacks long-range Army bombers, some under General MacArthur's command, and others under Vice-Admiral Ghormley's, were engaged in coordinated search operations.

"These bombers delivered heavy at-

search operations.

"These bombers delivered heavy attacks on enemy ships and air bases in the New Britain, New Guinea, and Solomons area.

"The first enemy counter-attack developed on August 7, about 3.20 p.m., when 25 heavy bombers attacked our occupying forces. The enemy scored no hits. Anti-aircraft fire from our surface ships brought down two bombers and damaged two.

"At 4 p.m. 10 dive-bombers attacked our ships, damaging one destroyer. Ack-ack shot down two enemy planes. Our operations on August 7 had resulted in heavy loss to the enemy, both in men and aircraft, also loss of control of all vital positions in Guadalcanal-Tulagi area and the loss of large quantities of supplies when positions were surrendered.

"We suffered one destroyer damaged, but our losses in men and aircraft were moderate during the first day's operations.

"On the night of August 7 and throughout the following morning supplies and equipment were hurriedly unloaded from our ships and sent ashore to assist our patrols in consolidating gains. The work was carried on in the face of sporadic attacks from scattered enemy troops, against whom continued assaults were made.

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"About noon on August 9, 40 or more enemy torpedo planes attacked our ships in the harbour, hitting a destroyer and an unloaded transport. Twelve planes were shot down by

the ships' ack-ack and fighters and two were destroyed by shore batteries.

"During enemy air attacks on August 7 and 8 our carrier planes and ack-ack shot down 47 enemy planes in addition to dive-bombing enemy shore batteries and supply centres.

"By sundown on August 8 the area occupied on Guadalcanal had been expanded, and an airfield, which the Japanese had nearly completed, was captured. Enemy resistance on Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo had been overcome, and large quantities of ammunition and supplies were captured as well as equipment which the Japanese were using to develop a major naval base.

"On the night of August 8 unloading from transports and cargo vessels continued. The enemy attempted to disrupt operations by a strong thrust with surface vessels. Our cruisers and destroyers intercepted the attack and forced the enemy to retreat before reaching the vessels engaged in the landing operations. Close-range fighting in this action resulted in damage to the enemy and our forces.

"By nightfall on August 9 the unloading operations had been completed and our transports and cargo ships left the area.

"By noon on August 10 the marines had overcome all major opposition on Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Makambo, and portions of Florida, and were engaged in pursuing isolated patrols which were withdrawn into the interior. Mopping up operations have continued to date.

"Several small contingents of enemy troops have been landed on the islands we hold. The largest landing was made by 700 troops on Guadalcanal on August 21. Our positions were bombarded by surface craft, submarines and aircraft, but the losses as a result of these attacks have been small. Every enemy attempt to recapture lost positions resulted in complete annihilation or capture of all the troops that landed.

"On August 21 reconnaissance aircraft observed several detachments of enemy ships approaching Guadalcanal from the north and north-east. The presence of transports indicated an attempt to recapture the shore positions in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area.

"The action at sea which ended in the withdrawal of enemy surface forces has been described in previous Navy communiques. While this action was progressing enemy aircraft made three attacks in force on Guadalcanal. Naval and marine fighters, based at the newly captured airfield on Guadalcanal, met and repulsed the attacks."

Lieut. H. L. Merrillat says the attack was made by the largest force of marines ever to engage in landing operations.

"And to the Japs on Guadalcanal and Tulagi it must have seemed like hell broken loose," Lieut. Merrillat said. "Japanese losses were certainly enormous."