

= Landing at Jacquinot Bay =

The Landing at Jacquinot Bay was an Allied amphibious operation undertaken on 4 November 1944 during the New Britain Campaign of World War II . The landing was conducted as part of a change in responsibility for Allied operations on New Britain with the Australian 5th Division , under Major General Alan Ramsay , taking over from the US 40th Infantry Division , which was needed for operations in the Philippines . The purpose of the operation was to establish a logistics base at Jacquinot Bay on the south coast of New Britain to support the 5th Division 's planned operations near the major Japanese garrison at Rabaul .

As part of the first stage of the Australian take over , Brigadier Raymond Sandover 's 6th Brigade was directed to secure the Jacquinot Bay area . While the region was believed to be undefended , the initial landing was conducted by a combat @-@ ready force comprising the reinforced Australian 14th / 32nd Battalion protected by warships and with aircraft on standby . As expected , there was no opposition to the landing on 4 November and work soon began on logistics facilities .

Once a base was established at Jacquinot Bay it was used to support Australian operations near Rabaul which were conducted in early 1945 in conjunction with advances on the northern side of New Britain . The campaign was effectively one of containment as the larger Japanese force was isolated while the Allies conducted further operations elsewhere .

= = Background = =

During December 1943 and early 1944 United States Army and United States Marine Corps units landed in western New Britain with the goal of securing the area so it could not be used to launch attacks against the flank of the main Allied offensive along the north coast of New Guinea . The American forces defeated the Japanese garrison of western New Britain during the Battle of Arawe , Battle of Cape Gloucester and Battle of Talasea . In late April 1944 the US Army 's 40th Infantry Division assumed responsibility for garrisoning the Allied positions in New Britain . The division subsequently maintained positions around Talasea ? Cape Hoskins , Arawe and Cape Gloucester and did not conduct offensive operations against the Japanese forces in the east of the island . As a result , the fighting on New Britain devolved largely into what Peter Dennis has called a " tacit truce " with the US and Japanese troops being separated by a " no man 's land " , in which Australian @-@ led native troops from the Allied Intelligence Bureau ( AIB ) conducted a small scale guerilla campaign .

In mid @-@ 1944 , the Australian Government agreed to take on responsibility for the military operations in the northern Solomon Islands and Australian New Guinea , including New Britain . The Australian Army 's 5th Division , under Major General Alan Ramsay , was selected to replace the 40th Infantry Division on New Britain in August , with the unit to assume responsibility for the island on 1 November . Instead of maintaining the American bases in western New Britain the Australians planned to operate closer to the Japanese forces which were positioned around the Gazelle Peninsula in the north @-@ east of the island . By the time of the Australian take @-@ over , Allied intelligence estimated that the Japanese forces on New Britain amounted to 38 @,@ 000 personnel , but in actuality there were 93 @,@ 000 Japanese on the island , forming part of General Hitoshi Imamura 's Eighth Area Army . The Japanese personnel were focused upon sustaining themselves , with rice @-@ growing and gardening being undertaken to supplement the limited supplies that were arriving . Japanese supporting elements were limited , with only two aircraft capable of action and no ships other than 150 barges that could move up to 90 personnel or 15 tons of stores .

As of April 1944 , small Japanese observation posts were located along the south coast of New Britain as far west as the village of Awul near Cape Dampier ( approximately 100 miles [ 160 km ] east of Arawe ) . A larger force was also stationed at Henry Reid Bay in the Wide Bay area to the south of the main force stationed around Rabaul . During that month the AIB force responsible for the south coast of New Britain was ordered to destroy all the Japanese posts to the west of Henry Reid Bay . This unit comprised about 140 native troops led by five Australian officers and ten non @-@ commissioned officers .

Operations against the Japanese observation posts began in June . On the fifth of the month a patrol of American troops attacked the position at Awul , causing its garrison to retreat into the centre of the island . Other attacks by the AIB force followed , and by early September all of the Japanese observation posts west of Wide Bay had been destroyed . Japanese troops conducted small scale reprisals against the native population of the Wide Bay hinterland , and the AIB officers attempted to persuade the population of this area to move inland before more severe reprisals were conducted .

During the operations along the south coast of New Britain the AIB officers sought to discourage the Japanese from moving west of the Wide Bay area by circulating rumours among the local population that a large Australian base had been established at Jacquinot Bay . In reality no such base existed at this time . The AIB force continued to make guerilla attacks on Japanese positions until early October , when it was ordered to cease offensive operations and concentrate on intelligence gathering ahead of the landing of Australian infantry and support units at Jacquinot Bay . The AIB 's operations from June to October were assisted by occasional air attacks and naval bombardments conducted by elements of the Allied air forces and navies .

= = Preparations = =

To support the 5th Division 's planned offensive operations the Australian high command in the New Guinea area , New Guinea Force , determined that a logistics base needed to be established closer to Rabaul than those used by the US Army forces on New Britain . At a conference held on 24 August involving the commanders of New Guinea Force and the 5th Division , it was decided to investigate whether the Talasea @-@ Hoskins area on the north coast of New Britain and the Jacquinot Bay area on the south coast of the island could accommodate bases for the 5th Division .

On 5 September a party of 105 personnel from the 5th Division , New Guinea Force and Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) was landed at Jacquinot Bay from the corvette HMAS Kiama . They investigated the area for two days , assisted by AIB personnel , while Kiama surveyed the bay . It was concluded that the region was suitable for a base as the bay could accommodate up to six liberty ships and an airstrip could be built nearby . The party which visited the Talasea ? Hoskins area ( which already housed an American base ) made a less favourable report . M Special Unit also reported that no Japanese personnel remained in the Jacquinot Bay area . On 15 September the commander of the Australian Army 's combat forces , General Thomas Blamey , approved a proposal to establish a base at Jacquinot Bay . He also agreed for two battalions of the 6th Brigade to be landed at Jacquinot Bay , with the formation 's third battalion being sent to Talasea ? Hoskins .

At this time the 6th Brigade ? consisting of the 19th , 36th and 14th / 32nd Battalions ? was led by Brigadier Raymond Sandover . A Militia formation , it had not previously seen combat as a whole , though one of its infantry battalions ? the 36th ? had fought in the Battle of Buna ? Gona during late 1942 and early 1943 . Nevertheless , Sandover and his three battalion commanders were all Australian Imperial Force veterans who had taken part in the fighting against the Germans and Italians in North Africa , Greece and Syria during 1941 and 1942 . The 36th Battalion was dispatched to Cape Hoskins in early October , and relieved a battalion of the US 158th Infantry Regiment .

The RAAF conducted three attacks on Rabaul as part of the preparations for the landing at Jacquinot Bay . On the night of 26 October a force of 18 Bristol Beaufort light bombers drawn from No. 6 , No. 8 and No. 100 Squadrons attacked Japanese stores dumps and anti @-@ aircraft positions at Rabaul . The results of this mission were unclear , however . The next raid by the three squadrons was conducted against stores dumps to the north of Rabaul on the evening of 27 October , and most of the bombs which were dropped landed in the target area . The third raid took place on 29 October , and involved 20 Beauforts from the three squadrons striking stores dumps to the west of Rabaul .

= = Landing = =

While AIB patrols continued to report that no Japanese troops were located in the Jacquinot Bay area , the Australian command decided that the landing there would be made by a combat @-@ ready force protected by naval vessels . This was intended both as a precaution against a sudden Japanese offensive and to provide useful experience for the units involved . The landing was designated Operation Battleaxe .

The initial landing force for the Jacquinot Bay operation comprised the 14th / 32nd Battalion Group , ' B ' Company of the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion , and an advance party from the 5th Base Sub Area . The combat troops and base personnel embarked on the transport Cape Alexander at Lae on 2 November . The transport sailed that afternoon under the escort of three Royal Australian Navy warships : the destroyer HMAS Vendetta , frigate HMAS Barcoo and sloop HMAS Swan . The other Australian forces involved in the landing were the transport Frances Peat which was escorted by RAN motor launch ML 827 , and the tugboat HMAS Tancred which towed a workshop barge to Jacquinot Bay under the escort of ML 802 . In addition , ' B ' Company of the US Army 's 594th Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment was attached to the force ; this unit was equipped with landing craft and sailed to Jacquinot Bay with Tancred . The 14th / 32nd Battalion had been raised in the state of Victoria during 1942 , and was still mainly made up of Victorian soldiers .

Elements of the RAAF were also available to support the landing . The plan for the operation specified that , if required , No. 6 Squadron , reinforced with Beauforts from No. 8 and No. 100 Squadrons , would attack the landing area before 6 am on 4 November . An additional two Beauforts could also observe for any bombardments made by the warships . Prior to the landing , the air strike was cancelled by the RAAF officer who was attached to the landing force to coordinate air support as no opposition was expected .

Cape Alexander and her escorts arrived at Jacquinot Bay at 6 : 35 am on 4 November , and were joined by the other Allied vessels shortly thereafter . While the voyage from Lae had been uneventful , the 14th / 32nd Battalion 's war diary records that the unit 's accommodation on board the transport was " VERY POOR " as it was " very cramped , dirty and wet " and sanitary facilities were greatly insufficient .

The landing of the 14th / 32nd Battalion commenced at 9 : 30 am , with ' A ' Company making up the first wave . All elements of the battalion were ashore by 11 : 30 am . No opposition was encountered , and the 14th / 32nd Battalion began to establish defensive and living positions . In addition , personnel from the battalion were detailed to unload stores . Sandover regarded the lack of opposition as fortunate , as the landing craft which were to carry the soldiers from the ships to the shore arrived late and he perceived that the RAAF had failed to provide adequate support . However , he was pleased with his brigade 's performance during operations in New Britain up to that time , and expressed pleasure at having " nearly reached the war " . The 180 man @-@ strong advanced party of the 5th Base Sub Area was landed on 5 November , and began work on establishing logistics facilities .

After covering the landing force for two days , HMAS Vendetta , Barcoo and Swan proceeded to Wide Bay and bombarded Japanese positions there before departing the New Britain area . The motor launches ML 802 and ML 827 remained at Jacquinot Bay and conducted patrols along the south coast of the island in search of Japanese barges . ML 827 ran aground during a patrol on 17 November , and sank three days later while under tow to an Allied base ; all of her crew survived . A Japanese air raid was conducted against Jacquinot Bay on 23 November .

During the days after the landing , the ground forces secured the Jacquinot Bay area . AIB personnel manned an outpost to warn of the approach of Japanese forces , while the combat troops patrolled and established positions near the main landing area . On 6 November the company from the 1st New Guinea Infantry Battalion was moved by landing craft to the northern shore of Jacquinot Bay , and subsequently guarded the tracks leading to this area . This unit later relieved the AIB of responsibility for maintaining some of its positions to the east of Jacquinot Bay . During this period the 14th / 32nd Battalion remained near the landing area , though one of its companies gradually established an outpost between 8 and 12 November .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Base construction = = =

The remainder of the 5th Base Sub Area arrived at Jacquinot Bay on 11 and 12 November , accompanied by a party of 670 native labourers . By this time the advance party had erected a pontoon jetty in the bay and unloaded 3 @, @ 400 cubic metres ( 4 @, @ 400 cu yd ) of stores and equipment . Major base construction works began on the second week after the landing , though the completion of some buildings was delayed by shortages of engineer stores . The 2 / 3rd Railway Construction Company reinforced the logistics units on 21 November , and worked on building roads . The headquarters of the 5th Division opened at Jacquinot Bay on 27 November .

Work on major facilities at Jacquinot Bay began in December . These were to include a large dock , an airstrip , buildings to be used by 2 / 8th General Hospital and stores depots . By this time it had been decided to stockpile sufficient stores at Jacquinot Bay to support 13 @, @ 000 soldiers for 60 days . Work on the airstrip was completed in May 1945 . Two squadrons of Corsair fighter aircraft from the Royal New Zealand Air Force were later based there .

The 6th Brigade , less the 36th Battalion , was gradually brought into the Jacquinot Bay area , with its final elements arriving on 16 December . Due to shipping shortages and the low priority given to building up forces on New Britain , it was not until April 1945 that all elements of the 5th Division had been brought forward to Jacquinot Bay . The company from the 594th Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment remained at Jacquinot Bay until it was replaced by the 41st Australian Landing Craft Company on 15 February 1945 .

= = = Subsequent operations = = =

As Allied intelligence regarding the Japanese was still uncertain , Ramsay , who officially assumed command of the forces on New Britain on 27 November , adopted a cautious approach . Jacquinot Bay was built up as a base of operations and the Australians began sending out patrols to fight for information and harass the Japanese , with limited advances taking place on both the northern and southern coasts of the island , pushing east towards the Japanese strong hold around the Gazelle Peninsula . The AIB also continued to operate in the area , passing information to the 5th Division . The Japanese lacked information on the movements of Allied forces in New Britain , and only learned of the change in command from Australian radio broadcasts .

The Australian advance was hampered by shortages of shipping , aircraft and communications , which limited operations to brigade @-@ strength only . In January 1945 the 36th Battalion was dispatched from Cape Hoskins to Ea Ea on the north coast of New Britain by barge , and began sending out company @-@ sized patrols ; they subsequently reached Watu Point , in Open Bay , at the base of the Gazelle Peninsula by April . The Australian forces also advanced along the south coast of the island , and began securing the Waitavalo ? Tol area in late February , with engineer support enabling the crossing of the Wulwut River . Several clashes followed around Mount Sugi as the Australians fought to gain control of several heavily defended ridges overlooking Henry Reid Bay . Heavy rain and flooding hampered their efforts , but by April the Australians had secured Wide Bay and had effectively hemmed the Japanese into the Gazelle Peninsula , where they were able to be contained for the remainder of the campaign . This enabled the Allies to focus their attention elsewhere , such as Borneo .