

The solomon islands campaign

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One of the Japanese tactics was to establish a series of airfields in the Pacific to cut off allied supplies, and their most important would be in the Guadalcanal Island off the Solomon's. No one realized, though that when the Japanese started construction on the airfield, the Solomon Islands would soon after become a viscous and costly fought campaign. Also, it would be the home of American victories that changed the tides of the Pacific War. In July 1942, American marines were sent to the Guadalcanal and with the aid of the allied fleet they were going to attempt to capture it. Then, they would finish the airfield and make it an allied base.

But quickly disaster struck the allies on the night of the invasion. Japanese cruisers went out to sea and surprised the allied fleet with a sneak attack, destroying the fleet. Four allied combat ships were sunk, and the rest of the allied fleet was driven out to sea. Now, the allied forces were marooned, with limited resources and equipment. Despite being constantly bombarded, the stranded troops used Japanese equipment left on the island to work on building the airfield, and used whatever artillery equipment they had to defend themselves from Japanese planes. In two weeks, the airfield was complete, and the military had sent allied bomber planes and fighter planes to the new airstrip.

Complications arose the day after the airfields completion when Japanese troops had begun to launch assaults on the airfield, determined to take it back. For months the battle raged on, each side sending wave after wave of troops to be thrown into battle. By the winter of 1942, both sides had fought themselves to exhaustion, and played defensively. In December 1942, the US Navy sent reinforcements to replace the battle tired Marines, and the allies

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started to push on the small pockets of Japanese resistance of the island. By the early February in 1943 the allies had successfully taken over the Guadalcanal, and then they could continue to capture the remaining islands.

After the capture of the Guadalcanal, the flamboyant U. S. military general Douglas MacArthur decided to take the rest of the Eastern Solomon Islands. Then, he could isolate and capture the important Japanese base of Rabaul, forcing Japanese troops on the Solomon Islands to surrender. Japanese forces had originally bypassed the New Georgia Islands to capture Guadalcanal as soon as possible, but now as allied forces started to occupy Guadalcanal and Henderson field, the Japanese revised their plans.

They needed more land-based aircraft to strike Guadalcanal and take it back, so on November 24, 1942, a large Japanese convoy made its way to a small clearing at the western side of the new Georgia Islands. Even though this action alerted allies' attention, they could not find any thing from their aerial photographs except for a few small buildings. However, on December 3, an American intelligence expert realized that the Japanese forces had been secretly building underneath the tall and leafy coconut trees. Then, on December 6, the allies launched aircraft from the Henderson field to secretly drop by on the Japanese construction. It was confirmed that the Japanese were building an airfield on the New Georgia Island, and on December 9, the first major actions were in progress against the new Munda fields. The allies began a series of raids on the Munda field, bombing day and night continuously.

But these actions weren't enough to keep aircraft from leaving New Georgia, so on January 4 1943, a fleet was sent to bombard Munda field to "divert any aerial reinforcement that might be sent to disrupt the Army offensive."

(Peter Chen) The bombings started in the early morning of January 5, and for the next hour continuously fired over 4,400 rounds of ammunition on the Japanese fleet and on Munda. The next day, allied aircraft visited the heavily damaged and deserted airfield. However, Munda field wasn't the only airfield on the New Georgia Islands constructed by the Japanese forces. Vila, another airfield built on the southern tip of the New Georgia Island Kolombangara.

On January 23, an allied bombardment group consisting of two light cruisers and four destroyers made its way up "the slot" and into New Georgia islands. Early the next day, the small fleet began firing and bombing Vila, and there was little return fire from coastal batteries. The Japanese tried to bomb the ships, but were unsuccessful in the event that radar-directed anti-aircraft guns shot them down. Although Vila field was intensely damaged, Japanese engineers could repair the airfield, just as the allies had done with Henderson field. The bombings on Vila were to disrupt the Japanese capability to launch land-based aircraft so that allied marines could start to invade the New Georgia Islands, but it wasn't until August 5, 1943 that the allied powers had control over it. The next island that allies needed was Bougainville.

However, Bougainville was surrounded by the Treasury Islands, the Short Lands, and Buka, all of which were at the time under Japanese control.

Bougainville would prove difficult to capture considering that Japanese forces had 5 airbases and 60,000 troops among these 4 islands. The allies could

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not invade Bougainville without suffering large casualties because of the airfields, so allied aircraft bombed them in October to soften the landings. The bombings were confusing for Japanese forces as they couldn't distinctively decide where allied forces would attack next, and decided to deploy 173 aircraft to the 4 islands in order to destroy the allies next air assault. The allied forces decided to invade the Treasury Islands in order to gain a logistical base to invade Bougainville, so on October 17, 1943 New Zealand troops attacked the island. But the well hidden machine gun nests were a difficult obstacle to overcome, but the New Zealand troops found a way.

“ They closed the front doors and this twenty-ton bulldozer, which happened to be one of the first pieces of equipment out, this man manned his bulldozer and lifted his blade up to give him protection in his cab and trundled out, dropped his blade in front of the strongpoint and in about ten minutes had covered the whole place over to a depth of about six feet. And then, not being satisfied, he rode back and forth over it and trampled it down well and covered up the entire strongpoint, and from that time on there was no further opposition to that particular landing.” (captain Robert Briscoe). This is how he described his troops as they took care of the machine gunners, in an insane and barbaric manner. However mad it seemed, this tactic proved to be effective and only a small number of casualties were suffered by the allies. They had successfully captured the Treasury Island by November 6.

Now with the New Treasury Islands almost under their control, the allied forces decided to invade Bougainville on November 1 with an amphibious landing force. Although they were struck by two air attacks, no heavy

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damage was done to the invasion. The allies had very few difficulties on shore, considering there were less than 300 defending Japanese troops at the landing. As marines headed inland, they were shocked to find out that the earlier bombings in late October had little effect to the Japanese defenders and their bases. The allies continued to advance inland, but the well hidden Japanese machine gunners, the dense jungle, and bad health conditions made progress slow. despite these conditions the allies continued to advance inland, and with help from flamethrowers, they could clear out clustered shrubbery and undergrowth for tanks and other vehicles.

Weeks into the battle, the allies number was shortened down to only 700 troops against 4000 Japanese soldiers. However, despite their low number, the allies managed to endure the rest of the invasion, and had Bougainville by the end of 1943 with a total of only 29 casualties. Now having Bougainville under their control, the allied forces could begin their invasion of New Britain to isolate Rabaul. The assault on Rabaul would be a two pronged attack, the eastern prong making its way up New Georgia and Bougainville while the western prong made its way through Papua New Guinea. In October 1943, before Rabaul was isolated, the allied forces struck repeatedly at the Japanese base by air. The attacks grew more intense and more destructive on New Britain, but necessary if the allies were going to eliminate or at least limit the Japanese air strength.

On October 12, the allied powers conducted their largest offensive move on Rabaul. General MacArthur ordered his air-force commander George Kenney to bring every plane that was in commission and could fly that far on the raid. the attacking party consisted of 201 bombers, 137 fighters, and 11

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reconnaissance planes, totaling a whopping amount of 349 planes. Due to operational accidents and mechanical failures, 50 of these planes were forced to go back. the Japanese forces had sent 32 of there remaining planes to counter Georges' assault, but did not succeed in doing so.

Within a month of the raid Rabaul was becoming less dangerous to the allies, and near the end of 1943 was no longer a threat to them. The allies had established airfields close enough to keep a sustained, continues air assault on Rabaul. This restricted the Japanese from being able to attack any allied ships, bases, or airfields. Rather than pointlessly defend when defeat was curtain, many Japanese troops evacuated New Britain by means of aircraft or ships. in February 1944, the Japanese were only being supplied by submarines, and only 1 or 2 supply runs were made over the course over several months.

it would only be a matter of time when they would surrender. After suffering from much malnutrition the Japanese surrendered to the allies on the British aircraft carrier HMS GLORY all Japanese forces left on the Solomon's, New Guinea, and New Britain. The Solomon Islands were the home of the most widely used and important bases that the allies had under their control during the Pacific campaign. Had the Japanese been able to keep Guadalcanal from the allies the results may have been very different in the outcome of the pacific war.