



### Taking Manos: Admiralty Islands Campaign (1944), pt.2

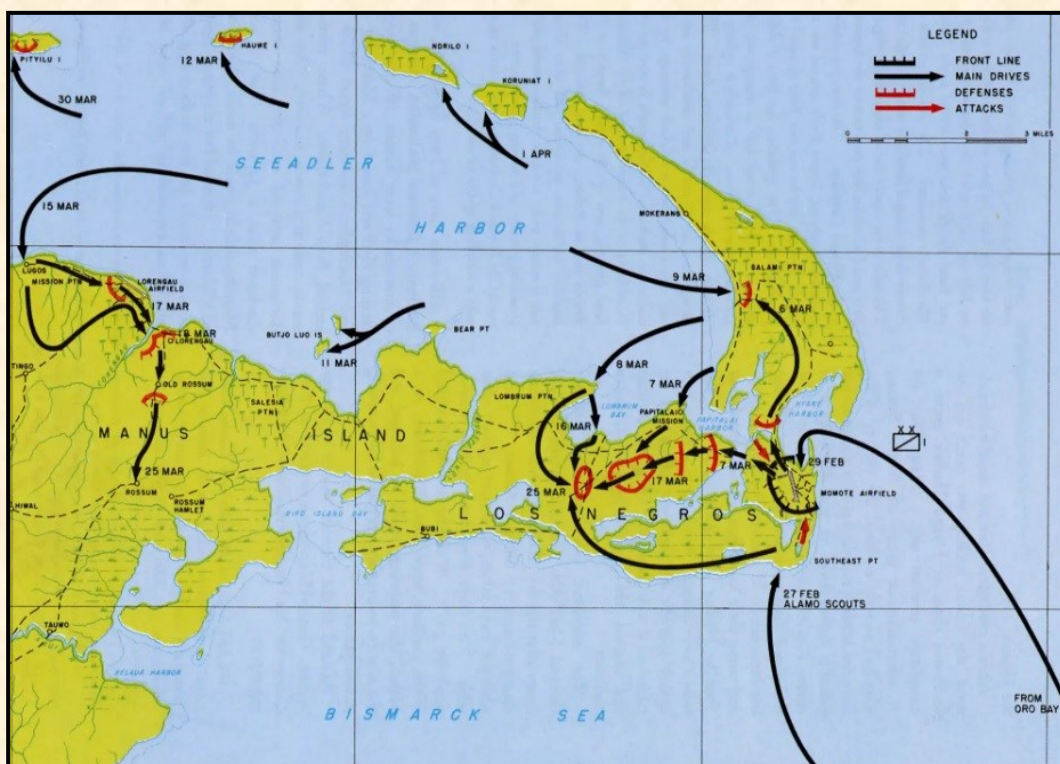
The Admiralty Islands Campaign began on Feb. 29, 1944, with an Allied invasion of the tiny island of Los Negros, located 200 miles off the northeast coast of New Guinea. By the second week of March, the combined invasion force of American and Australian troops had secured Hyane Harbor with Momote airstrip and Seeadler Harbor. At this time, there were an estimated 2,700 Japanese troops occupying the larger island of Manus, concentrated at Lorengau airstrip. In advance of an attack on the heavily fortified Lorengau, the Allies sent out three patrols to scout locations from which artillery could support an invasion. The first surveyed Bear Point, but determined it was unsuitable for artillery emplacements. The second landed on the Butjo Luo Islands on March 11, finding them unoccupied and well positioned.

The third patrol, made up of three dozen soldiers and guides, set out for Hauwei (Hauwe) Island, five miles north of the proposed landing spot. On March 12, as they landed, they spotted a bunker and tossed hand grenades into it. This resulted in an eruption of mortars and machine gun fire from the concealed Japanese defenders, prompting the landing party to scatter, though they would soon be picked up. The last rescue crat was struck by mortar fire and sunk, forcing a PT boat to rescue the men after three hours stranded in the water. The effort resulted in eight Americans killed and 15 wounded. As a result, Maj. Gen. Innis P. Swift, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, postponed the attack on Manus in order to deal with Hauwei. On March 13, he sent the 7th Cavalry to take the smaller island, supported by the gun emplacements on Los Negros, four destroyers, and six Kittyhawk bombers. The landing party faced strong bunkers and deadly sniper fire which was only overcome the next morning after receiving support from a medium tank. Two Allied battalions now occupied Hauwei, while a third occupied Butjo Luo.

The invasion of Manus commenced on March 15. The chosen landing site was the Lugos Mission, 2.5 miles west of Lorengau, a spot with ample beachhead but sufficiently distant from strong defensive emplacements. Starting before dawn, destroyers, artillery, and bombers attacked the area. However, the landing party found minimal defenders and soon had firm control of Lugos. The 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry moved east, encountering a strong bunker complex west of the airstrip. Following an airstrike, the invaders continued and captured a ridge overlooking the airfield. Joined by its 2nd Squadron, the 8th Cavalry was able to occupy the airstrip after two advances against another bunker complex. On March 18, Lorengau fell to the Allies. Though the invasion had successfully captured its target, they had yet to encounter the number of Japanese defenders estimated to occupy the island. Consequently, the 7th Cavalry advanced south from Lugos in search of the enemy. They found the bulk of Japanese force in Rossum. Due to the strength of the earthen bunkers

there, it took six days, and the combined efforts of the 7th and 8th Cavalry to defeat the entrenched defenders.

In the meantime, the Allies continued "mopping up" activities on Los Negros, rooting out pockets of resistance in the center of the island. This effort concluded on March 24, with the defeat of 50 Japanese defenders huddled in the Papitalai Hills. All that remained was rooting out remaining defenders on the smaller Admiralty Islands, to eliminate any remaining artillery and antiaircraft emplacements. First on the list was Pityilu Island. On March 30, the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry landed there with little resistance, under heavy air support. The Japanese bunker initially resisted, but soon fell to a combination of artillery and tank support.





On April 1, the 1st Squadron, 12th Cavalry landed on Ndrilo and Koru-niat, but found the islands unoccupied. This was the only instance in in the Pacific Campaign when an amphibious assault was conducted using dugout canoes. Finally, on April 30, the 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry landed without opposition on the island of Rambuty, 30 miles southeast of Los Negros. The invaders soon located defenders in the interior, killing 30 and capturing five.

As natives reported interactions with Japanese soldiers, the Allies followed up, hunting down resistors throughout the islands. These last remaining defenders found themselves in desperate conditions, lost in unknown and hostile territory, running out of rations and ammunition, while harried by Allied hunters. One such Japanese soldier left behind a diary of his experiences, while expressing collective preference for death over the perceived dishonor of surrender:

*28 March: ...it has been decided to abandon the present position and withdraw. The preparation for this has been made. However, it seems as though this has been cancelled and we will firmly hold this position. Ah! This is honorable defeat and I suppose we must be proud of the way we have handled ourselves. Only our names will remain, and this is something I don't altogether like. Yes, the lives of those remaining, 300 of us, are now limited to days.*

*30 March: This is the eighth day since we began the withdrawal. We have been wandering around and around the mountain roads because of the enemy. We have not yet arrived at our destination but we have completely exhausted our rations. Our bodies are becoming weaker and weaker, and this hunger is getting unbearable.*

*31 March: Although we are completely out of rations, the march continues. When will we reach Lorengau? Or will this unit be annihilated in the mountains? As we go along, we throw away our equipment and weapons one by one.*

*1 April: Arrived at native shack. According to a communication, friendly troops in Lorengau cannot help but withdraw. Hereafter there is no choice but to live as the natives do.*

The Admiralty Islands Campaign officially ended on May 18 with the successful Allied occupation of all islands in the region. Casualties numbered 3,280 Japanese dead and 75 captured, compared to 326 Allied dead. The result of the campaign was significant for the future Allied effort. The Admiralty Islands provided a valuable airbase as well as one of the largest naval bases in the Pacific. It became a major support center for Allied operations and a critical staging area for the future invasion of the Philippines. ~ ~ ~ Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson

JMC Historical Document Collection

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This Month in Military History

**Mar. 1, 1870:** After five years of fighting between Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, Paraguayan dictator Francisco Solano López dies at the Battle of Cerro Corá, ending the War of the Tripple Alliance.

**Mar. 4, 1215:** King John of England takes the crusader oath to strengthen the support of Pope Innocent III against the rebellious English barons. When John is forced to sign the Magna Carta in June, the pope declares it "not only shameful and de-meaning, but illegal and unjust", leading to the First Barons' War.

**Mar. 7, 1814:** Napoleon I of France defeats a combined force of Russian and Prussian troops under Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blü-cher at the Battle of Craonne, de-spite being outnumbered by more than 2-to-1.

**Mar. 10, 241 BCE:** The Romans sink the Carthaginian fleet at the Battle of the Aegates Islands, bringing the First Punic War to a close.

**Mar. 13, 624:** Grappling with thirst, a Meccan army of 650 men faces de-feat at the hands of a Muslim force of 300 led by the Prophet Muhammad at what becomes the Battle of Badr.

**Mar. 16, 1861:** Texas Governor Sam Houston is evicted from office for re-fusing to swear an oath to the Con-federacy. Edward Clark assumes the governorship in his place.

**Mar. 19, 1279:** Mongols achieve a naval victory at the Battle of Yamen, ending the last resistance of China's defeated Song Dynasty. In its place, the Yuan Dynasty expands under conquering Emperor Kublai Khan.

**Mar. 22, 1944:** Using more than 600 bombers, the 8th Air Force attacks Berlin, resulting in 2,000 dead and 175,000 homeless.

**Mar. 25, 1821:** After two months of intermittent clashes, Greeks formally declare their revolution against the Ottomans. The Greek War of Inde-pendence ends eight years later with the formation of modern Greece. This date is celebrated every year as Greece's Independence Day.

**Mar. 28, 1920:** White Russian troops under Gen. Anton Denikin are de-feated at Novorossiysk by Soviet and Bolshevik forces. Denikin narrowly escapes to Crimea, thanks to aid from the British. He will remain in ex-ile for the rest of his life.

**Mar. 31, 1854:** Giving in to threats by Commodore Perry, the Japanese Tokugawa Shogunate signs the Treaty of Kanagawa, opening its ports to the United States after 220 years without foreigners being al-lowed to set foot on Japanese soil.