

THE BATTLE OF BUNA BEGINS: 12 - 21 NOVEMBER



This map shows how the Battle of Buna-Gona evolved in the latter half of November, with Japanese forces concentrated in three separate Beachhead areas at Gona, Sanananda Point and Buna. The routes of the Allied advances, towards these areas are also shown. These advances, by elements of the Australian 7th Division and American 32nd Division, were supported by new airstrips quickly constructed at Dobodura and Popondetta. Another airstrip at Soputa was mainly used for airdrops.

desperate was Kenney for heavy bombers that the Liberators were rushed into action almost immediately. This hasty action would end in disaster, as will be seen.



The early hours of 12 November saw four No. 11 Squadron Catalinas raiding Buin airfield, dropping 16 x 250-pound and 12 x 500-pound general purpose bombs as well as 80 x 20-pound fragmentation bombs. Many fires were started, and it was presumed that fuel dumps had been hit. Three aircraft were claimed destroyed.

Shortly before dawn six 63rd BS B-17s raided shipping in the nearby Shortlands, dropping 29 x 500-pound bombs with the aid of illumination flares. The crews claimed two hits on two cargo vessels, one of which was a large ship estimated at 12,000-tons. In fact, the bombs had inflicted minor damage on the 15,000-ton IJN oiler *Naruto*.

The only other Allied air attack on 12 November was an early morning sweep by a trio of No. 30 Squadron Beaufighters. Two barges were strafed near Gona as were various huts and supply tracks, with a total of 1,300 x 20mm and 7,600 x 0.303-inch rounds expended.

The following day saw another pre-dawn B-17 raid on the Shortlands anchorage. Seven 63rd BS