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AMBON AND TIMOR INVASION OPERATIONS

PREPARED BY
MILITARY HISTORY SECTION
HEADQUARTERS, ARMY FORCES FAR EAST

DISTRIBUTED BY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

FOREWORD

This monograph was prepared in June 1947 by Lt Col Susumu Tozuka and was based on his diary notes. A staff officer with the Eastern Detachment which conducted operations on Ambon and Timor, Col Tozuka has augmented his narrative with recollections.

In its original, the English translation of this Japanese monograph consisted of only $5\frac{1}{2}$ pages of text and three maps. Aside from the quality of the translation, the text was characterized by extremes: on the one hand there was considerable repetition; on the other, overcondensation. Omissions were frequent. The maps in the original Japanese monograph are excellent, and contain much information that properly should have been included in the text; much of this data has been incorporated into the text.

Interviews with the Japanese staff of the Japanese Research Division resulted in the fleshing out of the original skeletal account to its present size. Of the three Japanese staff members who guided the editor in bringing this monograph to its present form, ex-Lt Col Kengoro Tanaka provided the greatest assistance.

This is an Army monograph. Additional information on air and naval participation in these operations can be obtained from companion Monograph No 101, (NAVY) Dutch East Indies Invasion Operations.

31 January 1953

Preface

Through Instructions No. 126 to the Japanese Government, 12 October 1945, subject : Institution for War Records Investigation, steps were initiated to exploit military historical records and official reports of the Japanese War Ministry and Japanese General Staff. Upon dissolution of the War Ministry and the Japanese General Staff, and the transfer of their former functions to the Demobilization Bureau, research and compilation continued and developed into a series of historical monographs.

The paucity of original orders, plans and unit journals, which are normally essential in the preparation of this type of record, most of which were lost or destroyed during field operations or bombing raids rendered the task of compilation most difficult; particularly distressing has been the complete lack of official strength reports, normal in AG or G3 records. However, while many of the important orders, plans and estimates have been reconstructed from memory and therefore are not textually identical with the originals, they are believed to be generally accurate and reliable.

Under the supervision of the Demobilization Bureau, the basic material contained in this monograph was compiled and written in Japanese by former officers, on duty in command and staff units within major units during the period of operations. Translation was effected through the facilities of Military Intelligence Service Group, G2, Headquarters, Far East Command.

This Japanese Operational Monograph was rewritten in English by

the Japanese Research Division, Military History Section, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East and is based on the translation of the Japanese original. Editorial corrections were limited to those necessary for coherence and accuracy.

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Japanese Operations Ambon and Timor

Organization of the Invasion Force

The immediate purpose of the Ambon and Timor operations¹ was to cut the lines of communications between Australia and Java, isolate the latter, and facilitate an invasion of Java. The ultimate purpose was to seize air and naval bases there and to form a defense line against an anticipated enemy counteroffensive from the Darwin area.

Troops for the operations, drawn mainly from the 38th (Infantry) Division which had participated in the battle for Hongkong, were formed into the Eastern Detachment, after the city fell on 25 December 1941. With the 228th Infantry Regiment as its nucleus, the Detachment was organized² near Hongkong on 4 January 1942, and was assigned to the 16th Army to assist its right flank in the drive to the south.

With the battle-tested 228th Infantry Regiment and with artillery, engineer, transport and other supporting units, the Eastern Detachment constituted a formidable striking force. Its commander was Major General Takeo Ito, commander of the 38th Infantry Group.³ Detachment personnel totaled 5,300, and its equipment included 110 vehicles and 400 horses.

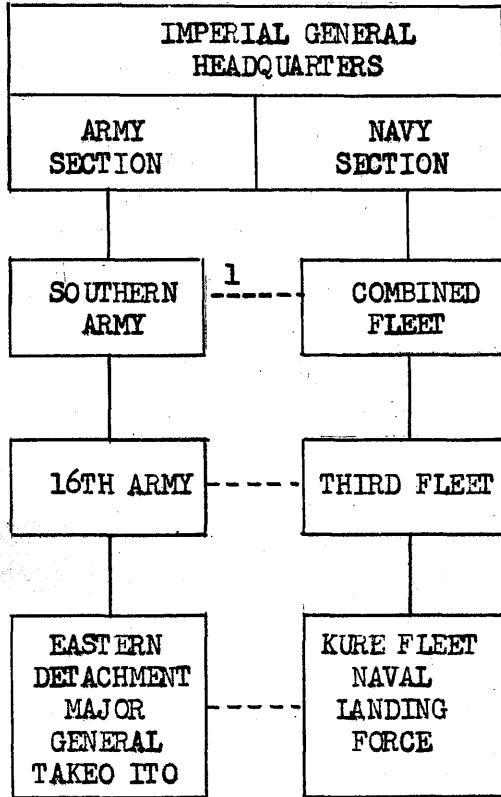
1. The genesis of these operations and the levels of command at which decisions were made are given in Chart 1.

2. For the composition of the Eastern Detachment, see Appendix 1.

3. General Ito, pursuant to the policy in the Japanese Army, while in command of the Eastern Detachment retained his position as 38th Infantry Group Commander. (See also footnotes 1 and 2 of Appendix 1.)

CHART 1

LEVEL AT WHICH DECISIONS WERE MADE FOR
THE AMBON AND TIMOR OPERATIONS



Decision

To seize southern islands in order to sever the lines of communication between Java and Australia.

Jointly selected Ambon and Timor² islands, and scheduled the movement of the invasion force and escort vessels.

Jointly selected actual dates of landings, and provided air support prior to and on dates of landings.

General Ito, as senior commander, selected exact sites of landing beaches, the time transport vessels entered the anchorage and landing craft lowered, and the volume and method of air support.

1. There was no joint command as such. However, liaison officers were exchanged between the services at each level of command.
2. Although operations on Ambon and Dutch Timor were readily approved by the Government and orders for their capture issued on 1 December 1941, it was only after a hot debate between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters that the invasion of Portuguese Timor was agreed upon (on 2 February 1942).

After hasty preparations the Detachment left Hongkong on 12 January aboard five vessels, and proceeded south to the assembly point at Davao in the southern Philippines. The ships, tonnage, and their personnel loading were as follows:

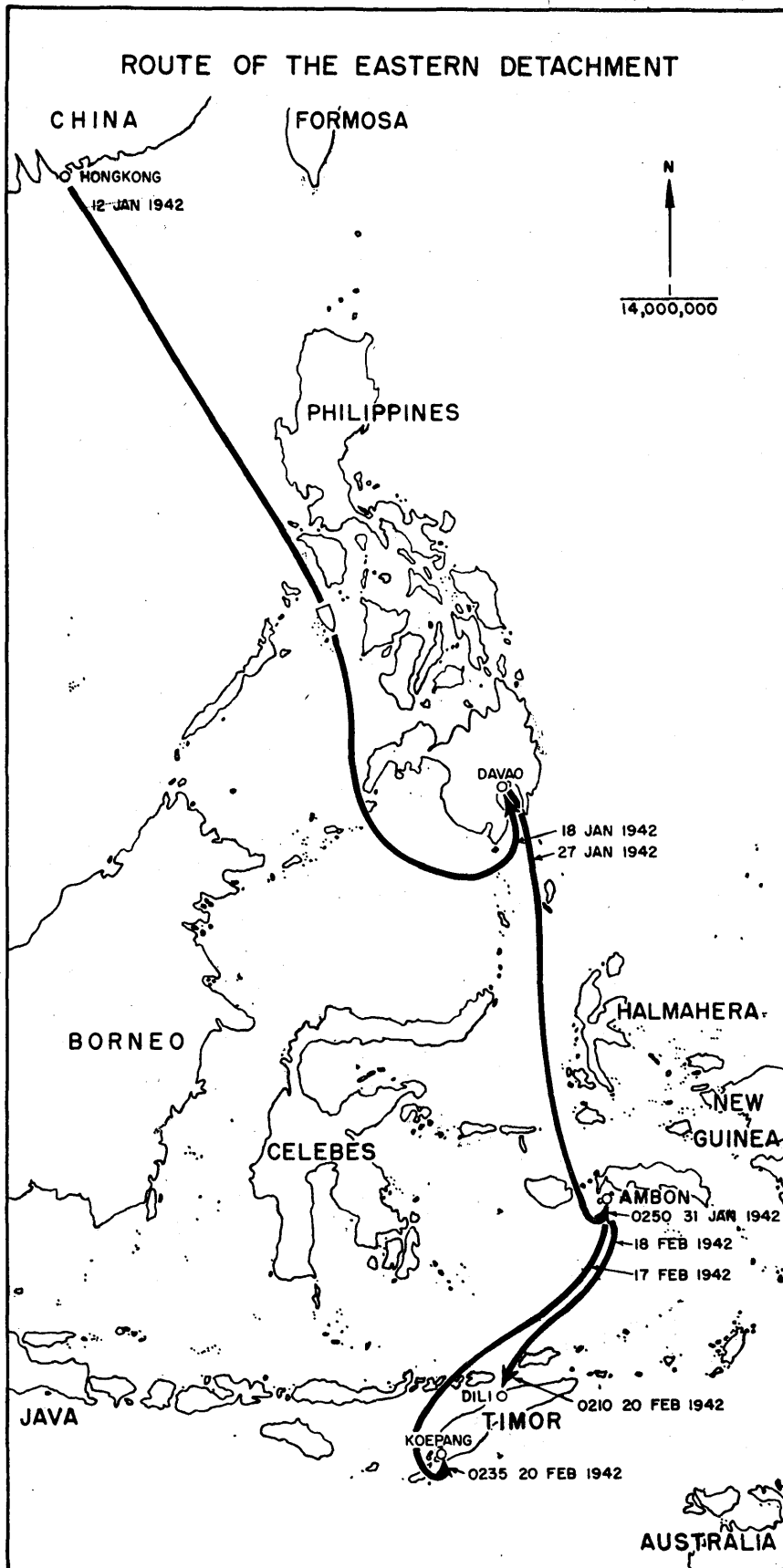
<u>Ships</u> ⁴	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>Loading</u>
<u>Miike Maru</u>	12,000	Headquarters and its supporting units
<u>Africa Maru</u>	9,000	3d Bn, 228th Inf
<u>Ryoyo Maru</u>	6,000	Part of the Infantry and Main Force of the 1st Mt. Arty. Bn.
<u>Zenyo Maru</u>	(Air Defense Ship) 6,000	1st Bn, 228th Inf
<u>Yamaura Maru</u>	6,000	2d Bn, 228th Inf

Ammunition for two weeks of active operations, and food and forage for three months were loaded at Hongkong.

Arriving at the Davao assembly area on 18 January, the Eastern Detachment conducted training, made changes in the loading of the vessels, and in conjunction with the Navy, formulated the plan for the Ambon invasion. On 27 January the Eastern Detachment left Davao in five vessels escorted by the 2d Destroyer Squadron. Two days later, at Menado in the Celebes, the invasion force was augmented by two more ships carrying 579 officers and men who made up the Kure First Special Naval Landing Force.

Ambon (or Amboina), an island of the Moluccas in the Malay Archipelago, has an area of 385 square miles and a population in excess of

4. These were all Merchant Marine Supply Ships and, except for the Air Defense Ships, they were unarmed.



50,000. It is almost 4 degrees below the equator, and at 128 degrees East Longitude. It lies about 250 miles west of the lower jaw of the "dinosaur" formed by New Guinea, and is less than 650 miles directly north of Darwin, Australia.

Operations Intelligence of Ambon

Information regarding terrain features of the operational area was obtained mainly from photographs obtained from naval aircraft reconnaissance, but was unsatisfactory. Two areas were singled out as important: Ambon City, on the peninsula, believed to be the best fortified area on the peninsula, and the airfield at Laha on the island proper. The enemy was known to have about eight large caliber fixed artillery weapons in the strongly fortified area southwest of Ambon City. Details as to enemy strength and disposition of forces were not clear. On the basis of pre-war estimates, however, it was believed that the main force of the enemy was concentrated on the peninsula, and was holding defensive strategic points southwest of Ambon City. Events were to prove these estimates to be valid.

The Plan of Attack for the Ambon Operation⁵

The plan of attack called for two simultaneous landings, one in the south and one in the north. The landing in the south, which was to be the major one, was to take place on the peninsula appended to the south of the island by a neck of land about 1 mile wide. This landing was to be made by a force consisting of the major assault elements of the

5. For the composition of the Ambon landing force, see Chart 2.

EASTERN DETACHMENT O/B FOR OPERATIONS ON AMBON

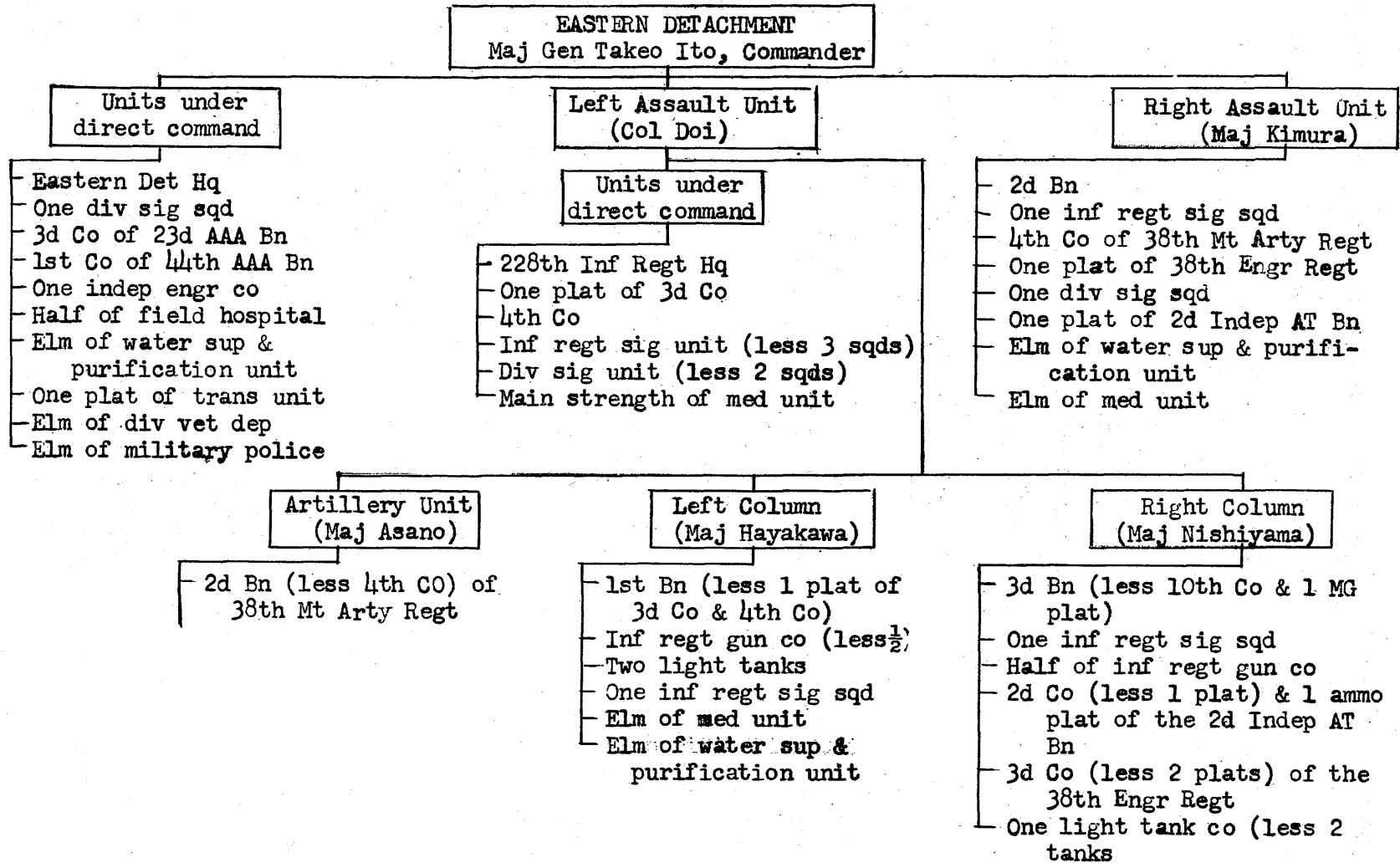


Chart No 2

Eastern Detachment, less one company. The landing in the north was to be carried out by the Kure First Special Naval Landing Force, assisted by the 10th Company of the 3d Battalion (228th Infantry Regiment).

For the peninsula landing, the landing point designated was the southeastern tip of the peninsula where the enemy was believed to have only light defenses. The landing on the north shore of the island was to take place east of Wakal from an anchorage off Hitoelama. The assaulting forces were to contact and destroy the enemy; the peninsula force was to seize Ambon City and other strategic points while the force in the north was capturing the airfield at Laha.

Ammunition, food, and forage for use in the initial landing stages were to be carried in by the assault troops. Subsequent supplies were to be brought in by the supply ships after the capture of Ambon City.

The peninsula landing was scheduled to commence between 0100 and 0240 on 31 January, with a simultaneous landing on the north shore of the main part of the island.

Operations on Ambon⁶

Four ships -- the Yamaura, the Africa, the Zenyo, and the Miike -- entered the anchorage off Roetoeng at the southeastern tip of the peninsula at 0100, 31 January 1942. The assault elements of the three battalions landed abreast, the 1st on the left, near Roetoeng, the 3d

6. The landings on Ambon were preceded by several days of naval air bombardment, and were accompanied by tactical air strikes. Naval aircraft came from bases in the Celebes. [See Monograph 101 (Navy) Dutch East Indies Invasion Operations.]

in the center, and the 2d on the right, east of Hoetoemori. All landings were completed by 0250,⁷ and the force fanned out: the 1st Battalion drove to the southern sector where Australian forces were entrenched; the 3d Battalion cut through the center of the peninsula to split the Australian and Dutch forces, and the 2d Battalion advanced northward along the east coast towards the Dutch-defended neck joining the peninsula to the body of the island. (For a detailed description of the progress of operations, see Map 2.)

Along separate paths of advance, the left and center battalions, which together and with supporting troops were called the left Assault Unit, converged on Ambon City. By dusk, this force had driven a wedge between the Australian Army in the southern portion of the peninsula and the Dutch force in the north, thereby dividing the enemy.

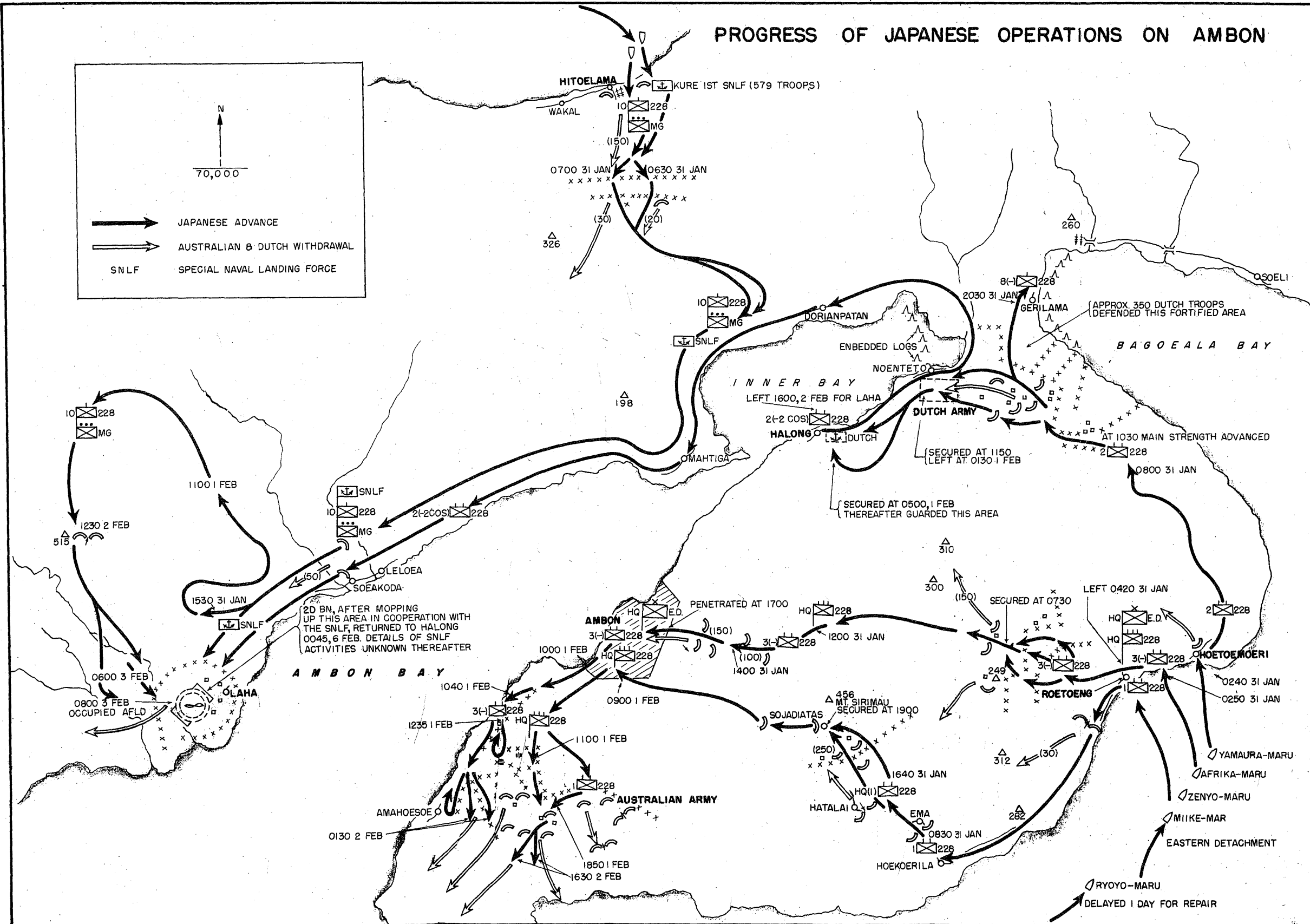
On the second day, the main force of the Left Assault Unit isolated the Australian force which had retreated into the southwestern part of the peninsula. Meanwhile, the Right Assault Unit (the 2d Battalion and supporting units) attacked the Dutch defenses at the neck of the peninsula and then cut across the peninsula to Ambon Bay, sealing off the Dutch force. In this way, the Dutch and Australian forces were subdued separately, and on the third day resistance on the peninsula ended.

Meanwhile, the landing on the north shore of the main body of the

7. During the China Incident the Japanese successfully carried out a pre-dawn landing. Since that time pre-dawn landings were incorporated into Japanese concepts of Amphibious operations. Under this concept, beachheads were to be secured by dawn.

PROGRESS OF JAPANESE OPERATIONS ON AMBON

N
 70,000
 JAPANESE ADVANCE
 AUSTRALIAN & DUTCH WITHDRAWAL
 SNLF SPECIAL NAVAL LANDING FORCE



island was not going as well as expected. Enemy resistance in the landing area had slowed down the advance, and it was only after the 2d Battalion less two companies was sent as reinforcements (after the northern sector of the peninsula was secured) that the Laha airfield was captured on 3 February.⁸

Organized resistance on the island, including the peninsula, ended on 3 February. In the airfield sector on the body of the island, approximately 400 Australians surrendered. In the northern sector of the peninsula approximately 800 Dutch Army and 30 Naval personnel surrendered, and in the southern sector, where the heaviest fighting took place, approximately 1,500 Australians surrendered.

It was afterwards learned that Dutch and Australian forces totaled about 3,000 at the beginning of the invasion. This would indicate that the defenders suffered 270 losses. All figures, however, are estimates. Japanese Army casualties on Ambon totaled 55 dead and 135 wounded. The number of casualties sustained by the naval force is not known.

After Ambon was secured, a temporary military administration was established on the island by the Eastern Detachment. Sometime in March the 24th Special Naval Base Force arrived, and the military administration of Ambon was placed under its jurisdiction.

8. On 10 February the 21st Air Flotilla began operating from the newly-captured airfield and carried out almost daily missions against Timor. /See Monograph No 101 (Navy) Dutch East Indies Invasion Operations./

The Japanese Invasion of Timor Island

At the same time that military administration was being set up on Ambon, preparations were going forward for the invasion of Timor, approximately 340 miles to the southwest.

Knowledge of the enemy situation on Timor, and of the details of terrain features, was lacking.⁹ Consequently, intelligence had to be based largely on estimates. Strategic naval and air bases were estimated to be at Koepang and Dili (also spelled Dille or Dilly), and the main enemy force was thought to be in the Koepang area.

Plan of Attack for the Timor¹⁰ Operation

The plan of attack for the Timor invasion paralleled that for Ambon in several respects: Two amphibious assaults were to be made; they were

9. Timor, an island of 13,700 square miles and a population of 820,000, is in the South Malay Archipelago, and lies between 8 and 11 degrees South Latitude, and between 123 and 128 degrees East Longitude. The island stretches generally on a northeast-southwest axis, being 340 miles long and reaching its greatest width--about 90 miles--in the southwest. The northeastern tip of Timor is 370 miles from Darwin, Australia. The eastern half of the island is controlled by the Portuguese who also have an exclave in the Dutch-controlled western half. The mountains in the center of the island reach a height in at least one spot of 8,000 feet. There are four airfields on the island, according to a US Army Air Force Long Range Air Navigation Chart published in 1944 by the Army Map Service (340101). These are: The Penfoei Field near Poeton (not far from Koepang) in the southwestern part of the island; the Atamboea Field and the Dili Field (sea level) in the north (these three have runways between 4,500 and 5,499 feet in length), and the Fuiloro Field in the northeast with a runway between 5,500 and 6,500 feet in length. The Penfoei and Atamboea fields are in Dutch Timor, while the other two are in the Portuguese portion of the island. At the time of the Japanese invasion, however, only two airfields existed on Timor, according to Japanese research consultants, those at Peoton and Dili.

10. Dutch and Australian forces had occupied Timor on 17 Dec 41.

to be carried out simultaneously; one landing was to be in the north and one in the south, with the latter--as in the Ambon invasion--the major one; and naval forces were to be used in the operation. The naval force for Timor, however, was to be used for an air invasion.

The plan called for organizing the Eastern Detachment into two landing forces--the Koepang invasion force, consisting of the 1st and 3d Battalions as the assault elements, and the Dili invasion force, the assault element of which the 2d Battalion. Both landings were to be made simultaneously on 20 February. On the same day, an inland air drop of naval paratroops was to be made in the vicinity of Desaoe to assist the Koepang invasion force in the capture of the airfield near Poeton.

The Koepang invasion force was to engage and destroy the enemy and then to seize and occupy the town of Koepang with its naval base, and also, with the cooperation of the paratroops, the Penfoei Airfield near Poeton. It was anticipated that the enemy, when pressed in the north, would retreat eastward. To intercept his retreat, one company, reinforced, was assigned to the right flank of the assault force. The Dili invasion force was to seize and occupy the town of Dili and the airfield nearby.

After completing preparations for the invasion of Timor, the main force of the Eastern Detachment (the Koepang invasion force) departed Ambon on 17 February. On the following day, the Dili invasion force, under the 228th regimental commander, departed.

Operations in the Koepang Area

The invasion began early on the morning of 20 February. The Koepang

invasion force¹¹ landed on the south shore of southwestern Timor between 0235 and 0400, took the enemy by surprise, and began advancing in three columns. (For exact sites of landings, and for details of the progress of operations See Map 3). The 1st Battalion, less two companies, landed on the left and, encountering no resistance, began marching towards Koepang on the north shore. The 3d Battalion's main elements started out in the right column and after traveling a short distance turned left and headed for Koepang as the center column. Its 10th Company, from the same starting point, took a different route, traveling perpendicularly to the line of advance of the center column, with the objective of seizing the airfield at Poeton. Upon reaching the juncture with the main/^{elements} of the 3d Battalion, however, the 10th Company joined it. The 9th Company, reinforced, replaced it as the force to take the airfield. (See Map No.3) Meanwhile, the 2d Company of the 1st Battalion, assigned as the right flank of the invasion force, continued advancing northward towards Desaoe.

At about 1045 approximately 308 navy paratroops were dropped behind enemy lines in the vicinity of Desaoe, northeast of the operational area. These were part of the 1,000-man Yokosuka Third Special Landing Force, and were airlifted from Kendari in the Celebes. On the following day, 323 more paratroops descended in the same area. This force was to help in the capture of the airfield near Poeton.

By 1900 on the first day of operations, the 1st Battalion had penetrated Koepang on the north shore, and by 0100 of 21 February, it was

11. For the composition of this force see Chart No. 3. The vanguard of this force actually consisted of two platoons (118 officers and men) of the Sasebo Combined Special Naval Landing Force. It was unusual to use naval forces in the first wave to secure the beachhead in amphibious operations. After securing the beachheads, they generally defended them and helped supply and transport operations.

EASTERN DETACHMENT O/B FOR OPERATIONS OF KOEPANG

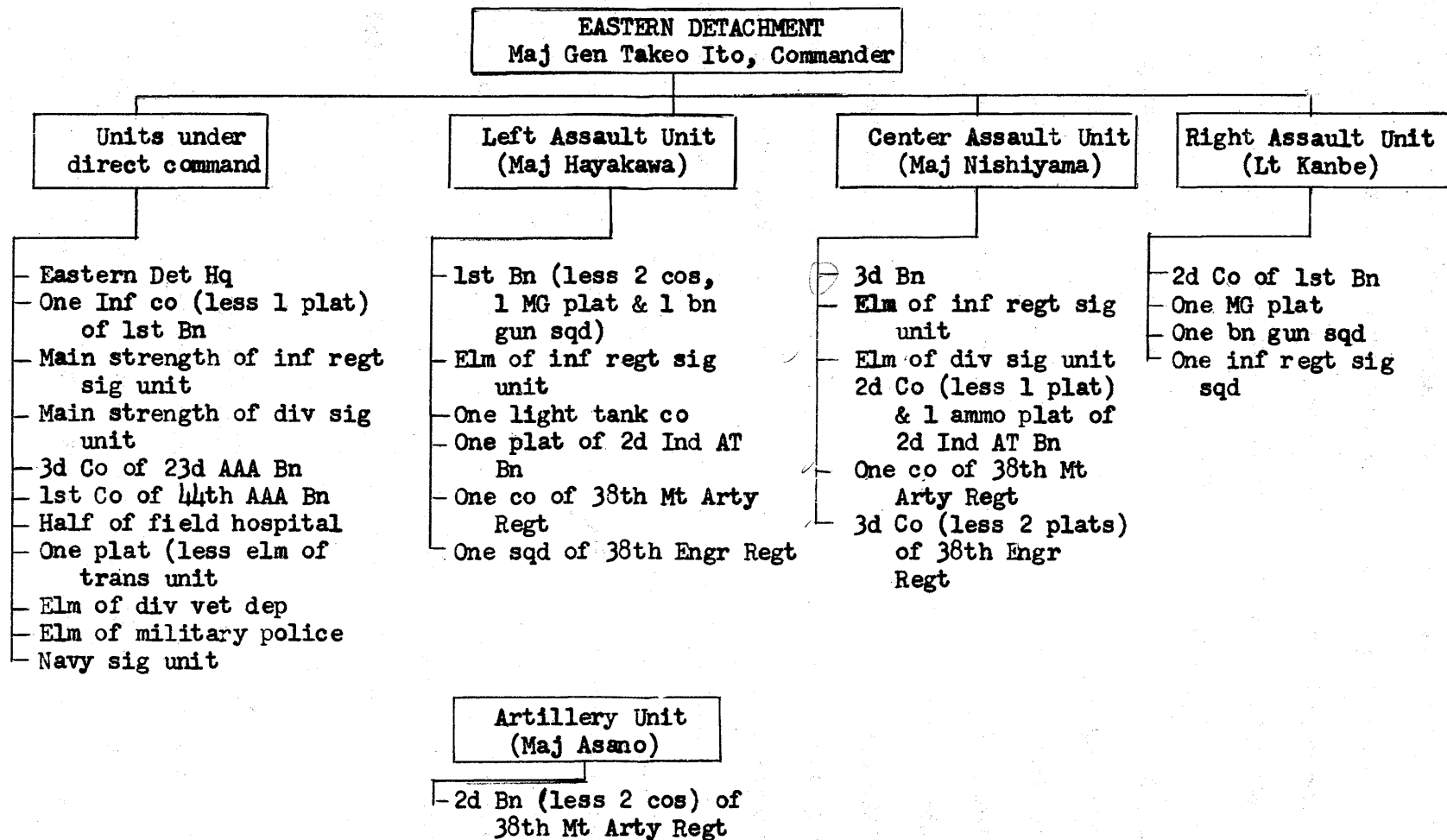


Chart No. 3
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joined by the 3d Battalion. The town was occupied at 1700, 21 February. The 9th Company overran the airfield at Poeton at 1420 on the same day. As anticipated, the enemy when compressed in the north sought to escape to the east and, encountering the 2d Company on the right flank, engaged it in desperate fighting near Babaoe.

Meanwhile the paratroops met and skirmished with the vanguard of the retreating enemy. It avoided a protracted engagement, however, in order to hasten to the airfield at Poeton, and arrived there early in the morning of the 22d, when the airfield was already in the hands of the center column.

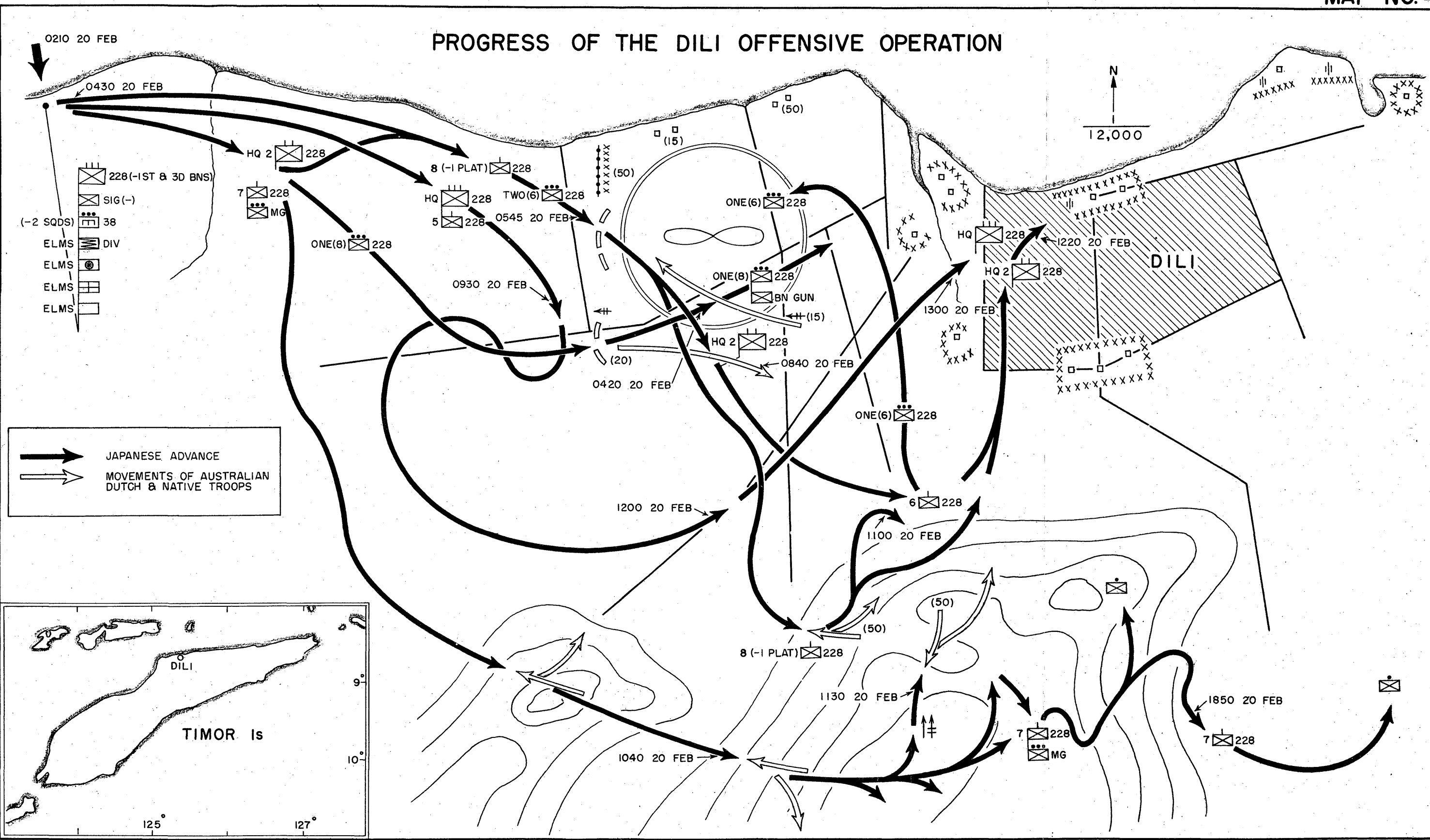
With Koepang and the airfield in its hands, and learning of the danger to its right flank, the Koepang invasion force sent reinforcements to the 2d Company. About 1,500 Australians had retreated to the area between Babaoe and Desaoe. At about 2130, 21 February, the right column engaged the Australians, and on the following morning the Australians counterattacked. The reinforcing 1st Battalion arrived in the afternoon and launched a final drive at 1700, which resulted in the surrender of the Australians and the end of organized resistance in the southwestern portion of the island.

Japanese Army losses during this engagement totaled 67 killed and 56 wounded. No figures on enemy casualties are available.

Operations in the Dili Area

The operation in the Dili area, unlike that in the Koepang area, failed to take the enemy by surprise and encountered resistance at the very outset. Invasion ships entering the anchorage off Dili for a

PROGRESS OF THE DILI OFFENSIVE OPERATION



seaborne frontal assault against the city were shelled by shore batteries. An alternate anchorage was therefore selected about two miles west of Dili. Landings were begun at 0210, 20 February.

The assault force for the landing was the 228th Infantry Regiment (less the 1st and 3d Battalions), supported by one engineer platoon (less two squads) and by elements of the Division Signal, Transport, Medical, and Water Supply and Purification Units. Because of the change in the anchorage and landing sites, a land attack from the west replaced the planned seaborne assault against Dili. This would make it necessary to capture the airfield before assaulting the city. (See Map No. 4).

Approaching the airfield in three columns, the 2d Battalion clashed with small pockets of resistance (15 to 50 men) at several points. The strongest resistance was met in the area of the airfield, although several sharp skirmishes took place farther to the south. The advance was rapid, however, and as early as 0420 the 6th Company began to attack the outer defenses of the airfield. Although the enemy tried to counter-attack in the southwest sector of the field, he was driven back and by 0840 he was retreating toward the city. One platoon of the 8th Company occupied a part of the airfield at 1020.

Elements of the battalion were in Dili at 1220, and by 1300 the city was secured. The enemy, caught between our forces and the sea, and realizing the hopelessness of his situation, sought the only avenue of escape and fled to the east. What eventually happened to these troops is unknown, but it is believed that they left the island.

The enemy force in the Dili area consisted of approximately 400 Dutch,

270 Australian, and 600 native troops. The Japanese invasion force totaled approximately 1,000 troops. Relatively few prisoners were taken, however. No exact figures on captured prisoners or on enemy casualties are available. Japanese casualties for the operation were two killed and five wounded.

The Eastern Detachment gradually consolidated its positions on Timor and by the middle of April the entire island was completely occupied.

APPENDIX No 1

Composition of the Eastern Detachment

Commander: Major General Takeo Ito

Staff Officer:¹ Major Susumu Tozaka

38th Infantry Group Headquarters²

228th Infantry Regiment

Light Tank Unit

Elements of Division Signal Unit³

* Elements of 2d Indep. A.T. Gun Battalion

Half of Field Hospital

Elements of Division Medical Unit

Elements of Division Veterinary Hospital

1 Mountain Artillery Battalion

* 2 AA Artillery Batteries

1 Engineer Company (less 1 platoon)

* 1 Independent Engineer Company

1 Transport Platoon (Approx. 50 men and 15 vehicles)

Water Supply and Purification Unit

* Elements of Anchorage Headquarters⁴

Elements of MP Unit

1. Major Tozaka was a 38th Division Staff Officer. Japanese infantry divisions usually have three staff officers, one to handle operations, one intelligence, and one supply; personnel was handled by the adjutant who was not a "staff officer." "Appointments" of staff officers were made by the Japanese War Minister. The Division Commander could, and did, "attach" this staff officer to the Eastern Detachment, where he handled all three staff functions. However, his "appointment" as staff officer of the 38th Division remained in effect while he was attached to the Eastern Detachment.

2. In a Japanese infantry division, the three infantry regiments constitute a group controlled directly by the group headquarters commander, usually a major general.

3. "Units" are generally battalion size.

4. Handled debarkation and embarkation.

* Asterisk indicates non-divisional units that were attached by 16th Army.