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TO SALAMAUA

Following his acclaimed book *The Battle for Wau*, Phillip Bradley turns his attention to the Salamaua campaign – the first of the New Guinea offensives by the Australian Army in the Second World War.

Opening with the pivotal air and sea battle of the Bismarck Sea, this important title recounts the fierce land campaign fought for the ridges that guarded the Japanese base at Salamaua. From Mount Tambu to Old Vickers and across the Francisco River, the Australians and their American allies fought a desperate struggle to keep the Imperial Japanese Army diverted from the strategic prize of Lae.

To Salamaua covers the entire campaign in one volume for the first time. From the strategic background of the campaign and the heated command conflicts, to the mud and blood of the front lines, this is the extraordinary story.

Phillip Bradley is the author of two previous books in the Australian Army History series, *On Shaggy Ridge* and *The Battle for Wau*. He writes for *After the Battle* and *Wartime* magazines.

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CONTENTS

Foreword by Professor David Horner	vii
List of illustrations	ix
Acknowledgements	xiii
Abbreviations	xv
Introduction	1
1 Death in the Bismarck Sea	3
2 Opposing forces	31
3 Warfe's tigers	52
4 Supply lines	78
5 Mubo stalemate	106
6 On Lababia Ridge	120
7 On Bobdubi Ridge	135
8 Yanks	161
9 Mubo falls	176
10 'A bit of a stoush'	186
11 The forbidden mountain	209
12 Roosevelt Ridge	231
13 Old Vickers	249
14 Komiatum Ridge	274

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[More information](#)

vi CONTENTS

15 Across the Frisco	293
16 Salamaua falls	309
Appendix: Place names	319
Notes	320
Bibliography	350
Index	360

FOREWORD

The six-month military campaign conducted in Papua between July 1942 and January 1943 by the Australian army, with help from the United States, saw some of the famous battles of Australian military history. These included the fighting retreat on the Kokoda Trail, the defence at Isurava, the battle at Milne Bay, the counter-offensive over the Kokoda Trail culminating in the victory at Oivi-Gorari and the gruelling battles at Buna, Gona and Sanananda.

Then, seven months later, the Australian army began a series of spectacular military operations in New Guinea. On 4 September 1943 the 9th Australian Division landed from the sea near the town of Lae. Next day the 7th Division began to arrive by air at the captured airstrip at Nadzab, and together the divisions closed in on Lae. Less than a month later the 9th Division carried out another amphibious landing, at Finschhafen, and the battles there ended with the seizure of the Japanese mountain stronghold at Sattelberg. Meanwhile, with the assistance of daring work by Australian commandos and American transport aircraft, the 7th Division advanced up the Markham and into the Ramu Valley. This thrust finished with the successful capture of Shaggy Ridge early in 1944. The campaign was an outstanding orchestration of the land, sea and air forces of two countries.

Yet between these two campaigns, both geographically and chronologically, the Australian army fought another gruelling campaign that deserves to be better known. The campaign really began with the Japanese landing at Salamaua on 8 March 1942. Australian commandos harassed the enemy until January 1943, when the Japanese tried to seize the inland town of Wau. In a heroic defensive battle, brilliantly described by Phillip Bradley in his book *The Battle for Wau*, Australian infantry, commanded by Brigadier Murray Moten, held off the Japanese and started a counter-offensive.

The 3rd Australian Division under Major General Stanley Savige took over the campaign in April 1943, and for almost six months his infantry

pursued a grim war through a jungle-covered tangle of mountains, ridges and valleys. Unknown to the soldiers and their commanders, their task was not to recapture Salamaua, but to draw the Japanese on to themselves like a magnet, thus ensuring that the troops who landed at Lae would have an easier fight.

It was a complex campaign. Savage never had a full-strength division as it could not have been supplied in this geographically isolated area. When American troops were brought in to ease his supply difficulties by securing the coast, they created command problems. It was difficult to provide artillery support, aircraft found it hard to locate the enemy in the maze of jungle-covered ridges, and supplies needed to be brought forward by native carriers. Eventually, after the success of the Lae landing, the troops captured Salamaua, but Savage and many of the men who had earned the victory had been relieved by fresher commanders and soldiers who had come in towards the end.

The story of the campaign needs to be told. Here the Australian army refined its techniques of jungle warfare and kept the pressure on the Japanese while other forces prepared for the major offensive later in the year. But the campaign presents problems for the historian. It lacks the spectacular large-scale battles of other campaigns, and instead consists of countless patrols, ambushes and battalion-level attacks on remote mountain tops. It is difficult to reach the area, and the terrain is also daunting for any historian who wants to research the battlefield.

In his third book on the fighting in New Guinea, Phillip Bradley has met the challenge of this most difficult of campaigns. He has trekked into the mountains to gain great insight into the problems faced by the soldiers, and to understand the tactical aspects of the key battles. He has researched both Australian and Japanese records. He has also interviewed a large number of the participants, to give the reader a first-hand account of what it was like to fight this war of close-quarter battles. And he has put it all together to give us a compelling story of one of the Australian army's more important Second World War campaigns. The result, this book, *To Salamaua*, is a wonderful tribute to the unpretentious but brave and determined men who helped win the war, and another major contribution to Australian military history.

David Horner
Professor of Australian Defence History
Australian National University
October 2009

ILLUSTRATIONS

PHOTOGRAPHS

1	High-level bombing of one of the convoy vessels	16
2	Flight Lieutenant Terry Duigan and his Catalina crew	17
3	Beaufighter strafing one of the convoy vessels	21
4	A convoy vessel, probably the <i>Kembu Maru</i> , burns	23
5	Brigadier Murray Moten	42
6	Lieutenant-General Savige, General Blamey and Lieutenant-General Berryman	43
7	Flight Lieutenant Newton's Boston bomber attacking Salamaua	50
8	Major George Warfe	53
9	The northern end of Bobdubi Ridge	66
10	Track along Komiatum Ridge	68
11	Japanese landing craft	82
12	Working on the Bulldog Road	99
13	Native carrier supply line	103
14	One of Major O'Hare's 3.7-inch mountain guns	108
15	The kunda-vine bridge across the Francisco River	143
16	View west over the Francisco River and Uliap Creek	145
17	Brigadier Heathcote 'Tack' Hammer	152
18	Gordon Ayre helping Wal Johnson across Uliap Creek	158
19	Gordon McDonald being brought back across the kunda-vine bridge	159
20	Landing craft at Nassau Bay	169
21	Vickers gun on Ambush Knoll	198
22	Private Len Mahon ready to attack Timbered Knoll	206

x ILLUSTRATIONS

23	Burial service on Timbered Knoll	207
24	A plaque on Timbered Knoll in remembrance of the fallen men	208
25	Captain Mick Walters	210
26	View of Mount Tambu from the north-west	213
27	Captain Cameron's company moves forward – 24 July	222
28	US infantry on Mount Tambu	225
29	Bull Allen bringing in one of the wounded Americans	228
30	The prize – the view north from Tambu Knoll	229
31	Major Archibald Roosevelt and Corporal Ralph Jones	232
32	Roosevelt Ridge	234
33	The attack on the Old Vickers position	255
34	The southern end of the Old Vickers position	255
35	Roy Dawson firing the captured mountain gun	259
36	View across the southern approach to Old Vickers	264
37	View south along the ridge to Centre Coconuts	270
38	Japanese flag taken from the South Coconuts position	272
39	Herbert Escreet from the 2/5th Battalion takes a break	275
40	Aerial view looking north down Komiatum Ridge	279
41	Charlie Hill	289
42	Japanese commander's position in the Komiatum Ridge area	291
43	Buirali Creek junction	296
44	Aerial view over Bobdubi Ridge and Arnold's Crest	301
45	Decorated men from the 58/59th Battalion	305
46	Aerial view down the coast south of Salamaua	311
47	Salamaua, September 1943	316
48	Salamaua 2006	316

MAPS

1	The New Guinea theatre	2
2	The Lae–Salamaua–Wau area	4
3	Lae convoy: 1–3 March 1943	14
4	Dispositions: 30 April 1943	46

5	Bobdubi Ridge area	56
6	Goodview Junction: 27 April 1943	59
7	Bobdubi Ridge: May 1943	65
8	Hote–Cissembob area	75
9	Japanese supply route – Rabaul to Lae	84
10	Japanese supply route – Madang to Lae	86
11	The Bulldog Road	96
12	The Pimple: 24–26 April 1943	115
13	Lababia Ridge area: 9–11 May 1943	121
14	Lababia Ridge area: 2–23 June 1943	129
15	Operation Doublet plan	139
16	58/59th Battalion attack: 30 June 1943	142
17	Old Vickers – Coconuts position: July 1943	146
18	Nassau Bay landing: 29–30 June 1943	164
19	Mubo area: 7–13 July 1943	178
20	Goodview Junction: 8–10 July 1943	190
21	Ambush Knoll: 6–23 July 1943	199
22	Mount Tambu: 16–18 July 1943	211
23	Mount Tambu: 24 July 1943	220
24	Roosevelt Ridge: 13 August 1943	240
25	Tambu Bay – Lake Salus area: August 1943	242
26	Old Vickers position: 28 July 1943	254
27	Old Vickers position: 2–4 August 1943	262
28	Coconuts position: 13 August 1943	268
29	Komiatum Ridge area: 16–19 August 1943	276
30	Charlie Hill area: August–September 1943	287
31	Bench Cut Track – Bobdubi Track junction: 17–18 August 1943	295
32	15th Brigade operations: 26 August – 10 September 1943	300
33	Arnold’s Crest: 27 August 1943	302
34	Lieutenant Garland’s ambush patrol: 3 September 1943	306
35	Scout Ridge area: August–September 1943	310
36	The fall of Salamaua: 11–13 September 1943	317

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Phillip Bradley
Lennox Head
September 2009

ABBREVIATIONS

2IC	second-in-command
AA	anti-aircraft
ADS	Advanced Dressing Station
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit
App	appendices
ASV	Air-to-Surface Vessel
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Section
Aust	Australian
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BAR	Browning Automatic Rifle
Bde	Brigade
Bdr	Bombardier
BG	Bombardment Group
Bn	Battalion
Brig	Brigadier
BS	Bomb Squadron
C in C	Commander-in-Chief
Capt	Captain
Cdr	Commander
Ck	creek
CO	Commanding Officer
Col	Colonel
Coy	Company
Cpl	Corporal
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
Div	Division
Docs	documents
DSC	Distinguished Service Cross
DSO	Distinguished Service Order

EBSR	Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment
EY rifle	extra yoke rifle (with grenade discharger)
FDL	Forward Defensive Line
Flt Lt	Flight Lieutenant
FOO	forward observation officer
FUP	forming-up point
Gen	General
GHQ	General Headquarters
Gnr	Gunner
GOC	General Officer Commanding
Gp	Group
GPS	Global Positioning System
HE	High Explosive
How	Howitzer
HQ	Headquarters
IJAF	Imperial Japanese Armed Forces
Ind Coy	Independent Company
Inf	Infantry
Intel	Intelligence
IO	Intelligence Officer
IR	Interrogation Report
LAD	Light Aid Detachment
L of C	line of communication
L-Cpl	Lance-Corporal
L-Sgt	Lance-Sergeant
LMG	light machine-gun
Lt	Lieutenant
Lt-Col	Lieutenant-Colonel
Maj	Major
MC	Military Cross
MG	machine-gun
MIA	missing in action
MID	Mentioned in Dispatches
Mk	mark
MLC	Motorised Landing Craft
MM	Military Medal
MMG	medium machine-gun
MP	military police
MV	Motor Vessel
NAA	National Archives of Australia

NCO	non-commissioned officer
NGF	New Guinea Force
NGVR	New Guinea Volunteer Rifles
No.	number
OC	Officer Commanding
OP	observation post
Ops	Operations
OR	other rank
PIB	Papuan Infantry Battalion
Pl	Platoon
POW	prisoner of war
Pte	Private
Ptn	Platoon
Pubs	publications
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAE	Royal Australian Engineers
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
Regt	Regiment
RMO	Regimental Medical Officer
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
Sgt	Sergeant
SL	Start Line
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SNLP	Special Naval Landing Party
Sqn	Squadron
SS	Steam Ship
SWPA	South-West Pacific Area
TCG	Troop Carrier Group
TF	Task Force
TSMG	Thompson submachine-gun
US	United States
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces
USS	United States Ship
WD	War Diary
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II