

World War II – 36 Australian Infantry Battalion

With the outbreak of World War II, the battalion was called up for a month of continuous service and recruitment was stepped up as national servicemen were used to fill the ranks. During 1940–41, training camps were conducted around New South Wales at Rutherford, Greta, and Bathurst Camps. In March 1942, following the entry of the Imperial Japanese into the war, the 36th Battalion was moved to Newcastle, along with the rest of the 14th Brigade in order to defend against a possible invasion of the area. In May 1942, as the Japanese began to threaten New Guinea, they returned to Greta Camp in preparation for transfer to Townsville, from where they would embark for Port Moresby. In Port Moresby, the battalion was initially employed in a garrison role, conducting long-range patrols in the Owen Stanley Range, however, as the Japanese moved further towards Port Moresby, the 36th Battalion was sent to Koitaki in September 1942 in anticipation of going into action. When the Japanese reached Nauro the battalion was sent in as a blocking force, and they patrolled the area along the track that ran south to Subitana for about a week before they were moved north to Uberi where they relieved the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions, before returning to Port Moresby on 9 October 1942. Around this time, the battalion's machine gun company was detached and in conjunction with several other Militia machine gun companies, it was used to form the 7th Machine Gun Battalion.

Despite being withdrawn back to Port Moresby the campaign continued and late in December, the 36th Battalion, now part of the 30th Brigade was sent to Sanananda to take part in the Battle of Buna-Gona.[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/36th_Battalion_\(Australia\) - cite_note-AWM2-9](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/36th_Battalion_(Australia) - cite_note-AWM2-9) The 16th Brigade had been unable to capture Sanananda initially and so between 19 December and 26 December 1942, the 30th Brigade launched further attacks against the Japanese defences at Sanananda. These too failed, however, and the 36th was transferred from action after being reduced in strength to just 16 officers and 272 men in a fortnight. After only a brief respite, in January 1943 the battalion moved up to the Gona area to relieve the 55th/53rd Battalion and to carry out patrols along the Amboga River. In March, the 36th Battalion was withdrawn from the line and returned to Australia for rest and training. At this time, they received a large batch of reinforcements from the 49th Battalion which had fought alongside them around Sanananda, and in July 1943 they had returned to New Guinea, where for the next fifteen months they would be moved around the island, stationed in Port Moresby tasks, Soputa, Buna–Oro Bay, Lae, Wau, and Bulolo, carrying out various garrison duties once more.

In October 1944, the 36th Battalion was placed under the command of the 6th Brigade and along with the 14th/32nd and 19th Battalions they moved by sea to the north coast of New Britain. Operating on the Gazelle Peninsula, the 36th Battalion took part in the Australian campaign of containment against the much larger Japanese forces that were in existence on the island at the time. In doing so, the battalion made a name for itself carrying out numerous long-range patrols and amphibious landings, becoming known as "Ike's Marines". In June 1945, after seven months on New Britain, the 36th Battalion was relieved and brought back to Australia in June 1945. It was disbanded in August 1945. Throughout its service during the war, the battalion lost 77 killed in action or died on active service, and 126 wounded. Members of the 36th Battalion received the following decorations: one Distinguished Service Order and 14 Mentions in Despatches. Four battle honours were awarded to the 36th Battalion for its involvement in the war in 1961.