

## **AMERICAL NUMA NUMA TRAIL MISSION**

*(September to October 1944)*

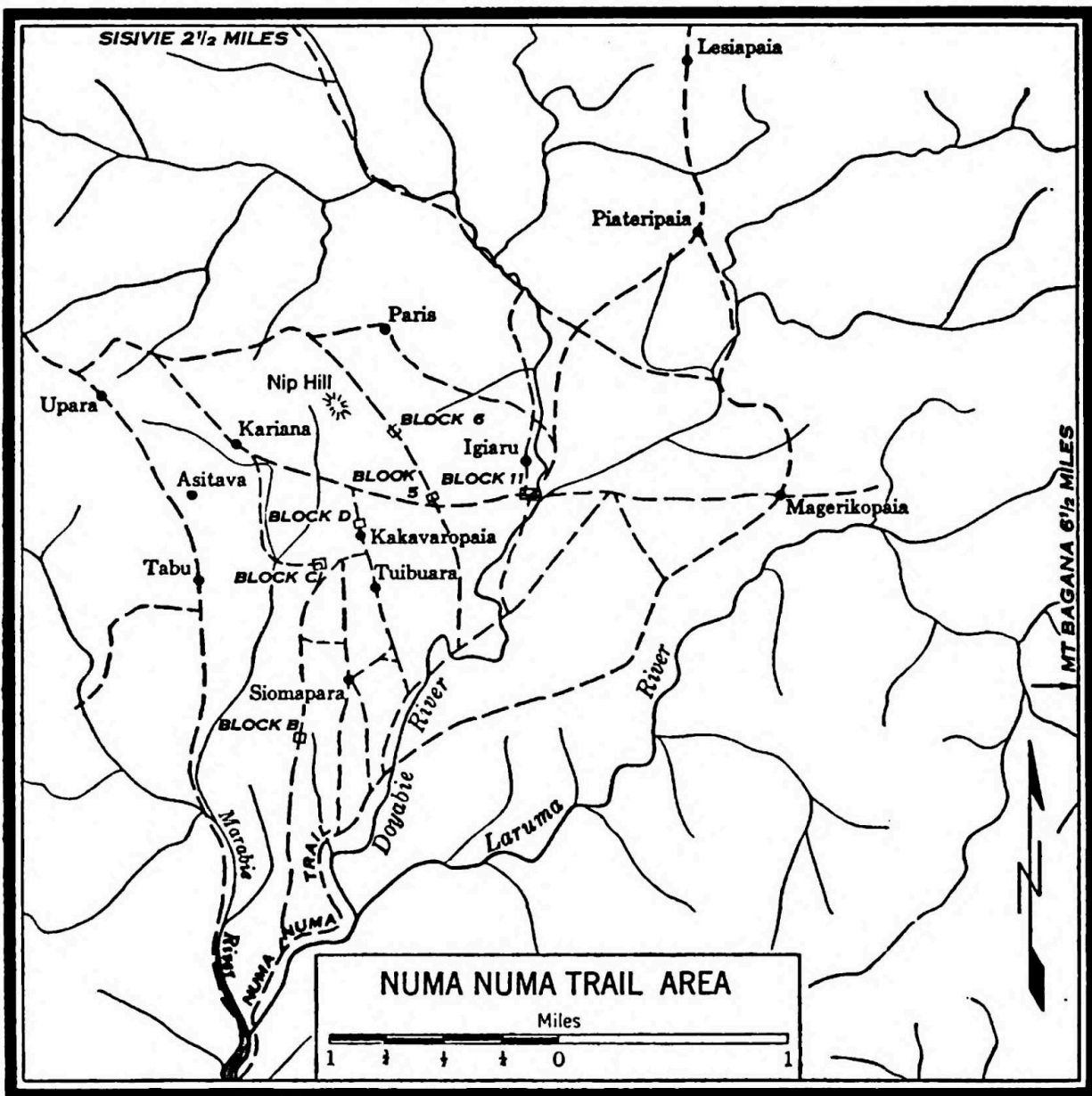
**Location:** The Numa Numa Trail (Numanuma Trail, Numa-Numa Trail) is a prewar walking track on Bougainville Island that spans from Numa Numa (Numanuma) on the east coast across the central mountain range to Torokina on the west coast. Prewar and during the Pacific War, part of the Kieta District in the Territory of New Guinea. Today located in the Central Bougainville District in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

**Wartime History:** After the American landing at Empress Augusta Bay on November 1, 1943, the Japanese Army used the Numa Numa Trail to move troops, artillery, and supplies across Bougainville from east to west for an early March 1944 counterattack against the American perimeter that failed. Afterwards, the Numa Numa Trail was used by the Japanese to withdraw westward and to fight a delaying action against U.S. Army and later Australian soldiers. By July 1945, Australian Army patrols crossed the entire trail and reached Numa Numa (Numanuma) on the eastern coast.

On September 2 the 182d Infantry stepped into the picture as its 3d Battalion took over from the 1st Battalion of the 164th. Commanded by Col. Floyd E. Dunn, the 182d was to continue with the mission assigned the North Dakotans on July 17.

By now, however, operations in this hill-pocked sector had dwindled down to a series of scattered contacts with Japanese who were now showing an increasingly distinct unwillingness to fight it out with the Americal. By September 14, after a relatively uneventful tour of duty in the valley, the 3d Battalion yielded its positions and its missions to the regiment's 2d Battalion.

Two days later direct support of the 182d passed from the 221st



Field Artillery to the 246th as the latter's Battery C moved into river-bed positions to relieve the 155mm howitzers of the 221st's Battery B. Without a break in the continual availability of artillery support, liaison officers and forward observers from the 246th went forward to join the 182d in the advance positions and trail blocks.

In an effort to inflict additional casualties on the enemy, Company K of the 182d set out on September 16 on combat and reconnaissance missions in the Sisivie area, establishing a base camp near the objective on the same afternoon. By September 21 patrols from the company had completed a series of small-scale attacks on bivouacs in the zone of operations and had reported killing seventeen Japanese.

The Bay Staters' 1st Battalion assumed control of the sector on September 22 and continued with the aggressive patrolling characteristic of the infantrymen of the Americal around the Numa-Numa trail. A patrol moving through the Piateripaia area later made a number of strong but fleeting contacts and, finally, on September 27, ran headlong into a group of from twenty-five to thirty enemy firmly entrenched on the Numa-Numa trail near this village.

Meanwhile, another 1st Battalion patrol, given the task of eliminating known enemy positions near Sisivie, pushed toward the well defended village from the south. After arriving in the area, orders from the battalion command post resulted in a change of mission for the patrol. Accordingly, ambushes were now set up in the sector and a number of contacts were soon reported. The patrol returned to the command post on September 29 with reports that seven enemy had been killed without loss to the group.

On September 24 a small patrol went forward from the 182d's Block 5 to search the body of a Japanese soldier killed earlier in the morning. While near the body, the group suddenly came under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire which inflicted serious casualties on the troops. Following the rapid withdrawal of the patrol, reconnaissance was initiated in an effort to determine the strength and disposition of the Japanese near the block.

Subsequent reports revealed that the enemy maintained strong positions on commanding ground near the Bay Staters' positions. So strong were the positions that a series of attacks beginning on September 26 failed to dislodge the Japanese. Apparently angered by the U.S. assaults, the enemy retaliated with a counterthrust. The Japanese were showing a willingness to fight back.

On the night of September 27, after the last attack of the 182d on

the positions near Block 5 had failed to gain ground, one platoon in a perimeter opposite the enemy was subjected to an all-night attack by an estimated eighty to a hundred Japanese. Although suffering heavily from the relentless onslaught, dawn found the platoon still able to hold out.

Realizing now that the Japanese in the Laruma River valley were becoming more aggressive and that firm countermeasures would have to be taken, General McClure ordered the remainder of the 182d Infantry into the sector. In doing so, he instructed the regimental commander to surround and annihilate all Japanese forces in the area bounded by Blocks 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11.

By 1200 on September 29 all three battalions of the Bay State regiment had begun early encirclements of the designated area. On September 30 Battery A, 221st Field Artillery, moved into positions near those of the 246th's Battery C to add more fire power to the artillery. The 49th Coast Artillery sent more 155mm guns to augment its weapons already in action.

As the encirclement got under way, the 1st and 3d Battalions took up positions on trails blocking all approaches to the area from the east, the south and the west. The 2d Battalion headed out into the jungles to cut all northern approaches, thereby completing the ring of trail blocks. The latter battalion, less Company E, moved north and west of Block 6, swung east at the village of Paris and then spread eastward across the northern extremities of the area to be attacked. Company E, by October 2, had moved six hundred yards north of Block 11 to join the remainder of the 2d Battalion.

Early on the morning of October 3, following a tremendously heavy artillery preparation, all units undertook simultaneous attacks on Japanese positions as the ring began to close. Throughout the remainder of the day the Massachusetts infantrymen poured heavy fire into a host of enemy positions in all parts of the sector. Impressive gains were scored early and often as the enemy forces were being killed or driven off in confusion into the underbrush.

For the next two days the attacks continued without abatement as point after point of Japanese resistance was being broken. By the evening of October 5 the regimental commander was able to report to General McClure that the mission had been accomplished. More than fifty enemy pillboxes and emplacements within the ring had been found and destroyed. A total of 105 Japanese had been killed, four had been captured and many more had been wounded.

Staff Sgt. Victor B. McGuire, of Jochin, West Virginia, personally accounted for one of the four positions captured during the regimental action when, on October 4, he came across a by-passed emplacement showing definite signs of enemy occupancy. After attempting to force the Japanese inside the position to surrender under fire, Sergeant McGuire, not knowing how many enemy occupied the position, seized the initiative and jumped into the doorway to force a capitulation. Much to his surprise McGuire found only one unarmed, thoroughly frightened and dazed Japanese soldier cowering in a corner of the dugout. The Japanese surrendered.

Patrols were now sent into the Piateripaia area in an effort to obtain information on which to base new attacks against known positions around this village. Almost immediately strong contacts were reported by reconnaissance groups attempting to reach the village. Once the necessary scouting was completed, plans were made for an all-out assault against the enemy in the sector.

On October 2 the 2d Battalion, once again less Company E, moved north from the trail-block area to envelop the village and begin an attack from the north. At the same time Company E was instructed to proceed eastward to Magerikopaia and then turn north toward a point four hundred yards south of Piateripaia from which a diversionary attack would be launched in conjunction with the battalion thrust from the north.

However, Nature suddenly went on the offensive against the 182d Infantry and its attached troops as the movement to Piateripaia was undertaken. As was to be expected, rain clouds gathered over the island on October 7, but these now seemed darker and more ominous than usual. A light wind toyed with the first drops of rain which fell rather quietly, but suddenly, as the rain began to pour down in torrents, strong gusts of wind whipped the sheets of water into every corner of the blackened jungle.

In alarming proportions, the volume of falling rain and the power of the wind rose over the entire valley, and over the entire Empress Augusta Bay area as well. Weather experts were soon sending out hurricane warnings, warnings which came too late.

For a seemingly endless three hours a deluge of rain, driven with irresistible force through the area by tree-bending winds, smothered the troops and the positions they held. Then, almost as quickly as it had begun, the storm abated and a now-strange quiet fell over the area, broken only by the drippings from the trees and vines.

In all sections of the valley casualties were now being reported as a result of falling branches and trees. Broken bones were numerous, and more than just a few infantrymen now nursed bruises caused by the wind-scattered debris. But this was not all.

Not long after the storm had passed, artillerymen in positions on the bed of the Laruma River noticed that the river was rising at a too-rapid rate. Within a matter of minutes a flash flood, raging madly toward the sea, swept into and through the gun positions of both firing batteries and continued on down to the bay. With the tons of water went supplies and ammunition, communications wire and radios. Only the weight of the 105mm and 155mm howitzers, now abandoned in midstream, kept them from being smashed into uselessness on the rocky bed of the Laruma.

The brief campaign conducted against the Americal by Nature adequately pointed out that not all the acts of heroism within the Division were confined to front-line units or activities. By the time the Laruma River had settled back to normal, more than forty men owed their lives to a pair of Bay Staters, Sgt. Frederick DeStefano, of Somerville, and Pvt. Bernard Doucette, of North Wilmington. At the height of the flash flood the angry, swirling waters of the Laruma stalled two truck-loads of men in midstream as the vehicles were attempting to ford the river. DeStefano, driver of one of the trucks, struggled to the river bank, enlisted Doucette's help and secured a stout rope to a nearby tree. He then managed to make his way back to the trucks in midstream, rigged the line to one of the trucks and began urging the men to move quickly to dry land. He and Doucette, during the evacuation of the stranded men, moved back and forth along the line, helping men who were faltering or who were being dragged under by the force the swollen river exerted. Within a short time every man in the group had been safely evacuated to the shore.

Troops of the 57th Engineers operating in support of the 182d in the valley also felt the weight of the waters. Two water points serving the sector were destroyed and seventy-five per cent of the roads and bridges winding back and forth through the valley were rendered impassable. One enlisted man was lost when he was caught in the flood and hurtled downstream.

Taking no notice of the time of day or night, the troops dug into the mass of scattered and damaged equipment as the flood waters receded. Ordnance officers checked the eight howitzers and pronounced them safe to fire once they were cleaned.

By now it was found that wire communications throughout the entire

regimental sector had been almost completely torn out by the wind, the rain and the flood. Rather than take time to repair the countless breaks in the existing net, new lines were laid to all units. The morning of October 8 found all units ready to continue with the operations against the Japanese.

Reaching positions south of Piateripaia and scouting the territory prior to the diversionary assault, patrols from Company E found that the village was strongly held by at least one company of Japanese infantry. While the remainder of the 2d Battalion moved into positions in the north from which the main effort would be launched, observers with Company E adjusted mortar and artillery concentrations on Piateripaia with devastating effects.

To the north of the village, however, the bulk of the 2d Battalion was encountering trouble in getting into the assigned position on schedule. Native guides leading the force to the jump-off point were unable to locate the proper trail into the area due to the difficulties imposed on the entire group by the rugged terrain. By October 9 it became evident that even if the force was able to reach its destination in a short time its troops would be too exhausted to carry out an efficient attack on the objective. Consequently, orders were radioed to the battalion for a return to the rear. Company E remained in position south of Piateripaia adjusting artillery and mortar fire on choice targets of opportunity until relieved on October 12.

Operations of the 182d Infantry in the Laruma River valley came to a close on October 13 when the 1st Battalion, 132d Infantry, moved in to relieve the entire regiment. Control of all patrols and combat activities, as well as of attached units, now passed to Col. Claude M. McQuarrie, commander of the Illinois regiment.

## ***The MUD PROMOTION***

***Background to the Promotion:*** There were periodic small clashes. In late September 1944, the 182nd Infantry set off into the jungle near the Laruma River to wipe out a reported Japanese encampment. The soldiers clawed their way up steep hills and waded through chest-deep rivers. By 1 October, they were in a position to launch what they referred to as “The Battle of Nip Gap” along the Doyabie River. PFC Arnold West of Company G was killed in an attack on a pillbox, while Sergeants Jack Morton and Robert Egler of the company were awarded Silver Stars for their actions that day.

The fighting continued for days, with the 182nd Infantry claiming nearly 200 enemy soldiers killed and multiple pillboxes. On 6 October, the American troops returned to camp to resupply, before heading out the next day to knock out another Japanese camp near the village of Piateripaia. As they moved in to encircle and attack the Japanese position, rain began to fall. This was a daily occurrence on Bougainville, but this storm strengthened and conditions worsened. The rain turned into a deluge, and the wind began to roar. The Laruma River flooded. Seven bridges built to cross the river were destroyed. Communication wires were ripped out<sup>1</sup>. Trees were knocked down, and the 182nd began to take casualties from the storm. The food spoiled, and supplies were washed away.

In the midst of this carnage, the 182nd Infantry kept advancing on the Japanese. But they soon found themselves out of position. The terrain, even in the best of conditions, was nearly impassable. Compounding that problem, some of the trails and roads had been washed away by the storm. Other routes were blocked by downed trees. The loss of food and supplies left the soldiers hungry, and emergency rations were being used.

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<sup>1</sup> ***This is a good indication that the Signal Company was with the Infantry as they moved into position in September.***



***On October 8, 1944, the Signal Company was moving to a different location with incredible difficulty. A large communications truck was in the convoy. The road on the ridge they traveled was crude and muddy from the storm. Suddenly, the large truck started to slide off the road and was in danger of falling down the ridge and into the jungle.***

***Nothing they could do was working. They had stopped the truck's slide by chaining it to some trees, but they could not get it back on the road. The chains blocked movement over this section of the road, and there was no alternative route. The officer in charge was frantic.***

***Then, the lowly motor pool sergeant, David Cazeault, stepped forward with an idea. The officer said, "Are you sure you know what you are doing? " He replied, "Yes, just give me what I require and stand back." The officer said, "If you save the truck, I will promote you, and you will be in charge of the whole motor pool."***

***He got the truck back on the road using blocks, tackles, an army wrecker (shown below), and other smaller trucks. He was promoted on the spot to Tech Sergeant and was instantly in charge of 60 vehicles, their 60 drivers, several mechanics, and the entire motor pool.***



By 10 October, the 182nd Infantry offensive was called off, and the exhausted troops returned to their base behind the front lines. Their attack was over, defeated by a storm that laid waste to the battlefield.

**This action is often referred to as the tropical cyclone that defeated the US Army. This Typhoon, labeled #16 of the Pacific season, reached 175 mph winds. A couple of months later, another typhoon (#22 and called Cobra) took on the US Navy.**

“Typhoon Cobra, also known as the Typhoon of 1944 or Halsey's Typhoon, was the United States Navy designation for a powerful tropical cyclone that struck the United States Pacific Fleet in December 1944, during World War II. The storm sank three destroyers, killed 790 sailors, damaged 9 other warships, and swept dozens of aircraft overboard off their aircraft carriers. Task Force 38 had been operating about 300 mi east of Luzon in the Philippine Sea, conducting air raids against Japanese airfields in the Philippines, and had been trying to refuel their ships.”

**At the end of October 1970, I was in Quinhon, Vietnam, waiting for a C-130 ride to my new unit in the 101st Airborne Division in Phu Bai, close to the DMZ. My unit, the 4th Division, was shipping home. I did not have enough time in the country to go with them (7½ months).**



**It was a beautiful Army Airbase on a peninsula surrounded by the ocean and at the base of some mountains—a serene place away from the jungle action. A mountain stream flowed down from the elevation and through the camp.**

**Shortly after we arrived, we were notified that flights would be delayed due to approaching**

weather. The weather was a Super Typhoon called Kate that would land to the north of us near Da Nang. It was later called the Typhoon Truce, which stopped the war for three days.

It started like a hurricane, rain, strong winds, and torrential downpours. The mountain stream turned into Niagara Falls, flooding the base with knee-high water. To prevent our flimsy barracks from being swept away, we knocked out about two feet of clapboards at each end so the water could flow freely through the structure. Sitting on your cot was like sitting in a trough of water. It was impossible to lie down and sleep. We had to sleep either sitting or standing.



*Sitting on top of my C-Rations and reading as the base begins to flood.*

*After the typhoon, I left the Central Highlands and joined the 101st Airborne in Phu Bai, near the DMZ. It was the beginning of the Monsoons. It rained constantly, and we had to endure it. In December, I counted 21 days of rain that did not stop. It either abated to a constant shower or a deluge.*

*Because of the enemy's proximity, we could not put up lean-tos, so we wrapped ourselves in ponchos and slept in the mud. The mud was like a soft mattress and very comfortable.*

***On the start of one mission on December 31, 1970, the rain stopped and the fog rolled in while we were on the chopper. All of a sudden, the pilot had no visibility and he got lost. Several times he tried to land, but only ran into the top of the trees. He finally found a clearing, but it was miles from the correct LZ. Because of low fuel, he apologized and asked us to exit there. It was a barren hill, and the six of us (The LT, Radioman, Squad Leader, Pointman, Machinegunner, and the Assistant Machinegunner) had to wait until the next day for it to be picked up and sent to the correct LZ. We set up a tight defensive perimeter and hoped for the best. We set up a poncho leanto and settled in for the night. At least there was no rain.***



***While I set up the M-60 machinegun, my assistant gunner took off his boots to dry his feet and cook supper.***

***It was an uneventful night, and we got picked up the next morning.***

***My Mother always told me, "If your feet are warm, your whole body will feel warm." It was not true. My Sergeant taught us to sit Indian style on the ground, light a small fire using C4 plastic explosive between our legs, and cover it with a poncho. Once your crotch was dry and warm, wrap up in the poncho, and you could sleep much more easily. It worked. Sorry, Mom.***

*We did not see much action during the monsoons because the NVA stayed undercover. If the brass served with us in the field, they would not have pressed the urge to fight either.*

*To get a better feel for the Bougainville terrain, see the following film shot by the Aussies after they took over from the Americal Division on the island.* <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F01354>

On **October 20, 1944**, the first invasion of the Philippines began on David's 25th Birthday. The invasion of the Philippines had been scheduled for January 1945, but the rapid pace of Allied victories in the Pacific caused MacArthur to bring forward the Philippines operation to October 1944. MacArthur would need all the ground troops he could get for the Leyte landings, so by mid-July, MacArthur had decided to withdraw Griswold's XIV Corps from Bougainville for rest and refit, to be replaced by the Australian II Corps.

On **November 27, 1944**, the last of the Americal combat operations ended, and all units were returned to their perimeters. They then began preparations for their next unknown mission.



*Nothing is easy or cheap in Combat, and Memories never die.*  
(Richard Cazeault 2025)