

SECTION III

The War Years

The 2d Marines, commanded by Colonel Joseph C. Fegan, was officially reactivated as part of the 2d Marine Division at Marine Corps Base, San Diego on 1 February 1941.(52) In April, the regiment moved to Camp Elliott, San Diego and began intensive training in the mechanics of amphibious warfare.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 caused some apprehension that the enemy might attack our West Coast. The 2d Marines was alerted to assist in protecting the area from Oceanside to the Mexican border.(53) When the danger of immediate invasion abated, the 2d returned to Camp Elliott to assist in training recruits. The 2d Marines was redesignated 2d Marines (Reinforced) (54) during May 1942 while its units were training in the San Diego area.

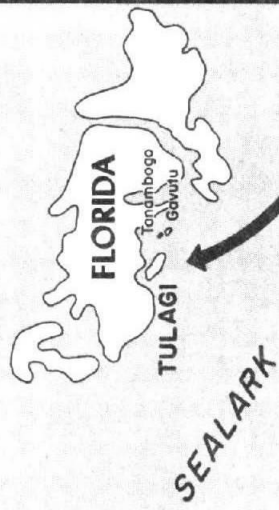
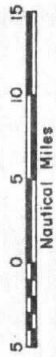
As part of a larger force, the 2d Marines (Reinforced), embarked and sailed from San Diego on 1 July 1942, arriving in the Transport Area off Koro Island on the 25th in sufficient time to take part in the final rehearsal prior to the Guadalcanal operations.(55) The 2d was in reserve for this operation, and yet provided the first Marines to land.

On 7 August, prior to the main assault on Guadalcanal by the 1st Marine Division, Company B (Reinforced), 2d Marines landed on Florida Island to protect the left flank of the Marines executing the Tulagi landing.(56) While Company B and its reinforcing elements deployed inland, the remainder of the 1st Battalion landed on Florida, near Gavutu and Tanambogo. By early afternoon, it had cleared its objective and reembarked to await further orders. Company B meanwhile, was ordered to assist the 1st Parachute Battalion in clearing Tanambogo, but because of the intensity of enemy fire, it was forced to withdraw to the transport area.

On the following morning, the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines landed on Gavutu Island and assisted the 1st Parachute Battalion in clearing Tanambogo on 9 August. The other two infantry battalions of the regiment landed on Tulagi on the 9th, and by that evening, had secured the small islands of the Tulagi area. Subsequent operations in that area consisted of mopping up and consolidating positions.

The 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, was moved from Tulagi to Guadalcanal on 14 September and inserted in the east side of the perimeter between elements of the 5th and 7th Marines.(57) It continued to man that position until early in October, when it

The First Offensive GUADALCANAL

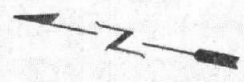


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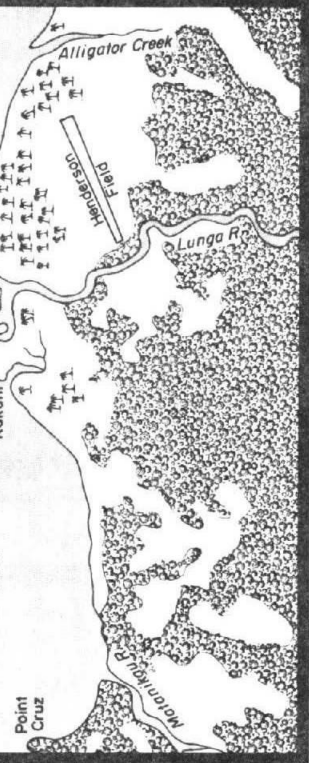
CAPE ESPERANCE

CHANNEL

GUADALCANAL



Initial PERIMETER AREA 1st MARINE DIVISION



participated in the Matanikau Offensive from the 7th to the 9th. The battalion then became part of the 1st Marine Division reserve once more and remained in that capacity until the 30th, when it returned to Tulagi for garrison duty and a well earned rest.

Meanwhile, elements of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, raided the area near the village of Koilotumaria and Garabusu, Guadalcanal, on 10 October, and returned to Tulagi two days later.(58) The 1st and 2d Battalions patrolled the Tulagi area until the 28th, consolidating positions off the coast of Florida.

The 2d Marines (-) moved to Guadalcanal on the 29th to participate, as part of a larger force, in the push towards Kokumbona. When the Japanese again threatened in the Koli Point area, the Kokumbona drive was terminated, and the two battalions of the 2d were assigned defensive positions in the Point Cruz area. The regiment, as part of a larger force, again moved forward on 10 November, to regain most of the ground given up earlier in the month, when the division had been forced to shift its attention eastward.

During the next six weeks, the 2d Marines was shifted about within the Guadalcanal perimeter, reinforcing danger spots and consolidating defensive positions along the front lines. On 12 January 1943, the regiment relieved the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines to participate, as part of XIV Corps, in offensive operations to the west of Point Cruz. Two days later, the 2d Marines was relieved and returned to a reserve area preparatory to leaving the island.

After rejoining its 3d Battalion from Tulagi, it left Guadalcanal on 31 January and sailed for New Zealand, arriving at Wellington on 6 February.(59) Here, as part of the 2d Marine Division, the regiment rested, reorganized, and trained for nearly a year. Liberty and leave were granted liberally, so that all Marines had an opportunity to see New Zealand and to become acquainted with its hospitable people. A well planned recreation program was implemented. But training went on, too, with the transition from play to work being brought about gradually.

The 2d Marine Division, including the 2d Marines, was attached to V Amphibious Corps on 15 September.(60) The Marines of the regiment attended various specialist schools, such as tank, intelligence, etc., and then made good use of their added instruction in the execution of amphibious training exercises.

The regiment sailed on 28 October, as part of the 2d Marine Division, for Efate, south of Espiritu Santo, to take part in final rehearsals for the landing at Tarawa.(61) At Efate, on 7 November, Colonel Marshall, who had rebuilt the 2d Marines in New Zealand, became ill and had to be returned to the United States. The following day, Lieutenant Colonel David M. Shoup



Patrol on Guadalcanal, August 1942. (USMC Photo #50831)



Assault on Tarawa, November 1943. (USMC Photo #63909)

(22d Commandant of the Marine Corps, 1960-1963), the division's operations officer, received a spot-promotion to colonel and was assigned the command of the regiment.(62)

The 2d Marines (Reinforced), with the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines attached, assaulted Betio Island, the main defensive bastion of the Japanese positions on Tarawa Atoll, on the morning of 20 November. Just prior to the main landing, the Scout-Sniper Platoon, H&S Company, 2d Marines, arrived at the end of the long pier jutting into the sea and proceeded to clear it of enemy forces. This helped the main assault forces move in towards their assigned beaches, but the Japanese fire was still murderous. Only the first three waves of Marines were mounted in amphibian tractors, which enabled them to cross the fringe coral reef and move steadily to the shore. The later waves were composed of landing craft, none of which could traverse the barrier reef. The Marines in these craft got out as best they could, stumbled across the reef, and waded towards shore. The toll in Marine blood was a costly price exacted by the devastating fire from well integrated gun positions on the island. These later waves kept the attack moving and helped defend the beachhead won by the assault waves.

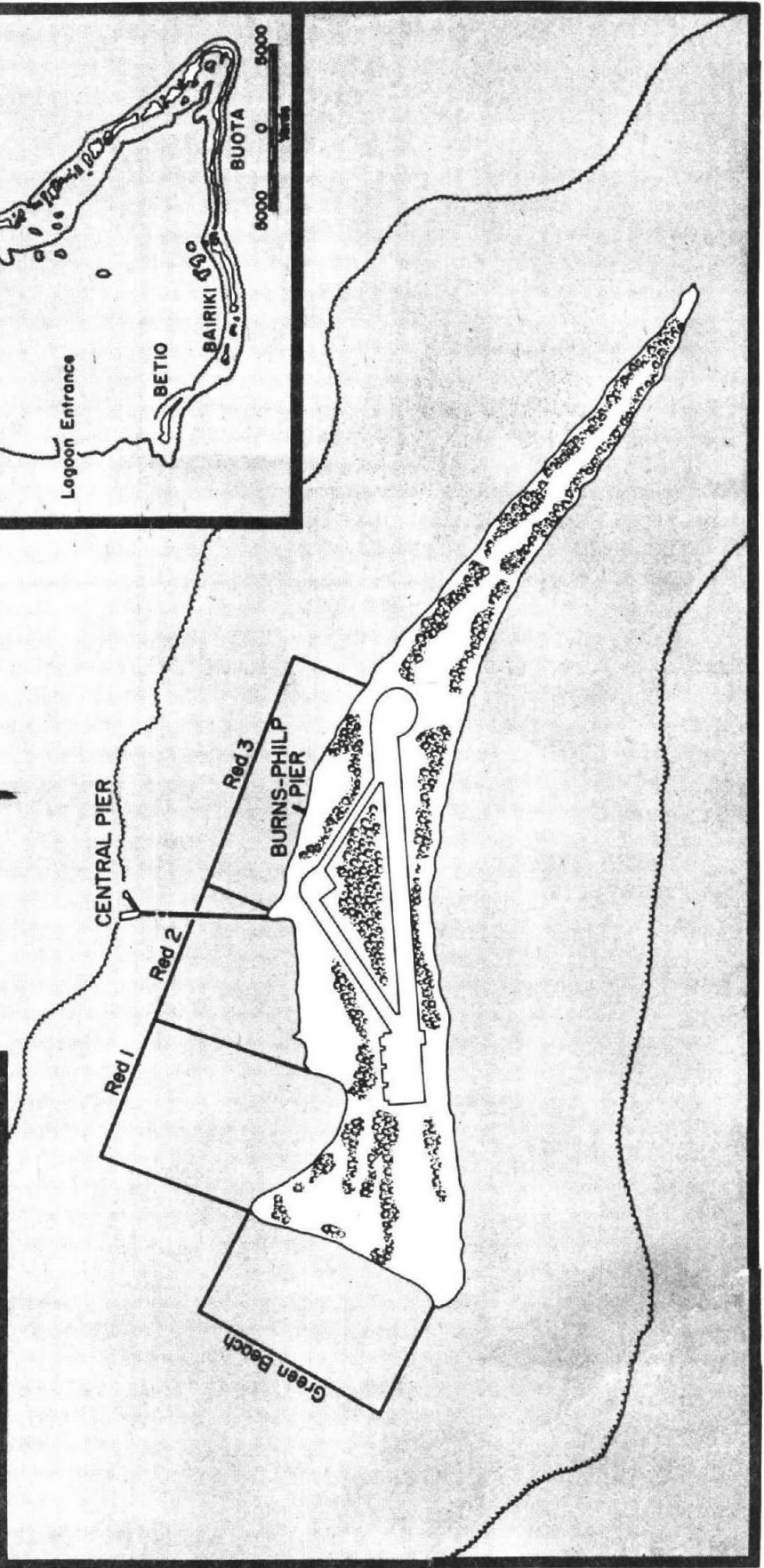
In the latter part of the morning, Colonel Shoup and his staff landed and set up a command post on the pier, and, later, on the beach. With the situation in critical balance, Colonel Shoup committed his reserve in the afternoon. By nightfall, Combat Team 2 (the name given the assault force) was clinging precariously to a slim perimeter and subject to continuous heavy enemy fire.

Early the following morning, reinforced by the remainder of the 8th Marines, Combat Team 2 pushed inland. Progress was slow and casualties were high. But elements of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines, supported by the 1st Battalions, 10th Marines, naval gunfire, and two tanks, managed to struggle southward to secure Green Beach, from which the anti-boat guns had been pouring death and destruction on the Marines still attempting to land.(63) In the afternoon, the situation turned to Marine advantage, as more room became available to land and maneuver. By nightfall, the 6th Marines began to land, and on arrival, the entire 2d Marine Division was committed. The attack was continued on the 22d with the Marines of the regiment holding their hard-won gains against vicious counter-attacks. That night, the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, helped repulse a fanatical Banzai attack from the southeastern end of the island. This was to be the last organized enemy action, for on the 23d, a final push met only scattered resistance. At approximately midday, Betio was secured.(64)

On the following day, the 2d Marines left the island bound for Hawaii, where a new camp awaited them at Kamuela. However, Camp Tarawa still required three weeks of tedious labor on the part of the Marines of the regiment before they could begin to

BETIO ISLAND WITH INSET OF TARAWA ATOLL

Showing Landing Beaches
20 November 1943





Marine reinforcements wading ashore at Tarawa. (USMC Photo #63516)



Assault on Saipan, 15 Jun 1944. (USMC Photo #89471)

rest and reorganize. Replacements were integrated into the elements of the regiment, and an intensive training program was launched. In the early phases of this program, training emphasis was placed on the lower units, with the newly adopted Marine Corps "fire-team" system being employed by the rifle battalions. The proper functioning of the infantry-tank-artillery-engineer team was stressed in exercises conducted night and day in terrain varying from jungle and cane fields to that more typical of larger volcanic land masses.(65)

The 2d Marines, as part of the 2d Marine Division, culminated its general training by taking part in V Corps amphibious maneuvers held during the latter part of March off the beaches of Maalaea Bay, Maui. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, scheduled for a special mission with Company A, Corps Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion, conducted a special final rehearsal during the period 20-24 May, at Hanalei Bay, Kauai. On 30 May, the 2d Marines, in 2d Marine Division reserve, left Hawaii for further action against the Japanese.

On board ship, Saipan was announced as the target with D-Day set for 15 June. The Marines of the regiment were given detailed information concerning their objective and mission. The 2d Marines was to feint a landing on Tanapag Harbor and then land in support of the actual landing forces near Charan Kanoa.

On 15 June, while elements of the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions made the assault landing in the vicinity of Charan Kanoa, the 2d Marines (less its 1st Battalion) successfully carried out the Tanapag feint in conjunction with the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines, and the 24th Marines. Later in the day, the 3d Battalion and a portion of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, landed on the Charan Kanoa beaches to the rear of the assaulting forces. The remainder of the regiment landed on the following day. That night, the 2d Battalion, on line as part of the 6th Marines on the division left, assisted in repelling a violent Japanese tank-infantry counterattack.

On the morning of the 17th, the regiment, as part of the 2d Marine Division, attacked towards Garapan, regulating its advance with that of the 6th Marines to its right.(66) The 2d Marines, the pivot of a corps wheeling movement to the north, marked time for several days just south of Garapan, sending out patrols and waiting for the word to continue the drive northward.

In the afternoon of 23 June, the 2d Battalion (less company F), was detached from the 6th Marines and returned to the 2d Marines as regimental reserve. On the same date, the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, which had been operating as a part of the 2d Marines, was returned to its parent unit. To replace it, the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines was released by division to the 2d Marines.

By the 24th, the inland drive of the forces had progressed sufficiently to enable the 2d Marines to advance. However, on the outskirts of Garapan the regiment was again held up for several days, patrolling and consolidating its lines, while other elements of the 2d Marine Division slowly pushed through the high ground inland against continuous formidable resistance.

Regimental patrols during this period not only kept the enemy off balance, but also provided an opportunity for the Marines to use various subterfuges to outwit the enemy and gain valuable information. On the 29th, for example, the regiment made a mock attack on a hill occupied by about a platoon of Japanese. After the preparatory fires had been lifted, the 2d Marines opened up with small-arms fire simulating an assault. But, as soon as the Japanese raised up in their positions to repel the assault, artillery, mortars, and heavy machine guns raked the exposed enemy. Several days later, when the regiment actually moved across the position, the litter of Japanese corpses attested to the success of the ruse.

The Regiment's 2d Battalion exchanged positions with the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines on 1 July, with the latter unit assuming a reserve role for the 2d Marines. The regiment drove into Garapan on the following day. The 3d Battalion moved directly into the heart of the city, the largest on Saipan, while the 1st Battalion occupied Sugar Loaf Hill, to the east of Garapan, and tied in with the 6th Marines by nightfall. The 3d Battalion pushed through the rest of the city and onto Mutch Point on 3 July, with the 1st Battalion reaching the sea north of Garapan that night. The two battalions cleared their sectors on the following day, and then, pinched out by the advance of the 6th Marines, they reverted to Northern Troops and Landing Force Reserve.

The regiment (less its 2d Battalion) was attached to the 4th Marine Division on the morning of 6 July, and advanced with the 23d Marines on its left and the 24th Marines on its right. For the next five days, the 2d Marines, as part of the 4th Marine Division, drove forward against sporadic resistance, finally compressing the enemy into a small area on the northern tip of the island. The 2d now participated in the mop up, and, on the 9th, the island was declared to be secured. Isolated pockets of resistance in the cliffs and wooded areas of the northern part of Saipan kept the Marines of the regiment employed until 23 July.

On the following day, the scene shifted for the 2d Marines as it participated in a feint landing off Tinian town, while the 4th Marine Division landed on the northern tip of the island of Tinian. The 2d Marines also landed over the northern beaches on the 25th, taking positions in the rear of the 8th Marines. (67) The regiment moved up on the right of the 8th Marines on the morning of the 26th, and joined that regiment in a drive toward



Company CP of I/3/2 on Saipan. (USMC Photo #84188)



Assault on Tinian, 21 Jul 1944. (USMC Photo #87236)