

sent, along with reinforcements of both men and machinery.

That day, Commander Cunningham recounted the events which had occurred to date in a report to Rear Admiral Bloch. Although many air raids had occurred, he reported, that most had resulted in few casualties and little damage to installations. He attributed Wake's escape from more serious damage to the effectiveness of the Marines' antiaircraft fire — fire delivered despite the lack of fire control equipment. A former fighter pilot, he also lavished unstinting praise on VMF-211's aviators, who had "never failed to push home attacks against heavy fire." That none of the planes had been shot down, he marvelled, "is a miracle."

The representative of the Bureau of the Budget, Herman P. Hevenor, who had arrived on Wake via the *Clipper* on 7 December to check the progress of construction on the atoll and review the expenditures, wrote to the Bureau telling them of the siege to that point and praising those who led the defense. "The Commanding Officer [Cunningham] and his staff, including the Marine Officers, have done a big job and an efficient one. Their stand against the Japs has been marvelous and they deserve everything our Government can give them"

Major Putnam dashed off a report of VMF-211's operations to Lieutenant Colonel Claude A. Larkin, commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 21. After recounting the losses of both planes and men suffered by his squadron, and the damage he felt his men had inflicted upon the enemy, Putnam wrote that a large share of the squadron's records had been destroyed on the first day, and since then, "parts and assemblies have been traded back and forth so that no airplane can be identified. Engines have been traded from plane to plane, have been junked, stripped, rebuilt, and all but created." Practically all of 211's

gear had been destroyed. Quartermaster property lay scattered about, wholly unaccounted for.

Nevertheless, he praised his men. "All hands have behaved splendidly and held up in a manner of which the Marine Corps may well tell." He singled out the "indefatigable labor, the ingenuity, skill, and technical knowledge of Lieutenant Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton," since "it is solely due to their efforts that the squadron is still operating."*

The next morning the PBY crew and their only passenger, Major Walter L. J. Bayler, who had completed his temporary duty at Wake, clambered on board the *Catalina*. The PBY taxied into the lagoon and took off for Midway.

As the PBY departed, a Japanese task force steamed toward Wake Island, intent upon attacking on the 22d. The arrival and departure of that PBY, however, influenced the Japanese plans. On 20 December, Rear Admiral Abe received a report (based upon the radio messages the PBY sent as it approached Wake) that planes from Patrol Squadron 23 had advanced to Wake from Midway the previous day. Consequently, the commander of the *South Seas Force*, hoping to catch and destroy those planes, pressed Abe to advance the attack one day. The *Wake Island Reinforcement Force* increased its speed to 30 knots.

In the meantime, on the morning of 21 December, Rear Admiral Kajio-ka set out from the Marshalls for a second attempt at Wake. The attacking naval forces included the same ships that had participated in the first attack, the destroyers *Asanagi* and *Yunagi* (which replaced the *Hayate* and the *Kisaragi*, which had been sunk during the initial attack), and some reinforcements, four heavy

*In a marginal note to this report by Putnam upon his return from a POW camp in Japan, in October 1945, he added AMM1c Hesson's name to those of Kinney and Hamilton.

cruisers (*Kako*, *Aoba*, *Furutaka* and *Kinugasa*) that had recently taken part in the occupation of Guam, and the seaplane carrier *Kiyokawa Maru*. Instead of 225 troops in each converted destroyer, 250 (some of whom had taken part in the seizure of Guam) had been embarked. Landing exercises had been conducted at Kwajalein.

At 0700 on the 21st, beneath cloudy skies, *Hiryu* and *Soryu* turned into the northeasterly wind and began launching planes. The aircraft arrived over Wake at about 0900 to find a 200-meter ceiling and, seeing no U.S. patrol planes, circled at 50 to 200 meters and began attacking shore installations. Antiaircraft fire hardly seemed to hinder them as they "worked things over a bit" and gave embattled defenders their first taste of dive-bombing. *Soryu's* and *Hiryu's* aviators, having experienced the flak over Pearl Harbor, reported "very slight" resistance from antiaircraft fire. "The enemy," Rear Admiral Abe reflected, "seemed to lose their fighting spirits."

The blow had fallen without warning. It caught Second Lieutenant Kliever eating breakfast with the crews of the two .50-caliber machine guns at the west end of the field. He admired them for the way in which they stuck to their guns amidst the bombing and strafing, continuing to fire "when other guns on the island [had been] silenced."

The raid had caught Major Putnam returning from Camp 2 in a truck. He attempted to reach the only flyable F4F, but strafing Zeroes twice forced him away. Only after the Mitsubishi and Aichis left the vicinity, at about 1020, was he able to take off and attempt to follow them to their ships. Although he was not successful in that endeavor, his attempt typified the "highest order of courage and resolution" that he displayed throughout the siege. As Putnam searched for the Japanese fleet, Cunningham radioed word of the morn-

ing's raid to CinCPac and the Commandant of the 14th Naval District.

Later that day, 33 Nells paid Wake a visit. The antiaircraft fire, however, apparently forced them to bomb from a higher altitude than before (18,000 feet *vice* 13,000). Although Dan Godbold claimed to have seen one plane dropping from the skies over Wake, trailing smoke, all G3M2s returned safely to Roi. Their bombs, however, had fallen thickly about the battery, scoring a bullseye on the director emplacement, killing Platoon Sergeant Johnalson E. Wright, wounding three other men, and knocking unconscious the range officer, Second Lieutenant Robert W. Greeley. The M-4 director, although destroyed by the bomb, deflected the full force of the explosion from Greeley and saved his life.

Wright, the firing battery officer, had been known for his cheerfulness and boundless vitality. Although during previous raids he had been told to take cover, he had remained at his post, calmly giving orders and disregarding the bombs. His seemingly tireless efforts to improve the efficiency of the battery earned him a Bronze Star posthumously.

At Peacock Point, a bomb had fallen near the shelter belonging to Barninger's no. 2 gun crew, causing the entrance to be blocked and blowing the sides in. Fortunately, no one was hurt. "The bomb hitting the shelter," Barninger wrote later, "was the only one close to the guns." He and his men spent the rest of the day repairing the damaged shelter. Most of the Marines, though, began feeling that foxholes were better. "Although we didn't lose a man," Barninger commented, "it was a close thing and with the heavy caliber bombs the shelter is too light. For that reason we are all back in the foxholes."

On the previous day, Major Devereux had ordered Marine Gunner McKinstry to keep the two guns of Battery F firing to divert the enemy's



Marine Corps Historical Collection
2dLt Carl R. Davidson (seen circa September 1941), VMF-211's assistant gunnery officer, was awarded a Navy Cross posthumously for courageously and unhesitatingly attacking an overwhelming number of Kates on 21 December.

attention from the only complete battery on the island, Battery E. On the 22d, McKinstry's gunners put on a fine performance, despite having neither director nor heightfinder to help them. Firing by the expedient of "lead 'em a mile," the two guns of Battery F kept the enemy guessing as to which group of guns was the greater threat.

Nevertheless, all of the planes from *Hiryu* and *Soryu* returned undamaged to their decks. Then, Abe's force steamed south to be in a position 200 miles from Wake the next day to provide an antisubmarine screen for Kajioka's ships.

At Pearl Harbor, Vice Admiral Pye read with concern Cunningham's dispatch reporting the raid by carrier planes. The Japanese had inserted a dangerous new factor into the equation. Pye deemed it essential "to insure [the] defense of the [Hawaiian] islands." With the Army's Hawaiian defense in shambles, and the battleship strength significantly reduced by the Japanese attack on 7 December, he believed that the Pacific Fleet's three carriers constituted the best protection for Oahu. After he considered the evidence of increased Japanese air activity in the Marshalls,

with one, or perhaps two, carrier groups in that vicinity, as well as "evidence of extensive offshore lookout and patrol," he decided that a surprise raid on Jaluit could not be conducted successfully. Thus, Pye reluctantly abandoned the proposed carrier raid on the Marshalls.

While he allowed the efforts to relieve Wake to continue, Pye warned Fletcher not to get within 200 miles of the atoll, and directed Brown to move north with Task Force 11 to support Task Force 14. That decided, on the afternoon of 20 December, he radioed his decision to the Navy Department.

With efforts to relieve Wake progressing, CinCPac radioed Cunningham on the morning of the 22d (21st at Pearl Harbor) and asked him to report the condition of the aircraft runways. He also requested to be informed immediately of any significant developments.

At 0800 on 22 December, 39 planes from the *Soryu* and the *Hiryu* ascended and headed into the gray skies above the beleaguered atoll. Their pilots expected to meet American fighters.

Second Lieutenant Davidson took off from Wake at 1000, cranked up his landing gear, and set out on the regular midday patrol. Engine trouble prevented Captain Freuler from getting aloft until 1030.

Shortly before noon, Davidson, patrolling to the north of Wake, radioed Freuler, then flying to the south of the atoll, informing him of approaching enemy aircraft. In spite of the odds, both men gave battle.

Freuler engaged six carrier attack planes and dropped one, trailing smoke, out of formation on his first pass. As the group of Nakajimas broke up, he made an opposite approach and fired, flaming one Kate, which exploded in an expanding ball of fire about 50 feet beneath him. As his controls responded sluggishly, and his badly scorched F4F's manifold pressure dropped, he



Marine Corps Historical Collection
Capt Herbert C. Freuler (seen circa September 1941), was VMF-211's gunnery and ordnance officer. Freuler was commissioned a second lieutenant in July 1931. He was awarded a Navy Cross and a Bronze Star for heroism at Wake.

glanced back toward Wake and saw Davidson engaging several enemy planes. An instant later, a *Hiryu* Zero got on Freuler's tail and opened fire. Bullets penetrated Freuler's fuselage, both sides of his vacuum tank, the bulkhead, seat, and parachute. Af-

ter his plane was hit, Freuler threw his F4F into a steep dive—the Japanese pilot did not follow him—nursed it home, and landed with the canopy stuck in the closed position. Ground crews extricated him and took him to the hospital.

Carl Davidson, unfortunately, did not return. The pilot who had knocked Freuler out of the fight went to the rescue of his shipmates and shot down Davidson. Rear Admiral Abe later paid homage to the two Marine pilots who had challenged his carrier planes, lauding them as having resisted fiercely and bravely.

The *Soryu* lost two planes and their three-man crews. Damage suffered in the aerial action compelled a third to ditch, but one of the screening ships recovered its crew.

That afternoon, at 1320, Cunningham radioed Pye that a "combined land- and carrier-based plane attack" had occurred and that his fighters had engaged the attackers. He reported Davidson's loss and the wounding of Freuler, but noted that they had shot down "several" planes. The atoll had suffered "no further

damage." As "Barney" Barninger later recounted: "Dive bombers again—the carriers must still be in the vicinity . . . Things are getting tense. Rumor continues to fly about relief, but the dive bombers [are] also present. Things go on in the same manner as before. All that can be done is being done, but there is so little to do [it] with."

Heavy seas bedeviled Frank Jack Fletcher's Task Force 14 as it pressed westward. Having been ordered to fuel to capacity before fighting, Fletcher began fueling his ships from *Neches* in the turbulent seas. Rolling swells and gusty winds slowed that process considerably and permitted the fueling of only four of his destroyers. If Fletcher was expected to fight, his ships would require more fuel to be able to maneuver at high speed, if necessary. He resolved to top off the rest the following day (23 December).

Meanwhile, at around 1900 on 21 December (1530, 22 December Wake), the PBV that had borne Major Bayler (the "last man off Wake Island") from Wake to Midway ar-

Wreckage of what is probably Capt Freuler's plane, on the beach where he crash-landed it on 22 December, after he had destroyed a Kate in aerial combat. Bullets penetrated his fuselage, vacuum tank, bulkhead, seat, and parachute.

National Archives Photo 80-G-413519





Marine Corps Historical Collection

The sound of the heavy surf surging ashore continuously in the defenders' ears as it pounded the reef that ringed the atoll, militated against their hearing approaching enemy planes—a decided disadvantage in view of Wake's lack of radar.

arrived at Pearl Harbor. The plane's commander dictated a report, which was transcribed by a CinCPac stenographer shortly after the pilot's arrival, regarding Wake's desperate plight. Pye, upon reading the report, was deeply moved. Members of Pye's staff, many of whom had also faithfully served on Admiral Kimmel's staff, pleaded with Pye's Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Milo F. Draemel, on behalf of the Wake relief efforts. Referring to the PBY commander's report, Pye declared later, "the situation at Wake seemed to warrant taking a greater chance to effect its reinforcement even at the sacrifice of the *Tangier* and possible damage to some major ships of Task Force 14." The admiral therefore removed the restrictions on Task Force 14's operations. The *Tangier* was to be detached with two destroyers to run in to Wake to begin the evacuation of the civilians and to disembark the Marines.

Pye also rescinded the restrictions on the operating areas of Task Forces 8 and 11, allowing them to support Cunningham's command more effectively. Those on the staff who had pleaded for the relief force to continue toward Wake felt vindicated by Pye's decision that night.

Meanwhile, at Wake, with Com-

mander Cunningham's prior approval, Paul Putnam, with no flyable planes left, reported his men to Major Devereux for service as infantrymen. Devereux ordered Putnam to keep his squadron where it was and await further orders.

'This Is As Far As We Go'

Shortly after midnight, First Lieutenant Barninger noted flashing lights "way off the windy side of the island." Alerted to the odd display on the horizon in the darkness, Barninger telephoned Major Devereux, who replied that he also had seen it. Devereux directed Barninger to keep a watch out and cautioned the Peacock Point strongpoint commander to be mindful that the lee shore posed the most possibilities for danger. Look-outs continued to note irregular flashes of light in the black, gusty, rainy predawn of 23 December 1941. It may have been the *Tenryu*, the *Tatsuta*, and the *Yubari* firing blindly at what their spotters thought was Wake Island but which was, instead, only empty ocean.

At 0145, however, a report came into the detachment commander's command post, telling of an enemy landing in progress at Toki Point, at the tip of Peale. Devereux alerted the battalion. Kessler, in the meantime,

dispatched a patrol up the lagoon beach toward the PanAm facility, which met a patrol from Battery D. Neither had anything to report. On Wilkes, Captain Platt directed Battery L to move the men of two 5-inch gun sections (equivalent to two rifle squads) to the shore of the lagoon, west of the area of the new channel being dredged across the island. The rest of the men of the battery—fire controlmen and headquarters men under McAlister, who had established his command post near the searchlight section of the battery—moved into positions they had readied along the south shore of Wilkes, between McKinstry's Battery F and the new channel.

Kessler, whom Devereux had requested to confirm or deny the accuracy of the information regarding the landing, reported that there was no landing in progress, but that he had seen the lights offshore. Cunningham, at 0145, radioed the Commandant, 14th Naval District, reporting "gunfire between ships to northeast of island."

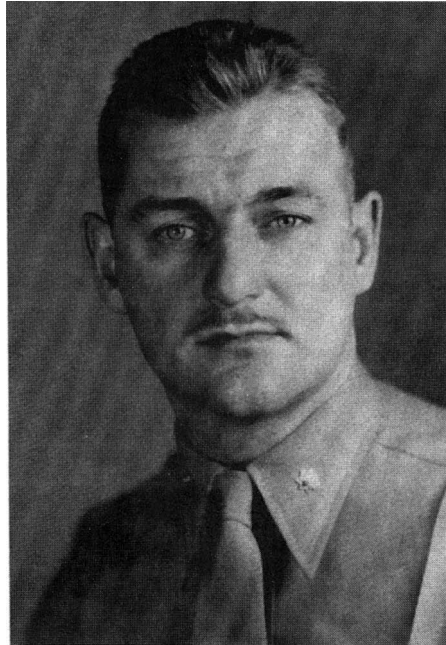
Wake thus alerted, Second Lieutenant Arthur A. Poindexter, at Camp 1 with the mobile reserve (predominantly supply and administration Marines and 15 sailors under Boatswain's Mate First Class James E.

Barnes), believed Peale to be threatened. He exercised initiative and entrusted eight Marines and with four .30-caliber machine guns. Reporting his intention to the detachment commander, Poindexter and that portion of his mobile reserve sped past the airfield toward Peale. It was nearing Devereux's command post when he ordered it intercepted. The major retained Poindexter's little force where it was, pending clarification of the situation.

The bad weather that prevented the Marines from seeing their foes likewise hindered the Japanese. Shortly before 0200, *Special Naval Landing Force* troops clambered down into the medium landing craft designated to land on Wilkes and Wake. Four landing craft were launched some 3,000 to 4,000 meters offshore, but in the squalls and long swells they experienced difficulty keeping up with *Patrol Boat No. 32* and *Patrol Boat No. 33* as they churned on a northeasterly course, headed for the beach. The landing craft designated to follow *No. 32* lost sight of her in the murky, gusty darkness.

At about 0230, Marines on Peacock Point detected the two patrol boats, which appeared to them only as dark shapes as they made for the reef by the airstrip. Then, the two ships ground gently ashore on the coral. The Japanese naval infantrymen slipped over the side into the surf, struggled ashore, and sprinted across the coral for cover.

On Wilkes, Gunner McKinstry called to Captain Platt and informed him that he thought he heard the sound of engines over the boom of the surf, and at 0235 one of his .50-caliber guns (gun no. 10) opened fire in the darkness. Ten minutes later, McKinstry, having sought permission to use illumination, caused a searchlight to be turned on. Although the light was shut off as suddenly as it had been turned on, its momentary beam revealed a land-



Poindexter File, Reference Section
1stLt Arthur A. Poindexter (seen here in a post-war photograph), commander of the mobile reserve on Wake, provided such evidence of "exemplary conduct and ability to lead troops . . . with utter disregard for his own safety" that he was ultimately awarded the Bronze Star.

ing boat aground on Wilkes' rocky shore and, beyond that, two destroyers, beached on Wake.

McAlister ordered Platoon Sergeant Henry A. Bedell to detail two men to hurl grenades into the enemy craft. The veteran non-commissioned officer, accompanied only by Private First Class William F. Buehler, gamely tackled the task, but Japanese gunfire killed Bedell and wounded Buehler before either had been able to work their way close enough to lob grenades into the boats.

McKinstry's men, meanwhile, manned the 3-inchers of Battery F, but the guns could not be depressed enough to fire onto the beach. The Marines held their position until the men from the *Takano Unit* of the *Special Naval Landing Force* approached closely enough to begin lobbing grenades. Marines and Japanese grappled in the darkness, hand-to-hand, before McKinstry's men, after removing the firing locks from the guns, pulled back to take up infantry positions. Their concentrat-

ed fires kept most of the Japanese at bay near the 3-inch gun position.

Other *Special Naval Landing Force* troops, however, probed westward, toward the 5-inch guns that had so humbled Kajioka's force on the 11th. They ran into heavy fire from gun no. 9, a well-camouflaged .50-caliber Browning, handled skillfully by 20-year old Private First Class Sanford K. Ray and situated some 75 yards west of where the *Takano Unit* had first swarmed ashore. Ray's fire prevented the enemy from advancing closer than 40 or 50 yards from his sand-bagged position, and his proximity to the beach allowed him not only to harass the enemy but also to report enemy movements. Although Japanese troops had severed most wire communication lines, Platt remained in touch with developments at the shoreline by reports from Ray.

Reports from observers along the beach soon began to deluge Devereux's command post, where he and his executive officer, Major Potter, attempted to keep abreast of events. Gunner Hamas relayed the information to Cunningham, at his command post. On the basis of those reports, the island commander, at 0250, radioed the Commandant of the 14th Naval District: "Island under gunfire. Enemy apparently landing."

At that point, Devereux directed Poindexter to move the mobile reserve into the area between Camp 1 and the west end of the airfield. Since the eight Marines had remained in the truck with the four machine guns, only 15 minutes elapsed before they set up both gun sections in a position commanding the road that ran along the south shore and also covering a critical section of beach. Within moments, Poindexter's Brownings chattered and spat into the dim shape of the grounded *Patrol Boat No. 32*, most of the bullets striking the after part of the ship. *Special Naval Landing Force* troops who disclosed their positions by igniting flares soon came under fire. At Camp 1, just up the

coast, men from Battery I and the sailors who had been serving as look-outs manned the four .30-caliber machine guns set up there. From Poindexter's vantage point, the enemy troops appeared confused and disoriented, shouting and discharging a number of flares, perhaps for "control and coordination."

Having received a report of Japanese destroyers standing toward Wake's south shore (and well inside the range of the 5-inch batteries that had so vexed the enemy on 11 December), Second Lieutenant Robert M. Hanna, who commanded the machine guns emplaced at the airstrip, clearly perceived the threat. Accompanied by Corporal Ralph J. Holewinski and three civilians, Paul Gay, Eric Lehtola, and Bob Bryan, Hanna set off at a dead run for the 3-inch gun that had been emplaced on the landward side of the beach road, on a slight rise between the beach road and the oiled tie-down area at the airstrip. Up to that point, Major Putnam's grounded airmen,

their ground support unit, and the volunteer civilians, had been awaiting further orders. As Hanna and his scratch 3-inch crew sprinted to the then-unmanned gun, Devereux ordered Putnam to support the lieutenant.

Putnam assigned Second Lieutenant Kliewer to a post on the west end of the airfield, along with Staff Sergeant John F. Blandy, Sergeant Robert E. Bourquin, Jr., and Corporal Carroll E. Trego. They were to set off the mines on the field if the enemy attempted to use it. Two .50-caliber guns situated just north of the airstrip covered Kliewer's position. At the eastern end of the strip lay the guns manned by Corporal Winford J. McAnally, along with six Marines and three civilians and supported by a small group of riflemen. The gunners enjoyed a perfect, unobstructed field of fire—the airstrip itself.

About 0300, just at a time when events began to develop with startling rapidity as the Japanese pushed ashore on Wilkes and Wake,

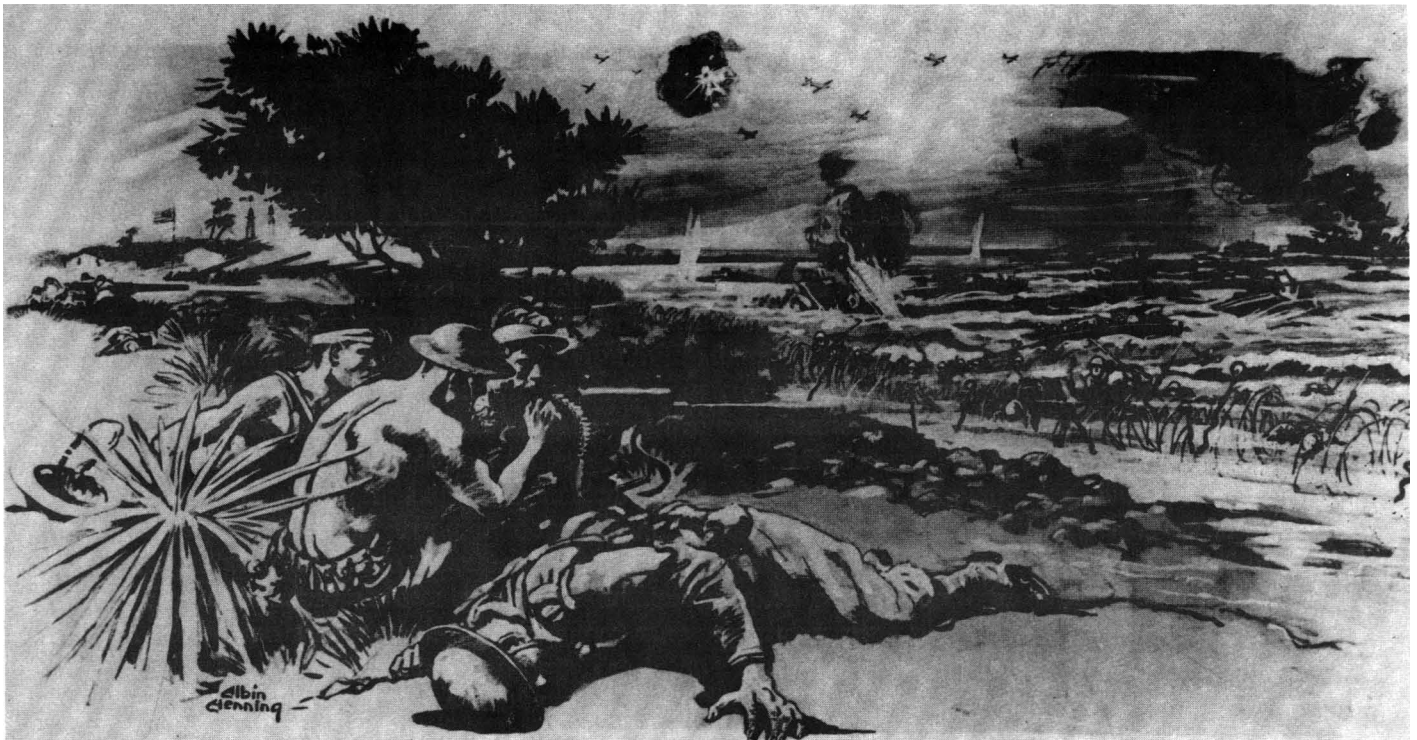
Major Devereux lost touch with Camp 1, Putnam's platoon, Hanna's command post near the airstrip, and Barninger's Battery A. Advancing Japanese troops probably had found the communication lines—the exigencies of war had prevented them from being buried—and cut them. Devereux's last situation reports from those units painted a bleak picture. If Cunningham received less-than-encouraging reports from the defense battalion commander, he received equally grim news from CinCPac when, at 0319 Wake time, Pearl Harbor radioed to Wake that the *Triton* and *Tambor* were returning to Hawaiian waters. "No friendly vessels should be in your vicinity today," the message stated, "Keep me informed."

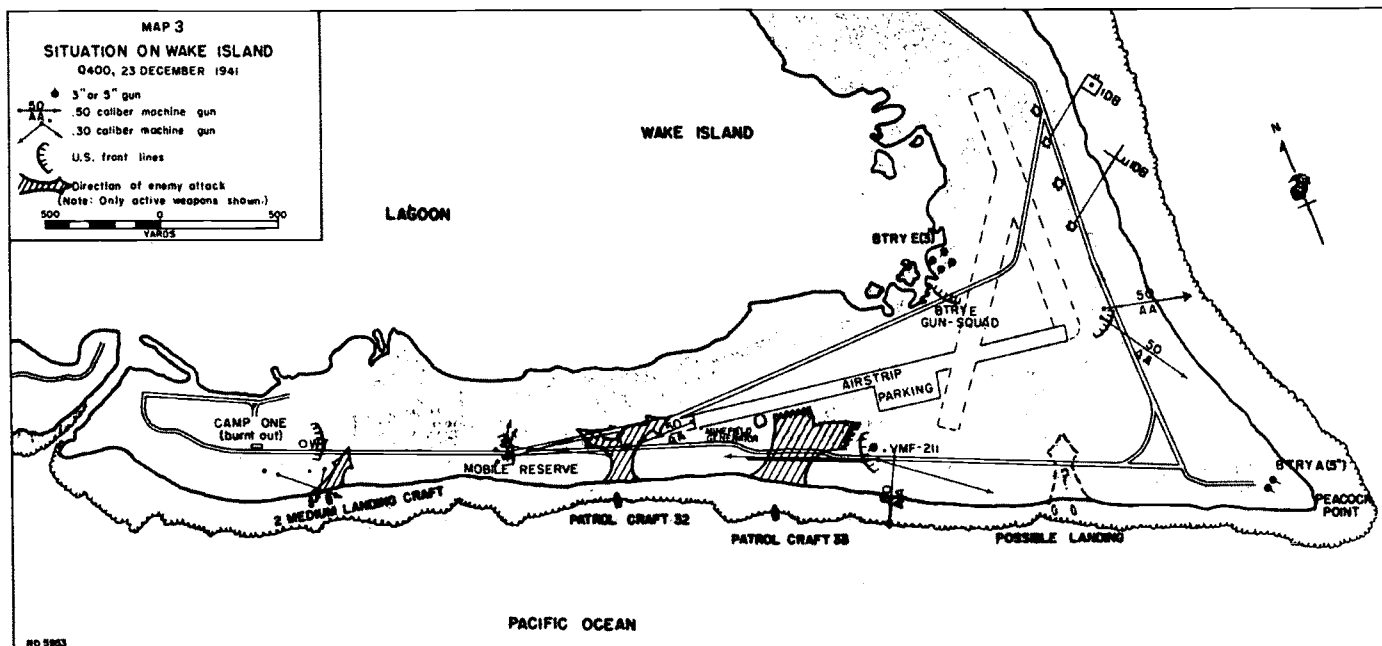
Hanna and his men, meanwhile, reached the 3-inch gun and set to work. Anxious hands fumbled in the darkness for ammunition while Hanna—since the gun lacked sights—peered down the bore to draw a bead on the beached and sta-

Painting by artist Albin Henning shows Marines firing a .30-caliber Browning machine gun as Japanese landing force sailors splash ashore. While inaccurate in details (barbed wire, for example, is an artist's invention because no such ob-

struction existed at Wake Island, since the coral reef surrounding the atoll was bare of any holding ground for the stakes or anchors necessary to keep them in place), it does capture the desperate nature of the Marines' final day's fighting.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 307142





tionary *Patrol Boat No. 33* that lay less than 500 yards away. The first round tore into the ship's bridge, seriously wounding both the captain and navigator, killing two seamen, and wounding five. Hanna's gun hurled 14 more rounds on target. Some of his projectiles evidently touched off a magazine, and the beached warship began to burn. The illumination provided by the burning ship revealed her sistership, which Hanna and his hard-working gunners bombarded, as well. A short time later three *Special Naval Landing Force* sailors attacked Hanna's exposed position. In the ensuing fight, Hanna coolly shot and killed all three enemy sailors with his pistol and resumed the operation of his 3-inch.

Reinforcing Hanna's cannoners became the next order of business. Devereux felt compelled to keep Peale's Battery B intact to deal with surface threats, and Battery E (which, by that point, had a full complement of guns and crews along with the only heightfinder and director) to deal with enemy planes. That left Godbold's Battery D, which by that point possessed only two operational guns and no fire-control gear. Devereux directed Godbold to send one section (nine men) to the battalion command post to reinforce Hanna's crew. Under Corporal Leon A.

Graves, the squad clambered on board a contractor's truck and reached the command post about 0315. They were to proceed along the road that paralleled the shoreline to a junction some 600 yards south of the airfield, where they were to leave the truck and proceed through the brush to Hanna's position. Quickly, they set out into the night.

The flames from the wrecked *Patrol Boat No. 33* disclosed Japanese troops advancing past the west end of the airstrip into the thick undergrowth in front of the mobile reserve's positions. Poindexter, after ordering one machine gun section to keep up a fire into the brush to interdict that movement and protect his own flank, heard machine gun fire from Camp 1, behind him. Wanting to see for himself if more Japanese landing craft were coming ashore to his rear, the lieutenant, accompanied by his runner, left the front in charge of Sergeant "QT" Wade, and hurried back to the camp.

There, unable to see at what his neophyte sailor-gunners were expending their ammunition, Poindexter asked each to point out his target. Two could not—they'd opened fire only because the other two had done so—but a third pointed to the dim outline of what appeared to be a "large landing barge on the order of

a self-propelled artillery lighter." When another craft of the same type seemed to materialize out of the murk, Poindexter ordered firing resumed at what proved to be two large landing craft that were attempting to ground themselves 1,200 yards east of the entrance to Wilkes Channel.

The enemy coxswains, however, appeared to be having difficulty coaxing the unwieldy landing craft onto the beach, backing off and trying again and again to land the *Special Naval Landing Force* men crouched behind the gunwales, which seemed to be deflecting the .30-caliber bullets peppering them. Seizing the moment, Poindexter called for volunteers to pick their way down the rocky beach to the water's edge, there to lob grenades into the boats. Poindexter organized two teams—Mess Sergeant Gerald Carr and a civilian, Raymond R. "Cap" Rutledge (who had served in the Army in France in World War I), in one, Poindexter and Boatswain's Mate First Class Barnes in the other. The grenadiers dashed to the water's edge while the machine guns momentarily held their fire. Barnes, taking cover behind coral heads, remained hidden until the barges ground ashore again. Then, exposing himself to enemy fire, he hurled several grenades toward the Japanese

craft, and managed to land at least one inside, killing or wounding many of the troops on board.

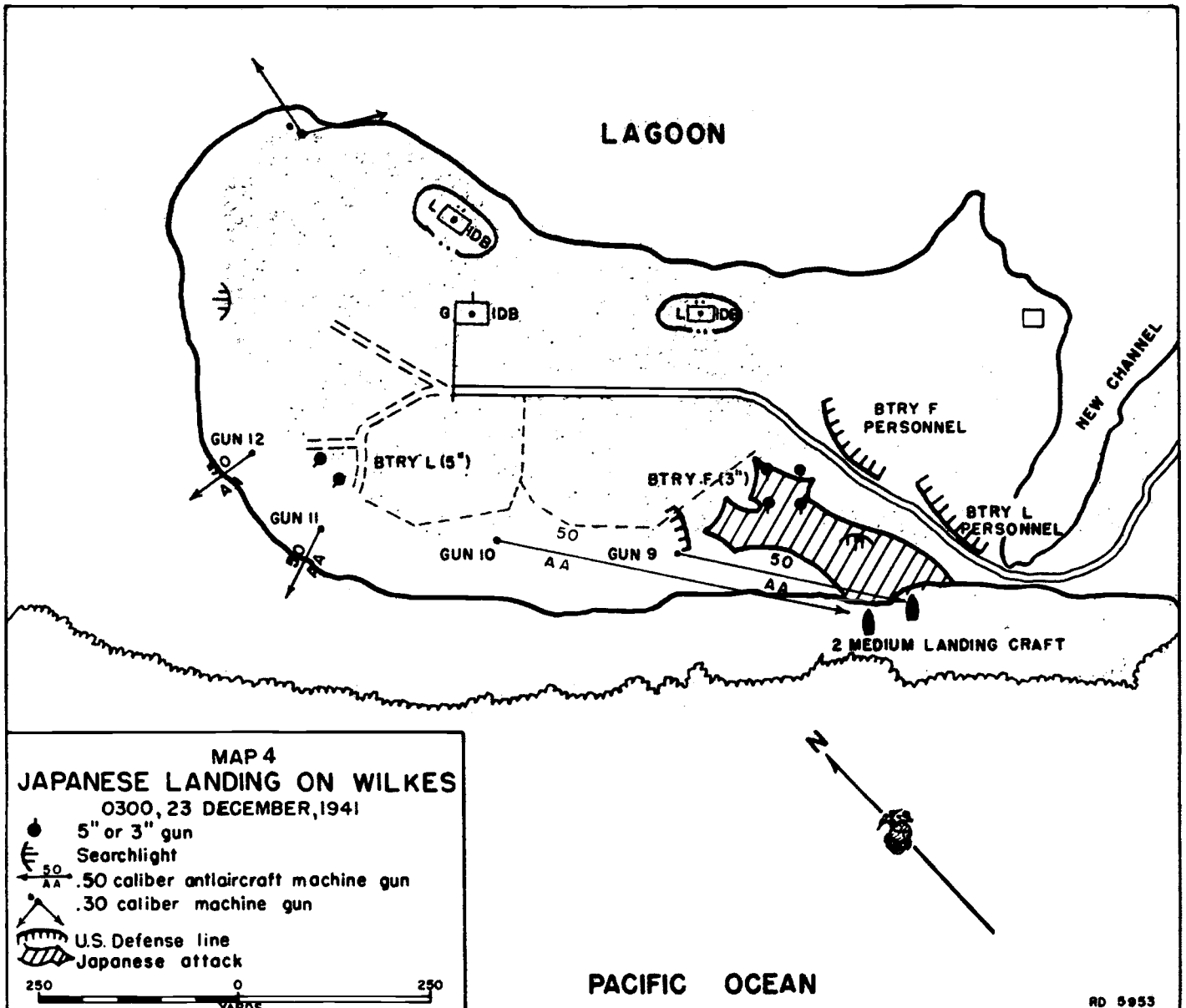
The valiant efforts of Poindexter and his men, however, stopped the Japanese just momentarily, for soon they began swarming ashore and moving inland. Shortly before the wire communications to Devereux's command post failed, Poindexter reported the result of his foray.

Having seen flares streaking skyward in the murk, Captain Godbold on Peale, meanwhile, sent out two patrols, one to move westward toward the naval air base, and the other to go eastward along the lagoon's shore. Neither patrol encountered any enemy troops. A half-hour

later, Godbold established an outpost at the bridge connecting Peale and Wake.

Meanwhile, after word of the enemy landing reached Pearl Harbor, Vice Admiral Pye convened a meeting of his staff. By 0700 (22 December, Hawaiian time), having received further word of developments at Wake, Pye estimated that a relief of the island looked impossible, given the prevailing situation, and directed that the *Tangier* should be diverted toward the east. With the relief mission abandoned, should his forces attack the enemy forces in the vicinity of Wake? Or should American forces be withdrawn to the east? He feared that the timing of the Japanese car-

rier strikes and the landing then in progress indicated that the enemy had "estimated closely the time at which our relief expedition might arrive and may, if the general location of our carrier groups is estimated, be waiting in force." American forces could inflict extensive damage upon Japanese, Pye believed, if the enemy did not know of the presence of the U.S. carrier task forces. They had not yet seen action, though, and no one could overestimate the danger of having ships damaged 2,000 miles from the nearest repair facilities—"a damaged ship is a lost ship," Brown had commented in Task Force 11's war diary. Damage to the carriers could leave the Hawaiian Islands



open to a major enemy thrust. "We cannot," Pye declared, "afford such losses at present."

Two courses of action existed – to direct Task Force 14 to attack Japanese forces in the vicinity of Wake, with Task Forces 8 and 11 covering Task Force 14's retirement, or to retire all forces without any attempt to attack the enemy. These choices weighed heavily on Pye's mind. If American forces hit the Japanese ships at Wake and suffered the loss of a carrier air group in the process, Pye deemed the "offensive spirit" shown by the Navy as perhaps worth the sacrifice.

However, in the midst of his deliberations, shortly after 0736, Pye received a message from the CNO which noted that recent developments had emphasized that Wake was a "liability" and authorized Pye to "evacuate Wake with appropriate demolition." With Japanese forces on the island, though, Pye felt that capitulation was only a matter of time. "The real question at issue," Pye thought, "is, shall we take the chance of the loss of a carrier group to attempt to attack the enemy forces in the vicinity of Wake?" Radio intelligence from the previous day linked "CruDiv 8 . . . CarDiv 2" and, erroneously, "BatDiv 3" (consisting of two battleships) with the forces off of Wake. A pair of *Kongo*-class fast battleships, supported by carriers and heavy cruisers would easily have overmatched Fletcher's Task Force 14.

In the meantime, Japanese cruisers – probably the *Yubari*, *Tenryu*, and *Tatsuta* – had begun shelling Wake, further discomfitting the defenders. Despite Lewis' Battery E firing "pre-arranged 3-inch air burst concentrations" over the Japanese beachhead, the enemy continued to press steadily toward VMF-211's position around Hanna's 3-inch gun. Major Putnam, already wounded in the jaw, with blood from his wound staining the backs of the snapshots of his little daughters, which he carried in his



Marine Corps Historical Collection
Raymond R. "Cap" Rutledge, one of the contractors on Wake, (seen here as a POW at Shanghai in January 1942), had served in the U.S. Army during World War I and threw hand grenades into Japanese landing barges off Wake in the pre-dawn fighting of 23 December.

pocket, formed his final line. "This," he said, "is as far as we go."

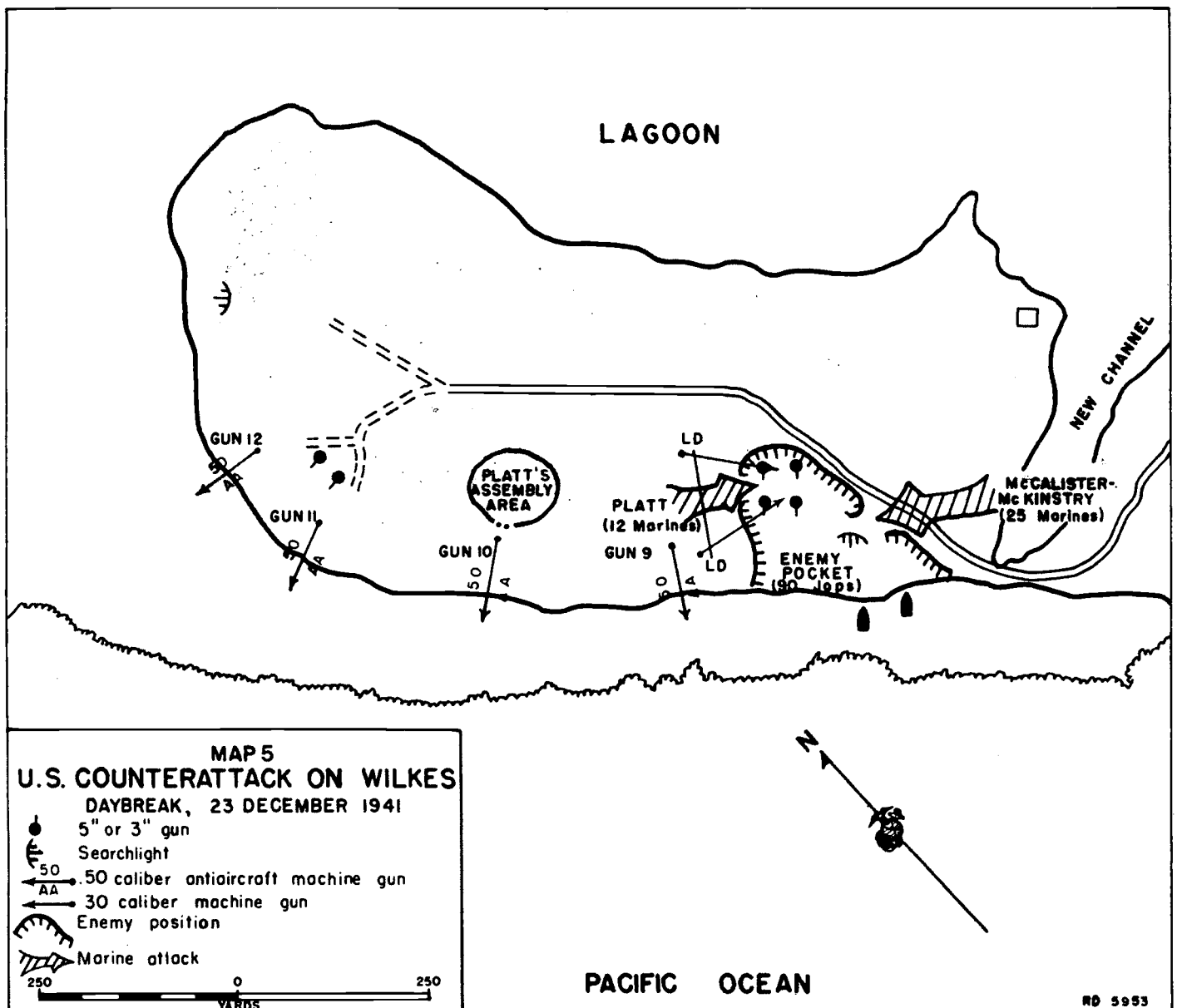
Putnam had placed Captain Elrod in command of one flank of VMF-211's defensive line, which was situated in dense undergrowth. In the impenetrable darkness, the squadron executive officer and his men – most of whom were unarmed civilians who acted as weapons and ammunition carriers (until weapons became available) – conducted a spirited defense which, repeated attacks by *Special Naval Landing Force* troops could not dislodge. Each time he heard Japanese troops mounting a probe of 211's position, Elrod interposed himself between the enemy and his own men and provided covering fire to enable his detachment to keep supplied with guns and ammunition. Shortly before dawn, a Japanese sailor who had hidden himself among the heaps of casualties surrounding Hanna's gun shot and killed the gallant Captain Elrod.

Captain Tharin, in charge of a group of Marines on the left flank of VMF-211's line, delivered covering

fire for the unarmed ammunition carriers attached to his unit, which repulsed several assaults on his position. At one point, Japanese sailors penetrated the defenses in Tharin's sector, but in the counterattack, which drove the enemy from the position, Tharin captured an enemy automatic weapon and used it "successfully and effectively against its former owners." The indomitable Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class Hesson armed himself with a Thompson sub-machine gun and some grenades and although wounded by rifle fire and grenade fragments, single-handedly drove back two concerted attacks – killing several Japanese and preventing them from overrunning 211's flank.

Despite the heroic efforts of Putnam's "platoon," the Japanese managed to move into the roughly triangular area which was bounded by Peacock Point, on one side, the beach and the south side of the airstrip on the others. Corporal Graves' squad from Battery D, meanwhile, detrucked somewhat north of their intended destination (200 yards south of the airstrip rather than 600), began walking toward VMF-211's position, and quickly encountered a Japanese patrol. In the ensuing fire-fight, enemy machine gun and rifle fire killed one Marine and pinned down the remainder for a time, until Graves and his men managed to extricate themselves and retire northward toward the battalion command post. Graves' encounter indicated that the Japanese had penetrated the U.S. defenses. Despite their extraordinary efforts, neither Kliever and the .50-caliber guns at the airfield, nor the Hanna-VMF-211 group at the 3-inch gun near the shore, had been able to stop them.

At the same time, Batteries A and E began to receive mortar, small arms, and machine gun fire, prompting Barninger to deploy his range section, armed with two .30-caliber Brownings, and deployed as infan-



trymen, facing northwest "across the high ground" to the rear of the 5-inchers at Peacock Point. Lewis, whose 3-inch fire had silenced an automatic weapons position in the thick undergrowth southwest of Battery E, dispatched a patrol to try to relieve the pressure on his position. That group, under Sergeant Raymond Gagg, progressed only 50 yards beyond the perimeter before it came under heavy fire. The Japanese, however, moved no further because of the resistance put up by Gagg's squad.

Amidst the chaos, Devereux groped for information about the progress of the battle. At some point, he received word from one of the few positions which had retained wire

contact with his command post, Corporal McNally's machine gun section, which was located at the eastern end of the airstrip. McNally reported that the Japanese were advancing up the shore road, apparently intent upon launching a thrust up the other prong of Wake. With one unit besetting Putnam's at the airstrip, another Japanese unit skirted Putnam and Hanna and was headed into the triangular end of Peacock Point.

McNally, establishing contact with the .50-caliber machine guns on the east shore of Wake, some 400 yards south, carried on a "resolute, well-coordinated defense" which stymied the enemy in the area. Perhaps more important, McNally served as Devereux's eyes and ears on

that portion of the battlefield.

On Wilkes, Private First Class Ray's defense of his position equalled that of McNally's. Captain Platt, having lost communication with his own posts and also with the defense battalion command post, set out on a personal reconnaissance mission at about 0430. He crawled through the thick underbrush and picked his way across the rocky beach, until, at about 0500, he came to a place east of gun no. 10 where he could see *Special Naval Landing Force* men massed in and about Battery F's guns. Soon thereafter, while clambering back to the gun, Platt met Sergeant Raymond L. Coulson and ordered him to gather two .30-caliber machinegun crews and their guns at Kuku Point

(where they had been sent during the false alarm earlier that morning), along with the searchlight crew and everyone else he could find, and to return to gun no. 10.

Devereux, still isolated from his units and literally in the dark about the actions on Wilkes and those in the vicinity of Camp 1, attempted as best he could to keep the island commander informed. Cunningham, consequently, also had scant comprehension of the way the fighting was progressing in those areas. At 0500, about the time Captain Platt was reconnoitering the Japanese position on Wilkes, Cunningham radioed Commandant 14th Naval District, "Enemy on island. Issue in doubt."

Poindexter, meanwhile, satisfied that Camp 1 was being defended as well as possible, proceeded to the mobile reserve gun positions on the west side of the airfield. Japanese machine gun and mortar fire, accompanied by "much shouting" and "numerous pyrotechnic flares," began to fall around those positions, partially disabling one U.S. gun section. As the sky over Wake began to lighten with the dawn, Poindexter became concerned about the enemy fire that had begun to land near his men, and also that the enemy troops infiltrating the woods might outflank the mobile reserve. He ordered a retirement toward Camp 1. The sections alternated in covering each other throughout the movement, maintaining a steady volume of fire. Reaching Camp 1 after daylight, Poindexter established a north-south line astride the shore road, east of a prominent water tank.

While Poindexter deliberated the situation facing his force, Japanese movement along the east shore road increasingly pressed Corporal McAnally's group. McAnally communicated his difficult situation to Devereux's command post. Japanese hand grenades and small arms fire made life difficult for McAnally's band, which nevertheless held its

ground and broke up several assaults.

Around 0530, Devereux told Major Potter to form a final defensive line astride the north-south road, which was being threatened from the south by the advancing Japanese. Calling Godbold's Battery D into the action soon thereafter, Devereux committed his last reserve troops into the action on the east side of Wake. Aware of Corporal McAnally's predicament, Devereux ordered the corporal's combat group to withdraw northward, toward the command post, to join Major Potter's detachment.

On Wilkes at about that time, Sergeant Coulson rejoined Captain Platt with the two machine-gun crews and guns, and eight riflemen. The surf that had masked the sound made by the invaders now worked to the advantage of the hard-pressed defenders. Along with the sputter and crackle of gunfire along the south shore of Wake and on Wilkes, it prevented the Japanese from discovering Platt's briefing of his Marines for the assault on the abandoned Battery F position. In the waning darkness, Platt and his men crept toward the enemy, reaching a point less than 50 yards away from the abandoned 3-inchers. On Platt's signal, the two machine guns chattered and spat toward the enemy position. His skirmishers charged forward and soon began engaging the Japanese—who, with no security on the west, were taken completely by surprise, and whose only light machine guns had been emplaced facing eastward, toward the old channel.

Almost simultaneously with Platt's assault, but not at all coordinated with it, McAlister (who lost contact with the Wilkes strongpoint commander soon after the enemy landing) and his men encountered and engaged a small enemy patrol on the beach ahead of them, killing one man before the rest took cover behind some coral boulders. While flanking fire pinned down the enemy,

Gunner McKinstry started forward to clean out that pocket of resistance. McAlister stopped him, but as he was telling the Gunner to detail one of the men to do it instead, Corporal William C. Halstead climbed atop the rocks and slew the remainder of the enemy.

Platt's and McAlister's assaults cleaned out the Japanese in the 3-inch gun position. Platt and McAlister reorganized their units and searched for any enemy troops who might have escaped. They encountered no further resistance and took two prisoners, who had been wounded and had feigned death. The Marines counted at least 94 dead Japanese. American losses included nine Marines and two civilians killed; four Marines and one civilian wounded.

Meanwhile (shortly before dawn) on Wake, Japanese troops surrounded Kliever's position. The four Marines, however, armed with only two Thompsons, three .45-caliber pistols, and two boxes of hand grenades, repelled multiple bayonet charges in the darkness. Dawn revealed a full-scale enemy attempt to carry the post, but Kliever and his three shipmates, backed up by the two .50-caliber machine guns 150 yards behind them, killed many of the attacking Japanese and continued to hold their ground.

On Peale, with the departure of Captain Godbold and the Marines of Battery D for the island's command post on Wake, First Lieutenant Kessler became strongpoint commander. At dawn, he scanned the other islets. On Wilkes, he discerned Japanese flags whipping in the breeze—one particularly large one flying where Battery F had been (flags which Platt's men would remove shortly thereafter). Kessler reported his observations to Devereux, who had not heard a word from Platt since around 0300. The report prompted Devereux to fear that Wilkes had fallen.

As he scanned Wake at about 0600, however, Kessler observed the

masts of what proved to be *Patrol Boat No. 32*, which was aground on the south shore of Wake. Kessler requested permission to fire at the ship. His request was approved, but he was admonished to avoid firing into friendly troops. Kessler ordered his 5-inchers to open fire. The first salvo clipped off the mainmast. Then Battery B's gunners lowered their sights to hit the ship itself. They could see only the funnel tops over the intervening island. Twenty-five minutes later, at 0625, the command post ordered Battery B to cease fire, their target having been "demolished."

Twenty minutes later, Kessler observed four "battleships, or super heavy cruisers" (probably the heavy cruisers *Aoba*, *Kinugasa*, *Furutaka*, and *Kako*) off Heel Point, moving westward but remaining well out of range. Those ships lay 10 kilometers off shore and shelled the atoll, but achieved little success.

Additional Japanese forces were headed for Wake. At 0612, off to the northwest, *Soryu* turned into the wind and launched 12 planes. The day's air operations had begun. In less than an hour, the planes were over the island.

Throughout the battle, Major Devereux had, as well as he could, kept the island commander informed of

the progress of the assault. While the Marines, assisted by the sailors and civilians, had been attempting to stem the tide, most of the news which trickled into Cunningham's command post boded ill. At 0652, he sent out a message reflecting the situation as he knew it: "Enemy on island. Several ships plus transport moving in. Two DD aground." That was at 1032, 22 December 1941, on Pearl Harbor. It was to be the last message from the Wake Island defenders.

At Pearl Harbor, at about the time that Cunningham was sending that last message, Vice Admiral Pye had reached making a decision. He concluded that if Task Force 14 encountered anything but a weaker Japanese force, the battle would be fought on Japanese terms while within range of shore-based planes and with American forces having only enough fuel for two days of high speed steaming. Like Brown, Pye believed that a damaged ship was a lost ship, especially 2,000 miles from Pearl Harbor. The risk, he believed, was too great. He ordered the recall of Task Forces 14 and 11, and directed Task Force 8 to cover the retirement.

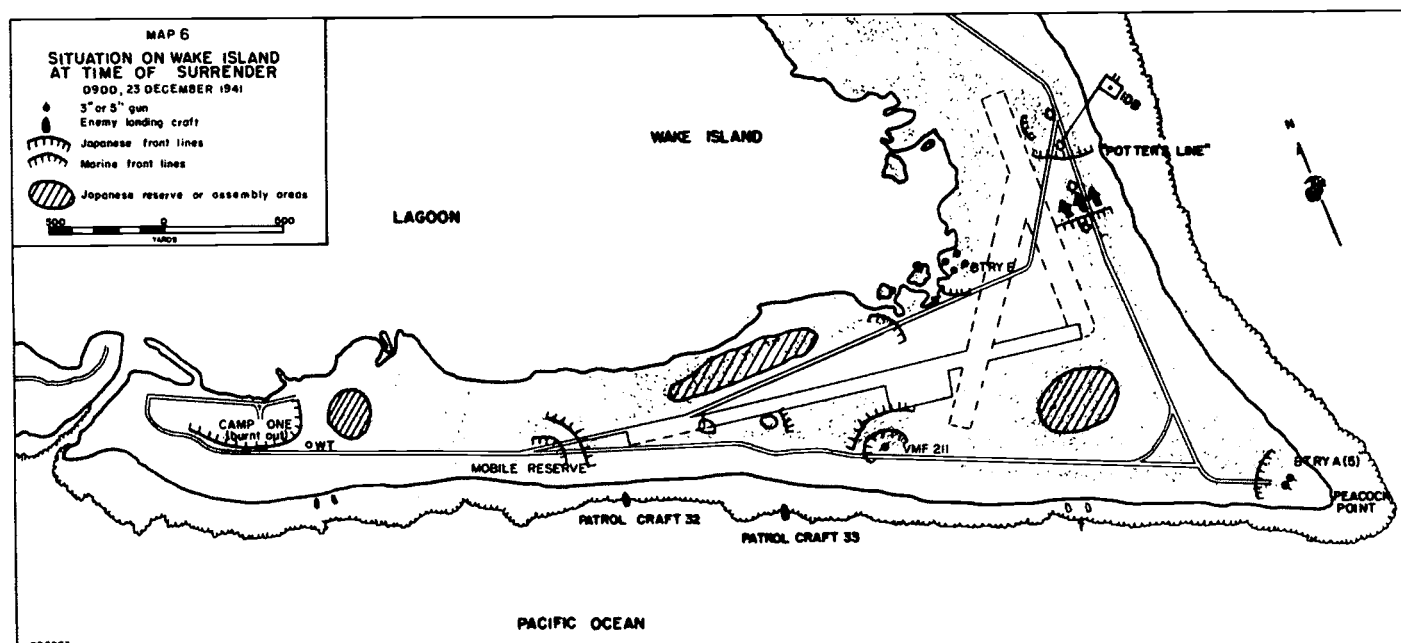
Frank Jack Fletcher's Task Force 14, meanwhile, was right on schedule, and was in fact further west than Pye knew. His ships fully fueled and

ready for battle, Fletcher planned to detach the *Tangier* and two destroyers for the final run-in to Wake, while the pilots on board the *Saratoga* prepared themselves for the fight ahead. Fletcher, not one to shirk a fight, received the news of the recall angrily. He ripped his hat from his head and disgustedly hurled it to the deck: Rear Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, Fletcher's air commander, similarly felt the fist-tightening frustration of the recall. He retired from the *Saratoga's* flag bridge as the talk there reached "mutinous" proportions.

As word of the recall circulated throughout Task Force 14, reactions were pretty much the same. Pye's recall order left no latitude for discussion or disobedience; those who argued later that Fletcher should have used the Nelsonian "blind eye" obviously failed to recognize that, in the sea off Copenhagen, the British admiral could see his opponents. Fletcher and Fitch, then 430 miles east of Wake, could not see theirs. They had no idea what enemy forces they might encounter. The Japanese had beaten them to Wake.

'A Difficult Thing To Do'

Even as deliberations proceeded to determine the fate of the relief efforts, the men on Wake, ignorant of what



was transpiring at Pearl Harbor and on the bridges of Task Force 14's ships, fought on. Shortly before 0700 on Wake (1040, 22 December, at Pearl Harbor), the two trucks bearing Battery D's former antiaircraft gunners, under Second Lieutenant Greeley and Captain Godbold, respectively, reached Devereux's command post. Major Potter deployed the new arrivals in an attempt to form a thin defensive line running across the island. The attempt was doomed because of the terrain they were being forced to defend, an area which had been partially cleared of brush as part of the airfield construction. It presented the Marines with 450 yards of ground without cover or concealment. Marine Gunner Borth established a defensive line near the battalion command post with two .30-caliber guns crewed by command post Marines and a few Marines from Battery D.

At about the time Greeley and Godbold reached Devereux's command post with Battery D's Marines, Second Lieutenant Kessler, at Battery B, shifted his attention to a column of three destroyers off Kuku Point. Four U.S. salvos appeared to inflict heavy damage on the lead ship, so he shifted his attention to the second ship in column. After about 15 minutes, dive bombers directed bombs and strafing toward the position, the battery's firing having called attention to its existence. Fortunately, their accuracy was poor, and Kessler's men escaped without casualty.

By that time, the situation seemed to be grim. Enemy planes were attacking every visible target. Major Potter's final defense line was receiving increasingly heavy enemy rifle and machine gun fire. Japanese troops near the airstrip continued probing and besetting VMF-211's encircled remnant. Wilkes had apparently fallen to the enemy. Major Devereux saw little left to be done. Still having no communication with the stubborn defenders of Wilkes and

of Camp 1, Devereux had no way of knowing which of his units were still fighting.

About an hour after daylight (0630), Commander Keene picked up the telephone in the contractors' headquarters and found Commander Cunningham and Major Devereux engaged in conversation on the line. The latter reported being hard-pressed at his command post. He did not believe, he said, that the battalion could hold out much longer. Cunningham told Devereux that if he did not feel he was able to continue fighting, he should surrender. A discussion between the two men then ensued. "You know, Wilkes has fallen," Devereux stated. Cunningham answered that he did. Devereux then stated that he did not feel he should make the decision to surrender, that Cunningham, the commander of the island, should decide. Pausing for a moment, Cunningham then told Devereux that he authorized surrender, and to take the necessary steps to carry it out. Uncertain of his ability to contact the Japanese commander, Devereux asked Cunningham to attempt to make contact with the enemy, as well. Cunningham responded: "I'll see what I can do."

Surrendering, however, would take time, and the "word" did not reach everyone right away. On Wilkes, having reorganized his men, Platt attempted at about 0800 to phone the battalion command post on Wake. He managed to reach someone at the Camp 1 motor pool, but got no farther, because the motor pool was not in communication with the command post.

At about 0800, Devereux notified the units he could still reach of the surrender decision. On Peale, Kessler received orders to cease firing the 5-inch guns. At Battery E, Lewis' men removed and smashed the firing locks. When stuffing blankets into the muzzles and firing a round did not do sufficient damage to the guns,

the men rolled grenades down the barrels. Other Marines smashed equipment and chopped up electrical cables. Lewis himself destroyed the optics and electromechanical parts of the heightfinder and director by firing 20 rounds into them from his .45. Satisfied with that work of destruction, he marched his men as a unit to Devereux's command post. At Peacock Point, First Lieutenant Barninger ordered that the 5-inch firing locks be broken and buried, the telescopes smashed, and the range-keeper destroyed. Then, running up a white flag, he ordered all hands, including the civilians who had stood faithfully with the battery, to eat as much as they could. No one knew how much the enemy would allow their captives to eat.

As surrender preparations proceeded apace on one side of Wake and in the positions that Devereux had been able to reach by telephone, Poindexter's men, meanwhile, established themselves along a line at the edge of the clearing east of Camp 1. They emplaced 10 .30-caliber machine guns to cover their entire front with interlocking fields of fire. Occasional low-flying planes strafed their positions. Japanese gunfire from their front, though, proved ineffective. Poindexter sent back word to Camp 1 for all "special duty personnel" to join the reserve as riflemen.

When, by 0900, the enemy at the front having shown no inclination to attack his position, Poindexter ordered a counterattack toward the airstrip. Dividing his men into three 10-man squads with a non-commissioned officer in charge of each, the commander of the mobile reserve decided to launch his attack along a front which extended from the beach into the brush on the north side of the road. Poindexter's counterattack regained the terrain between Camp 1 and the road junction west of the airstrip.

Meanwhile Devereux, accompanied by Sergeant Donald Malleck,



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 315174

Civilian contractors are marched off to captivity after the Japanese captured Wake. Some, deemed important by the Japanese to finish construction projects, were retained there. Fear-

ing a fifth column rising, the Japanese executed 98 contractors in October 1943, an atrocity for which atoll commander, RAdm Shigematsu Sakaibara, was hanged after the war.

who held aloft a white rag attached to a swab handle, set out down the north-south road along the eastern shore of Wake to contact the Japanese. As he passed Marines still in action he ordered them to cease firing.

A *Special Naval Landing Force* sailor soon emerged from the brush along the road and halted Devereux's progress, covering the major and Sergeant Malleck as they took off their helmets and laid down their weapons. Unable to speak any English, the Japanese motioned them toward the hospital bunker, where Devereux found an enemy officer who spoke some English. The enemy had already captured the hospital, killing one patient and wounding another when they fired into the entrance. Soon thereafter, Commander Cunningham, who had changed into his blue uniform for the occasion, arrived to arrange the details of the sur-

render. Devereux and Malleck, accompanied by a Japanese officer, then began the sad journey toward those Marines who still stubbornly held out ahead of them.

Meanwhile, the resistance put up by Hanna and the remnant of VMF-211 had prompted the Japanese to call for more close air support. One plane overflew the embattled 3-inch gun and carried out low-level attacks that allowed the observer to fire on the position with his flexible-mount 7.7mm gun. The strafing killed two civilians, Paul Gay and Eric Bryan, and wounded Major Putnam, Second Lieutenant Hanna, and Corporal Holewinski.

Having finally reached the airfield at around 0930, Devereux found that the Japanese had taken cover behind the revetments and had pinned down Hanna's men and what remained of VMF-211's force. The major ordered Captain Tharin, the only officer who

had not been seriously wounded, to cease fire. Of the 10 men in that position, all—including the gallant Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class Hesson—had been wounded in the last-ditch fighting.

Even as elements on Wake still held out, Vice Admiral Pye was informing the CNO that Wake could not be evacuated. Japanese forces had landed, supported by cruisers and destroyers and, probably, by a covering force nearby. The "gallant defense of Wake," Pye stated, "has been of utmost value, but hereafter Wake is a liability." In view of the "extensive operations" then underway, the situation had forced Pye to conclude that risking one carrier task force to attack enemy forces in the vicinity of Wake was "not justifiable." Pye had ordered the two westernmost task forces (14 and 11) to retire toward Pearl Harbor. The third (Task Force 8) he sent on an unrelated mission.

On Wake, Second Lieutenant Kliewer, seeing the Japanese flags all along the beach, decided to set off the mines, blowing up the airfield, and then to fall back in the confusion generated by the explosions. Unfortunately, the rain had drowned the generator motor, which disabled the electric detonator.

At 1015 Kliewer saw men carrying a white flag coming down the beach. Major Devereux was among them, with a group of what appeared to be Japanese officers. They stopped about 50 feet from Kliewer's trench and ordered him to surrender. Kliewer's men counseled against giving up: "Don't surrender, lieutenant. The Marines never surrender. It's a hoax."

"It was a difficult thing to do,"

Kliewer wrote later, "but we tore down our guns and turned ourselves over."

About one hour later, Devereux's melancholy procession arrived at the lines facing the mobile reserve, which still fought stoutly. A rifleman shouted back to Poindexter that a "large group of Japs are coming down the road toward us with a white flag." As they trudged closer, Poindexter could see no Americans in the group, and after ordering his men to hold their fire, he stepped out into the road, Springfield at the ready. Cautioning his men not to fire unless the enemy fired at him, he walked toward the group. Soon, he discerned Major Devereux amidst them, shouting to him,

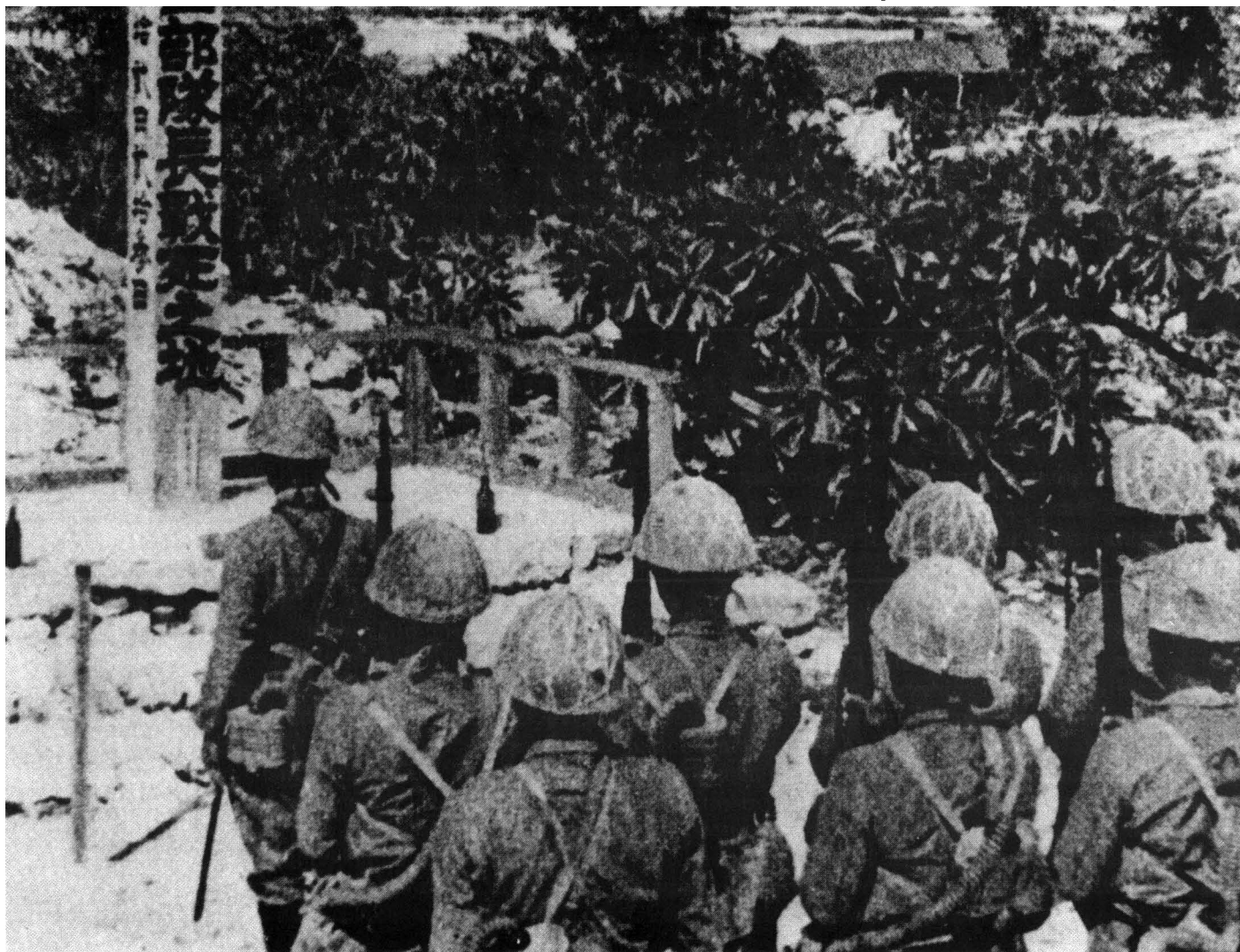
telling him that Wake had been surrendered.

Dropping his rifle and grenades in the road, Poindexter joined Devereux, who then told him to return to his unit and order his men to drop their weapons and stand up. At that, Japanese troops, bayonets fixed, began to rush the positions they had been engaging, but were stopped by a Japanese officer who interposed himself between the two sides. As Poindexter and his men trudged toward the airstrip, he saw large numbers of enemy troops emerging from the brush and falling in along the road, confirming his suspicions that the enemy had established itself in force in the region.

Devereux then progressed to Camp

In a photo copied from a Japanese pictorial history, Special Lt Kinichi Uchida, whose unit lost two other officers and 29 enlisted men killed and 34 wounded at Wake Island.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 315175



1, which was still held by the machine-gun sections of Poindexter's group. There, a Japanese sailor climbed to the top of the water tower observation post and cut down the stars and stripes that had been flying throughout the battle. Elsewhere at Camp 1, in what could be regarded as one of the last measures of defiance to the now-victorious foe, Gunnery Sergeant John Cemeris, the Wake detachment's machine gun maintenance sergeant, unaware of the surrender, fired briefly at a low-flying floatplane.

Cemeris was not alone in his defiance. Marines on Wilkes, ignorant that their shipmates on Wake and Peale had laid down their arms, still sought to carry on the fight as best they could. Platt, sighting ships to the southwest of Wilkes, ordered Battery L to engage them. McAlister and his men hurried back to the 5-inchers, only to find the ships out of range. Enduring bombing and strafing attacks from Japanese planes, around noon the Marines at Battery L spotted small boats standing toward the channel between Wilkes and Wake, and observed several transports and warships lying about 4,000 yards out. Manning the 5-inchers, the Marines discovered one would not move and that one of the dive-bombing attacks had damaged the recoil cylinders of the other. Platt then ordered McAlister's Marines to take up a position along the old channel and fire on the small boats. An exploding bomb killed 20-year-old Private First Class Robert L. Stevens while the men were en route to their new positions. He was the last combat casualty suffered by the Marines on Wake Island.

At about 1300, Devereux reached Wilkes. Soon thereafter, a Japanese destroyer closed with the island and opened fire, apparently intent on bombarding them, but an exchange of signals quickly caused the ship to cease firing. Almost a half hour later, at a point about between the old and



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 529733

One of the many cartoons that mirrored Wake's gallant battle, "Sun Spots," shows holes marked "Wake Island Saga" and "Philippine Fortitude" in a Japanese flag.

new channels, Devereux spotted "a few grubby, dirty men [Platt's] who came out of the brush with their rifles ready." They laid down their arms and surrendered, too. The men of Wake had fought well, impressing the victors with their tenacious bravery, which later proved to be inspiring, not only to the Marine Corps, but also to the nation as a whole.

Of the 449 Marines (1st Defense Battalion and VMF-211 detachments) who manned Wake's defenses, 49 were killed, 32 were wounded, and the remainder became prisoners of war. Of the 68 Navy officers and men, three were killed, five wounded, and the rest taken prisoner. The

small, five-man Army communications detachment suffered no fatalities; they were all taken prisoner. Of the 1,146 civilians involved in construction programs on Wake Island, 70 were killed and 12 were wounded. Five of Wake's defenders were executed by the Japanese on board *Nitta Maru*. With the exception of nearly 100 contractors who remained on Wake Island, all of the rest of the civilians joined Wake's Marines, sailors, and soldiers in prisoner of war (POW) camps. The Japanese transported the wounded military men and civilians from the island as their wounds healed and they were deemed well enough to travel. They,

too, were placed in POW camps until their liberation in 1945.

The Japanese lost two ships and seven planes; a score more were damaged. The casualty statistics, though irrevocably incomplete, show that at least 381 Japanese died and many more were wounded.

Wake was not recaptured by American forces during the war. Air

raids on Wake occurred throughout the war, the first occurring in February 1942. Raids in October 1943, however, had grave repercussions for the contractors who had been left behind. Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, the atoll commander, who feared that the raids portended a major landing, had them all executed. He was unwilling to have his gar-

rison threatened by such a large "fifth column." For that offense, he was hanged as a war criminal. The U.S. recovered Wake Island after the Japanese surrender in 1945.

Wake's defense in 1941 had been one of the few bright spots during the first months of war in the Pacific. It provided Americans a stirring example of heroism.

In a 1942 Ralph Lee cartoon a battered but still defiant Marine shakes his fist angrily at Japanese planes overhead.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 307267



Sources

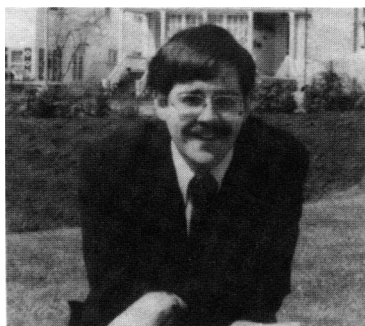
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Robert J. Cressman, currently a member of the Naval Historical Center's Contemporary History Branch, earned both a bachelor of arts in history, in 1972, and a masters of arts in history, in 1978, at the University of Maryland. Formerly also a historian in the Marine Corps Historical Center's Reference Section, from 1979-1981, he has published articles in such publications as the *Naval Institute Proceedings*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, and *The Hook*. He is the author of *That Gallant Ship: USS Yorktown (CV-5)* (1985), and editor and principal contributor of *A Glorious Page in Our History: The Battle of Midway, 4-6 June 1942* (1990). With J. Michael Wenger, he has co-authored *Steady Nerves and Stout Hearts: The USS Enterprise (CV-6) Air Group and Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941* (1990) and *Infamous Day: Marines at Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941* (1992), another title in this World War II commemorative series of publications.



WORLD WAR II



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