PART VI

The Turning Point: Guadalcanal

Background and Preparations [1]

Scarcely had Admiral Yamamoto pulled his *Combined Fleet* away from its defeat at Midway before the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff began reconsidering basic Pacific policy. They wanted an offensive which would aid containment of the Japanese advances toward Australia and safeguard the U. S. communication lines to the Anzac area. As early as 18 February, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the U. S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, told Chief of Staff George C. Marshall that he considered it necessary to garrison certain South and Southwest Pacific islands with Army troops [2] in preparation for launching U. S. Marines on an early offensive against the enemy.[3] And shortly after the Battle of the Coral Sea, General MacArthur advanced plans for an attack against the Japanese at Rabaul. For this move he requested aircraft carriers, additional troops, and more planes.[4] But Nimitz rejected this plan. His carriers were too precious for commitment in waters so restricted as the Solomon Sea, he told the general. Besides, the admiral had a plan of his own. He wanted to capture Tulagi with one Marine raider battalion.[5] Admiral King's reaction to this plan was initially favorable, but on 1 June he sided with Marshall and MacArthur that the job could not be done by one battalion. (See Map 11)

[1] Unless otherwise noted the material used in Part VI is derived from 1st MarDiv FinalRept on the Guadalcanal Operation, Phases I through V, issued June-August 1943, hereinafter cited as *FinalRept* (with Phase No) ; action reports, war diaries, and journals of the various units which served with or as part of the 1st MarDiv ; *Marine Air History; Strategic Planning;* W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate (eds.), *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan—The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1950) ; J. Miller, Jr., *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive—United States Army in World War II* (Washington: HistDiv, DA 1949), hereinafter cited as *Miller, Guadalcanal;* S. E. Morison, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), hereinafter cited as *Struggle for Guadalcanal;* Capt H. L. Merillat, *The Island* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), hereinafter cited as *The Island;* Maj J. L. Zimmerman, *The Guadalcanal Operation* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1949) ; VAdm R. Tanaka with R. Pineau, "Japan's Losing Struggle for Guadalcanal," two parts, *USNI Proceedings,* July and August 1956, Copyright 1956 by the U. S. Naval Institute, hereinafter cited as *Tanaka Article.* Specific citations of material, in addition to direct quotations, taken from *FinalRept* have been noted where the information presented may be of special interest.

[2] CominCh ltr to CofSA, 18Feb42 (located at NHD).

[3] Specific mention of Marines for assault work came after Marshall questioned King's plans and asked why these FMF troops could not perform the garrison duty. CofSA ltr to CominCh, 24Feb42; CominCh ltr to CofSA, 2Mar42 (located at NHD).

[4] CinCSWPA msg to CofSA, 8May42 (located at OCMH).

[5] CinCPac ltr to CinCSWPA, 28May42 (located at NHD).

But now time and the victory at Midway had improved the U. S. position in the Pacific, and on 25 June Admiral King advised Nimitz and Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, Commander of South Pacific Forces,[6] to prepare for an offensive against the Lower Solomons. Santa Cruz Island, Tulagi, and adjacent areas would be seized and occupied by Marines under CinCPac, and Army troops from Australia then would form the permanent occupation garrison.[7] D-Day would be about 1 August.

The task seemed almost impossible. Ghormley had just taken over his Pacific job after a hurried trip from London where he had been Special Naval Observer and Commander of U. S. Naval Forces in Europe; the 1st Marine Division, slated for the Solomon landing, was making an administrative move from the United States to New Zealand; and Marshall and King continued to debate matters of command. The general contested the Navy's right to command the operation. The area lay in the Southwest Pacific, Marshall pointed out, and so MacArthur ought to be in charge.[8]

Never mind arbitrary geography, King's reply seemed to say. The forces involved would not come from MacArthur, but from the South Pacific; and King doubted that MacArthur could help the operation much even if he wanted to. The Southwest Pacific's nearest land-based bomber field was 975 miles from Tulagi. The command setup must be made with a view toward success, King said, but the primary consideration was that the operation be begun at once. He stated unequivocally that it must be under Nimitz, and that it could not be conducted in any other way.[9]

The Joint Chiefs resolved this conflict on 2 July with issuance of the "Joint Directive for Offensive Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area Agreed on by the United States Chiefs of Staff." The directive set the seizure of the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area as the objective of these operations, but it broke this goal down into three phases designed to resolve the dispute between MacArthur and Nimitz. Phase One would be the seizure of the islands of Santa Cruz and Tulagi, along with positions on adjacent islands. Nimitz would command this operation, with MacArthur concentrating on interdiction of enemy air and naval activity to the west. And to remove MacArthur's geographic claim on the Phase One target area, the Joint Chiefs shifted the boundary between the general and Admiral Nimitz to place the Lower Solomons in the admiral's South Pacific area. MacArthur then would take command of Phase Two, seizure of other Solomon Islands plus positions on New Guinea, and of Phase Three, the capture of Rabaul and adjacent bases in New Britain and New Ireland. Questions of timing, establishment of task organizations, and arrangements for command changes from one area to another would be governed by the Joint Chiefs.

Preparation of this directive in Washington had prompted King's warning

[6] Two days earlier a message from Nimitz gave Ghormley the Midway victory tally and suggested that the carriers now might be made available for support of an operation against the Solomon Islands. ComSoPac War Diary, June 1942 (located at NHD).

[7] CominCh disp to CinCPac and ComSoWesPacFor, 25Jun42 (located at NHD).

[8] CofSA ltr to CominCh, 26Jun42 (located at NHD).

[9] CominCh ltr to CofSA, 26Jun42 (located at NHD).

order which Ghormley received on 25 June; and when the directive arrived in the South Pacific the force commander there already was making his plans for Phase One, which Washington labeled Operation WATCHTOWER. But, valid as was the Chiefs' of Staff determination to lose no time in launching this first offensive, problems facing Ghormley and Nimitz were so grim that the pseudo code name for the undertaking soon became "Operation Shoestring."

JAPANESE SITUATION

Since Pearl Harbor the Japanese had expanded through East Asia, the Indies, and much of Melanesia to a gigantic line of departure which menaced Australia from the Indian Ocean to the Coral Sea. Lae, Salamaua, and Finschhafen on New Guinea's north coast had been occupied, and a force for the capture of Port Moresby—a New Guinea town just across the north tip of the Coral Sea from Australia's Cape York Peninsula—stood poised at Rabaul in the Bismarcks, a position taken by the Japanese on 23 January 1942.

A month later the Japanese took Bougainville Island in the Northern Solomons, and on 4 May they took a 300-mile step down this island chain to capture Tulagi, which lay between the larger islands of Florida and Guadalcanal. This started the Japanese encirclement of the Coral Sea, a move that was thwarted by Admiral Fletcher in the naval battle that preceded the fight at Midway (see Part V, Chapter 1).

Defeat of their fleet at Midway forced the Japanese to alter many of their ambitious plans, and on 11 July they gave up the idea of taking New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. But if Admiral Yamamoto realized that the failure of his fleet at Midway spelled the doom of Japanese ambitions in the Pacific, U. S. fighting men were to meet a number of his countrymen who did not get the word, or who were bent on convincing Yamamoto that he was wrong. Rabaul and Solomons positions grew stronger after the Battle of Midway, and reduction of Fortress Rabaul would occupy efforts of the Allied South Pacific forces for nearly two years. Operation WATCHTOWER, which turned out to be the landing against Tulagi and Guadalcanal, was the first Allied step toward Rabaul.

In 1942 the Australian garrison at Tulagi consisted of a few riflemen of the Australian Imperial Force, some members of the Royal Australian Air Force, a member of the Australian Naval Intelligence, the Resident Commissioner, the civil staff, and a few planters and missionaries. Most of these people evacuated the area after a heavy Japanese air raid of 1 May, and the subsequent sighting by coastwatchers of enemy ships en route toward the Southern Solomons. Among those who remained in the Solomon area were the coastwatchers, courageous old island hands who now retired into the bush and hills from which they would observe Japanese movements and report regularly by radio to their intelligence center in Australia.[11]

The *3d Kure Special Landing Force* made the Tulagi landing from the cruiser-mine layer *Okinoshima* which flew the flag of Rear Admiral Kiyohide Shima. One group of these Japanese "marines"—a machine gun company, two antitank gun

[11] For an excellent account of the work of these men see Cdr E. A. Feldt, RAN, *The Coastwatchers* (New York and Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1946), hereinafter cited as *Coastwatchers*.

platoons, and some laborers—occupied Tulagi while a similar task organization from the *3d Kure Force* went ashore on Gavutu, a smaller island nearby. They met no opposition, except that from Admiral Fletcher's planes in the action ancillary to the Battle of the Coral Sea, and defensive installations were set up immediately to protect the base construction and improvement work which soon got underway. The Japanese set up coastwatcher stations on Savo Island at the northwest end of the channel between Florida and Guadalcanal, and on both tips as well as the south coast of Guadalcanal.

Tulagi has an excellent harbor,[12] and initial efforts of the Japanese landing force improved this and developed a seaplane base there. The enemy took no immediate steps to develop airfields, and a full month passed before surveying parties and patrols crossed the 20-mile channel to Guadalcanal where they staked out an air strip site on the plains of the Lunga River. They finished this survey late in June and began to grade a runway early in July.

With a scrapping of the plans to occupy Samoa, Fiji, and New Caledonia, and with the importance of Rabaul thus increased, Japanese holdings in the Lower Solomons had gained in value. Tulagi with its excellent harbor, and Guadalcanal with its broad plains suitable for airstrips, would be an important outwork to Rabaul. A new offensive likewise could be mounted from the Bismarck-Solomon positions, to erase the Coral Sea and Midway setbacks. Japan still had her eye on Port Moresby. The troops slated for that occupation already waited at Rabaul, and now a new fleet, the *Eighth*, under Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, was created to help look after this southern end of the Japanese conquest string. This fleet, with the help of aircraft from Rabaul and the Lower Solomons, would protect the ferrying of troops to Buna, and the subsequent overland march of these troops across New Guinea's Owen Stanley Mountains to capture Port Moresby. Thus Australia would be well blocked if not completely isolated; and maybe if the Japanese did not think about the defeat at Midway the sting would just go away and everything would be all right again.[13]

U. S. PREPARATIONS

After reinforcing the Anzac lifeline (see Part II, Chapter 3), the U. S. began edging toward its Solomon Islands target area. Near the end of March some 500 Army troops from Major General Alexander M. Patch's America Division in New Caledonia went up to garrison Efate in the lower New Hebrides. On 29 March the 4th Marine Defense Battalion and Marine Fighter Squadron 212, diverted from their deployment from Hawaii to Tongatabu, also landed on this island. These Marines and Army personnel built an airstrip for the fighter squadron. Naval forces also began to arrive during this time, and in April other elements of Marine Air Group 23, parent organization of Squadron 212, came to the island. The prewar seaplane base at Vila, Efate's larg-

[12] Earl Jellicoe, the British admiral who commanded at Jutland, recommended after a South Pacific inspection trip following World War I that the Tulagi harbor be developed as a major fleet base.

[13] For an idea of the pains taken by official Japan to hide the facts of the Midway defeat, see the preface of Mitsuo Fuchida in *Battle That Doomed Japan*, xiii–xv.

est town, was improved, and another such base was built in Havannah Harbor on the island's northwest coast.

This was a hazardous and rather unnerving extension of defensive lines for the meager American force of that period. The Japanese were just 700 miles to the north in the Lower Solomons, and this fact gave these New Hebrides islands and waters that same hostile, "creepy" feeling that members of the unsuccessful Wake relief expedition had sensed while on that venture deep into the enemy zone. The Japanese made a few air raids into this area, but the greatest opposition came from the anopheles mosquito.

In the New Hebrides American troops of World War II had their first wholesale encounter with this carrier of malaria, and the field medical units were not prepared to cope with the disease in such proportions. Atabrine tablets were not yet available, and even quinine was in short supply. By the end of April there were 133 cases of malaria among the 947 officers and men of the 4th Defense Battalion, and by the time of the Guadalcanal landing early in August the entire New Hebrides force reported the disease in even greater proportions. Medical units were dispatching requests for "an enormous amount of quinine."[14]

In May both General Patch and Admiral Ghormley recommended that a force be sent even farther north, to Espiritu Santo. An airfield there would put the Allied planes 150 miles closer to the Solomons, and the force there would be a protective outwork for Efate until that first offensive started. Admiral Ghormley also recommended that the Ellice Islands, between the Samoan group and the Gilberts, be occupied as an additional outpost of the communication lines to Australia. This move was postponed, however, and it was not until October that Marines landed at Funafuti in the Ellice group. Espiritu Santo was immediately important to the Solomons operation, however, and on 28 May a force of about 500 Army troops moved from Efate to the larger New Hebrides island farther north. The first attempt of these troops to build an airfield there bogged down in a stretch of swamp and new outbreaks of malaria.

By this time, plans for the WATCHTOWER landings were firming up, and the effort at Espiritu Santo was reinforced so that the airfield would be completed in time. On 15 July a detachment from the 4th Marine Defense Battalion went up to Santo with a heavy antiaircraft battery and an automatic weapons battery. The airfield was completed in time, but the Army troops and Marines were mostly walking cases of malaria by then. However, important islands had been reinforced, new garrisons formed to protect the communication lines, and these displacements toward enemy bases had been accomplished. The time had come to strike back at the Japanese.

PLANS FOR BATTLE

When Admiral Ghormley received the WATCHTOWER warning order on 25 June, the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Major General Alexander Archer Vandegrift, was en route from the United States to Wellington, New Zealand. The advance echelon had arrived on 14 June, and the rear was at sea. It would land on 11 July. Until 26 June when information of the operation reached the division staff, Vandegrift had planned to continue

[14] MedRept, 4th DefBn, March–August 1942.

training his division in New Zealand.[15] The division, the Marine Corps' major unit available for employment on such short notice, was understrength by about one third because of detachment of the reinforced 7th Marines to Samoan duty.

Army troops in the area, originally under Ghormley's command, could provide little more than moral support to the landings. This shoestring venture would not remove the need for garrison forces elsewhere in the South Pacific. Besides, Ghormley lost his direct control of these troops on 1 July when Major General Millard F. Harmon, USA, became Commanding General, South Pacific Area, to head all Army forces in the theater. Even though Harmon would be under Ghormley's command, the admiral at first disliked this command setup. But he later came to regard Harmon as one of the finest administrators and coordinators he had ever met.[16]

Admiral Ghormley's job in the South Pacific seemed almost to resemble that of a traffic director more than it did the role of a commander. According to plans, Nimitz would order task force commanders, with their missions already assigned them, to report to Ghormley when they were going to carry out missions in his area. Ghormley then would direct these commanders to execute the missions Nimitz had assigned them, and he could not interfere in these missions except when tasks were opposed by circumstances of which Nimitz was not aware.[17]

To complete the picture of command for WATCHTOWER, Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner arrived from Washington on 18 July and reported to Ghormley as commander of the amphibious force. Ghormley, under Nimitz, was in over-all strategic command, but he would remain at his headquarters in Noumea. Admiral Fletcher would command the joint expeditionary force. But in practice Fletcher confined himself almost completely to providing air cover from his carriers, and this left Turner, in addition to commanding Vandegrift and his division, in charge of almost everything else as well.

This command setup which placed Vandegrift under the Navy's amphibious force commander rankled until nearly the time of the withdrawal of the 1st Marine Division from Guadalcanal fighting. It was not a case of small jealousy about control or any sort of petty peevishness on the part of either Vandegrift or Turner. Rather it was a clash of serious opposing convictions about how such an operation should be conducted. Turner and many other Naval authorities looked upon the landing force as just a detachment from the force afloat, and still connected to the Navy's amphibious force by firm command lines. That was a traditional view from an earlier age.

But this was the beginning of a big new war, and Marines had experience and thinking time enough in amphibious matters to have definite studied opinions about how these intricate over-the-beach operations should be conducted when they reached the proportions which would be

[15] Gen Vandegrift was under the impression that his division would not be called for combat duty prior to early 1943.

[16] Adm R. L. Ghormley personal notes, n. d., hereinafter cited as *Ghormley MS;* Maj J. L. Zimmerman interview with Adm R. L. Ghormley, January 1949.

[17] ComSoPac War Diary, 9May42 (located at NHD).

necessary in the Pacific. Vandegrift, faced with the task of putting these studied opinions and experiments into practice, wanted a clear-cut command right, free from any vestige of divided responsibility shared with the commander afloat. Once firmly established ashore, Marine opinion held, the landing force commander should command his own land operation. His training and position on the battleground made him more qualified for this job than was the amphibious force commander. It took some arguing, and this matter finally had to be taken to the top of military hierarchy, but the Navy eventually saw the point and agreed with it.

Turner's second in command was Rear Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, RN, whose covering force would include eight cruisers (three Australian and five U. S.) and fifteen destroyers (all U. S.). These ships were to provide naval gunfire support and antiaircraft protection. In all, the naval contingent included three aircraft carriers with a strength of 250 planes; a number of light and heavy cruisers; two new battleships; and the available screening vessels and auxiliary craft. Transports and cargo vessels were at a premium, and would continue so for some time.

In addition to the approximately 250 carrier aircraft, Ghormley could muster only 166 Navy and Marine Corps planes (including two Marine squadrons—VMF–212 and VMO–251), 95 Army planes, and 30 planes from the Royal New Zealand Air Force. These 291 aircraft—all unfortunately based beyond striking range of the target area—were under the command of Rear Admiral John S. McCain whose title was Commander Aircraft South Pacific. He was instrumental in bringing about the construction of the Espiritu Santo airfield and seeing that it was available for aircraft on 28 July, in spite of all the troubles which befell the force in the New Hebrides.

VMO–251 came in to Noumea on 12 July on board the USS *Heywood*. The outfit barely had time to set up camp at Tontouta and uncrate its aircraft before it got the word to go up to that new field at Santo and back up the landing. On 2 August the unit began to arrive at this northern New Hebrides field, and within nine days Lieutenant Colonel John N. Hart had his squadron installed there with its sixteen F4F–3P long-range photographic planes. Hart still was short his wing tanks for long-range flying, however. These were finally flown out from Pearl Harbor and arrived on 20 August.

MacArthur's contribution to the Guadalcanal operation consisted of about sixteen B–17's which flew reconnaissance over the area west of the 158th meridian east (the boundary between the South and Southwest Pacific Areas for air search) and attempted to put a stopper on the enemy air from Rabaul.

Thus Ghormley could rely only on the services of a small, highly trained striking force of fluctuating but never overwhelming power. He had no assurances of reserve ground troops, although plans were under way to release both the 7th and 8th Marines from their Samoan defense missions,[18] and he had been advised that garrison forces would have to come from the troops already within his area on base de-

[18] Relief for 7th Mar. was to leave the U. S. on 20 July and that for the 8th Mar on 1 September. ComSoPac War Diary, June 1942 (located at NHD).

fense duty.[19] The 1st Base Depot had set up an advance echelon in Wellington on 21 June, and other supply bases were to be established later at Noumea and Espiritu Santo.

The general structure organized to employ these resources against the Japanese was laid down in Nimitz' order to Ghormley of 9 July, and Ghormley's Operation Plan 1–42 of 17 July 1942.[20]

Ghormley, exercising strategic command, set up his organization in three main groups:

Carrier Forces (Task Force 61.1), commanded by Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes, was composed of elements of three task forces from Nimitz's area—11, 16, and 18. It would include three carriers, *Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp*, the fast new battleship *North Carolina*, five heavy cruisers, one so-called antiaircraft cruiser, and 16 destroyers.

Amphibious Force (Task Force 61.2), commanded by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, included the Marine landing force carried in 13 attack transports, four destroyer transports, and six cargo ships; a fire support group of one antiaircraft and three heavy cruisers plus six destroyers; a screening group of one light and three heavy cruisers as well as nine destroyers; and a small mine-sweeping group.

Shore-Based Aircraft (Task Force 63), under Rear Admiral J. S. McCain (ComAirSoPac), included all aircraft in the area except those on carriers.

Complicating this symmetrical structure was the tactical command role played by Vice Admiral Fletcher. He was in overall command of TF 61 which included the forces of Noyes and Turner.

Ghormley called for a rehearsal in the Fiji area and directed that all task force commanders arrange to hold a conference near the rehearsal area. He himself would move from Auckland to Noumea about 1 August in order to comply with his orders to exercise strategic command within the operating area.[21]

By this time the plans and orders were formed, the target selected, the forces organized, and the Navy given leeway to operate without poaching in the territory of the Southwest Pacific. Only the detail of a landing date remained unsettled. Vandegrift pointed out to Ghormley that the late arrival of his second echelon, and a stretch of bad weather, had so complicated his loading problem as to make it impossible to meet the date of 1 August. Ghormley and Nimitz agreed that an additional week was needed, and King consented to postpone the landing until 7 August. King warned, however, that this was the latest date permissible and that every effort should be made to advance it.

ACCUMULATION OF INTELLIGENCE

From an intelligence point of view, the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landings can hardly

[19] Adm King's effort to secure quick release for the assault troops was not successful. The Army's commitments to the European Theater were such that no units were available for such missions. Initially assured that air support and air replacements would be available, King was advised on 27 July by LtGen Joseph C. McNarney, acting Chief of Staff, that commitments in other areas would not permit further air reinforcements of the South Pacific—a dictum which King protested strongly. CominCh memo to CofSA, 1Aug42 (located at NHD).

[20] *Ghormley MS*, 54, 58.

[21] *Ibid.*, 59.

be described as more than a stab in the dark. When General Vandegrift received his initial warning order on 26 June 1942, neither his staff nor the local New Zealand authorities had more than the most general and sketchy knowledge of the objective area or the enemy's strength and disposition, and there was but a month available before the scheduled date of mounting out, 22 July.

As in the case with most tropical backwaters, the charting and hydrographic information was scanty and out of date. Lieutenant Colonel Frank B. Goettge, Intelligence Officer of the 1st Marine Division, therefore set out to locate traders, planters, shipmasters, and a few miners who had visited or lived at Guadalcanal or Tulagi. A number of likely sources resided in Australia, and while his subordinates tabulated the formal data available, Goettge left for Australia on 2 July. He returned to New Zealand on the 13th.

Long after the conclusion of the campaign, it was learned that Colonel Goettge's efforts deserved better success than they had enjoyed. During his hurried trip to Australia, he arranged with the Southwest Pacific Area for maps to be made from a strip of aerial photographs and to be delivered prior to the sortie of the 1st Marine Division. The maps were made, but were not received because of certain oversights and confusion in mounting out the division.

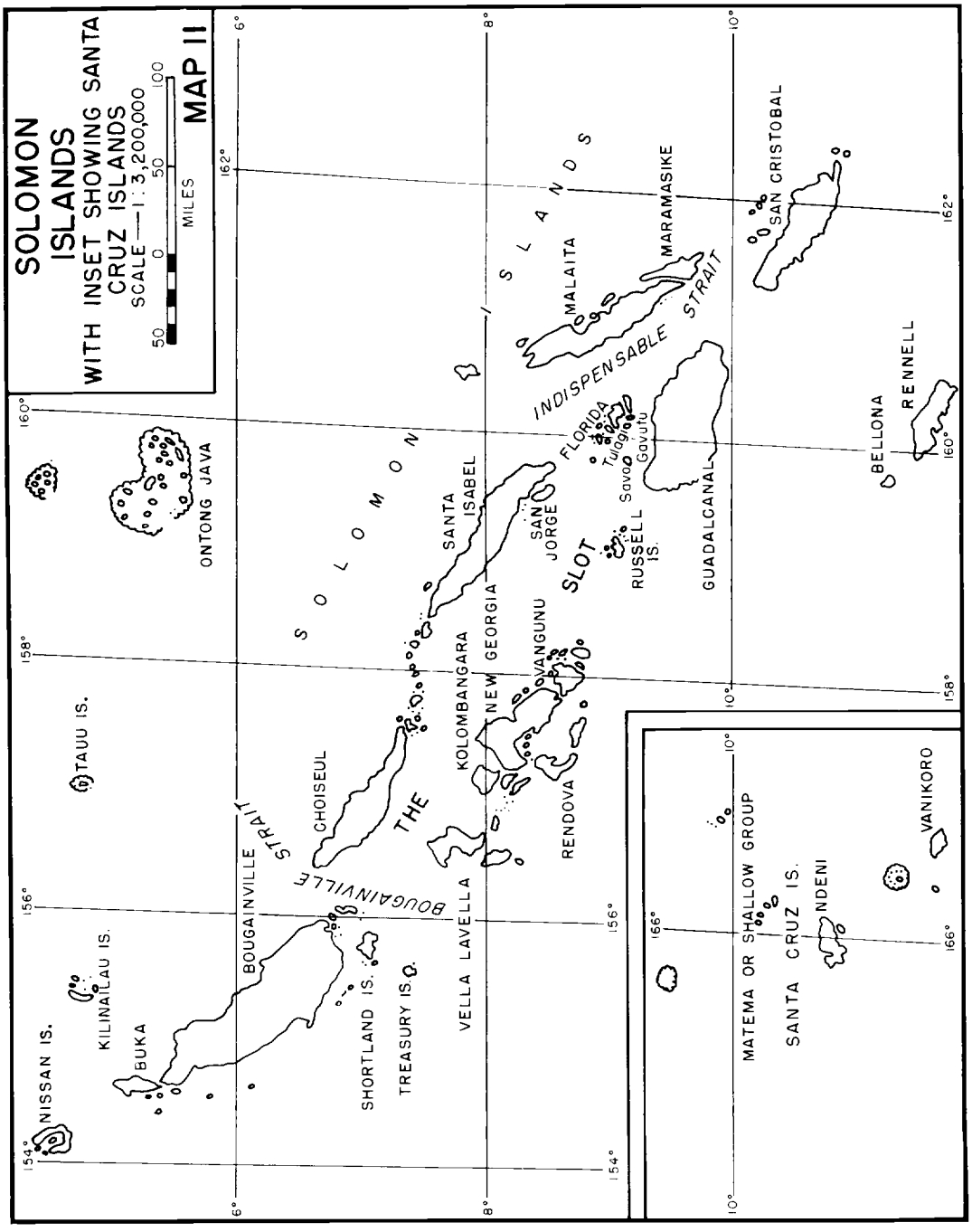
From Buka and Bougainville in the north, the Solomons form a double column of islands streaming southeast between latitudes five and twelve degrees south. Looking northwest toward Bougainville, the large islands on the right are Choiseul, Santa Isabel, and Malaita. In the column to the left are the islands of the New Georgia group, the Russells, Guadalcanal, and San Cristobal. Buka and Bougainville at outbreak of the war were part of the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea ; the remainder of the double chain formed the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. In all, the islands number several hundred, with some 18,600 square miles of land area. (See Map 11)

Florida, the largest island of the Nggela Groan, lies between Malaita and Guadalcanal; and between the northern tips of Guadalcanal and Florida is the small, nearly-conical island of Savo. Indispensable Strait separates Florida from neighboring Malaita to the east, and the twenty-mile-wide strait between Florida and Guadalcanal to the south is known generally as Sealark Channel. (See Map 13, Map Section)

Nestled into the northwest rim of a jagged bight in Florida's south coast lies Tulagi, seat of the British Resident Commissioner. Tulagi Harbor, the water between the two islands, is the best anchorage in the Southern Solomons.

In the middle of Florida's bight, generally east southeast of Tulagi, lie the smaller causeway-connected islands of Gavutu and Tanambogo. Gavutu was the local headquarters of Lever Brothers which operated coconut plantations in the area, and this island, as well as Tanambogo and Tulagi, possessed some docks, jetties, and other developments for shipping, management, and copra processing.

Mostly volcanic in origin and lying within the world's wettest area, the Solomons are jagged, jungle-covered, and steamy with humid tropical heat. Lofty peaks and ridges cross-faulted by volcanic action and dramatic erosion cuts from swift rivers chop the islands into conflict-


SOLOMON ISLANDS
WITH INSET SHOWING SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS
SCALE — 1: 3,200,000
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MILES
MAP II
NISSAN IS.
KILINAILAU IS.
BUKA
BOUGAINVILLE
SHORTLAND IS.
TREASURY IS.
TAUU IS.
ONTONG JAVA
BOUGAINVILLE STRAIT
CHOISEUL
THE SOLOMON ISLANDS
VELLA LAVELLA
KOLOMBANGARA
NEW GEORGIA
VANGUNU
RENDOVA
SLOT
SANTA ISABEL
SAN JORGE
FLORIDA
Tulagi
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Guvutu
RUSSELL IS.
GUADALCANAL
INDISPENSABLE STRAIT
MALAITA
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ing terrain that became a nightmare for military operations.

Guadalcanal, some 90 miles in length and about 25 miles wide, presents a varied topography ranging from plains and foothills along the north coast to a mountain backbone dropping rapidly to the south coast. Rainfall is extremely heavy, and changes in season are marked only by changes in intensity of precipitation. This, together with an average temperature in the high 80's, results in an unhealthy climate. Malaria, dengue, and other fevers, as well as fungus infections, afflict the population.

Rivers are numerous and from the military point of view may be divided arbitrarily into two classes. The first of these is the long, swift, relatively shallow river that may be forded at numerous points. Generally deep only for a short distance from its mouth, it presents few problems in the matter of crossing. Examples of this type on Guadalcanal are the Tenaru, the Lunga, and the Balesuna. The second type is that of the slow and deep lagoon. Such streams are sometimes short, as in the case of the Ilu River, and some lagoons are merely the delta streams of rivers of considerable size, as in the case of the Matanikau. This type, because of depth and marshy banks, became a military obstacle.

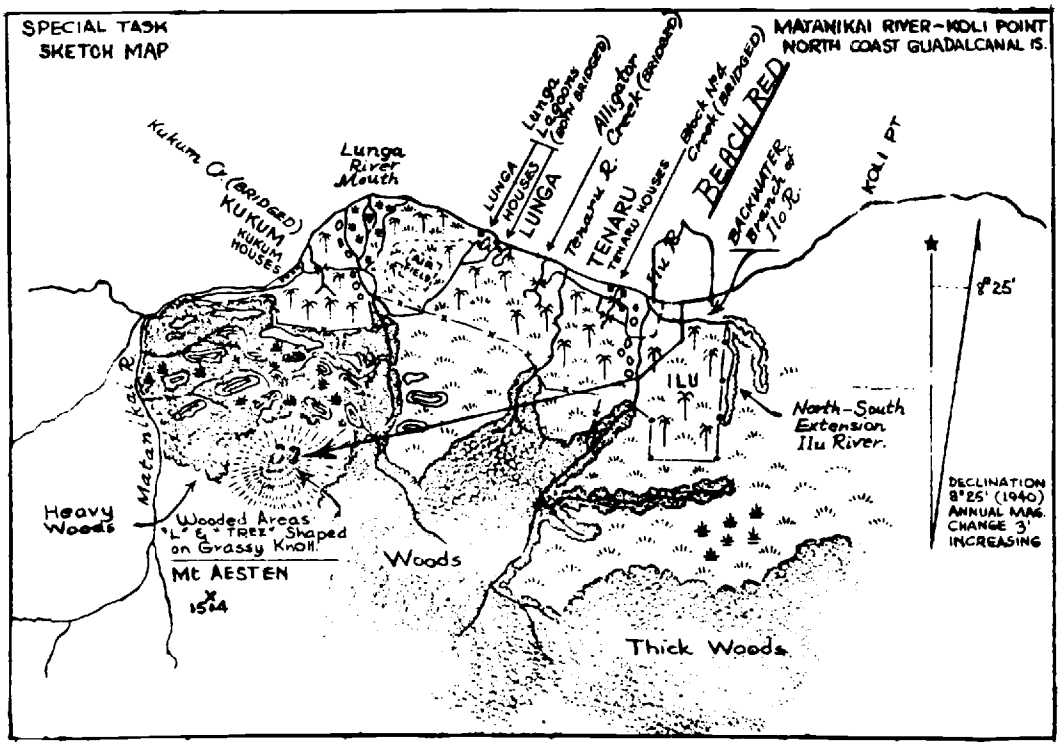
Although such accumulation of data afforded much enlightenment beyond the little previously known, it included corresponding minor misinformation and many aggravating gaps, for detailed information in a form suitable for military operations was mainly lacking.

In spite of the number of years which had elapsed since initiation of the systematic economic development of the islands by the British, not a single accurate or complete map of Guadalcanal or Tulagi existed in the summer of 1942. The hydrographic charts, containing just sufficient data to enable trading schooners to keep from grounding, were little better, although these did locate a few outstanding terrain features of some use for making a landfall or conducting triangulation. Such locations were not always accurate. Mount Austen, for example, was assigned as an early landing objective, but the landing force discovered that instead of being but a few hundred yards away from the beaches, the mountain actually lay several miles across almost impassable jungle.[22]

Aerial photographs would have been a profitable source of up-to-date information, but the shortage of long-range aircraft and suitably located bases, and the short period available for planning, combined to restrict availability of aerial photos in the quantity and quality normally considered necessary.

Perhaps the most useful photographic sortie carried out prior to the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landings was that undertaken on 17 July by an Army B–17 aircraft in which Lieutenant Colonel Merrill B. Twining, assistant operations officer of

[22] This was the so-called "Grassy Knoll" assigned to the 1st Marines. Guadalcanal residents described it as lying virtually within the perimeter area ultimately occupied and defended by Gen Vandegrift, whereas its true location was six miles to the southwest. This discrepancy, unexplained for years, has given much cause for speculation to historians of the Guadalcanal campaign, some of whom have raised the question whether Mount Austen was really the "Grassy Knoll" which Goettege's informants had in mind. This school of thought suggests that a feature within the described limits which might answer that description would have been the high ground later to become known as Edson's Ridge.



Prepared under the direction of the Commander Combat Team No. 5; 1942. From Special Sketch submitted, and controlled by Map; North Coast of Guadalcanal Island, B.F. 1:95,040; 14 July, 1942.

R.F. 1:95040 *Natural Scale 1:108.643*

5000 0 5000 Yards

1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Statute Miles

Cartographic & Reproduction Unit, Combat Team No. 5 1242

SPECIAL NOTE: This map was reproduced from Special Sketch Map drawn from the information supplied by a man thoroughly familiar with the terrain shown. It is an approximate pictorial representation drawn from this person's memory. It is not to be construed as being an accurate map.

: S Y M B O L S :

DEEP DITCHES, WITH HOLES

GRASS PLAINS (THICK: 4 TO 6 FT. HIGH).

SWAMP. KNOLLS.

COCONUT PALMS AND GRASS LAND.

FIVE STRAND BARBED WIRE FENCES (GOOD REPAIR).

FENCE. (TEN YEAR OLD).

BRIDGES. 3 TON LIMIT. ONE WAY TRAFFIC.

KUKUM, LUNGA, TENARU and ILU, are Plantations.

CRUDE SKETCH MAP *used in the planning and early operational phases of the Guadalcanal campaign by units of the 5th Combat Team; it is an adaptation of a map prepared by the D-2 Section and typifies the scarcity of reliable terrain information available to the 1st Marine Division when it left New Zealand.*

the 1st Marine Division, and Major William B. McKean, member of the staff of Transport Squadron 26, conducted a personal reconnaissance of the landing areas. They assured General Vandegrift that the Lunga beaches appeared suitable for landing.[23]

The coastal map of Guadalcanal finally adopted by the 1st Marine Division (and employed, with such corrections as could later be developed, through the entire campaign) was traced from an aerial strip-map obtained by Colonel Goettge on his mission to Australia. It was reasonably accurate in general outline, but contained no usable indications of ground forms or elevations. The Goettge map was supplemented by aerial photos of Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo Islands, and these constituted the sum of the Marines knowledge of Tulagi and Guadalcanal prior to the landings.[24]

In format ion concerning the enemy's strength, dispositions, and activities was collected by the U. S. planners from coastwatcher report s.[25] Strength figures were by no means as definite or convincing as were the factual accounts of the defenses. Various intelligence estimates, prepared during July, gave figures as high as 8,400. Admiral Turner's Operation Plan A3–42, issued at the Koro Island rehearsals in the Fijis on 30 July, estimated that 1,850 enemy would be found on Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo, and 5,275 on Guadalcanal. 130th figures were high. A count of enemy dead in the Tulagi and Gavutu area placed the number of defenders at about 1,500 (including 600 laborers), while study of positions, interrogation of prisoners, and translation of enemy documents on Guadalcanal proper indicated that about 2,230 troops and laborers had been in the Lunga area at the time of the Marines landing.

Close and determined combat was anticipated with these forces; and on 17 July, Admiral Nimitz notified Admiral King that it would be unsafe to assume that the enemy would not attempt to retake the area to be attacked, and that, if insufficient forces were assigned, the Marines might not, be able to hold on.[26]

PLANNING AND MOUNTING OUT

For the dual landing operation, General Vandegrift divided his organization into two forces. The units landing on the Florida side of Sealark Channel (Group Yoke) were to he commanded by Brigadier General William H. Rupertus, the assistant division commander (ADC), while Vandegrift himself would exercise command over Group X-Ray landing at Lunga Point. (See Map 13, Map Section)

It was expected that the Florida-side landings would be more severely contested by the Japanese, and to that landing group the general assigned his best-trained units : the 1st Marine Raider Battalion, com-

[23] HistSec, HQMC interview with Col W. B. McKean, 18Feb48.

[24] Two aerial photos, taken on 2 August by a ComAirSoPac R-l i and developed aboard the USS *Enterprise*, were forwarded to Division Headquarters. They showed Tulagi defensive positions iii sharp detail, and verified the reports of coastwa tchers about the rapidly approaching completion of the airstrip in the Lunga plains.

[25] "The invaluable service of the Solomon Islands coastwatching system . . . cannot be too highly commended." *FinalRept*, Phase I, Annex E, 2.

[26] CinCPac disp to CominCh, 17Jul42 (located at NHD).

manded by Lieutenant Colonel Merritt A. Edson; the 1st Parachute Battalion of Major Robert H. Williams; and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines under Lieutenant Colonel Harold E. Rosecrans, all with their reinforcing units attached. Edson would be the commander of the Tulagi landing force; Williams the commander at Gavutu-Tanambogo. The Guadalcanal group included Colonel Clifton B. Cates' 1st Marines and Colonel Leroy P. Hunt's 5th Marines (less 2/5), both reinforced. plus the balance of the division special and service troops.[27]

The Tulagi plan called for the 1st Raider Battalion and 2d Battalion, 5th Marines to land in column on the island's south coast, turn east, and attack down the long axis of the island. This would be followed by 1st Parachute Battalion landings on Gavutu and Tanambogo, and a two-company sweep along Florida Island's coast line fronting Tulagi Bay. (See Map 15, Map Section)

The Guadalcanal scheme envisaged landing the 5th Marines (less 2d Bn) across a beach some few hundred yards east of the Lunga Point area where the Japanese were expected to be concentrated, and there to establish a beachhead. The 1st Marines then would come ashore in a column of battalions and pass through this perimeter to take Mount Austen. The primary goal was to establish a beachhead in an area not strongly defended.""

To make up for the division's manpower shortage caused by the detached duty of the 7th Marines in Samoa, Admiral King on 27 June had proposed that Vandegrift be allotted the 2d Marines of the 2d Marine Division. Accordingly this unit (reinforced) sailed combat loaded from San Diego on 1 July.[29] The regiment would be the landing force reserve.[30]

While staff planners contemplated a target area nearly as unfamiliar to them as the back side of the moon, other members of the landing force wrestled the monumental chore of preparing for the movement to combat. "Seldom," General Vandegrift said later, "has an operation been begun under more disadvantageous circumstances." [31]

When the decision to land on enemy beaches reached the 1st Marine Division, the command post and the 5th Marine Regiment were in Wellington, New Zealand; the 1st Marines and the 11th Marines, less two of its battalions, were at sea en route to New Zealand; service and special troops were split between the forward and rear echelons; the 2d Regiment was on

[27] At this time, the later-used phrase "regimental combat team" (RCT) had not come into uniform use. This we would currently style a "regimental landing team" (RLT). What Guadalcanal Marines labeled a "combat group" included a rifle regiment with its direct-support artillery battalion, engineers, signal, medical, and other supporting elements. Within the so-called combat groups, similar battalion-sized aggregations were designated combat teams. This usage will be followed throughout this narrative.

[28] 1st MarDiv OpOrd T-12, 20Jul42. See Appendix E.

[29] Original plans called for this unit to carry out projected landings at Ndeni in the Santa Cruz Islands. Seedless to say, these were never made, although occupation plans for that island. always involving Marine forces, continue to appear in Adm Turner's record until October 1942.

[30] "It is most desirable that 2d Marines he reinforced and combat unit loaded and ready upon arrival this area for employment in landing operations as a reinforced regimental combat team." ComSoPac War Diary, 27Jun42 (located at NHD).

[31] *FinalRept*, Phase V, 1.

the way from San Diego to the South Pacific; the 1st Raider Battalion was in Samoa, and the 3d Defense Battalion was in Hawaii. Preliminary plans and moves had to assemble these widely scattered units into a fighting force which could make an amphibious landing, one of the most intricate of military maneuvers. From the understanding that it would be the nucleus for the buildup of a force which would be trained for operations which might come late in 1942, the 1st Marine Division had to shift at once into hurried preparations to mount out for action.

Most of the ships transporting units of the division had been loaded organizationally for the voyage to New Zealand, but for the proposed amphibious assault the supplies had to be reshuffled and ships combat loaded so that items first needed in the fighting would be readily at hand in the holds. The reloading and re-embarking of Combat Group A (5th Marines, reinforced) went smoothly, uncomplicated by the necessity for simultaneous unloading and reloading which plagued the rear echelon. The group began embarkation on 2 July and remained on board its transport to await the arrival of the rear echelon.

This second echelon arrived on 11 July, and had eleven days to empty and reload its ships. No troops were disembarked except those who were to remain in New Zealand as rear echelon personnel. All others, who already had been in cramped quarters during the long trip across the Pacific, were put to work in eight-hour shifts, and parties of 300 men were assigned to each ship.[32]

Aotea Quay at Wellington was the scene of this squaring away. It was inadequate in all ways save that it could accommodate five ships at a time. Labor difficulties with the highly unionized stevedores resulted in the entire task being undertaken and carried through by Marines. Because of security regulations, no appeal to patriotism could be made to the regular dock workers since care was taken to have civilians believe that all the flurry was merely preparation for a training exercise. Dockside equipment was meager, and there was no shelter close at hand.

As the gear began to be juggled from ship to dock and back again, a cold, wet "southerly" settled down to lash New Zealand. But in spite of the weather, work had to continue around the clock. Carton-packed food and other supplies "deteriorated rapidly," the division later reported by way of an understatement, and the morale of troops followed the direction of the down-slanting rain.

On the dock, cereal, sugar, and other rations mushed together with globs of brown pulp that once had been cardboard boxes. A great number of wet cartons that were rushed to the hopeful safety of wool warehouses later gave way under the weight of stacking. Lieutenant Colonel Randolph McC. Pate and his logistics section had a herculean task in managing this unloading

[32] The passage from the United States to New Zealand had been particularly trying for the officers and men on board the *Ericsson*, a commercial ship under charter. Lack of proper food, and use of oil substitutes for shortening, resulted in loss of weight of as high as 23 pounds per man. Two meals only were served during the greater part of the passage, and one of these often consisted of soup or soup and bread. Medical officers estimated the daily calorie content of meals at less than 1,500. The ship's personnel enjoyed a full and well balanced diet during the same period. *Ibid.*, Phase I, Annex M, 1.

and reloading. Transport quartermasters of the various ships supervised work on board while a relay of officers from the division took charge of the eight-hour shifts dockside. The New Zealand Army furnished 30 flatbed lorries and 18 ten-wheelers to transfer fuel, small-arms ammunition and explosives to dumps several miles away.

There was not enough hold space for all the division motor transport. Most of the quarter- and one-ton trucks were put on board, but 75 percent of the heavier rolling stock was set aside to stay with the rear echelon that would be left behind when the division sailed for the Solomons.

Engineers loaded what little dirt-moving equipment they owned, but it was so meager that they hoped the Japanese would have most of the airfield built by the time it was captured. The engineer battalion also loaded bridging material, demolitions, and all available water supply equipment. No major construction was contemplated in early phases of the operation, however, and equipment and supplies for such work were not taken.

With the D–4 or an assistant in constant touch with the dockmaster, order began to appear from the chaos of strewn gear, swelling cereal, wilting cardboard cartons, and frayed tempers. But there were still serious problems. Supplies and equipment piled on docks often made it difficult for trucks to negotiate the narrow passages to reach all areas of the stacked gear, and during this mounting out certain modifications of the logistical plan became necessary. As finally loaded, the Marines carried 60 days supplies, 10 units of fire for all weapons, the minimum individual baggage actually required to live and fight, and less than half the organic motor transport authorized.

Regardless of the difficulties, however, the force sailed as scheduled at 0900 on 22 July, under escort of cruisers of Admiral Turner's Task Force 62.[33] General Vandegrift, despite his request for a vessel better suited in communications and accommodations, had been directed to embark his command post in the USS *McCawley*.

REHEARSALS AND MOVEMENT TO THE OBJECTIVE

In accordance with orders received from Nimitz on 1 July,[34] Ghormley had directed that all forces involved in the assault make rendezvous at a position south of Fiji, out of sight of land so that there would be no chance of observation by enemy agents and no chance that an inadvertent tip-off would be made by friendly observers.[35] At that point there would be a conference between the commanding officers who had not as yet been able to discuss in person the various aspects of the operation.

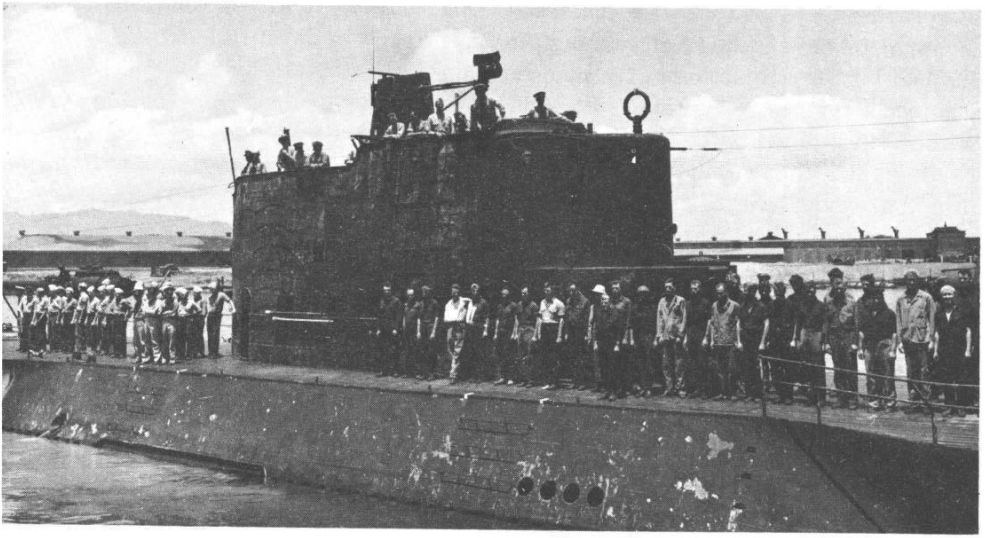
The components of the assault force not previously in New Zealand with the division were converging upon the rendezvous point from many directions. Colonel John M. Arthur's 2d Marines (reinforced), embarked in the *Crescent City*, *President Adams*, *President Hayes*, *President Jackson*, and *Alhena*, steamed south under escort of the carrier *Wasp* and a destroyer

[33] Adm Turner assumed the title of Commander, Amphibious Force South Pacific on his arrival in the South Pacific on 24 July.

[34] CinCPac OpOrd 34–42, cited in CinCPac War Diary, July 1942. By terms of this order also, Fletcher, CTF 11, had been ordered to assume command of the combined task forces at the rendezvous, and Ghormley had been put in command of the operation.

[35] *Ghormley MS*, 64.

EQUIPMENT FOR THE 1ST MARINE DIVISION, *including tanks and amphibian tractors, is unloaded in New Zealand preparatory to the Guadalcanal operation. (USN 11526)*



MARINE RAIDERS *and the crew of the submarine* Argonaut *line the deck of the vessel as it returns to Pearl Harbor after the Makin Island raid. (USN 13859)*

screen.[36] The 1st Raider Battalion, in the four destroyer transports of Transport Division 12, had been picked up at Noumea.

The 3d Defense Battalion (Colonel Robert H. Pepper) on board the USS *Betelgeuse* and *Zeilin* was en route from Pearl Harbor where it had been stationed since the outbreak of the war. It would meet the remainder of the force on 2 August. The Carrier Force, built around the *Saratoga* and the *Enterprise*, with Fletcher flying his flag in the former, likewise was on its way from Pearl Harbor. Rendezvous was made as planned, at 1400 on 26 July, some 400 miles south of Fiji. The conference convened at once on board the *Saratoga.* Ghormley, unable to attend, was represented by his Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Daniel J. Callaghan and his Communications Officer, Lieutenant Commander L. M. LeHardy.

The conference pointed up several serious problems. General Vandegrift learned he would not have adequate air and surface support for the completion of the unloading phase of the operation. Fletcher wanted to retire within two days after the landing, and this meant that transport shipping would have to clear out within an unreasonably short period. The Marine general also learned that the 2d Marines, counted as his reserve, actually would be used for the proposed operation at Ndeni in the Santa Cruz islands. Admiral Callaghan reported Fletcher's retirement plans to Ghormley: "This sounds too sanguine to me," Callaghan reported, "but they believe it can be done. . . . AKs [cargo ships] may not be unloaded for three or four days." [37] Ghormley, too, believed that the ships could not be pulled out that soon.

Landing rehearsals at the island of Koro in the Fijis were conducted from 28 through 30 July, but Vandegrift labeled them a waste of time and effort. "A complete bust," he observed later.[38] Necessity for conserving landing craft made it impossible to conduct the practice landings in a realistic way, although the men involved were given additional training in debarkation,[39] and attack force ships were able to practice their gunfire support.

On 31 July, as night was falling, the ships weighed anchor and departed from Koro. The carrier task force proceeded north and west while the transports and their screen plodded steadily toward the Solomons. Almost 19,000 Marines were embarked in the 19 transports and four destroyer-transports.[40]

All circumstances favored the advancing convoy. Weather conditions during the final two days were extremely favorable: sky topped by a low ceiling and winds gusty with intermittent rain squalls. There was no sign of enemy aircraft or submarines, and no indication that the approach was observed. In fact, enemy

[36] The regiment had been on board since 1 June, lying in the harbor of San Diego.

[37] *Ghormley MS*, 67.

[38] Statement at Princeton, N. J., 12Mar48.

[39] Gen Vandegrift noted at the time that the precious landing craft were not in the best of condition in any event—12 of them were inoperative on one ship alone. Gen A. A. Vandegrift ltr to CMC, 4Feb49.

[40] A seemingly irreconcilable discrepancy of figures between those of the Amphibious Force, South Pacific, and the 1st Marine Division prevents a wholly accurate statement as to the number of troops embarked then or landed subsequently. The amphibious force lists a figure of 18,722, while the division records list, variously, 19,546 or 19,105.

patrol planes were grounded at Rabaul on 5 and 6 August because of bad weather.[41]

The convoy headed generally west from Fiji and well to the south of the Solomons chain. The course gradually shifted to the northward, and the night of 6–7 August found the entire group of ships due west of the western extremity of Guadalcanal.

Task Force 62, commanded by Admiral Turner, was divided into two Transport Groups. Transport Group X-Ray (62.1) commanded by Captain Lawrence F. Reifsnider, with the Guadalcanal forces embarked, consisted of four subgroups, as follows:

Transdiv A: *Fuller, American Legion, Bellatrix.*
Transdiv B: *McCawley, Barnett, Elliot, Libra.*
Transdiv C: *Hunter Liggett, Alchiba, Fomalhaut, Betelgeuse.*
Transdiv D: *Crescent City, President Hayes, President Adams, Alhena.*

Transport Group Yoke (62.2) commanded by Captain George B. Ashe, and carrying the assault troops for the Tulagi landing, consisted of the following subgroups:

Transdiv E: *Neville, Zeilin, Heywood, President Jackson.*
Transdiv 12: *Calhoun, Gregory, Little, McKean.* (the destroyer transport group).[42]

At 0310, 7 August, the force was directly west of Cape Esperance with an interval of six miles between groups and a speed of 12 knots. Transport Group X-Ray steamed in two parallel columns of eight and seven ships each with a distance of 750 yards between ships and an interval of 1,000 yards between columns. The rugged outline of the Guadalcanal hills was just visible to starboard when the course was shifted to 040°, and a few minutes later the two groups separated for the completion of their missions. X-Ray, shifting still further to starboard, settled on course 075°, which took it along the Guadalcanal coast, while Yoke, on course 058°, crossed outside Savo Island, toward Florida. The final approach to the transport area was made without incident, and there was no sound until, at 0614, the supporting ships opened fire on the island.[43]

There are some indications that the Guadalcanal operation on D-Day morning was something of a minor Pearl Harbor in reverse for the Japanese. A recent study of Japanese wartime messages indicates the enemy was aware that a U. S. force had sortied from Hawaii. Warnings were issued to Central Pacific outposts; Rabaul and points south were to be notified for information only. Commander of the Japanese *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla* (Marshall-Gilbert-Wake area) relayed his warning message south the next morning—at 0430 on 7 August. It was too late. Less than an hour later he received Tulagi's report that the U. S. striking force had been sighted in Sealark Channel at 0425.[44]

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[41] Cdr J. Shaw ltr to Maj J. L. Zimmerman, February 1949.

[42] CTF 62 OPlan A3–42, 30Jul42.

[43] CTG 62.1 ActRept 7–9Aug42, 3.

[44] Capt. E. T. Layton, USN, ltr to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, June 1955.

Guadalcanal, 7–9 August 1942

THE LANDING

When Task Groups X-Ray and Yoke separated northwest of Cape Esperance at 0240, the former group made for the Red Beach transport area off Guadalcanal in a double column at 12 knots. No enemy activity was observed, and the preliminary naval bombardment of the coastal area, which began at 0613, aroused no response. The X-Ray shipping reached its transport area at 0645 and began to lower the landing craft. Across the channel, Group Yoke likewise arrived at its assigned area off Tulagi without incident at 0630 and straightaway got the word from Captain Ashe that H-hour would be 0800. The units slated for Florida Island would hit their beaches first, as will be described in the next chapter.

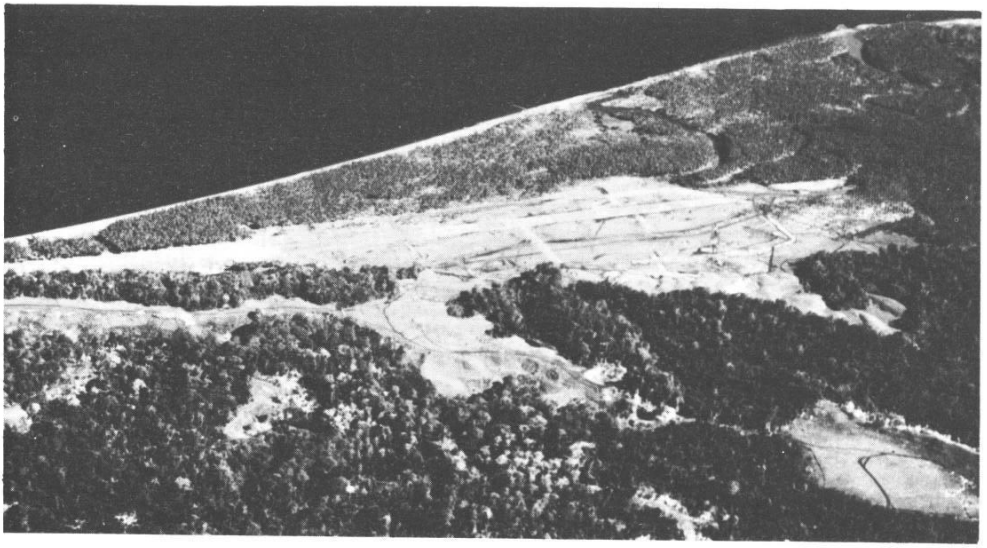
The division's command post in the *McCawley* broke radio silence at 0519, and eight minutes later General Vandegrift set the H-hour for his side of the landing at 0910. The bombardment ships worked through their fire plans, and then as news of the successful landings on Florida and Tulagi reached Vandegrift, the first waves of assault troops moved toward the beach. (See Map 14, Map Section)

Three planes from the *Astoria* flew liaison missions in the Guadalcanal area while three from the *Vincennes* performed the same duty above Tulagi. An additional three aircraft, from the *Quincy*, were available for artillery spotting over Guadalcanal. During the ship to shore phase, these aircraft marked the beach flanks with smoke to assist naval gunfire and to guide the landing boats. Vandegrift and his division air officer held this use to be unwarranted and unnecessary.

But Admiral Turner considered it necessary to "accurately mark the extremities of the landing beaches" as directed by the operation order, and he marked them for twenty minutes. The planes made eight runs at extremely low altitudes, four runs on each beach extremity. Vandegrift pointed out that this would result in a serious if not complete loss of planes if the beaches were defended—this loss at a time when aircraft are critically needed as "eyes" to gain information about the progress of a landing.

Actually the liaison planes over Guadalcanal's random clouds and splotchy jungle furnished Vandegrift precious little information. It was not the fault of the pilots, however, since there was very little to see anyway. In the tense period of this first landing on a hostile beach, the sins were more often those of commission rather than omission. One pilot reported "many enemy troops" only to admit, under questioning for more explicit information, that his "troops" were, in fact, cows.

Other than the cows there still were no signs of activity around Lunga at 0859, 11 minutes before H-hour, when an observation plane from the *Astoria* reported that no Japanese could be seen in that area. But 15 minutes later the same pilot spotted some trucks moving on the Lunga



THE ORIGINAL HENDERSON FIELD, *target of the 1st Marine Division's assault at Guadalcanal, as it appeared shortly after its capture. (USMC 108547)*

TRANSPORTS AND CARGO SHIPS STAND OFFSHORE *as vitally needed supplies for the 1st Marine Division are manhandled by members of the Shore Party. (USMC 51369)*

airfield several thousand yards west of the landing beach.

Meanwhile the 5th Marines (less 2d Battalion) had crossed its line of departure and moved into the 5,000-yard approach to the beach. Naval gunfire lifted inland as the craft neared the shore, and minutes later, at 0910, the assault wave hit the beach on a 1,600 yard front and pushed into the sparse jungle growth beyond. With Lieutenant Colonel William E. Maxwell's 1st Battalion on the right (west) and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick C. Biebush's 3d Battalion on the left, the beachhead expanded rapidly against no opposition. A perimeter some 600 yards inland soon established a hasty defense. The line anchored on the west at the Tenaru River, on the east at the Tenavatu River, and reached on the south an east-west branch of the Tenaru.[1]

Regimental headquarters came ashore at 0938 to be followed two minutes later by heavy weapons troops. Landing of the reserve regiment, Colonel Cates' reinforced 1st Marines, already was underway. Beginning at 0930, this regiment came ashore in a column of battalions with 2/1 in the the van followed by the 3d and 1st Battalions in that order.

Artillery came next, and the units partially bogged down. The howitzer men admitted later that they had taken too much gear ashore with them. Prime movers for the 105mm howitzers did not get ashore initially because there were not enough ramp boats for this work, and one-ton trucks proved too light to handle the field pieces. Needed were two-and-a-half-ton six by sixes and ramp boats to put these vehicles on the beach simultaneously with the howitzers. Such prime movers were authorized, but so were a lot of other things the Marines did not have.

In spite of these troubles, the artillery units reached their assigned firing positions by making overland prime movers out of amphibian tractors that began to wallow ashore heavy with cargo.[2] Once in position, however, the gunners found the amphibian was a creature of mixed virtues: tracked vehicles tore up the communications wire, creating early the pattern of combat events that became too familiar to plagued wiremen.

Meanwhile the light 75mm pack howitzers had made it ashore with little trouble, and the advance toward the airfield got underway. At 1115 the 1st Marines moved through the hasty perimeter of the 5th Marines and struck out southwest toward Mount Austen, the "Grassy Knoll." Cates put his regiment across the Tenaru at an engineer bridge supported by an amphibian tractor, and the 1st Marines progressed slowly into the thickening jungle. Behind, to extend the beachhead, 1/5 crossed the mouth of the Tenaru at 1330 and moved toward the Ilu. Neither advance encountered enemy resistance.

[1] In early maps the names of the Tenaru and Ilu Rivers were incorrectly transposed. In this account the names will be applied to the correct rivers, but the name, "Battle of the Tenaru," will be retained to identify the August battle at the mouth of the Ilu.

[2] The amphibian, later to be used to transport assault troops from ship to shore, started its war career here in a modest manner. Its "usefulness exceeded all expectations," the Marines reported, but at the time nobody considered the strange craft capable of much more than amphibious drayage. The following day (D-plus one) on Gavutu an amphibian would create rather dramatic history by attacking a hostile cave, but such bravery was never recommended, even later when these craft entered the heyday of their more important role.

Colonel Cates realized almost at once that it would be impossible to reach Mount Austen as his day's objective. The so-called Grassy Knoll, visible from the ships, could not be seen from the beach. It commanded the Lunga area, but it lay much farther inland than reports of former planters and schooner pilots had indicated.

Under heavy packs, sometimes excessive loads of ammunition, and with insufficient water and salt tablets,[3] the 1st Marines by late afternoon had struggled but a mile when General Vandegrift ordered the regiment to halt, reorient, and establish internal contact. The men dug in a perimeter in the jungle, some 3,500 yards south of the Ilu's mouth where 1/5 had ended its advance, to set up for the night.

In spite of the breakneck pace with which the shoestring operation had mounted out and thrown itself in the path of the Japanese advance along the Solomon chain, the landing was a success. Although the lack of opposition (on the Guadalcanal side only) gave it somewhat the characteristics of a training maneuver, the need for additional training that Vandegrift had hoped to give his men in New Zealand became apparent. The general criticized the "uniform and lamentable"[4] failure of all units to patrol properly their fronts and flanks.

Logistical difficulties were worse. Movement of supplies from the landing craft to the beaches and then to supply dumps soon began to snarl. Admiral Turner blamed this on the Marines' failure to understand the number of troops required for such work, failure to extend the beach limits promptly enough and, to some extent, a lack of control and direction over troops in the beach area. But the trouble and its causes were neither as clear-cut nor as damning as that. Marine planners had foreseen a dangerous shortage of man power at this critical point, but under the uncertain circumstances on this hostile beach they felt they could allot no more men to the job than the 500 from Colonel George R. Rowan's 1st Pioneer Battalion. Vandegrift did not want working parties to cut the strength of his fighting units to a level which might risk getting them defeated.

Hindsight now makes it clear that the supplies mounting up as a juicy beach target jeopardized the operation more than a call for additional working parties would have done. There were hardly enough Japanese fighting men ashore on the island to bother the Vandegrift force, but if enemy planes from Rabaul had concentrated on hitting the congested beach they would have played havoc with this whole venture. Marines were aware of this risk, but they also expected to run into a sizable Japanese force somewhere in the thickening jungle. The people in the shore party would just have to work harder.

Sailors joined the pioneers but the beach remained cluttered in spite of this help. Needed, division officers reported later, were "additional personnel in the proportion of at least 100 men for each vessel discharging cargo across the beach."[5] It was not that this problem had never been thought out and planned for in fleet exercises over the years. It was just that this was "Operation Shoestring." The situation became so bad during the night of 7–8

[3] Medically speaking, the weight of individual equipment was excessive in most cases for men who had been cooped so long in steamy holds of ships and fed short, and sometimes inferior, rations. *FinalRept*, Phase II, 6.

[4] *Ibid.*, 10.

[5] *Ibid.*, Phase V, 7.

August that the landing force had to ask the ships to stop unloading. There had been air attacks that afternoon, and more were expected on the 8th. The exhausted workers needed time to clear the beaches and spread out the gear so it would be less of a target.

Fortunately the air attacks during the day had concentrated on the shipping. At about 1100 on the 7th a coastwatcher in the Upper Solomons passed the word on the watchers' network that about 18 bombers were on the way to Guadalcanal. This warning was relayed to Guadalcanal through Brisbane within 25 minutes, and the planes arrived at 1320. The destroyer *Mugford* suffered 20 casualties under a 250-pound bomb hit, but it was the only ship struck by the attack. Antiaircraft fire downed two of the twin-engined Type 97's. Later in the afternoon, at about 1500, 10 Aichi dive bombers had no luck at all, but fire from the ships scratched another two Japanese planes. Other planes from both these attacks were downed by Fletcher's carrier aircraft.

At 2200 on 7 August, Vandegrift issued his attack order for the following day. Plans had been changed. Since Mount Austen was out of reach, and because only 10,000 troops were available in the Lunga area, he ordered an occupation of the airfield and establishment of a defensive line along the Lunga River. Positions east and southeast of Red Beach would be maintained temporarily to protect supplies and unloading until shore party activities could be established within the new perimeter.

At 0930 on 8 August the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines and Company A, 1st Tank Battalion crossed the Ilu River at its mouth and advanced cautiously westward along the beach toward the Lunga. At the same time the 1st Marines moved from its night perimeter. Contact between units within this regiment was faulty, but by nightfall Lieutenant Colonel Lenard B. Cresswell's 1st Battalion had overrun the field and reached the Lunga. The other two battalions, slowed by difficult terrain, advanced about 500 yards an hour and bivouacked for the night south of the airfield.

Along the beach, 1/5 and the tanks met the first scattered resistance as they passed through the area in which the main Japanese force had been located. A few prisoners were taken, and intelligence indicated that the enemy was in no position to attack the superior Marine landing force. Continued lack of resistance elsewhere seemed to confirm this, and at 1430 the Marines contracted their front, crossed the Lunga by a bridge immediately north of the airfield, and advanced more rapidly toward the Kukum River, a stream in the western fan of the Lunga delta.

With Company D leading, this advance came upon the main Japanese encampment area at 1500. The enemy force, obviously smaller than anticipated, had retreated in evident haste and confusion. Large quantities of undamaged food, ammunition, engineering material, electrical gear, and radio equipment had been left behind. Although some improperly indoctrinated Marines began to destroy this gear, that tendency soon was halted, and in the next few weeks these men would lose their contempt for this windfall of material.

Except for token resistance from some of the straggling Japanese attempting to flee west, air action constituted the enemy's only effort to hamper the Marines. At about 1100 Coastwatcher Cecil John Ma-

son, Pilot Officer, RAAF, warned from his Bougainville hide-out that a large number of planes were winging toward Guadalcanal. In another hour some 40 twin-engine torpedo planes appeared over the area to find the task force, alerted by the warning, maneuvering at top speed while employing evasive tactics.

A torpedo sent the destroyer *Jarvis* limping southeast for the New Hebrides. She was sunk next day by an enemy air attack. The transport *Elliott*, set afire when an enemy plane crashed aboard, had to be beached and destroyed by her sister ships. Survivors went on board the *Hunter Liggett*.

Ship antiaircraft fire and fighter planes from Admiral Noyes' carriers shot down 12 Japanese planes, and shore-based antiaircraft accounted for two more. Still others were splashed by carrier-based fighters west of the transport area. A total of seven American planes were lost.[6]

THE JAPANESE RETALIATE

These early attacks hampered Marine operations and unloading, but the beachhead continued to grow. The Japanese had no intentions of giving up their positions in the Southern Solomons without a fierce fight, however, and early on 8 August a task force of five heavy and two light cruisers and a destroyer made ready to strike American shipping in Sealark Channel.

After rendezvousing at St. George's Channel off Rabaul, this force steamed south along Bougainville's east coast until it sighted an Allied patrol plane observing its course. Reversing, the ships made back up the island coast until the plane departed. Then turning again, they sailed between Bougainville and Choiseul northeast of the Shortlands and set course down "The Slot" toward Guadalcanal.

Word of this approaching force reached Admiral Turner at 1800, and, when Admiral Fletcher notified him shortly thereafter that the carrier force was to be withdrawn, Turner called Vandegrift to the flagship *McCawley* and informed the general that, deprived of carrier protection, the transports must leave at 0600 the next day.

As early as 2 August Admiral Ghormley had known of Fletcher's intentions to retire the carriers before D-Day plus three.[7] At 1807 on 8 August Fletcher cited fuel shortage and plane losses that had reduced his fighter craft from 99 to 78 and again requested permission to withdraw until sufficient land-based aircraft and fuel were available to support shipping.[8] It seems that Ghormley had not really expected this problem to come up, in spite of Fletcher's announcement about this matter at the Fiji rehearsals. But now that Fletcher was making the request, Ghormley gave his approval. Ghormley explained later:

> When Fletcher, the man on the spot, informed me he had to withdraw for fuel, I approved. He knew the situation in detail; I did not. This resulted in my directing Turner to withdraw his surface forces to prevent their destruction. I was without detailed information as to Turner's situation, but I knew that his forces had landed and that our major problem would become one of giving every support possible to Vandegrift.[9]

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[6] CinCPac, "Preliminary Report, Solomon Islands Operation," August 1942, 4.

[7] ComSoPac War Diary, 2Aug42 (located at NHD).

[8] *Ibid.*, 9Aug42. For a detailed discussion of Adm Fletcher's withdrawal of his carriers see also *Struggle for Guadalcanal*, 27–28, 117.

[9] *Ghormley MS*, 93.

Vandegrift held that retirement of the ships would leave him in a "most alarming" position.[10] Division plans assumed the ships would remain in the target area four days, and even then all available supplies would prove scanty enough, such was the haste with which the assault mounted out with less than the normal minimum in basic allowances. But a withdrawal early on 9 August would take much of the supplies and equipment away in the holds of ships and leave beach dumps in a state of chaos. The "shoestring" of this first Allied offensive seemed to be pulling apart. This was the first of the operation's many dark hours. (See Map 14, Map Section)

While Vandegrift conferred with Turner, the Japanese ships, elements of the enemy's *Eighth Fleet*, approached Savo Island undetected by destroyers *Ralph Talbot* and *Blue* on picket duty northwest of that small island. They slipped past these ships toward the two Allied cruisers, HMAS *Canberra* and the USS *Chicago*, and destroyers USS *Bagley* and *Patterson* which patrolled the waters between Savo and Cape Esperance. Farther north cruisers USS *Vincennes*, *Astoria*, and *Quincy* and destroyers *Helm* and *Wilson* patrolled between Savo and Florida. Down the channel two cruisers with screening destroyers covered the transports.

With seaplanes up from his cruisers to scout for the Allied ships, *Eighth Fleet* Commander Rear Admiral Gunichi Mikawa steamed southeast until he sighted his enemy at about the same time Allied ships in Sealark Channel received reports of one or more unidentified planes. But Admiral Mikawa's surface force still was undetected at 2313 when these reports came in. Admiral Turner had estimated that the Japanese ships would hole up in Rekata Bay on Santa Isabel Island and strike at the amphibious force with torpedo-carrying floatplanes.

At 0316 Mikawa ordered independent firing, and torpedoes leaped from their tubes two minutes later. Japanese floatplanes illuminated briefly. The *Canberra* caught two torpedoes in her starboard side, the *Chicago* lost part of her bow, and then the Japanese turned toward the Allied ships between Savo and Florida.

The resulting melee was one of the worst defeats ever suffered by the U. S. Navy. The *Vincennes* and the *Quincy* were lost; the Australian *Canberra* burned all night and had to be abandoned and sunk; destroyer *Ralph Talbot* was damaged, and *Astoria* went down at noon the next day. Fortunately Mikawa retired without pressing his advantage in an attack on the amphibious shipping farther down the channel, and Admiral Turner, delaying his departure, ordered unloading to continue. Late in the afternoon the transports got underway for Noumea, leaving the Marines on their own with four units of fire and 37 days' supply of food.

Even when loaded in Wellington the level of supplies and ammunition had been considered slim. That original loading of 60 days' supplies and 10 units of fire was respectively 33 and 50 per cent below the 90-day and 20-unit levels then considered normal for operations of this kind.[11] Now the ships had taken part of these loads

[10] *FinalRept*, Phase II, 13.

[11] Division staff officers admitted later that supplies for 60 days represented more gear than their slim fighting outfit could handle logistically at the beach. They recommended that levels should be pegged at 30 days for general supplies, 50 days for rations. The lower level

away, leaving a most inadequate fraction behind. And with air support so sketchy, there was no way to know when the transports could come back again. The stacks of captured Japanese rations began to gain in importance if not in palatability.

According to the war diary of the Commander, Task Force 62, the following troops were left in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area when the transports and supply ships withdrew:

At Guadalcanal:
- Division Headquarters Company (less detachments)
- Division Signal Company (less detachments)
- 5th Marines (less 2d Battalion)
- 1st Marines
- 11th Marines (less Battery E, 1st and 4th Battalions)
- 1st Tank Battalion (less detachments)
- 1st Engineer Battalion (less detachments)
- 1st Pioneer Battalion (less detachments)
- 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion (less detachments)
- 1st Service Battalion (less detachments)
- 1st Medical Battalion (less detachments)
- 1st Military Police Company
- 2d Platoon, 1st Scout Company
- Units, 3d Defense Battalion
- Local Naval Defense Force
- *Total on Guadalcanal, about 10,000*

At Tulagi:
- 1st Raider Battalion
- 1st Parachute Battalion
- 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Pioneers attached)
- 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions, 2d Marines
- Batteries H and I, 3d Battalion, 10th Marines
- Detachment, Division Headquarters Company
- Detachment, 2d Signal Company
- 3d Defense Battalion (less detachments)
- Company A, 1st Medical Battalion
- Company A, 2d Engineer Battalion (2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Engineer Battalion attached)
- Company C, 2d Tank Battalion
- Company A, 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion (2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion attached)
- Company D, 2d Medical Battalion
- Company A, 2d Pioneer Battalion (2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Pioneer Battalion attached)
- Battery E, 11th Marines
- Company C, 2d Service Battalion
- Local Naval Defense Force
- *Total on Tulagi, 6,075*
- *Total personnel left in area, about 16,075*

The 2d Marines under Colonel John M. Arthur had formed the division reserve and was originally slated for the occupation of Ndeni, but all its battalions now were in action in the Tulagi area. The regimental headquarters remained afloat, however, as did working parties from all companies, most of the Headquarters and Service Company, Regimental Weapons Company, administrative units from the various battalions, and G and Headquarters and Service Batteries of 3/10.

The sudden withdrawal of the transports carried these units, which totaled about 1,400 officers and men, back to Espiritu Santo where they were used to "reinforce the garrison there," according to the reports of Admiral Turner. On 14 August, Turner ordered Colonel Arthur to report for duty with the Commanding General, Espiritu Santo. But a few days later Colonel Arthur and a small number of his officers and men got back up to Tulagi.[12]

There seemed no question in Turner's mind about his unrestricted claim of "possession" of the Marines in his area. If his handling of Colonel Arthur was a rather ungenerous bypass of General Vandegrift's command territory, the admiral's plan for those Marines who remained at Espiritu Santo was an even

of 10 units of fire was just right, they added; no attempt should be made to carry 20 units into future landings. *FinalRept*, Phase II, 17.

[12] CTF 62 War Diary, September and October 1942.

more glaring example of his theory of personal command possession. He ordered those "idle" 2d Marines to form a "2d Provisional Raider Battalion." Then he wrote to Admiral Ghormley recommending an overhaul of all Marine regiments in the Amphibious Force, South Pacific. All regiments then would contain raider battalions which could be sent out on special missions. Turner said he did not think Marine regiments would be suited to operations in the Pacific. "The employment of a division seems less likely," the admiral added. He would use raider battalions like building blocks, and fit the landing force to the special problem. Obviously, he expected the Pacific war to be small and tidy.

Admiral Ghormley answered that Turner ought to hold up such reorganization until he found out what the Commandant of the Marine Corps thought of all this. Admiral Ghormley then sent this letter and his endorsement to the Commandant via Admiral Nimitz at Pearl Harbor. Nimitz agreed with Ghormley, and he stressed that "extemporized organization of Marine Forces should be made only in case of dire necessity." Nimitz then forwarded this correspondence on to Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, Marine Commandant.

General Holcomb responded to Nimitz that the latter's objections had surely stopped Turner's plan without the need for the Commandant to add other objections, but Holcomb noted "with regret" that Turner had not seen fit to ask General Vandegrift about this plan to reorganize his troops.

This reaction from Nimitz, and the arrival at about that time in the New Hebrides of the "authentic" 2d Raider Battalion of Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, caused Turner to halt his plan to turn all Amphibious Force Marines into raiders. But it took the admiral much longer than this to abandon his theory that these Marines were direct "possessions" of his.[13]

[13] ComPhibForSoPac ltr to ComSoPacFor, 29Aug42; ComSoPacFor ltr to CinCPOA, 6Sep42; CinCPOA ltr to CMC, 24Sep42; CMC ltr to CinCPOA, 30Oct42.

Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo

TULAGI: THE FIRST DAY

After Task Group Yoke separated from the larger body of ships at 0240 on D-Day, its approach to Tulagi was accomplished without incident. All elements of the group arrived in position at about 0630 [1] and made ready for the landing.

As the ships approached the transport area, 15 fighters and 15 dive bombers from *Wasp* strafed and bombed the target area,[2] setting fire to seaplanes that were caught in the harbor.[3] (See Map 15, Map Section)

Five-inch naval gunfire from the destroyer *Monssen*, opened up at a promontory of Florida Island, west of Tulagi, and 60 rounds were expended on the target between 0727 and 0732. In the meantime, both the *Buchanan* and *San Juan* (an antiaircraft cruiser) pumped 100 rounds each into nearby targets. *Buchanan* concentrated on a point of land east of Haleta, on Florida, while the *San Juan* blasted a small island south of the same point of land.[4]

At 0740, 20 minutes before H-hour, Company B (reinforced) of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, under command of Captain Edward J. Crane, landed on Florida near Haleta to protect the left flank of the Tulagi Force. The landing was unopposed, although enemy troops had been reported in position there on 25 July.[5] Crane, his company reinforced by the 4th platoon of Company D and 21 men from Headquarters Company, reached his objective within 40 minutes. The 252 officers and men went ashore in eight landing boats and were guided to their objective by one of the several Australians on duty with the division.[6]

While this covering force deployed inland from its Florida beach, the remainder of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Hill) made a similar security landing at Florida's Halavo Peninsula near Gavutu and Tanambogo. The craft drew some fire from Gavutu but there were no casualties, and no enemy forces were encountered on the peninsula. These Marines later returned to their ships.

At Tulagi not a single landing craft of the first wave was able to set its passengers directly ashore. All of them hung up on

[1] At 0625, Tulagi sent its message to Japanese stations to the north that an enemy surface force had entered the channel. Tulagi CommB msg of 7Aug42 in 25th AirFlot War Dairy, August-September 1942, hereinafter cited as *25th Air Flot Diary*.

[2] Com*Wasp*AirGru Rept to CO *Wasp*, 10Aug42. In general, during the first day *Wasp* planes operated over the Tulagi area while *Saratoga* planes gave comparable support to the main landing off Beach Red at Guadalcanal. *Enterprise* planes gave protection to the carriers and flew patrol missions.

[3] "0630—All flying boats have been set afire by the bombardment." CTF 18 ActRept, 6-10Aug42, 1, hereinafter cited as *CTF 18 AR*.

[4] *Ibid.*, 2.

[5] ComSoPac War Diary, 25Jul42 (located at NHD).

[6] LtCol H. R. Thorpe ltr to CMC, 19Jan49.

coral formations at distances varying from 30 to well over 100 yards from the beach line, and the assault personnel of raider Companies B and D waded ashore against no opposition, through water initially from waist to armpit deep.[7]

Meanwhile the enemy defense forces, concentrated in the southeastern third of the island, realized that an all-out assault was underway. Between 0725 and 0749, the *Tulagi Communication Base* notified the Commanding Officer of the *Twenty-Fifth Air Flotilla* at Rabaul that Tulagi was under bombardment, that the landings had begun, and that the senders were destroying all equipment immediately. At 0800 the Japanese messages said shells were falling near the radio installation. Ten minutes later, the final message went out: "Enemy troop strength is overwhelming. We will defend to the last man." [8]

Companies B and D had reached the beach, and the landing craft carrying raider Companies A and C now began to hang upon the coral. The Weapons Company (Captain George W. Herring) of the raider battalion, whose 60mm mortars had been attached to the assault companies,[9] headed ashore to assume responsibility for beachhead security.

Assaulting Marines crossed the beach and moved up the face of a steep, heavily-wooded coral slope, the southwestern portion of the 350-foot ridge that forms an almost unbroken wall along the island's entire length. Major Lloyd Nickerson's Company B pushed on to the far coast of the island where it captured, without opposition, the native village of Sasapi. This company then swung to the right and, tying in with Major Justice Chambers' Company D which had gained the high ground, began moving southeast. The advance of these two companies was steady and without opposition until Company B reached Carpenter's Wharf, halfway down the east shore of the island, where it encountered a series of enemy outposts.

Meanwhile additional raiders had landed. Captain Lewis W. Walt's Company A, landing to follow the leading companies, swung right atop the ridge spine, and tied in on the left with Company D. Major Kenneth Bailey's Company C also swung right, tied its left flank to Company A, and echeloned itself to the right rear to the beach. Spread out across the island, the raiders swept southeast against little opposition until Phase Line A, from the high ground northwest of Hill 281 to Carpenter's Wharf, was reached at 1120. Here Major Chambers was wounded by mortar fire, and Captain William E. Sperling assumed command of Company D.

By this time Colonel Edson, commanding the 1st Raider Battalion, was ashore and ready to begin a coordinated attack to the southeast. Confronting him was the more thickly settled portion of the island where the British governmental activities had centered. This area is a saddle between the ridge first swept by the raiders and a smaller hill mass at the island's southeastern end.[10]

After directing a preparatory fire of infantry weapons into the area to their front,

[7] Maj J. C. Erskine interview in HistDiv, HQMC, 15Mar49.

[8] *25th AirFlot Diary.*

[9] Majs J. B. Sweeney, H. Stiff, W. E. Sperling interview in HistDiv, HQMC, 4Feb49, hereinafter cited as *Sweeney Interview.*

[10] The raiders had been well briefed on the terrain of the island by Lt H. E. Josselyn, RANR, a former resident of the area who had intimate knowledge of it. *Ibid.*

the raiders moved out toward the high ground beyond the saddle. Company C, on the right flank of the attack, drew fire almost immediately from Hill 208, a knob forward of the ridge that had just been cleared. The bulk of the Japanese resistance concentrated in the seaward face of the high ground, and Company C was caught by fire from enemy infantry weapons as it tried to pass between the hill and the beach. The raider company then turned its attack toward the hill and fought for nearly an hour before the Japanese positions were silenced.

Radio communications between Edson and General Rupertus deteriorated rapidly after this attack was launched, but the raider commander remained in contact with his fire support ships. Operation orders called for the various fire support sections to provide the landing force with naval gunfire liaison parties, and two of these were in Edson's CP with their radios.[11] When the other raider companies came under fire from Hill 281 while Company C fought against Hill 208, Edson put these naval gunfire teams to work. The *San Juan* fired a seven-minute, 280-round concentration of 6-inch shells onto Hill 281. When it lifted the raiders advanced with a steady pressure against the enemy.

Four hours later, at 1625, Edson notified Rupertus that 500 enemy had broken contact with his force and had withdrawn into the southeastern ridge.

The advance continued slowly until dusk. At that time Company E (raiders), relieved of the beach defense mission by 2/5 which had landed at 0916, reported to its parent organization. Company D, now on the extreme left flank, had met little opposition since midmorning, when the first enemy encountered were flushed near Carpenter's Wharf by Company B. After this contact Company D pushed south along the eastern beach and at dusk reached the crest of Hill 281. Meanwhile Company B moved up again, now on the right of Company D, and gained high ground overlooking the cut of a cross-island roadway through the saddle between Hills 281 and 230. Company D, on the far side of the road and to the left of B, took up night defensive positions with its right flank resting on the southern brink of the cut. Company B, augmented by elements of Headquarters Company, rested its left flank on the cut and extended its lines generally westward along the brink.[12] Both companies put listening posts forward of the lines.

Companies A and C (less one platoon) meanwhile encountered the terrain feature which harbored the island's most serious resistance. In the forward slope of Hill 281, a deep ravine lay almost parallel to the raider advance and debouched several hundred yards southeast of Hill 208. Its sides were precipitous, and within it the enemy held strong positions which made assault hazardous. Maps which had been captured and translated during the day confirmed that this ravine would contain the core of enemy resistance.

With further action against the pocket impossible at the time, all battalion elements went into position for the night. Company E was placed on Company B's right, while Companies A and C (less one platoon) respectively tied in from the right of Company E. The positions extended along high ground facing the ra-

[11] *CTF 18 AR*, 2; Lt A. L. Moon ltr to LtCol R. D. Heinl, Jr., 13Feb49.

[12] *Sweeney Interview.*

vine's long axis, and listening posts were established.[13]

During Edson's sweep down the island, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (Rosecrans), had landed 1,085 officers and men and committed its units to various tasks. Company F scouted the northwest section of the island but met no opposition. At 1000 Company E was ordered to operate generally in support of Company B (raiders), and one hour later the 3d Platoon of Company H (weapons) went forward to assist Company C (raiders) in the latter's attack against Hill 208. By 1300, when the raider battalion began its attack from Phase Line A, Company G moved down the trail along the ridge line and supported the raider battalion. Rosecrans' command post later displaced southeast from near Beach Blue toward the scene of this action.

TULAGI—THE FIRST NIGHT AND SUCCEEDING DAY

The first night on Tulagi set the pattern for many future nights in the Pacific war. During darkness, four separate attacks struck the raider lines, and, although minor penetrations occurred, the enemy made no attempt to consolidate or exploit his gains. The first attack, which met with some initial success, hit between Companies C and A. Outposts fell back to the main line of resistance (MLR), and the two companies were forced apart. The attack isolated Company C from the rest of the battalion, but the company was not molested again. Company A refused its right flank and awaited developments.

They were not long in coming. Shifting the direction of his attack toward his right front, the enemy attempted to roll back Walt's men from the refused flank. But the flank held, killing 26 Japanese within 20 yards of the MLR.

That ended the concerted attacks of the night. Thereafter, enemy efforts consisted entirely of attempts at quiet infiltration of the Marine positions. Individuals and small groups worked from the ravine through the raider lines and launched five separate small-scale attacks against the command post between 0030 and 0530. These were repulsed, and efforts on the part of two other enemy groups to skirt the beach flanks of Companies D and C likewise were turned back.

On the morning of 8 August, two companies of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, moved up to assist in the sweep of the southeastern part of the island. Companies E and F, 5th Marines, passed through Company D raiders, attacked down the forward slope of Hill 281, and swung right toward the enemy pocket in the ravine.

Now flanking this troublesome terrain feature on three sides, Marines laid down a heavy mortar concentration from the 60mm weapons of the raiders and 2/5's 81s. By midafternoon the preparation was complete, and at 1500 the raiders and Company G, 5th Marines, pushed through the ravine to wipe out remaining resistance. This ended organized opposition on the island, and by nightfall of 8 August Tulagi was labeled secure. For several days, however, individual Japanese and small groups continued to be flushed from hiding places and hunted down by patrolling Marines.

THE LANDINGS ON GAVUTU—TANAMBOGO

These islets, each dominated by a low, precipitous central hill of coral, are joined

[13] *Ibid.*

by a 500-yard causeway. Gavutu's hill, 148 feet in height, stands some 25 to 30 feet higher than Tanambogo's highest point, and Gavutu thus became the main objective of the landing which aimed at the higher ground.

The plans[14] called for the landing to strike the northeast coast after an approach from the east, and since Tanambogo lies approximately northwest of Gavutu the assault force faced the possibility of flanking fire from that island as well as frontal resistance from the main objective. Opposition from both islands was expected from the terrain dominating the flat beach.

Naval gunfire and close air support by SBD's from the *Wasp* were expected to neutralize most enemy emplacements on these hills, but the fire plan did not reckon with the coral cave. Caves of this type began to appear as serious obstacles for the parachute battalion on Gavutu at about the same time the raiders began to encounter them on Tulagi.

Surprise was impossible. There were not sufficient craft for simultaneous landings, and the hour of assault was established in General Vandegrift's Operation Order Number 7–42 as H-plus four hours. So four hours after the raider landing on Tulagi, the parachute battalion made its frontal assault in the face of fire from an alerted garrison which was supported by fires from a flanking position.

The battalion went ashore in three waves, one company per wave. The thoroughness with which the antiaircraft cruiser *San Juan* had carried out her fire support mission—280 rounds of 6-inch fire against Gavutu in four minutes[15]—and the intensity of the *Wasp's* dive-bombers' preparation caused heavy damage to the enemy installations, but this destruction actually worked to the disadvantage of the parachute battalion in one instance. The unit intended to land on a seaplane ramp from which the beach could be easily reached, but the ramp had been reduced to an unusable mass of rubble. Observing this, the landing wave commanders altered course slightly to the north where craft became even more vulnerable to flanking fire. Part of the troops, scrambling over a concrete pier that jutted four feet out of the water, were exposed to fire from both islands. General Vandegrift estimated that troops landing in this area suffered ten per cent casualties.

Company A, the first wave, got ashore without casualties to work inland against no serious opposition. The four boats carrying Company B and the final wave, with Company C and miscellaneous attachments, came under fire as they neared the island. The landing succeeded, however, and Company B, moving left and working toward Gavutu's southern end, gained some protection from enemy fire and continued to attack.

Pinned down on the beach under heavy fire, the other companies made no advances until Company B gained high ground from which its fire assisted in getting the attack off the beach. Hill 148, Gavutu's high ground, was plastered by naval guns and assaulted on the east and southeast. By 1430, Major Charles A. Miller, who had succeeded the wounded Major Robert H.

[14] 1st Mar Div OpOrd No. 7–42, 20Jul42. See *FinalRept*, Phase II, Annex E, 2. Gavutu's importance stemmed from the islet's numerous installations which included machine shops, jetties, and a radio station. USN ND Hydro, *Vol. I—Sailing Directions For the Pacific Islands*, (Washington: GPO, 1938, 4th ed.), 323.

[15] *CTF 18 AR*, 2.

Williams in command, controlled most of the island. Partially defiladed positions on Hill 148's west-southwestern slopes, however, still were active, and enemy emplacements there and on Tanambogo threatened further advance. Miller requested reinforcements to complete the capture of both islands.

In anticipation of their arrival, Miller also requested an air strike and naval gunfire on Tanambogo, and *Wasp* planes furnished a 10-minute strike while *Buchanan* and *Monssen*, in position south of Gavutu, fired over that island and subjected the exposed faces of the hill on Tanambogo to an intense concentration of 5-inch shells.

By this time all forces available to General Rupertus had been committed, but since Captain Edward Crane's Company B (1/2) had met no opposition on Florida near Tulagi, this unit was ordered to report to Miller. The message reached the company just as landing craft arrived to withdraw the Marines from their Florida beach.[16]

Embarked in six landing craft, the company arrived at Gavutu at about 1800, and Miller directed Crane to land on Tanambogo and seize that island. Told that only a few snipers held the island, Crane guided his overcrowded craft around the east shore of Tanambogo according to directions provided by Flight Lieutenant Spencer, RAAF, and under cover of darkness attempted a landing on a small pier on the northeastern tip of the island. (One boat, containing the 2d Platoon, hung up on a coral reef at Gavutu and took no part in the Tanambogo assault.)

The first boat landed without incident, and the men deployed along the beach; but as the second boat discharged its men, a shell from one of the fire support ships ignited a nearby fuel dump, and the resulting glare lighted the landing area and exposed the Marines. The enemy opened up immediately, taking all boats under rifle and machine-gun fire. Casualties mounted among the Marines ashore and still afloat, but the boat crews, being exposed, suffered most heavily. One crew was completely wiped out and a Marine assumed control of the craft.

The reinforcing machine-gun platoon (4th Platoon, Company D) in the second boat managed to set up two of its weapons on the pier, but intense enemy fire forced a withdrawal.

In the meantime, Crane and about 30 men had gone ashore. The intensity of resistance, however, made withdrawal inevitable, and Crane succeeded in reembarking all wounded and all but 12 of the able survivors. The boats withdrew, some to Gavutu where they reported the event, and others direct to ships where the wounded were put aboard. Two of the men left ashore managed to return to Gavutu at about 2200 in a rowboat, while Crane and Lieutenant John J. Smith, leader of the 2d Platoon, and the remainder of the dozen men made their way around the beach and over the causeway to arrive at Miller's Gavutu command post about midnight.

At 2200, having been informed of the abortive attack on Tanambogo, General Rupertus requested the release of an additional combat team. This request reached Vandegrift during his conference with Admiral Turner on board the USS *McCawley*, and Vandegrift, Turner concurring, released the remaining two battalions of the Division Reserve. At 0330, 8 August, the USS *President Hayes* and *President Adams*, with the 1st and 3d Bat-

[16] LtCol W. B. Kyle ltr to CMC, 10Feb49.

talions, 2d Marines (reinforced) embarked, were ordered to cross from the transport area off Guadalcanal's Beach Red to the Tulagi transport area. Simultaneously battalion commanders received orders to land their troops at Beach Blue on Tulagi and report to General Rupertus.[17]

Upon arrival at the transport area off Beach Blue at 0730, the 3d Battalion was directed to pass to Gavutu, reinforce the troops engaged there, and seize Tanambogo. Orders for the 1st Battalion were cancelled and this unit did not land.

The 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Hunt, landed on Gavutu in a succession of boat waves, with companies in the following order: Company L, with 5th Platoon, Company M attached, at 1000; Company K, with 4th Platoon, Company M attached, at 1025; Company I, with 3d Platoon, Company M attached, at 1050; Company M, less 3d, 4th, and 5th Platoons, with Headquarters Company, at 1120.

Troops deployed initially to eliminate Gavutu opposition and to take Tanambogo under fire. Company L, for example, assumed positions generally around the base of Hill 148 facing Tanambogo, while Company K moved up the hill to relieve parachute battalion elements in positions there. At 1330 Company K had just accomplished its mission when an SBD pilot dropped a bomb within company positions on the northwest nose of the hill. Three men were killed and nine wounded. Eight of the casualties were men of the supporting platoon of Company M.

At 1225, Captain W. B. Tinsley, commanding Company I, was ordered to prepare for a landing on Tanambogo. He would have the support of two tanks from Company C of the 2d Tank Battalion (one of the reinforcing units of the 2d Marines), and his attack would be preceded by a 10-minute naval gunfire preparation by the *Buchanan*. The company would not be accompanied by its supporting machine-gun platoon, which was to stay in position on Gavutu and lay down supporting fires from there.

At 1315 the tanks landed on Gavutu. Lieutenant E. J. Sweeney, commanding them, was ordered to land at 1615 on Tanambogo, using one tank to cover the south side of the hill on that island and the other to cover the eastern slope.

The naval gunfire preparation began at 1600. Twenty minutes later the assault company, following the tanks, made its landing. Lieutenant Sweeney was killed, but his tank rendered valuable support to the riflemen. The other tank, getting too far ahead of the assault troops, was disabled by an iron bar and set afire by oil-soaked rags employed by Japanese riflemen. The entire enemy group was wiped out; 42 bodies were piled up around the disabled tank.

At 1620 Company I landed and formed two attack groups. One worked up the southern slope of the Tanambogo hill while the other, moving to the right and then inland, attacked up the eastern slope. Japanese fought fiercely from caves and dugouts, and the eastern group drew fire from a few enemy riflemen and machine gunners on Gaomi, a tiny islet a few hundred yards east of Tanambogo. Naval

[17] CWO T. W. Huston ltr to CMC, 28Dec48. Orders to report to Rupertus did not go through Col J. M. Arthur, CO 2dMar. Each battalion commander was notified direct, and it was not until he reached Espiritu Santo that Arthur knew which of his troops had been committed. Col R. E. Hill interview at HistDiv, 18Apr49.

gunfire from USS *Gridley* was directed upon Gaomi at 1700 and positions on the small island were silenced. At this time the 1st platoon of Company K attacked across the causeway from Gavutu, secured the Tanambogo end of the causeway, and took up positions for the night.

By 2100, the southeastern two-thirds of the island had been secured, and at 2300 a light machine-gun platoon from Company M reported to Company I for support against enemy counterattacks. Considerable close-in fighting took place during the night between the Marines and Japanese who sallied from foxholes and dugouts. No change in position occurred, however, and by late the next day continued attacks had secured the island.

While Gavutu and Tanambogo were mopped up, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 2d Marines unloaded at Tulagi. The 1st Battalion, unengaged since its 7 August landing on Florida, went ashore at Beach Blue at 0900 on 9 August. The 2d Battalion (Major Orin K. Pressley) followed an hour later.

Here, as at Guadalcanal, the amphibian tractor emerged as a versatile piece of equipment whose importance and utility could hardly be overestimated. From noon of 8 August throughout the following night, five of these vehicles of the 3d Platoon, Company A, 2d Amphibian Tractor Battalion (one of the reinforcing elements of the 2d Marines) operated between Gavutu and the *President Adams*. They carried water, supplies, ammunition, and personnel to shore and evacuated wounded on the return trips. On one occasion a tractor moved some distance inland to attack a Japanese position that had pinned down and wounded a number of Marines. Using their two machine guns, one .30 and one .50 caliber, the tractor's crew neutralized the enemy fire and then evacuated the wounded Marines.[18] The five tractors of the platoon were taken back on board the *Adams* before sundown on 9 August.

With the fall of Tanambogo, the last effective resistance in the Nggela island group ceased. Subsequent operations consisted of mopping up, consolidating defenses, and occupying several small peripheral islands including Makambo, Mbangai, Kokomtumbu, and Songonangona.[19]

The mission of clearing out these small islands fell to various units of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines. Makambo was taken by Company E, Mbangai by Company F, and Kokomtambu and Songonangona, by Company G. Occupation of all these smaller islands was completed during the morning of 9 August. In all cases, opposition was slight.

Occupation of the entire island group and destruction of the Japanese garrison had been accomplished in three days. The few prisoners taken were questioned and sent to rear areas. Most of them finally were placed in a prisoner of war camp near Featherstone, New Zealand.

Comparatively, the American losses were not excessive. An early report by Rupertus to the effect that the parachute

[18] ". . . this was an emergency undertaking only as it is not considered that the tractor is a tactical combat vehicle." *Final Rept*, Phase II, 16.

[19] Spelling of place names are those which appear in *Sailing Directions for the Pacific Islands, op. cit.* The versions given there differ in numerous cases from those used in official reports of the campaign. Kokomtambu, for instance, appears in at least three different guises, while Songonangona surrendered its musical name to emerge as "Singsong" Island.

battalion had suffered 50–60 per cent casualties can only be explained in terms of inadequate communications between him and his troops ashore.

The exact number of Japanese casualties will never be known. An estimated 750–800 enemy were present in the Tulagi-Gavutu-Tanambogo area at the time of the landings. Twenty-three prisoners were taken, and an intelligence summary gives 70 as the approximate number of survivors who escaped to Florida.

Immediately after organized resistance ceased and the isolated defending groups were rounded up or wiped out, Tulagi and its satellite islands were organized for defense against counterattack. The 1st Parachute Battalion, depleted by its experience on Gavutu, moved from that island at 1700 on 9 August to Tulagi, where it went into position in the Government building area. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines occupied the southeastern sector of the island, while two battalions of the 2d Marines took over the defensive mission in the northwest. The 1st Battalion occupied the extreme end of the island while the 2d Battalion established positions at Sasapi. Third Battalion, 2d Marines, took over the occupation and defense of Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Makambo.[20]

The logistic problem on Tulagi was a miniature of that encountered on Guadalcanal, although certain details were peculiar to Tulagi. The beachhead, for instance, was severely restricted by the abrupt ridge and, there were no usable roads. Only after noon of the second day was it possible to move supplies ashore at the piers on the eastern coast. Both Gavutu and Tanambogo were so small that only ammunition and water were landed until the islands were secured.

Naval gunfire on this side of the Solomon Islands operation had more of a workout than it had received across the channel at Guadalcanal where opposition was at first light, but it was not an unqualified success. As a matter of fact it was "very poor," according to naval headquarters in Washington.[21] But this failing was caused mostly by lack of intelligence and time for planning and coordinated training. Improper ordnance made for another failing. Only armor-piercing shells could have blasted the Japanese from their caves, but the ships repeatedly fired high-capacity bombardment projectiles. Although many Naval officers were still of the opinion that a ship was a "fool to fight a fort," some began to agree with the Marine Corps that naval gunfire properly employed could be a big help in an amphibious assault. It was a case of the gunfire ships needing to move in closer for their fire missions. The commander of one ship reported:

> It was observed that the enemy had not been driven from the beach at Gavutu by the shelling and bombing preceding the landing. Furthermore Tanambogo withstood two days of intermittent bombing and straffing and was not taken until a destroyer closed in to point blank range and shelled it for several minutes. It was evident that this fire was necessary to insure the capture of Tanambogo without further heavy casualties.[22]

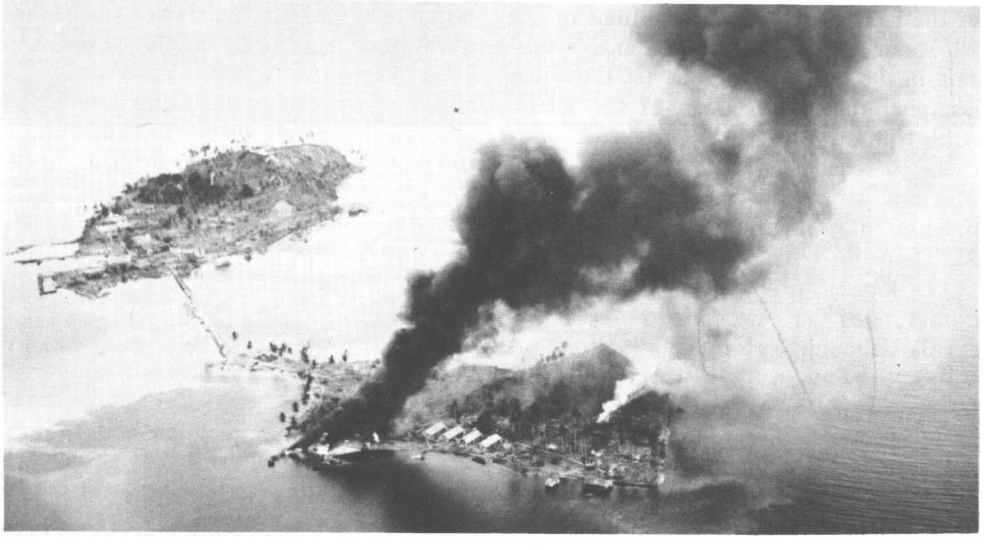
Taking into account the indications that these shortcomings would be corrected in

[20] Col C. P. Van Ness ltr to CMC, 12Jan49. Defense initially was oriented against an anticipated attack from Florida and artillery positions were selected with this, as well as the possibility of a sea-borne attack, in view. LtCol M. L. Curry interview at HistDiv, 28Jan49.

[21] ComInCh, "Battle Experiences, Solomons Island Action." *Information Bulletin No. 2* (located at NHD), Chap X, 10.

[22] USS *Heywood* Rept, 12Aug42, 3.

TULAGI ISLAND, *framed against the background of the larger Florida Island, is fire-swept from the hits scored by American carrier dive bombers. (USN 11649)*



TANAMBOGO AND GAVUTU ISLANDS *photographed immediately after a pre-landing strike by USS* Enterprise *planes; Gavutu is at the left across the causeway. (USN 11034)*

later operations, the Marine Corps was generally satisfied with the ships' fire. "The operation did not involve a real test . . . [but] nothing developed during the operation to indicate the need for any fundamental change in doctrine." [23]

After these three days of fighting in the Tulagi area, this side of the operation remained quiet. Enemy planes bypassed it to strike at the more tempting Guadalcanal airfield and perimeter. Surface craft shelled Tulagi occasionally, but never was it subjected to the kind of bombardment that struck Guadalcanal in October. There is no record that enemy reinforcements landed either on Tulagi or on Florida Island. With this sharp fighting out of the way, the division could give all its attention to things on the larger island of Guadalcanal. There the picture was not a bright one.

[23] *Final Rept*, Phase V, 6.

The Battle of the Tenaru

With naval support gone, about the only hope was the airfield. Shipping would need air cover before regular runs could bolster the Marines' slim supply levels, and time was of the essence. If the Japanese struck hard while the landing force was abandoned and without air support, the precarious first step toward Rabaul might well have to be taken all over again. Vandegrift centered his defense at the field and gave completion of the strip top priority equal to the task of building the perimeter's MLR.

On 8 August, almost as soon as the field was captured, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Geraci, the Division Engineer Officer, and Major Kenneth H. Weir, Division Air Officer, had made an inspection of the Japanese project and estimated the work still needed. They told Admiral Turner that 2,600 feet of the strip would be ready in two days, that the remaining 1,178 feet would be operational in about two weeks. Turner said he would have aircraft sent in on 11 August. But the engineer officer had made his estimate before the transports took off with his bulldozers, power shovels, and dump trucks.[1]

Again, however, the Marines gained from the Japanese failure to destroy their equipment before fleeing into the jungle. Already the U. S. forces were indebted to the enemy for part of their daily two meals, and now they would finish the airfield largely through the use of enemy tools. This equipment included nine road rollers (only six of which would work), two gas locomotives with hopper cars on a narrow-gauge railroad, six small generators (two were damaged beyond repair), one winch with a gasoline engine, about 50 hand carts for dirt, some 75 hand shovels, and 280 pieces of explosives.

In spite of this unintentional assistance from the Japanese, the Marine engineers did not waste any affection on the previous owners of the equipment. The machinery evidently had been used continuously for some time with no thought of maintenance. Keeping it running proved almost as big a job as finishing the airfield, and one of the tasks had to be done practically by hand, anyway. The Japanese had started at each end of the airstrip to work toward the middle, and the landing had interrupted these efforts some 180 to 200 feet short of a meeting. Assisted by a few trucks and the narrow gauge hopper cars (which had to be loaded by hand), engineers, pioneers, and others who could be spared moved some 100,000 cubic feet of fill and spread it on this low spot at midfield. A steel girder the Japanese had intended to use in a hangar served as a drag, and a Japanese road roller flattened and packed the fill after it had been spread.

[1] "The failure to land engineer equipment and machinery severely handicapped our efforts to complete the airfield and its defenses. Construction equipment and personnel are not a luxury but an absolute necessity in modern warfare." *Final Rept*, Phase III, 12–13.

Problems facing the infantry troops were just as great. There had been no impressive ground action on Guadalcanal since the landing, but intelligence in the immediate vicinity as well as in the South Pacific in general was not yet able to indicate when, how, and where Japanese reaction would strike. Estimating a counterlanding to be the most probable course of Japanese action, General Vandegrift placed his MLR at the beach. There the Marines built a 9,600-yard defense from the mouth of the Ilu River west around Lunga Point to the village of Kukum. The Ilu flank was refused 600 yards inland on the river's west bank, and at Kukum the left flank turned inland across the flat land between the beach and the first high ground of the coastal hills. The 5th Marines (less one battalion) held the left sector of the line from Kukum to the west bank of the Lunga, and the remainder of the line (inclusive of the Lunga) was held by the 1st Marines. (See Map 16)

The line was thin. The bulk of the combat forces remained in assembly areas inland as a ready reserve to check attacks or penetrations from any sector. Inland (south) of the airfield, a 9,000-yard stretch of rugged jungle terrain was outposted by men from the artillery, pioneer, engineer, and amphibian tractor battalions. These men worked during the day and stood watch on the lines at night.

The workers on the airfield as well as those on the thin perimeter were under almost constant enemy observation. Submarines and destroyers shelled the area at will day or night. Large flights of high-level bombers attacked the airfield daily, and observation planes were continually intruding with light bombs and strafing attacks. At night the enemy patrols became increasingly bold, and troops on the MLR mounted a continuous alert during the hours of darkness. South of the airfield the outpost line had to be supplemented by roving patrols.

In spite of this harassment, the perimeter shaped up. The 1st Special Weapons Battalion dug in its 75mm tank destroyers (half-tracks) in positions inland from the beach, but kept them ready to move into prepared positions near the water. Howitzers of the 11th Marines were situated to deliver fire in all sectors. The 2d and 3d Battalions of the artillery regiment had 75mm pack howitzers and the 5th Battalion had 105mm howitzers. There were no 155mm howitzers or guns for counterbattery, there was no sound-flash equipment for the location of enemy batteries, and the 3d Defense Battalion had not had a chance to unload its 5-inch seacoast guns or radar units prior to the departure of the amphibious shipping. Air defense within the perimeter also was inadequate. There were 90mm antiaircraft guns ashore, but the restricted size of the perimeter kept them too close to the field for best employment.

It was a hazardous and remote toe-hold which the Marines occupied, and within the Pacific high command there were some grave doubts whether they could hang on. Major General Millard F. Harmon said to General Marshall in a letter on 11 August:

> The thing that impresses me more than anything else in connection with the Solomon action is that we are not prepared to follow up. . . . We have seized a strategic position from which future operations in the Bismarcks can be strongly supported. Can the Marines hold it? There is considerable room for doubt.[2]

[2] CGSoPac ltr to CofSA, 11Aug42 (located at OCMH).

Admiral Ghormley, also concerned about the precarious Marine position,[3] on 12 August ordered Admiral McCain's TF 63 to employ all available transport shipping to take aviation gasoline, lubricants, ammunition, bombs, and ground crews to Guadalcanal. To avoid Japanese air attacks, the ships were to leave Espiritu Santo in time to reach Sealark Channel late in the day, unload under cover of darkness, and depart early the following day.

For the "blockade run" to Guadalcanal, Admiral McCain readied four destroyer transports of TransDiv 12. They were loaded with 400 drums of aviation gasoline, 32 drums of lubricant, 282 bombs from 100- to 500-pounders, belted ammunition, tools, and spare parts. Also on board were five officers and 118 Navy enlisted men from a Navy construction base (Seabee) unit, Cub–1. Under the command of Major C. H. Hayes, executive officer of VMO–251, this unit was to aid the Marine engineers in work at the field and to serve as ground crews for fighters and dive bombers scheduled to arrive within a few days.

McCain's ships arrived off Guadalcanal during the night of 15 August, and the equipment and men were taken ashore. By this time the Marine engineers had filled the gap in the center of the landing strip and now labored to increase the length of the field from 2,600 feet to nearly 4,000 feet. Work quickened after the Seabees landed, but there was no steel matting and the field's surface turned to sticky mud after each of the frequent tropical rains.

General Harmon blamed a faulty planning concept for the serious shortages of tools, equipment, and supplies. The campaign, he said, ". . . had been viewed by its planners as [an] amphibious operation supported by air, not as a means of establishing strong land based air action."[4]

But in spite of these shortages at the airfield and elsewhere, the Lunga Point perimeter was taking on an orderly routine of improvement and defense. Motor transport personnel had put their meager pool of trucks into operation shortly after the landing, and they had added some 35 Japanese trucks to the available list. Pioneers had built a road from the airfield to the Lunga River where they erected a bridge to the far side of the perimeter. Supply dumps also had been put in order. The pioneers cleared the landing beach, moving gear west to the Lunga-Kukum area, and sorted and moved Japanese supplies. The old Japanese beach at Kukum was cleaned up and reconditioned to receive U. S. material.

Most of the work of moving the beach dumps to permanent sites was completed in four days. There was a great amount of tonnage to handle in spite of the fact that only a small portion of the supplies had been landed. Amphibian tractors and all available trucks, including the Japanese, were used. The Government Track (the coastal road to Lunga) was improved and streams and rivers bridged to speed truck traffic. The amphibians carried their loads just offshore through shallow surf, and farther out to sea the lighters moved from old beach to new and back

[3] He warned Adms King and Nimitz that Guadalcanal might again fall to the Japanese if carrier support and reinforcements were not made available. ComSoPac msgs to CinCPac and CominCh, 16 and 17Aug42, in SoPac War Diary (located at NHD).

[4] CGSoPac ltr to CGAAF, 23Aug42 (located at OCMH).

again. The amount of supplies at each of the new classified dumps was kept low to avoid excessive loss from bombardment.

Captured material included almost every type item used by a military force—arms, ammunition, equipment, food, clothing, fuel, tools, and building materials:

> As the division was acutely short of everything needed for its operation, the captured material represented an important if unforeseen factor in the development of the airfield and beach defenses and the subsistence of the garrison.[5]

The landing force was particularly short of fuel, but in this case the supply left behind by the Japanese garrison was not as helpful as it might have been. Marines found some 800 to 900 drums of Japanese aviation gasoline on Guadalcanal, but this 90-octane fuel was not quite good enough for our aircraft, and it was too "hot" and produced too much carbon in trucks and Higgins boats unless mixed evenly with U. S. 72-octane motor fuel. Likewise some 150,000 gallons of Japanese motor fuel of 60 or 65 octane proved unreliable in our vehicles although some of it was mixed with our fuel and used in emergency in noncombat vehicles.

So critical was the supply of gasoline and diesel fuel that the division soon adopted an elaborate routine of "official scrounging" from ships that came into the channel. Rows of drums were lined bung up on old artillery lighters, and these craft would wallow alongside ships where Marines would ask that a hose from the ships' bulk stores be passed over so they could fill the drums one at a time. This method helped the Marines' fuel supply, but not relations with the Navy. Small boats taking off supplies had difficulty negotiating their passes alongside with the unwieldy lighters in the way, and ships officers quite frequently took a dim view of dragging along such bulky parasites when they had to take evasive action during the sudden air raids. But the system often worked well when early preparations were made with particularly friendly ships.

This over-water work in Sealark Channel, maintaining contact between Tulagi and Guadalcanal as well as meeting the supply ships which began to sneak in more frequently, pointed to another serious deficiency: there was no organized boat pool available to the division. More often than not the personnel and craft that the division used in those early days had merely been abandoned when the attack force departed, and there was no semblance of organization among them. Even the creation of order did not solve all the problems. A high percentage of the boats were damaged and crewmen had no repair facilities. The situation was gradually improved but was never satisfactory.

At last, on 18 August, the engineers and Seabees had a chance to stand back and admire their work. The airfield was completed. On 12 August it had been declared fit for fighters and dive bombers, but none were immediately available to send up. A Navy PBY had landed briefly on the strip on that date, but this was before Admiral McCain made his initial blockade run, and there was very little fuel for other planes anyway. But by the 18th the fill in the middle had been well packed, a grove of banyan trees at the end of the strip had been blasted away to make the approach less steep, and newly-arrived gasoline and ordnance were ready and waiting for the first customers. In the South Pacific during that period of shoestring existence,

[5] *FinalRept*, Phase III, 4.

MARINE COMMANDERS ON GUADALCANAL *appear in a picture taken four days after the landing which includes almost all the senior officers who led the 1st Marine Division ashore. Left to right, front row; Col George R. Rowan, Col Pedro A. del Valle, Col William C. James, MajGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, Col Gerald C. Thomas, Col Clifton B. Cates, LtCol Randolph McC. Pate, and Cdr Warwick T. Brown, USN. Second row: Col William J. Whaling, Col Frank B. Goettge, Col LeRoy P. Hunt, LtCol Frederick C. Biebush, LtCol Edwin A. Pollock, LtCol Edmund J. Buckley, LtCol Walter W. Barr, and LtCol Raymond P. Coffman. Third row: LtCol Francis R. Geraci, LtCol William E. Maxwell, Col Edward G. Hagen, LtCol William N. McKelvy, LtCol Julian N. Frisbee, Maj Milton V. O'Connell, Maj William Chalfont, III, Capt Horace W. Fuller, and Maj Forest C. Thompson. Fourth row: Maj Robert G. Ballance, Maj Henry W. Buse, Jr., Maj James G. Frazer, Maj Henry H. Crockett, LtCol Leonard B. Cresswell, LtCol John A. Bemis, Maj Robert B. Luckey, LtCol Samuel G. Taxis, and LtCol Eugene H. Price. Last row: Maj Robert O. Bowen, LtCol Merrill B. Twining, Maj Kenneth W. Benner (behind Bemis), LtCol Walker A. Reeves, LtCol John DeW. Macklin, LtCol Hawley C. Waterman, and Maj James C. Murray. Many of these men went on to become general officers and three of them (Vandegrift, Cates, and Pate) later became Commandants of the Marine Corps. (USMC 50509)*

however, "readiness" was a comparative thing. There were no bomb handling trucks, carts or hoists, no gas trucks, and no power pumps.

The state of readiness had a way of fluctuating rapidly, too, and the breathing spell for the workers did not last long. With most sadistic timing, a large flight of Japanese planes came over and scored 17 hits on the runway. One engineer was killed, nine were wounded, and the field "was a mess." [6]

The runway damage was disquieting but not altogether a surprise. Air raids had been frequent, shelling from offshore submarines likewise was common, and planes droned overhead frequently during the hours of darkness to drop small bombs here and there at well-spaced intervals. After the big raid on the 18th, the well-practiced repair teams merely went to work again. In filling the craters, the engineers and Seabees first squared the holes with hand shovels and then air hammered the new dirt solid by tamping every foot and a half of fill. They had found that this system kept settling to a minimum and prevented dangerous pot holes.

Two days later Henderson Field, named after Major Lofton Henderson, a Marine aviator killed at Midway, was again ready. And this time the planes arrived. The forward echelon of Marine Aircraft Group 23, the first arrivals, numbered 19 F4F's and 12 SBD–3's. The units were under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Fike, executive officer of the air group. The F4F's, a part of Marine Fighter Squadron 223, were commanded by Major John L. Smith, and the 12 Douglas dive bombers from Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 232 were led by Lieutenant Colonel Richard D. Mangrum.

Arrival of planes ended an era for the Guadalcanal defenders—the hazardous period from 9 to 20 August when the landing force operated entirely without air or surface support. During this period lines of communications were most uncertain. Nothing was known of the general naval situation or the extent of losses at sea, and little information was received from aerial reconnaissance from rear areas. Ashore, patrolling was constant, but the terrain was such that much could be missed. Short rations, continuous hard work, and lack of sleep reflected in the physical condition of the troops. Morale, however, remained high.

Formed in March of 1942 at Ewa, Oahu, MAG–23 remained in training there, with much shifting of personnel and units, until this two-squadron forward echelon sailed to the South Pacific on 2 August on board the escort carrier *Long Island*. Smith's men had just been issued new F4F's with two-stage superchargers, and Mangrum's unit had turned in its old SBD–2's for the newer 3's with self-sealing gasoline tanks and armor plate. The remaining two squadrons of the group, Captain Robert E. Galer's VMF–224 and Major Leo R. Smith's VMSB–231, would sail from the Hawaiian area on 15 August.

John Smith's VMF–223 and Mangrum's VMSB–232 came down by way of Suva in the Fijis and Efate in the New Hebrides. At Efate, Smith traded some of his young, less-experienced pilots to Major Harold W. Bauer's VMF–212 for some fliers with more experience. On the afternoon of 20 August, the *Long Island* stood 200 miles southeast of Guadalcanal and launched the planes.

[6] *Ibid.*, Annex C, 2.

Two days later, on 22 August, the first Army Air Force planes, five P–400's [7] of the 67th Fighter Squadron, landed on the island. On 24 August, 11 Navy dive bombers from the battle-damaged *Enterprise* moved to Henderson Field to operate for three months, and on 27 August nine more Army P–400's came in. Performance of these Army planes was disappointing. Their ceiling was 12,000 feet because they had no equipment for the British high-pressure oxygen system with which they were fitted, and they could not reach the high-flying enemy planes. Along with the Marine SBD's, the P–400's spent their time during Japanese air raids off strafing and bombing ground targets, and they returned to Henderson after the hostile planes departed.

A short while later—early in September—supply and evacuation flights were initiated by two-engined R4D's (C–47's) of Marine Aircraft Group 25. Flying daily from Espiritu Santo and Efate, the cargo planes each brought in some 3,000 pounds of supplies and were capable of evacuating 16 stretcher patients.

Although this increased air activity at Henderson Field was of great importance to the operation in general and the combat Marines in particular, the field still was not capable of supporting bombers which could carry attacks to Japanese positions farther to the north. On 20 August General Harmon voiced the opinion that it would be too risky to base B–17's at Henderson until more fighter and antiaircraft protection were available. [8]

Early in September he suggested that heavy bombers stage through the Guadalcanal field from the New Hebrides and thus strike Rabaul and other Japanese bases,[9] but a closer investigation pointed up the impracticality of this plan. It would have meant hand-pumping more than 3,500 gallons of gasoline into each bomber landing at Guadalcanal on the 1,800-mile round trip from the New Hebrides to the Northern Solomons; and although this manual labor was not too great a price to pay for an opportunity to strike at the Japanese, it was impossible to maintain a fuel stock of that proportion at Henderson Field.

GROUND ACTION

Combat troops meanwhile probed the jungles with patrols, and early reconnaissance indicated that the bulk of Japanese troops was somewhere between the Matanikau River, about 7,000 yards west of the Lunga, and Kokumbona, a native village some 7,500 yards west of the Matanikau. General Vandegrift wanted to pursue the enemy and destroy him before the Japanese could reinforce this small, disorganized garrison, but no substantial force could be spared from the work of building the MLR and the airfield.

Minor patrol clashes occurred almost daily, but many of these meeting engagements were with wandering bands of uniformed laborers who only confused attempts to locate the main enemy force. This patrolling gradually revealed that the area between the Matanikau and Kokumbona was the main stronghold, however. Stiff resistance continued there with each attempt to probe the area, and this

[7] Early P–39 "klunkers" converted for export to the British. They could carry one bomb, were armed with a 20mm cannon, two .50 caliber, and four .30 caliber machine guns.

[8] CGSoPac Summary of Situation, 20Aug42 (located at NHD).

[9] CGSoPac ltr to CofSA, 9Sep42 (located at NHD).

pattern had started as early as 9 August when one officer and several enlisted men were wounded while trying to cross the river. This patrol had reported the west bank of the river well organized for defense. The enemy kept shifting his position, though, to maneuver for an advantage against the patrols which came to seek him out. Final confirmation of the enemy location came on 12 August when a Japanese warrant officer captured behind the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines said that his unit was between the Matanikau and Kokumbona.

Under questioning, the prisoner admitted that possibly some of his fellow garrison mates were wandering aimlessly through the jungle without food and that some of them might surrender. First Sergeant Stephen A. Custer of the division intelligence section made plans to lead an amphibious patrol to the area. Meanwhile, a Marine patrol reported seeing what it took to be a white flag west of the river. Hearing these reports, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Goettge, division intelligence officer, decided to lead the patrol himself.

The original plan had called for an early start so that a daylight landing could be made. The patrol then would work inland along the west bank of the Matanikau and bivouac for the night far back in the hills. The second day was to be spent in a cross-country return to the perimeter. The primary mission of the patrol would be that of reconnaissance, but it was to be strong enough for combat if it ran into a fight.

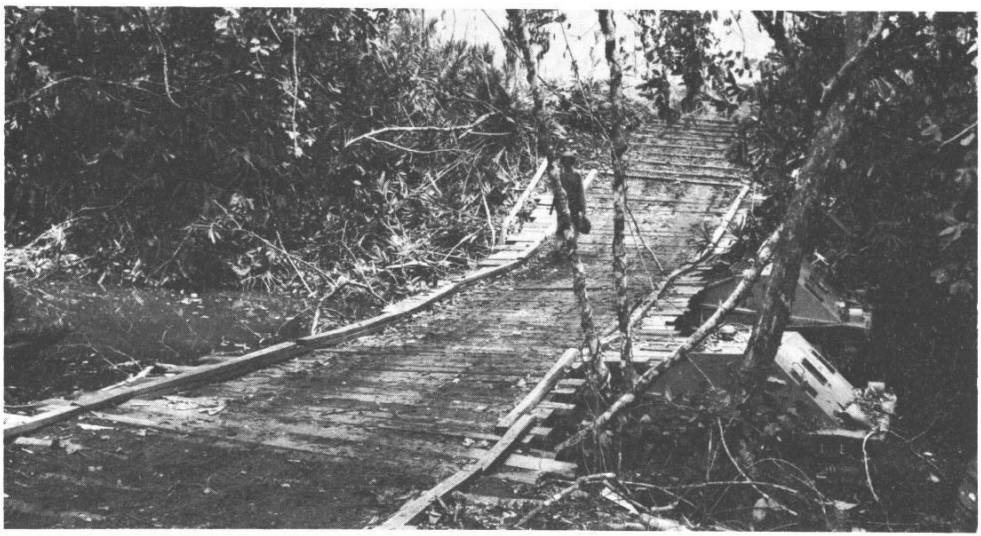
Colonel Goettge's new plans delayed departure of the patrol about 12 hours and cut down its combat potential by including among its 25-man strength Lieutenant Commander Malcolm L. Pratt, assistant division surgeon, Lieutenant Ralph Cory, a Japanese linguist, and several members of the 5th Marines intelligence section. The boat got away from the perimeter at about 1800 and landed after dark at 2200 at an undetermined point west of the Matanikau. The Japanese, instead of surrendering, attacked the patrol and cut off from the beach all but three men who escaped back into the surf to swim and wade to safety.

One of these men, Sergeant Charles C. Arndt, arrived in the perimeter at about 0530 on 13 August to report that the patrol had encountered enemy resistance. Company A, 5th Marines set off immediately as a relief patrol to be reinforced later by two platoons of Company L and a light machine-gun section. Meanwhile, the other two escaped patrol members, Corporal Joseph Spaulding and Platoon Sergeant Frank L. Few, came back at 0725 and 0800 respectively and revealed that the remainder of the Goettge patrol had been wiped out.

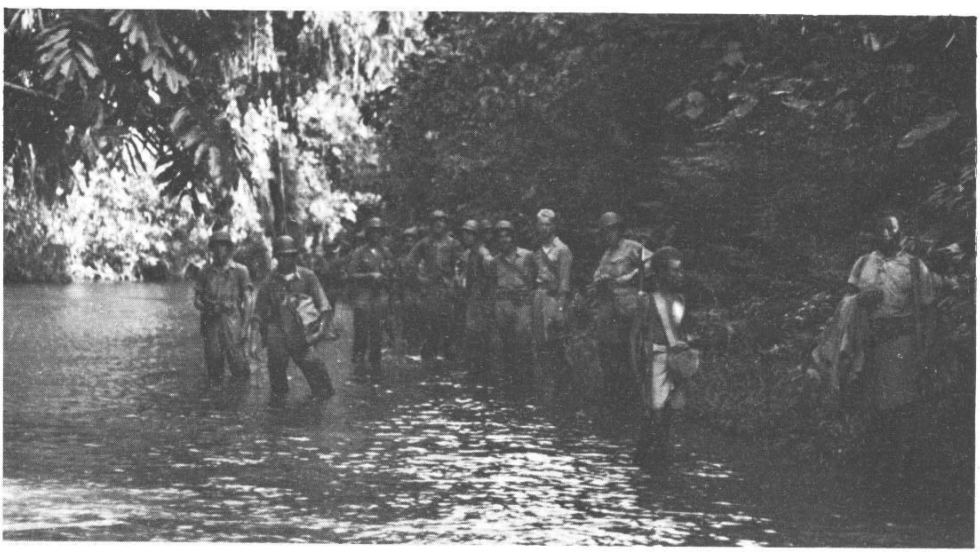
The relief patrol landed west of Point Cruz, a coastal projection a short distance west of the Matanikau's mouth. Company A moved east along the coastal road back toward the perimeter while the reinforced platoons of Company L traveled over the difficult terrain inland from the beach. Company A met brief Japanese resistance near the mouth of the river, but neither force found a trace of the Goettge patrol.[10]

This action was followed a week later by a planned double envelopment against the village of Matanikau. Companies B and L of the 5th Marines would carry out

[10] Goettge's position as Division G–2 was filled on 14 August by LtCol E. J. Buckley, formerly of the 11th Marines. *FinalRept*, Phase III, Annex F, 5.



MARINE ENGINEERS *erected this bridge across the Tenaru River to speed the flow of troops and supplies from the beaches to the perimeter. (USMC 50468-A)*



SOLOMONS NATIVES, *recruited by Captain W. F. Martin Clemens, BSIDF, guide a patrol up the winding course of the Tenaru River in search of Japanese. (USMC 53325)*

this attack while Company I of the same regiment made an amphibious raid farther west, at Kokumbona, where it was hoped that any Japanese retreating from Matanikau could be cut off. On 18 August Company L moved inland, crossed the Matanikau some 1,000 yards from the coast, and prepared to attack north into the village the next day. Company B, to attack west, moved along the coastal road to the east bank of the river.

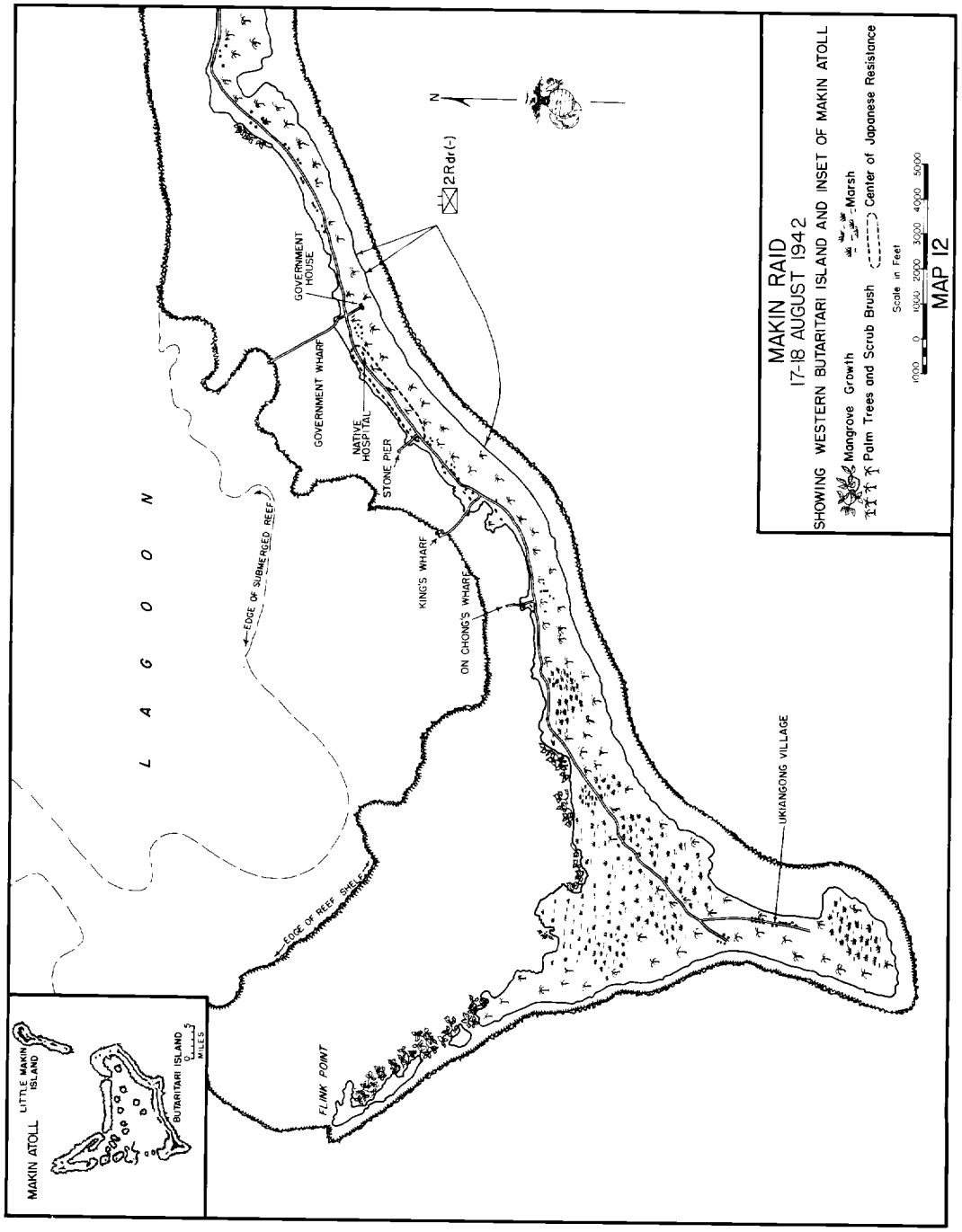
Next day, after preparation fire was laid down by the 2d, 3d, and 5th Battalions of the 11th Marines, Company L launched its attack. Shortly after jumping off, scouts discovered a line of emplacements along a ridge some 1,000 yards to the left flank of the company front. The platoon on this flank engaged the small enemy force in these emplacements while the remainder of the company moved on toward the village. In this action off the left flank, Sergeant John H. Branic, the acting platoon leader, was killed. The company executive officer, Lieutenant George H. Mead, Jr. next took command. When he was killed a short time later Marine Gunner Edward S. Rust, a liaison officer from the 5th Marines headquarters took command. This platoon continued to cover the advance of the remainder of the company.

Company B, thwarted in its attempt to cross the river because of intense Japanese fire from the west bank, could only support the attack of its sister company by fire. Company L managed to reach the outskirts of the native village at about 1400, however, and one platoon entered the settlement. This platoon lost contact with the remainder of the company, and when the other platoons attempted to enter the village they were met by a strong Japanese counterattack which caused the separated platoon to withdraw to company lines. The Marines were nearly enveloped and succeeded in repulsing the attack only after close-range fighting. Defending in depth, the Japanese drew up on a line which extended from the river some 200 yards west through the village. While the Marines maneuvered for an attack, the Japanese fire became more sporadic, and an assault at about 1600 revealed that the enemy pocket had dispersed.

Meanwhile the amphibious raid of Company I also aroused opposition. Two enemy destroyers and a cruiser lobbed shells at the landing craft while they swung from the Marine perimeter to Kokumbona, and the raiding party escaped this threat only to be met at the beach by Japanese machine-gun fire. The landing succeeded, however, and the enemy resistance began to melt. By the time a Marine attack swept through the village, the defenders had retired into the jungle to avoid a conclusive engagement. The three companies killed 65 Japanese while suffering the loss of four Marines killed and 11 wounded.

Although these actions served only to locate the general area into which the original Japanese garrison of Guadalcanal had withdrawn in the face of the Marine landing, another patrol on 19 August indicated the pattern of things to come on the island.

The patrol and reconnaissance area assigned to the 1st Marines lay east and southeast of the perimeter where the plains of the Lunga fan into a grassy tableland which is nearly eight miles wide near the coastal village of Tetere. Some thought had been given to the construction of an airfield there, and on 12 August a survey party went out with a platoon-sized security force under Second Lieutenant John J. Jachym. Passing through a native village on 13 August, this group encountered Father Arthur C. Duhamel, a young Cath-


MAKIN RAID
17-18 AUGUST 1942
SHOWING WESTERN BUTARITARI ISLAND AND INSET OF MAKIN ATOLL
Mangrove Growth
Marsh
Palm Trees and Scrub Brush
Center of Japanese Resistance
Scale in Feet
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000
MAP 12
LAGOON
EDGE OF SUBMERGED REEF
EDGE OF REEF SHELF
GOVERNMENT HOUSE
GOVERNMENT WHARF
NATIVE HOSPITAL
STONE PIER
KING'S WHARF
ON CHONG'S WHARF
UKIANGONG VILLAGE
FLINK POINT
2 Rdr (-)
N
MAKIN ATOLL
LITTLE MAKIN ISLAND
BUTARITARI ISLAND
MILES

olic priest from Methuen, Massachusetts,[11] who related native rumors of an enemy force along the coast to the east.

Two days later a partial verification of the priest's information was made by Captain (of the British Solomon Islands Defense Force) W. F. M. (Martin) Clemens, the district officer who had withdrawn into the hills to become a coastwatcher when the Japanese entered his island. On 14 August Clemens left his watching station near Aola Bay with his 60 native scouts[12] and entered the Marine perimeter. Clemens and his scouts reported seeing signs of a new Japanese force. And on the heels of Clemens' reports came word from Admiral Turner that naval intelligence indicated a Japanese attack in force.

To investigate, Captain Charles H. Brush, Jr. took a part of his Company A of the 1st Marines and at 0700 on 19 August began a patrol eastward along the coastal track toward Koli Point and Tetere. At about noon near Koli Point the patrol spotted a group of four Japanese officers and 30 men moving, with no security to front or flanks, between the road and the beach. Captain Brush struck frontally with a part of his unit while Lieutenant Jachym led an envelopment around the enemy left flank. In 55 minutes of fighting, 31 of the Japanese were killed. The remaining three escaped into the jungle. Three Marines were killed and three wounded.

It was clear that these troops were not wandering laborers or even members of the original garrison. Helmets of the dead soldiers bore the Japanese Army star rather than the anchor and chrysanthemum device of the special landing force. A code for ship-to-shore communications to be used for a landing operation also was found among the effects, and the appearance of the uniforms indicated that the troops were recent arrivals to Guadalcanal. There appeared little doubt that the Japanese were preparing an attempt to recapture their lost airfield. And Brush found they had already completed some excellent advance work:

> With a complete lack of knowledge of Japanese on my part, the maps the Japanese had of our positions were so clear as to startle me. They showed our weak spots all too clearly.[13]

While these patrols searched for the enemy on Guadalcanal, another force of approximately 200 Marines moved into enemy waters farther north and raided a Japanese atoll in the Gilbert Islands. Companies A and B of Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson's 2d Raider Battalion went from Oahu to Makin atoll on board submarines *Argonaut* and *Nautilus* and landed on the hostile beach early on 17 August. The raid was planned to destroy enemy installations, gather intelligence data, test raiding tactics, boost homefront morale, and possibly to divert some Japanese attention from Guadalcanal. It was partially successful on all of these counts, but its greatest asset was to home-front morale. At a cost to themselves of 30 men lost, the raiders wiped out the Japanese garrison of about 85 men, destroyed radio

[11] Father Duhamel, as well as Father Henry Oude-Engberink and Sister Sylvia of France, and Sister Odilia of Italy, were later tortured and killed by the Japanese.

[12] Including Vouza, a retired sergeant major of police and native of the Tetere area who previously had volunteered additional service to the Crown and Capt Clemens. A veteran of 25 years in the native constabulary, the "reactivated" Vouza provided valuable assistance to the coastwatchers and to the Marines.

[13] Maj C. H. Brush, Jr. ltr to CMC, 15Jan49.

stations, fuel, and other supplies and installations, and went back on board their submarines on 18 August for the return to Pearl Harbor. This raid attracted much attention in the stateside press but its military significance was negligible. Guadalcanal still held the center of the stage in the Pacific and attention quickly turned back to that theater.[14] (See Map 12)

BATTLE OF THE TENARU [15]

The picture that began to take shape as these bits of intelligence fitted together provided an early warning of Japanese plans that already were well underway. On 13 August, Tokyo ordered Lieutenant General Haruyoshi Hyakutake's *Seventeenth Army* at Rabaul to take over the ground action on Guadalcanal and salvage the situation. The naval side of this reinforcement effort would be conducted by Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, a wily Imperial sea dog who was a veteran of early landings in the Philippines and Indonesia and of the battles of Coral Sea and Midway. With no clear picture of his opponent's strength, Hyakutake decided to retake the Lunga airfield immediately with a force of about 6,000 men. On the evening of the 15th of August, while Tanaka's ships of the reinforcement force were loading supplies at Truk, the admiral got orders to hurry down to Rabaul and take 900 officers and men to Guadalcanal at once. Hyakutake had decided that the attack would begin with a part of the *7th Division's 28th Infantry Regiment* and the *Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force.* These units would be followed by the *35th Brigade.*

Admiral Tanaka thought he was being pressed a little too hard, considering that the *Eighth Fleet* under which he operated had just been formed at Rabaul on 14 July, and that the admiral himself had hardly been given time to catch his breath after hurrying away from Yokosuka for his new job on 11 August. The admiral reported later:

> With no regard for my opinion . . . this order called for the most difficult operation in war—landing in the face of the enemy—to be carried out by mixed units which had no opportunity for rehearsal or even preliminary study. . . . In military strategy expedience sometimes takes precedence over prudence, but this order was utterly unreasonable.
>
> I could see that there must be great confusion in the headquarters of Eighth Fleet. Yet the operation was ordained and underway, and so there was no time to argue about it.[16]

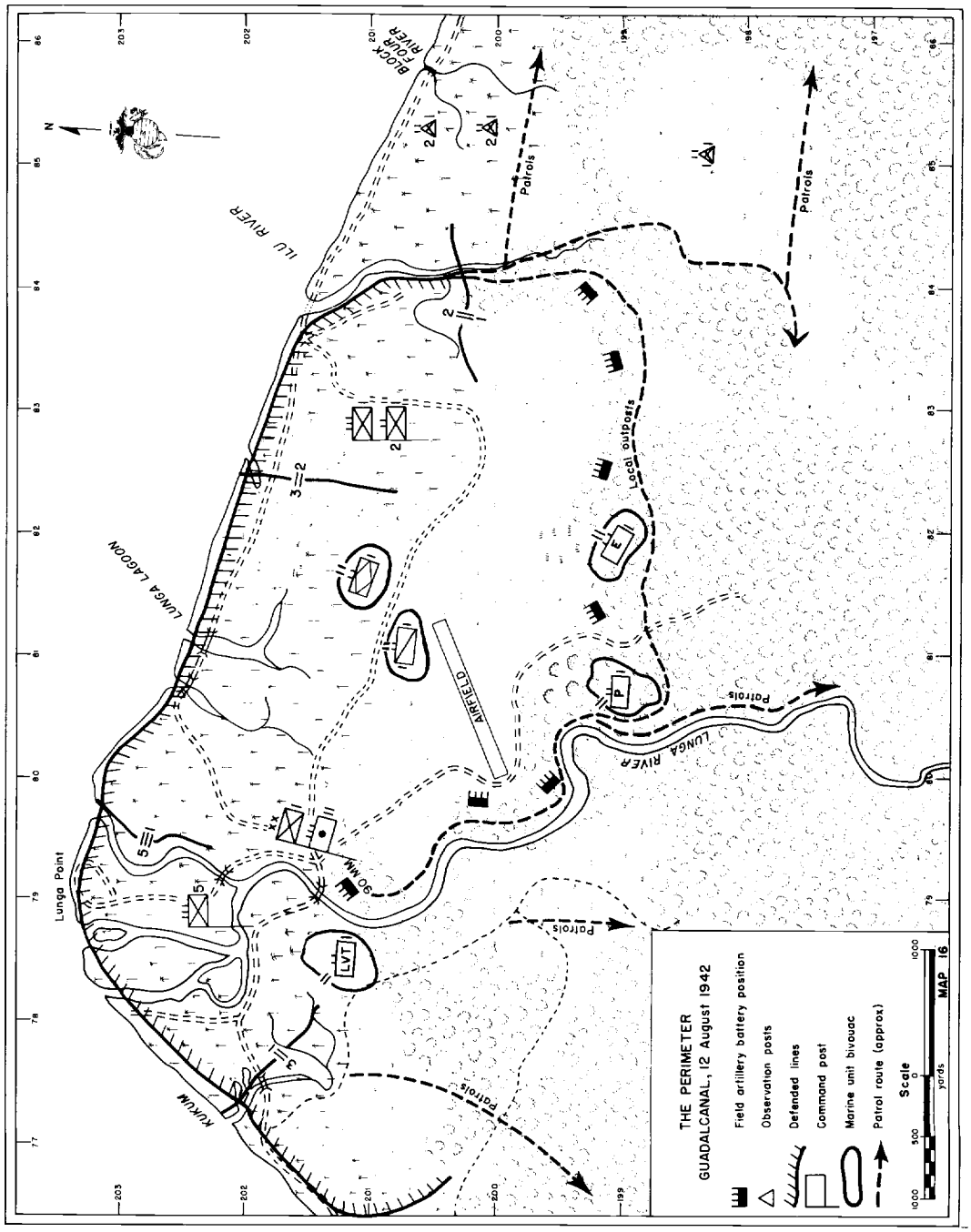
Backbone of the initial effort would consist of the reinforced *2d Battalion, 28th Infantry*, a 2,000-man force of infantry, artillery, and engineers under the command of Colonel Kiyono Ichiki. This force had been en route to Midway when the defeat of the Japanese carriers caused a change to Guam.[17] Later the *Ichiki Force* was en route back to the home islands when the Marine landing in the Solomons brought another change of

[14] CTF 7.15 Rept, 24Aug42; 2dRdrBn Rept of Ops on MakinIs, 19Aug42; WDC Japanese Documents No. 161,013, 161,110, and NA 12053, "Records of Various Base Forces" and "Base Force Guard Units and Defense Unit Records," 17–22-Aug42 (located at NHD).

[15] Actually the Ilu. But as previously explained, Marines of the division identified these rivers incorrectly throughout the campaign and the action to be described has thus become known historically and to the participants as the Battle of the Tenaru.

[16] *Tanaka Article*, I, 690. Excerpts from this account are quoted in this volume with the permission of the U. S. Naval Institute.

[17] See Part V of this volume.


THE PERIMETER
GUADALCANAL, 12 August 1942
Field artillery battery position
Observation posts
Defended lines
Command post
Marine unit bivouac
Patrol route (approx)
Scale
yards
MAP 16
Lunga Point
LUNGA LAGOON
ILU RIVER
BLOCK FOUR RIVER
LUNGA RIVER
AIRFIELD
Local outposts
Patrols
90 MM
KUKUM

Japanese plans. The unit was diverted to Truk where it landed on 12 August and was attached to the *35th Brigade* which then garrisoned the Palau Islands. The brigade's commander was Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi. The 900 or 1,000 men which Admiral Tanaka loaded for his first reinforcement run to Guadalcanal were from this Ichiki unit.

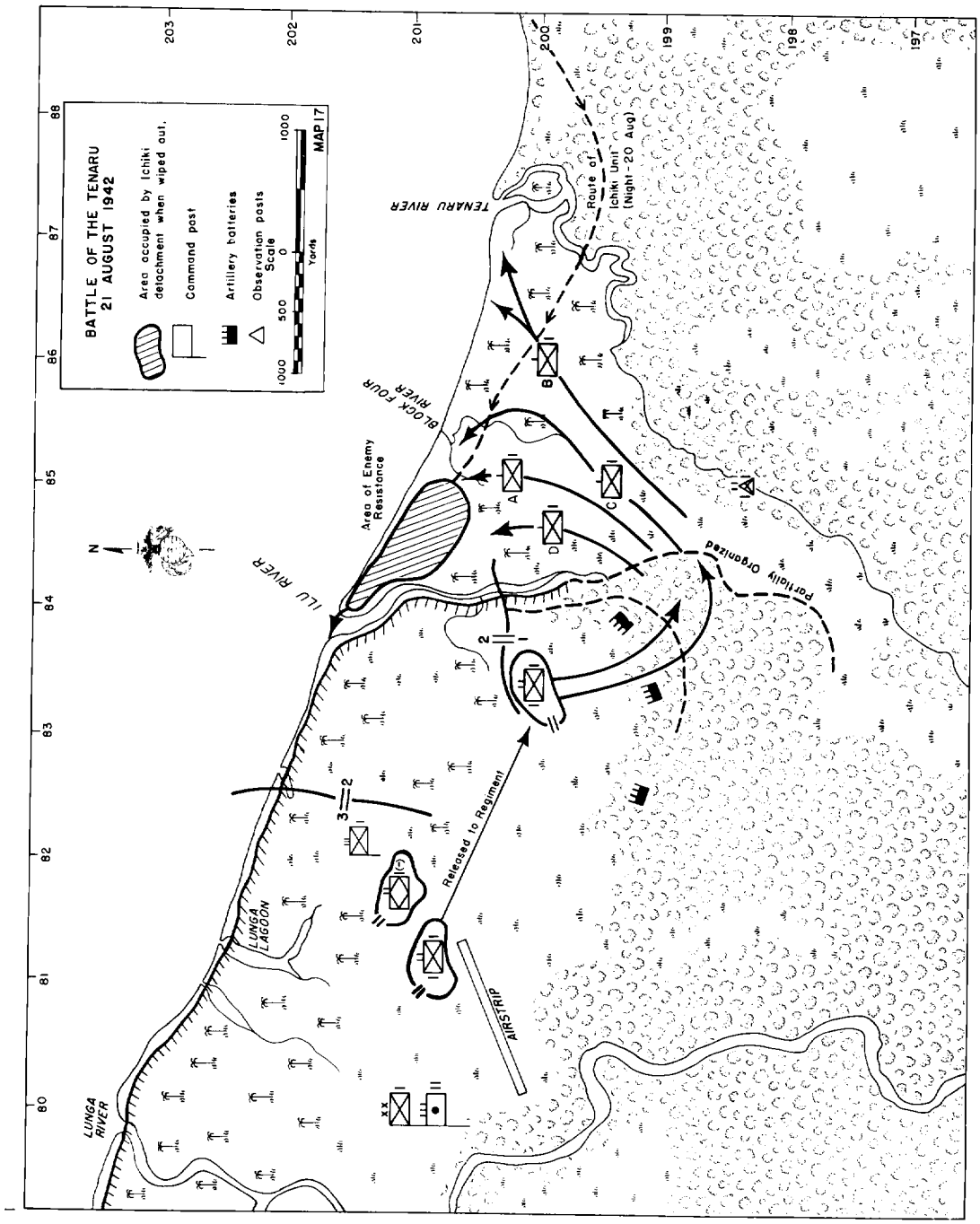
The reinforcement ships landed Colonel Ichiki and this forward echelon at Taivu Point on Guadalcanal during the night of 18 August. While this force landed at this point some 22 air miles east of the Lunga, some 500 men of the *Yokosuka Fifth Special Naval Landing Force* arrived at Kokumbona. This was the first of many runs of the Tokyo Express, as Marines called the Japanese destroyers and cruisers which shuttled supplies and reinforcements up and down The Slot in high-speed night runs. Brush's patrol had encountered part of Ichiki's forward echelon, and the Japanese commander, shaken by the fact that he had been discovered, decided to attack at once.

At that time the Marines had five infantry battalions available for defense of Lunga Point. Four battalions were committed to beach defense, one was withheld in division reserve. On 15 August work had begun on a new extension of the right flank by refusing it inland along the west bank of the Ilu River (then called the Tenaru) for a distance of 3,200 yards. This plan involved road and bridge construction as well as extensive clearing before field fortifications could be built. As of 18 August little progress had been made. (See Map 17)

In the face of the threats pointed out by intelligence sources, the division considered two courses of action: first, to send the division reserve across the Ilu to locate and destroy the enemy, or, second, to continue work on defensive positions while limiting actions to the east to strong patrols and outposts. The first course, General Vandegrift realized, involved accepting the premise that the main Japanese force had landed to the east and that it could be dealt with by one Marine battalion. But if Brush's patrol had encountered only a small part of the new enemy unit while the bulk of the force stood poised to strike from another direction, or from the sea, absence of the reserve battalion would become a serious manpower shortage in the perimeter. The intelligence Vandegrift had gleaned from all sources was good, but there wasn't enough of it. So the division sat tight to await developments. Work continued on field fortifications, native scouts worked far to the east, and Marines maintained a strong watch on the perimeter each night.

The Marines did not have long to wait. Colonel Ichiki had wasted no time preparing his attack, and during the night of 20–21 August Marine listening posts on the east bank of the Ilu detected enemy troops moving through the jungle to their front. A light rattle of rifle fire was exchanged, both sides sent up flares, and the Marines withdrew across the river mouth to the lines of their battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Edwin A. Pollock's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. They reported that a strong enemy force appeared to be building up across the river.[18]

[18] At about the same time the native scout Vouza entered the command post of 2/1 to warn LtCol Pollock about the Japanese buildup. Badly wounded, Vouza had been captured by the Ichiki Force, knifed about the face, throat, and chest when he wouldn't talk, and then left for dead by the Japanese. This report to Pollock was one of the many services for which Vouza later was cited by the Americans and British.


BATTLE OF THE TENARU
21 AUGUST 1942
Area occupied by Ichiki detachment when wiped out.
Command post
Artillery batteries
Observation posts
Scale
0
500
1000
Yards
MAP 17
TENARU RIVER
Route of Ichiki Unit (Night - 20 Aug)
BLOCK FOUR RIVER
Area of Enemy Resistance
ILU RIVER
Partially Organized
Released to Regiment
LUNGA LAGOON
AIRSTRIP
LUNGA RIVER
N
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
XX

By this time Ichiki had assembled his force on the brush-covered point of land on the east bank of the river, and all was quiet until 0310 on 21 August when a column of some 200 Japanese rushed the exposed sandspit at the river mouth. Most of them were stopped by Marine small-arms fire and by a canister-firing 37mm antitank gun of the 1st Special Weapons Battalion. But the Marine position was not wired in, and the weight of the rushing attack got a few enemy soldiers into Pollock's lines where they captured some of his emplacements. The remainder of the line held, however, and fire from these secure positions kept the penetration in check until the battalion reserve could get up to the fight. This reserve, Company G, launched a counterattack that wiped out the Japanese or drove them back across the river.

Ichiki was ready with another blow. Although his force on the east bank had not directly supported this first attack, it now opened up with a barrage of mortar and 70mm fire, and this was followed by another assault. A second enemy company had circled the river's mouth by wading beyond the breakers, and when the fire lifted it charged splashing through the surf against the 2d Battalion's beach positions a little west of the river mouth.

The Marines opened up with everything they had. Machine-gun fire sliced along the beach as the enemy sloshed ashore, canister from the 37mm ripped gaping holes in the attack, and 75mm pack howitzers of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines chewed into the enemy. Again the attack broke up, and daylight revealed a sandy battlefield littered with the bodies of the Japanese troops who had launched Guadalcanal's first important ground action.

Although outnumbered at the actual point of contact, Pollock assessed the situation at daybreak and reported that he could hold. His battalion had fire superiority because of the excellent artillery support and because the course of the river gave part of his line enfilade fire against the enemy concentration in the point of ground funneling into the sandspit. In view of this, General Vandegrift ordered Pollock to hold at the river mouth while the division reserve, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines enveloped Ichiki. While this battalion prepared for its attack, Company C of the 1st Engineer Battalion went forward to Pollock's command to help bolster defensive positions. During the morning the engineers built antitank obstacles, laid a mine field across the sandspit, and helped the 2/1 Marines string tactical wire and improve field fortifications. They were under intermittent rifle fire during most of this work.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Lenard B. Cresswell's division reserve battalion had reverted to parent control and reported to Colonel Cates to receive the attack plan for the envelopment. Before 0700, Cresswell crossed the Ilu upstream, posted elements of his Company D (weapons) to cover a possible Japanese escape route to the south, and then turned north toward the *Ichiki Force*. By 0900 his companies crossed their lines of departure in the attack against the Japanese left and rear.

Company C on the right along the coast met one platoon of the enemy near the village at the mouth of the Block Four River, and the Marines moved to encircle this force and isolate it from the remainder of Ichiki's unit farther west. The other companies moved north with little opposi-

tion, A on the right and B on the left. As the advance continued, the enemy was forced into the point of land on the Ilu's east bank. By 1400 the enemy was confined completely by the river, the beach, and the envelopment from the left and rear. Some of the Japanese made unsuccessful attempts to escape through the surf and along the beach; another group burst out temporarily to the east but ran head-on into Company C moving up from its battle at the mouth of the Block Four.

The fight continued, with Cresswell tightening his encirclement, and more of the Japanese attempted to strike through to the east. These breakout attempts gave the new Guadalcanal fliers, on the island less than 24 hours, a chance to fire their first shots in anger, and the F4F pilots from VMF–223 gave Cresswell's Marines a hand with strafing attacks that destroyed the Japanese or turned them back into the infantry trap.

To conclude the action by nightfall, Vandegrift ordered a tank attack across the sandspit and into what now had become the rear of the *Ichiki Force.* The platoon of light tanks struck at 1500, firing at the enemy with canister and machine guns. Two tanks were disabled, one by an antitank mine, but the crews were rescued by the close supporting action of other tanks and the attack rolled on into the Japanese positions. It was over by 1700. Nearly 800 Japanese had been killed and 15 were taken prisoner while only a few escaped into the jungle. Disgraced by the debacle, Colonel Ichiki committed suicide.

The action cost the Marines 34 dead and 75 wounded. A policing of the Japanese battlefield gleaned the division ten heavy and 20 light machine guns, 20 grenade throwers, 700 rifles, 20 pistols, an undetermined number of sabers and grenades, three 70mm guns, large quantities of explosive charges, and 12 flame throwers. The flame throwers were not used in the action.

Admiral Tanaka later had this to say about the disaster:

> I knew Colonel Ichiki from the Midway operation and was well aware of his magnificent leadership and indomitable fighting spirit. But this episode made it abundantly clear that infantrymen armed with rifles and bayonets had no chance against an enemy equipped with modern heavy arms. This tragedy should have taught us the hopelessness of 'bamboo-spear' tactics.[19]

BATTLE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS

While Colonel Ichiki prepared for his ill-fated attack, Rear Admiral Tanaka and Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, the *Eighth Fleet* commander, worked to get the colonel's second echelon ashore for what they hoped would be an orderly, well-coordinated effort against the Marines. These troops were on board the *Kinryu Maru* and four destroyer transports, and they were escorted by the seaplane carrier *Chitose* with her 22 floatplanes and by Tanaka's *Destroyer Squadron 2*, which Tanaka led in light cruiser *Jintsu.* A larger naval force operated farther to the east outside the Solomons chain. In all, the Japanese task forces included three aircraft carriers, eight battleships, four heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 22 destroyers in addition to the five transport vessels.

At this time Admiral Fletcher's force of two carriers, one battleship, four cruisers, and ten destroyers operated to the southeast of the Lower Solomons conduct-

[19] *Tanaka Article,* I, 691.

ing routine searches to the northwest. Fletcher believed the area to be temporarily safe from Japanese naval trespass, and he had sent the carrier *Wasp* off to refuel. This left him only the *Enterprise* and the *Saratoga* for his air support.

On 23 August, two days after the Battle of the Tenaru, American patrol planes first sighted the Japanese transports and the Tanaka escort some 350 miles north of Guadalcanal. Marine planes from Henderson Field attempted to attack the troop carriers, but a heavy overcast forced them back to Lunga. The fliers had a better day on the 24th, however. At 1420 the F4F pilots intercepted 15 Japanese bombers being escorted toward Guadalcanal by 12 fighters from the carrier *Ryujo*. Marines broke this raid up before it got close. They downed six of the Zeros and ten bombers in what was VMF–223's first big success of the war. Captain Marion Carl splashed two bombers and a Zero, and two planes each were downed by Lieutenants Zennith A. Pond and Kenneth D. Frazier, and Marine Gunner Henry B. Hamilton:

> This was a good day's work by the fighter pilots of VMF–223. It is necessary to remember that the Japanese Zero at this stage of the war was regarded with some of the awe in which the atomic bomb came to be held later. . . . The Cactus [Guadalcanal] fighters made a great contribution to the war by exploding the theory that the Zero was invincible; the Marines started the explosion on 24 August.[20]

Three Marine pilots did not return from the action, and a fourth was shot down but managed to save himself by getting ashore at Tulagi. In plane strength, however, the Cactus Air Force (as the Guadalcanal fliers called their composite outfit) gained. This was the day, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that the 11 SBD's came in from the damaged *Enterprise*. At the time the ship was struck, Lieutenant Turner Caldwell, USN, was up with his "Flight 300," and, low on gas, he led his fliers to Guadalcanal where they more than paid for their keep until 27 September.

Meanwhile Admiral Fletcher's carrier planes located the enemy task force in the Eastern Solomons at about the same time Japanese planes spotted Fletcher. Like the Battle of Midway, the resulting action was an air-surface and air-air contest. Surface vessels neither sighted nor fired at each other.

The *Ryujo*, whose Zeros had fared so poorly with John Smith's F4F pilots, took repeated hits that finally put her out of control and left her hopelessly aflame. One enemy cruiser and a destroyer were sunk; a second cruiser was damaged; the *Chitose* sustained severe wounds but managed to limp away; and 90 Japanese planes were shot down. On the American side, 20 planes were lost and the damaged *Enterprise* lurched away to seek repair.

This action turned back the larger Japanese attack force, and Fletcher likewise withdrew. He expected to return next day and resume the attack, but by then the Japanese had moved out of range. The escorted transports with reinforcements for the late Colonel Ichiki continued to close the range, however, and early on 25 August SBD's from VMSB–232 and the *Enterprise* Flight 300 went up to find them. The Battle of the Eastern Solomons had postponed Tanaka's delivery of these reinforcements, but after that carrier battle was over the admiral headed his ships south again late on 24 August.

At 0600 on 25 August, Tanaka's force was some 150 miles north of Guadalcanal, and there the SBD's from Henderson

[20] *Marine Air History*, 81.

Field found him. The *Jintsu* shook under an exploding bomb that Lieutenant Lawrence Baldinus dropped just forward of her bridge, and Ensign Christian Fink of the *Enterprise* scored a hit on the transport *Kinryu Maru* amidships. Admiral Tanaka was knocked unconscious by the explosion on his flagship, and a number of crewmen were killed or injured. The ship did not list under the bow damage, however, and she still was seaworthy. When Tanaka recovered he transferred his flag to the destroyer *Kagero* and sent the *Jintsu* to Truk alone.[21]

Flames broke out on the *Kinryu Maru* which carried approximately 1,000 troops of the *Yokosuka 5th SNLF*, and the destroyer *Muzuki* went alongside to rescue survivors. At just that moment this ship became "one of the first Japanese warships to be hit by a B–17 since the war began" [22] when these big planes from the 11th Bombardment Group at Espiritu Santo arrived to lend a hand to the Cactus fliers. The *Muzuki* sank at once. Another ship then moved in to rescue the survivors from this destroyer while two destroyer transports went to the rescue of the men from the *Kinryu Maru*. These men were picked up just as the *Maru* also went to the bottom. Meanwhile another pass at the ships had resulted in light damage to the destroyer *Uzuki*, and Admiral Tanaka turned back for Rabaul. Many of the *SNLF* men had been lost, and his force was badly shaken and disordered:

> My worst fear for this operation had come to be realized. Without the main combat unit, the Yokosuka 5th Special Naval Landing Force, it was clear that the remaining auxiliary unit of about 300 men would be of no use even if it did reach Guadalcanal without further mishap.[23]

Thus had the 1st Marine Division gained some valuable time to prepare for the next Japanese attempt to dislodge its Lunga defense. With air support on Henderson Field and with a tenuous supply route established to the New Hebrides, the division's grip on Guadalcanal was much improved at month's end. But it still was a long way from being completely secure, especially now that Ichiki's act of *harakiri* had pointed up for the Japanese the impropriety of trying to dislodge the landing force with only 900 or 1,000 men.

[21] *Tanaka Article*, I, 693.

[22] *Marine Air History* 81. See also *Tanaka Article*, I, 694; *Struggle for Guadalcanal*, 105.

[23] *Tanaka Article*, I, 694.

The Battle of the Ridge

General Vandegrift and his staff were aware that the defeat of the *Ichiki Force* left the division's position on the island only temporarily improved. Obviously the Japanese could be expected to mount larger and better planned attacks against the small Marine perimeter; air and naval activity at Guadalcanal indicated no waning enemy interest in the South Solomons area. A noon-hour visit from Rabaul bombers was an almost daily occurrence, and enemy warships and submarines entered Sealark Channel nearly every night to shell Henderson Field.

Although the Battle of the Eastern Solomons gave Allied shipping from Espiritu Santo an opportunity to increase the flow of supplies to the beleaguered Marines, the Lunga defenders still operated on a hand-to-mouth basis.

The Cactus Air Force performed beyond all proportion to its facilities and equipment, and the 3d Defense Battalion finally was able late in August to bring in the 5-inch guns of its two seacoast batteries; but there were not enough Marines on the island to enlarge the perimeter for an adequate defense. General Vandegrift believed that positions along 45 miles of Guadalcanal's north coast would have to be held before the Japanese could be restrained from landing and attacking Henderson Field and before air defenses would have sufficient room for deployment. The general did not have that kind of manpower.

Since Major John Smith and Lieutenant Colonel Mangrum arrived with their F4F's and SBD's on 20 August, the airfield had taken on a more proficient and permanent look. By the end of August a daily routine of scheduled patrol flights had been initiated. Four-plane fighter patrols flew from 0545 to 0830 each morning and from 1400 to 1830 each afternoon, and mixed fighter-bomber squadrons frequently made night searches for enemy shipping to the northwest. Cactus aviators flew cover for the Allied shipping to the island, and went up on intercept during the Japanese raids.

The U. S. fighters did well against the enemy bombers, but their only chance against the highly maneuverable Zero was to pair up in mutual support. In this way they could protect themselves when the Zeros came down to drive them away from the bombers. They found that the Grumman did have certain advantages over the Zero, however. It had great fire power, and it could stay in the air with more holes in it than the more flimsy Japanese fighter could endure. During the first ten days of Cactus operations, U. S. fliers shot down 56 Japanese planes at a cost of 11 of their own craft.

Marine engineers rigged a system of lights from captured Japanese equipment to outline the field for emergency night landings, and, when dump trucks and pneumatic tampers came in later, workers could fill a 500-kilogram-bomb crater in 30

minutes. Dump trucks were kept loaded with gravel and sand, and "flying squads" of engineers rushed out to repair any damage immediately after the departure of Japanese bombers.

But not even counting enemy action, Henderson personnel still had plenty of problems. An early method of fueling employed drums strung up in the rafters of partially built Japanese hangars, and even when gasoline trucks arrived later the fuel had to be hand pumped from drums to the trucks. There was no steel matting, and the field was completely at the mercy of the whimsical tropical weather:

> Henderson Field was a bowl of black dust which fouled airplane engines or it was a quagmire of black mud which made the take-off resemble nothing more than a fly trying to rise from a runway of molasses.[1]

When engineers and Seabees had no bomb craters to patch, they still had to fix up the field in the wake of the early SBD's which had hard-rubber tail wheels designed for landing on the sturdy decks of carriers. On the Henderson earth these wheels ". . . chewed up the runway like a plowshare."[2] The sorry condition of the field added serious operational losses to the troubles of the small Cactus force which was nearly always outnumbered in the air. Occasionally a plane was gripped so persistently by the mud that it failed to take off and crashed at the end of the runway; ruts and the beginnings of potholes were hazards on dry days, and on one foggy wet afternoon in early September a landing F4F crashed into a bulldozer.

But in spite of everything the installation grew and slowly improved, and this was a period when American fighting men were thankful for small favors. On 20 August the transport *William Ward Burrows* came up from the New Hebrides with the forward echelon of MAG–23. All the men and some of the gear were put ashore, but then the ship scurried across Sealark Channel for Tulagi when the word came in that a Japanese cruiser force was expected that night. Near Tulagi the transport went aground and much of the equipment still on board had to be jettisoned to float her free.

Next day Colonel William J. Wallace, group commander, came up to Henderson with more planes: 19 F4F's of Major Robert E. Galer's VMF–224, and 12 SBD–3's of VMSB–231 commanded by Major Leo R. Smith. That brought the Cactus strength to 86 pilots and 64 planes, 10 of them Navy and three Army.

On 1 September the ground crews got more help. Five officers and 387 men of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees) landed with two bulldozers. They would ". . . help make an airfield out of Henderson and . . . clear a short grassy strip a mile to the east called Fighter 1."[3] But next day came one of the infamous Henderson disasters that always loomed as a threat to much of the backbreaking effort that had gone before.

With the frequent raids, fire was always a dangerous possibility, and a field fire brigade had been organized around two Japanese trucks which had been repaired by the 1st Marines. They got their baptism on 2 September when a bomb from a heavy Japanese raid hit an armed SBD parked at the edge of a coconut grove where ammunition was stored. The bomb could not be removed from the burning

[1] *Marine Air History*, 82.
[2] *Ibid.*, 83.
[3] *Ibid.*, 84.

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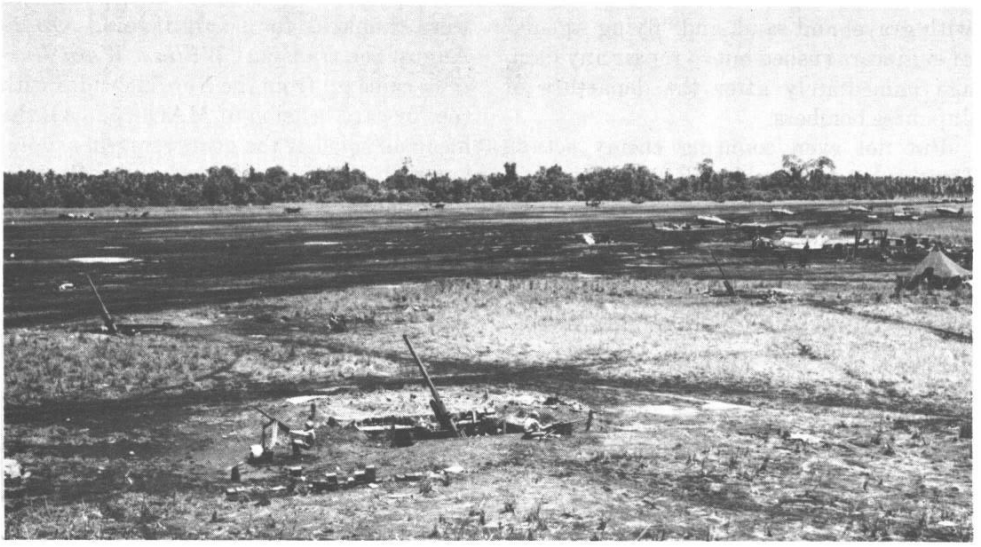


90MM ANTIAIRCRAFT GUNS *of the 3d Defense Battalion point skyward at Henderson Field on alert against the attacks of Japanese bombers. (USMC 61608)*

105MM HOWITZER *of the 11th Marines nestles beneath the slope of a protecting ridge on Guadalcanal ready to go into action against the Japanese. (USMC 51832)*

SBD, and when it exploded it spewed flaming gasoline in all directions. One 90mm shell dump was ignited, and the fire brigade could not do its best work with all the explosions that resulted. Several of the fire-fighters were injured, and the trucks seemed to be making little headway since they had to take turns dashing off to the Lunga River, the closest supply of water. If the fire expanded much more it would set off a chain reaction and all the ammunition in the area would be lost.

Had not the situation been so grim, some old hands might have been reminded of the Chinese fire drill of ancient Marine legend. The blaze was eventually brought under control, however, and the loss was serious but not critical. After this, large water tanks from coconut plantations were spotted around the ammunition dumps; but this fire proved to be the most serious of the campaign. Subsequent losses occurred in division dumps as a result of naval shelling at night. These losses were negligible since the ammunition by that time had been buried.

This bombing raid had arrived at 1135, and while the fire department below worked to save the ammunition dumps, Cactus fliers were up among the bombers. They shot down three of the twin-engined craft and four Zeroes without a single loss of their own.

On 3 September the command echelon of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing arrived. This group included Brigadier General Roy S. Geiger, commanding general of the wing; his chief of staff, Colonel Louis E. Woods; and Lieutenant Colonel John C. Munn, wing intelligence officer. Using the MAG-23 staff as his wing staff, Geiger established his command post near that of General Vandegrift. Liaison in the form of daily conferences between the two generals was established, and Kenneth H. Weir, now a lieutenant colonel, at last had a well-organized air headquarters with which to deal as division air officer.[4]

Fueling and arming of the planes continued in a make-shift manner for some time, and as late as November bombs had to be manhandled. Radio communications likewise posed problems. Army and Navy receiving channels did not mesh, and the Army planes of the Cactus Force could not receive Navy traffic. Operations resolved this by employing the radio from a grounded Army P-400 alongside the Navy set and thereafter making simultaneous broadcasts over twin microphones. This was a big help, but communications still were far from satisfactory. Beyond 20 miles the planes could not depend on receiving the field, but the field could normally read the planes' messages from as far as 100 miles.

Since the fight against Ichiki, there had been little opportunity for close air support of ground troops, but Marines continued to plan for this sort of air-ground teamwork. Communications was the big problem here, too. At that stage of operations only visual signals were used, consisting mainly of colored panels which the ground troops had, but they left much to be desired. Planes now flew higher and faster than they had in the banana wars and maneuvers, and this made it more difficult for pilots to read the panel messages, even if they could catch a glimpse of the colored markings. And more often than not in Guadalcanal's thick jungle and tall grass, they could not even see them. Guadalcanal Marines had heard about colored smoke grenades which were being tested back in the States, and they thought these

[4] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Weir's first look at the field had come on 8 August when he and the division engineer officer had estimated how much work they would have to add to the early Japanese efforts to make the strip usable.

might be helpful for air-ground signals. But what they really had their eyes out for were some radio sets. That seemed to be the only promising solution for air-ground coordination. Radios initially available to the division would not serve the purpose, and it would not be until October that Vandegrift could detail an officer and suitable radio equipment and personnel to train as "air forward observers" from each infantry regiment and thereby pioneer in what later became an important phase of Marine combat operations.

While Geiger built up his air arm, Vandegrift likewise added strength to the Lunga perimeter. With Tulagi quiet, he brought some of General Rupertus' troops across the channel to Guadalcanal. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines made the move on 21 August, and the 1st Raider Battalion and the 1st Parachute Battalion crossed to the Guadalcanal side on 31 August. In early September, when a detachment of the 5th Defense Battalion came ashore at Tulagi, a 90mm battery of the 3d Defense Battalion joined its parent organization in the Henderson Field area.

From all indications these additional troops would be needed. Aerial observation and native scouts piled up reports of Japanese landings on both sides of the perimeter, and staff officers estimated a build-up of some 200 or 300 well-equipped enemy troops near the village of Tasimboko some 18 miles east of Lunga Point. Native scouts placed the enemy strength much higher, but Marines suspected such counts to be exaggerated.

Patrolling continued in all sectors, and on 27 August the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines under Lieutenant Colonel William E. Maxwell met a strong body of troops near the village of Kokumbona, west of the perimeter. The battalion had made an amphibious landing without incident at about 0730, but later ran into the Japanese force dug into positions throughout a narrow coastal gorge. Maxwell was beyond artillery range of the perimeter, and although the 2d and 5th Battalions of the 11th Marines fired diversionary missions east of him in Matanikau village, the Japanese facing the infantry Marines seemed inclined for once to make a strong stand rather than to slink off into the brush as they had frequently done in other such engagements.

Faulty communications and other difficulties bogged the Marine attack, and Lieutenant Colonel Maxwell withdrew his force to comply with a portion of his patrol order which required him to return to the perimeter by nightfall. But the regimental commander, Colonel Hunt, ordered the battalion back into the fight, relieved Maxwell of command, and soon thereafter arrived on the scene himself. Major Milton V. O'Connell succeeded to command of the battalion, but the attack was not resumed until the predawn hours of the following morning. A few Japanese were killed, but most of them had withdrawn. The Marines retired to Matanikau village and later returned by water to the perimeter.

On 2 September two companies of the raider battalion patrolled Savo Island but found no enemy. Following this the raiders and parachutists, consolidated into a provisional battalion, moved into defensive positions on the south rim of the perimeter, inland from the airfield. While they dug in, Colonel Edson and his staff made plans for an amphibious raid to the east where the enemy build-up was reported around the Tasimboko area.

The landing was made just east of Tasimboko before dawn on 8 September,

and the raiders[5] advanced west into the rear of the reported Japanese positions. At about 0630 planes of MAG–23 bombed and strafed the suspected strong point, and two destroyer transports, *Manley* and *McKean*, opened up on the area. At 0830 Edson made contact against light resistance, and his advance overran two artillery pieces. He still could not determine the strength of the enemy, but the force appeared to be withdrawing toward the village, and he requested that supporting dive bombers remain on station in the event that the enemy pocket could be localized for an air strike. General Vandegrift ordered ten planes to remain in continuous support and placed another squadron on call to Edson.

By 1045 the resistance had stiffened, and the raiders requested that more troops land to the west of the village and support their attack. Not wanting to weaken the perimeter, division replied that such a move was not feasible. Vandegrift suggested that the raiding force reembark and return to the perimeter if the Japanese proved too strong to handle. Edson remained, however, and 45 minutes later had overrun more artillery pieces as the battalion advanced slowly against a heavy volume of fire. The colonel estimated the enemy as about 1,000 well-armed and well-equipped troops, and the force now seemed inclined to make a stand. Portions of Edson's advance drew fire from field artillery at point-blank range.

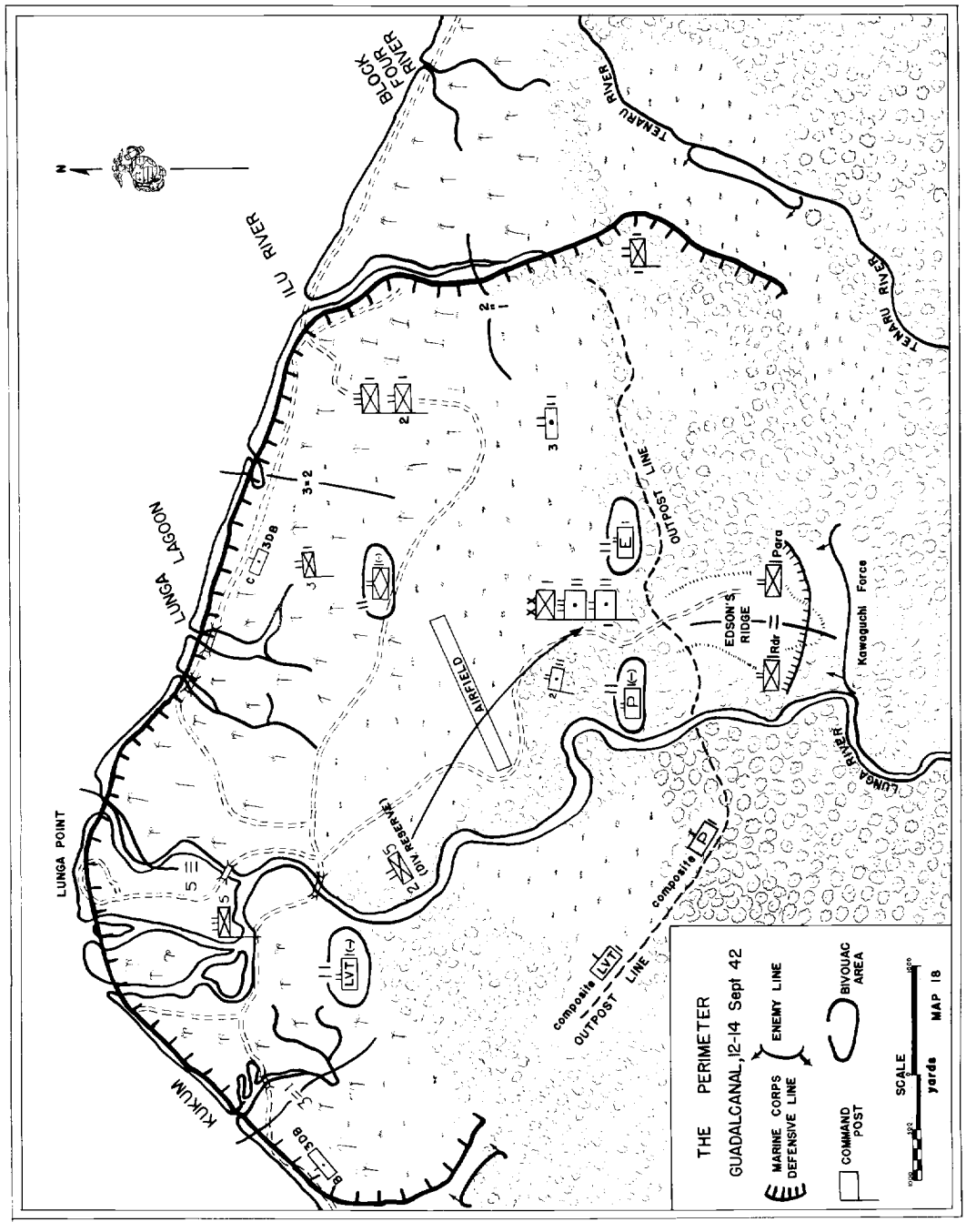
Some of the raider units had lost internal contact during the stiffening battle, but these faults were corrected at about 1100, approximately the same time that the parachute battalion reported to Edson, and the commander decided to make a coordinated attack against the firm opposition. The colonel called in a P–400 strafing attack and then followed this with an envelopment inland by his raiders while the parachutists protected his flank and rear. The assault carried the village, but again the Japanese had elected to break contact and prepare for an attack at a time and place of their own choosing.

The village was deserted, but the appearance of the abandoned encampment indicated that reports of native scouts had been most accurate. Edson estimated that some 4,000 Japanese had been in the vicinity until shortly before his attack, that his force had met only outposts and rear guards of a newly arrived unit which obviously was preparing a strong attack on Henderson Field. Twenty-seven Japanese had been killed. Marine casualties numbered two dead and six wounded.

Edson's estimate of the Japanese strength was a little low, but he was right about the enemy's intentions. Just as the 1st Marines had previously scouted elements of the *Ichiki Force* it later met at the mouth of the Ilu River, so Colonel Edson had located the gathering *Kawaguchi Force* his men would meet later in a bitter stand before the airfield.

Rabaul had kept Admiral Tanaka's reinforcement ships busy. The admiral had taken over the cruiser *Kinugasa* to replace his damaged *Jintsu*, and early on 29 August Admiral Mikawa had ordered Tanaka to begin transporting reinforcements by destroyer. The remnants of Ichiki's rear echelon would be taken down to Guadalcanal as would the *Kawaguchi Force*, due to arrive later that day from Truk on board the transport *Sado Maru*. Tanaka loaded supplies on board the ships of *De-*

[5] There was a shortage of landing craft and the parachute battalion would not leave the perimeter until shortly after 0800.


THE PERIMETER
GUADALCANAL, 12-14 Sept 42
MARINE CORPS DEFENSIVE LINE
ENEMY LINE
COMMAND POST
BIVOUAC AREA
SCALE
yards
MAP 18
LUNGA POINT
KUKUM
LUNGA LAGOON
LUNGA RIVER
TENARU RIVER
BLOCK FOUR RIVER
AIRFIELD
EDSON'S RIDGE
Kawaguchi Force
OUTPOST LINE
Composite
LVT
Rdr
Pgrs

stroyer Division 24, and put the troops of Ichiki's rear echelon on board two destroyer transports. Then he stood by for the arrival of Kawaguchi.

Kawaguchi's *35th Brigade*, a part of the *18th Division* in China, was built around Colonel Akinosuka Oka's *124th Infantry Regiment.* From China the unit had moved in December 1941 to Borneo. In March 1942 it moved to Cebu in the Philippines, in April to Mindanao, and in June to Palau. Alerted for a New Guinea operation that never came off, the force remained in the Palau Islands until late in August when it began to stage in echelons through Truk for the Rabaul area. When it arrived for this new mission it was formed up to include the rear echelon of the *2d Battalion, 28th Infantry* (*Ichiki Force*), the *124th Infantry*, the *2d Battalion, 4th Infantry*, and units of artillery, engineer, signal, and antitank troops. In that form the *Kawaguchi Force* numbered more than 6,000 men.[6]

Admiral Tanaka had his destroyers all ready when Kawaguchi arrived. The admiral met immediately with the general to hurry things along, but he ran into difficulty at once. Kawaguchi was a barge man, and he did not care much for this idea of going down to Guadalcanal in destroyers. He had once moved his unit 500 miles by barges to make a distinguished landing on Borneo. Now he wanted to know how it would be if he went on down to Gizo Harbor just north of New Georgia on board his *Sado Maru*, and then transferred to barges for the remainder of the trip and for the landing at Guadalcanal. Kawaguchi's subordinate officers nodded agreement to this idea. They were barge men, too. The impatient Tanaka referred this dispute to Mikawa of the *Eighth Fleet* and Hyakutake of the *Seventeenth Army.* These officers prevailed upon Kawaguchi to temporarily curb his warm regard for barges. He would make all of the trip on Tanaka's destroyers, and land on Guadalcanal from them, besides.[7]

For the build-up on Guadalcanal, Kawaguchi split his command. The general would land in the Tasimboko area with the Ichiki rear echelon and the *1st* and *3d Battalions, 124th Infantry Regiment.* Colonel Oka would land with the remainder of the force—the *2d Battalion, 124th Infantry*—west of Lunga Point near Kokumbona. Each of the two forces was reinforced by a share of the artillery, engineers, and other special troops. There was only one hitch in the reinforcement efforts, even if Kawaguchi might have been uneasy without a barge under him, but this bobble had no serious over-all results. Captain Yonosuke Murakami, commanding *Destroyer Squadron 24*, was to clear the way for the landings by going down The Slot on the night of 29 August to attack a U. S. task force which was reported to be off Lunga Point. Instead, Murakami came steaming back up The Slot for the comfort of the Shortlands. The night sky around Guadalcanal, he explained, was too full of a bright moon and U. S. aircraft. "He was transferred shortly to the homeland," Tanaka reported later.[8] The elements of the *Kawaguchi Force* landed during the nights of 30 and 31 August, at about midnight in both cases.

In spite of the fact that the commanders were separated by a distance of some 30 miles, Kawaguchi planned a difficult

[6] 17th Army Ops, I, cited in *Miller, Guadalcanal*, 114.

[7] *Tanaka Article*, I, 695, 697.

[8] *Ibid.*, 696.

maneuver that proposed to strike the Lunga perimeter in a three-jawed envelopment from the west, south, and southeast. It was to be a coordinated attack with air and naval support. To the normal problems inherent in such an involved plan, Kawaguchi imposed upon his force the additional task of cutting a trail over the steep jungle-covered ridges and gorges from the Tasimboko area to a point south of Henderson Field. The jungle trail, planned as a route which would enable the Japanese to escape observation, was begun about 2 September by Kawaguchi's engineers. Infantry, artillery, and other units followed the engineers along this hand-hewn jungle route toward their lines of departure for the attack against the Marines.

THE BATTLE OF THE RIDGE

Kawaguchi's fade-out into the jungle was successful. He was not spotted by Marines again until he was ready to attack, but it soon became apparent to the Lunga defenders that he would have imposing support from Rabaul. Far-ranging intelligence sources reported a Japanese naval build-up in the Truk and Palau areas and greatly increased air activity around the Bismarck Archipelago.

"The situation as I view it is very critical," Admiral Ghormley messaged Nimitz.[9] "Our transportation problem increases steadily as Japs perfect their blockade methods." Japanese pounding of Guadalcanal picked up; the defenders clearly were being softened up for a big attack, and while the South Pacific scurried to get them more planes the men at Lunga hoped that the field would stay dry for the important day.

[9] Quoted in *Marine Air History*, 88–89.

On 11 September, the pace of the attacks quickened. Twenty-six bombers and eight Zeros came over at 1210 to pock the field, kill 11 Marines, and wound 17 others, and destroy one P–400 parked beside the strip; and a heavy cruiser and two destroyers were spotted steaming south about 100 miles to the northeast. But on the same day the Cactus Air Force added to its strength. At 1620 a flight of 24 F4F's that had been idle since their carrier *Saratoga* had been torpedoed on 31 August came up to Henderson from Espiritu Santo under the command of Lieutenant Commander Leroy C. Simpler. Before noon the next day (12 September) Simpler's men got their chance to learn Cactus operations. Twenty-one of them went up with 11 "old" Cactus fliers to shoot down 12 bombers and three fighters out of a 42-plane Japanese strike that came over at 1100.

Meanwhile patrols from the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines began to encounter frequent opposition east and southeast of the perimeter. Native scouts brought word of large bodies of troops that clearly were not wandering remnants of Ichiki's action. The troops had an air of purpose and direction apparent even to the local natives who began to flee from their villages to the Marine perimeter. By 10 September native reports indicated that the enemy was less than five miles east of the perimeter and that he was cutting a road to the south.

The perimeter by this time had been improved and strengthened. The 1st Marines right (east) flank was refused for some 4,000 yards inland from the mouth of the Ilu, and on the west the 5th Marines, with a strong reserve in the form of its 2d Battalion just over from Tulagi, refused

its flank inland for approximately half that distance. The space inland between these flanks still posed a serious problem, but it had been partially solved by the establishment of well-prepared strong points and outposts. (See Map 18)

Troops from the 1st Amphibian Tractor and Pioneer Battalions maintained positions south (inland) of the 5th Marines sector west of the Lunga, while east of the Lunga a 4,000-yard outpost line was maintained by the 1st Marines, artillerymen, the engineer battalion, the bulk of the pioneer battalion, and the raider-parachute battalion. General Vandegrift had ordered the raiders and parachutists out of division reserve to augment this line by preparing positions on a long low ridge that extended south of Henderson Field and parallel to the Lunga River. The thousand-yard-long ridge was but a mile south of the airfield and, unless well defended, offered the Japanese an inviting avenue of approach to the field.

The pioneer battalion (minus its company west of the Lunga) held positions just south of Henderson Field between the Lunga and the north spur of the ridge occupied by Edson's force. Farther to the east—and across the ridge spur from the pioneers—was the area of the engineer battalion. Between the two positions was the division command post which recently had been moved from its former, bomb-pocked position near the airfield.

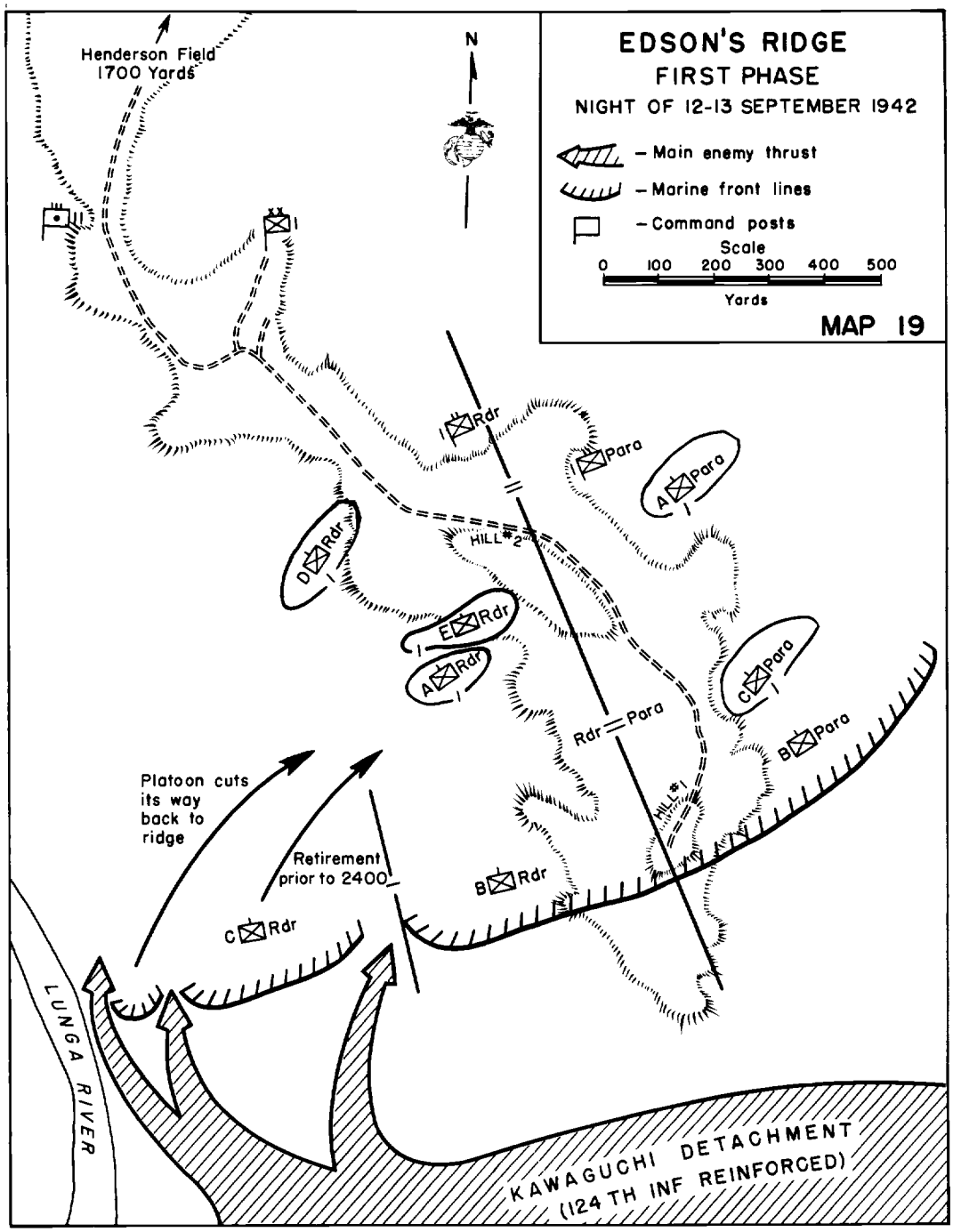
On the 12th, the same day the *Saratoga* fliers went into business with the Cactus circus, Edson and his executive officers walked out on their ridge to decide on a location for defenses. The officers drew small-arms fire from the jungles to the south, and Edson called up his troops to dig in across the southernmost knoll on the ridge. This was forward of the flanks of engineers on his left (east) and the pioneers on his right, but Edson wanted to hold all the ground he could and to launch an attack against the enemy the next day.

At about 2100 that night a Japanese light cruiser and three destroyers entered Sealark Channel to shell the airfield, and at about the same time the enemy ground force probed lightly at the raider-parachute force on the ridge. Fighting was sporadic all along the line, and although one desultory Japanese attack actually made a slight penetration of the Marine line, the enemy made no attempt to consolidate or expand this gain.

Early the next morning (the 13th) Edson launched his counteroffensive, but he found the enemy too strong and well-prepared to be thrown back. In the afternoon the Marine officer withdrew his exhausted men north of the positions they had held the previous night and established a stronger line on a higher portion of the ridge closer to the engineers and pioneers to his left and right rear. On the right, in the jungle between the ridge and the Lunga, a sketchy contact was made with the pioneer battalion; on the left (east) the raider-parachute flank dangled open. (See Map 19)

While Edson's force sweated under the hot sun on the grassy ridge, Henderson Field was having more than its share of action. The Japanese raids started at 0950, came back at 1300 and again at 1730. The mixed Guadalcanal force shot down 11 of the enemy planes during the day while losing five of their own number. But again the U. S. air strength grew.

Navy pilots from the *Hornet* and *Wasp* brought in 18 F4F's, and in the afternoon more *Saratoga* fliers and planes came up


EDSON'S RIDGE
FIRST PHASE
NIGHT OF 12-13 SEPTEMBER 1942
– Main enemy thrust
– Marine front lines
– Command posts
Scale
0 100 200 300 400 500
Yards
MAP 19
N
Henderson Field
1700 Yards
HILL #2
HILL #1
Rdr
Para
Rdr = Para
Platoon cuts its way back to ridge
Retirement prior to 2400
LUNGA RIVER
KAWAGUCHI DETACHMENT
(124 TH INF REINFORCED)

from Espiritu Santo. Nimitz and Ghormley were doing all they could to bolster the Solomons toe hold against the Japanese attack that was coming. Later in the day Lieutenant Commander Louis J. Kirn brought in a flight of 12 SBD's of VS–3 and the field also got its first torpedo planes when Lieutenant Harold H. Larsen, USN, flew in leading six TBF's of VT–8.[10] But while the Henderson flying force gained by 60 planes during the period of 11–13 September, Rabaul's air power jumped an additional 140 planes on 12 September alone.

Taking periodic cover from sniping and bombing raids, Edson's men continued to dig in for one more night on the ridge; on the morning of the 14th they were to be relieved by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. But it looked as if the night would be the worst they had seen yet; scouting planes spotted seven destroyers coming down The Slot, evidently to add their bombardment to the ground attack that appeared shaping up in the jungle to the south.

During the afternoon the reserve battalion (2/5) moved to an assembly area east of the Lunga and between the airfield and Edson's Ridge, and officers of this battalion had gone forward to Edson's lines to look over the area they would control the following day. The 105mm howitzers of the 5th Battalion, 11th Marines lay in direct support of the Edson force, and elements of the special weapons battalion had an observation post on the ridge. The Guadalcanal defense was as ready as it could get.

Edson's disposition placed his two parachute companies on the exposed left flank and tied them in on the right with raider Company B which held the ridge knoll in the center of the Marine line. Company A of the raiders extended down the west slope of the ridge toward the Lunga and to the makeshift contact with the pioneers. Raider Company C, on a high knoll to the north (rear) of Company B, was Edson's reserve.

At sunset units were organized in small combat groups of about platoon strength disposed at intervals along the main line of resistance. There were open fields of fire only in the center of the position where the MLR crossed the grassy ridge, but even here the abrupt slopes and broken ground made coordination of fires difficult. In the last hours of daylight the troops improved their foxholes and the fields of fire, but the resulting positions were neither continuous nor complete.

In the first hours of darkness, Louie the Louse, or Washing-Machine Charley,[11] chugged over to drop his inconsistent scattering of bombs, and about 2100 he let go a flare that hung over the field as a registration point for the destroyer task force that now opened up from Sealark Channel.

As if in answer, a flare went up from the troops south of Edson, and without artillery preparation Kawaguchi drove a two-battalion attack against the center and right of the raider-parachute line. Com-

[10] After this day account-keeping pretty well broke down. Records defy determination of who flew from Cactus on any given day. In the press of fighting, often with "staff" officers in the air as much as anybody else, administration and office work were marked by extreme casualness.

[11] Familiar but unaffectionate names by which Guadalcanal defenders identified the nuisance raiders that droned around almost nightly. Technically, "Charlie" was a twin-engine night bomber from Rabaul, "Louie" a cruiser float plane who signalled to the bombardment ships. But the harassed Marines used the names interchangeably.

pany B's central sector on the high knoll caught most of this first assault and turned it back, but the other attack column found an opening to the west and came through to cut off and envelop Company B's right platoon. While the Japanese drove through this gap between Companies A and B, the isolated platoon fought its way back along 250 yards of the ridge to join Company C on the knoll to the north. Still engaged and nearly overpowered, Company B refused its right flank along the ridge's west slopes. (See Map 20)

Edson had been calling in fire from 5/11's howitzers since the beginning of the attack, and as the Japanese continued to hammer at his men the colonel directed the artillery closer and closer until it was falling within 200 yards of the Company B lines. But still the Japanese came on, and by 2200 Edson estimated that the two understrength parachute companies and Company B (less the withdrawn platoon) were opposed by at least two enemy battalions attacking in full force.

Japanese infiltration parties were taking over some of the Company B foxholes, communication lines were cut throughout the area, and the Japanese now began to drum the ridge with heavy mortar fire. Following a violent barrage at 2230, the Japanese attack shifted to the east where it struck the thin flank held by the parachute troops. Screaming in English, "Gas attack! Gas attack!", the Japanese came out of the jungle through a smoke screen and drove the parachutists back along the ridge to expose the left flank of Company B.

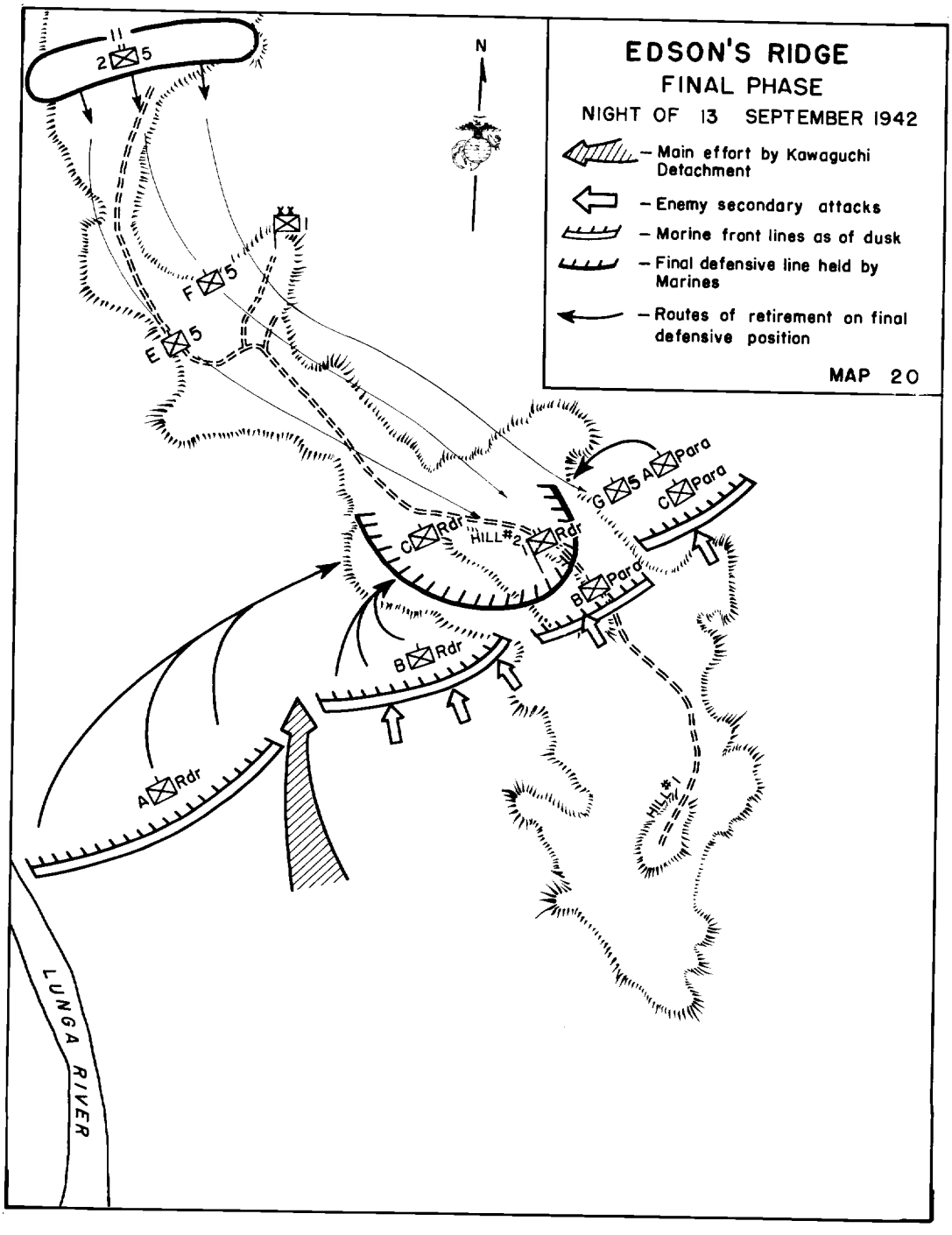
This left the B Company raiders, now cut to approximately 60 men, exposed on both flanks as well as their front, and Edson called for them to pull back to a last-ditch stand with Company C. Company A would join the force there, and Edson ordered his men to hold at all costs. It was the last dominating terrain feature south of the airfield.

Screening the withdrawal of the two companies with artillery fire, Edson collected his men as they filtered back and built them up in what he hoped would be a line strong enough to make the final stand. The colonel and his officers ironed out the confusion of setting in the new defense in darkness and under fire while holding off repeated Japanese assaults. In all, the enemy struck more than a dozen times throughout the night, the Kawaguchi men grinding themselves into the fire from Marine artillery, mortars, machine guns, and rifles in vain attempts to dislodge Edson from his final knoll of Bloody Ridge.[12] Japanese flares "telegraphed" each attack, providing the 11th Marines gunners with reference points for their all-night firing in which they expended 1,992 rounds of 105mm projectiles, some at ranges as short at 1,600 yards.

At 0400, with the Japanese attacks still in progress, companies of reserve battalion 2/5 began to move singly through the darkness and into positions on the raider-parachute left flank. Darkness and uncertainty about Edson's new location brought confusion to this reinforcement effort, but the companies succeeded in gaining positions from which they aided in standing off the final Japanese attacks.

While the action on the ridge was in progress, another Japanese unit (possibly the Ichiki rear echelon) struck farther to the east where the right flank of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines lay exposed near the Ilu River inland. Striking with a

[12] The name, used interchangeably with "Edson's Ridge," was employed after the battle, to identify this terrain feature.


EDSON'S RIDGE
FINAL PHASE
NIGHT OF 13 SEPTEMBER 1942
– Main effort by Kawaguchi Detachment
– Enemy secondary attacks
– Marine front lines as of dusk
– Final defensive line held by Marines
– Routes of retirement on final defensive position
MAP 20
N
11
2 5
F 5
E 5
1
G 5
A Para
C Para
C Rdr
HILL #2
Rdr
B Para
B Rdr
A Rdr
HILL #1
LUNGA RIVER

force of about two reinforced companies, the Japanese engaged the Marines in a night-long fire fight but failed to penetrate the line.

In another, lesser action of the night a patrol of some 30 Japanese, evidently from the force that penetrated Edson, wandered into a thin line of Company C, 1st Engineers in the area east of the division CP and near 5/11's Headquarters and Service Battery south of the airfield. The line had been thinned earlier in the night when Company A of the engineers had been called back to aid the CP defense, and the Japanese patrol which struck at 0530 succeeded in taking two left flank machine-gun positions before headquarters and service artillerymen came up to bolster the line and help evacuate wounded. The Japanese heckled the line for the short time remaining until daylight, then retired into the jungle. Four engineers were killed and 14 were wounded. Ten Japanese bodies were buried in the area.

Also by daylight (14 September) the attacks on Edson's Ridge and the 3/1 line had dwindled to sporadic sniping, and in the Edson Ridge sector the disorganized Japanese were bombed and strafed into retreat by three P–400's from Henderson Field. Survivors remaining near the ridge were hunted down and killed.

After this the only enemy still in action was a force of about battalion strength which fired across the Ilu plain some distance east of Bloody Ridge and harassed the Marines of 3/1 (Lieutenant Colonel William N. McKelvy, Jr.) who held that portion of the Marine line. Tanks were called up against this enemy force, and after a hasty reconnaissance six of these vehicles moved forward without infantry support toward the Japanese line in the fringe of jungle by the Tenaru. Two tanks were hit almost at once by a Japanese antitank gun. Another tank charged across the plain and over a grass hut only to plunge down a 30-foot bank into the Tenaru; all four crew members were killed. A fourth tank was hit by this antitank gun shortly after this, the fifth tank returned to the infantry lines, and the sixth tank was stopped by a wrecked track 50 yards in front of the Japanese gun. The men in this tank bailed out and returned to the infantry position. The tank attack had to be chalked off as a costly failure, but the Japanese caused little trouble in the area after this. A desultory fire fight continued across the plain until 16 September when the enemy withdrew.

Tactically the entire *Kawaguchi Force* could be scratched. About 400 of the Ichiki rear echelon subsequently reached Koli Point as did some troops of the *2d Battalion, 4th Infantry*, but these were hardly more than stragglers. The remainder of the force—the larger element which had struck Edson's Ridge—reduced itself to a rabble while cutting a tortuous jungle trail over the southern slopes of Mount Austen, across the up-country Matanikau territory, and finally to Kokumbona. Wounded died along the route and equipment was abandoned by the weakened, exhausted survivors.

The Marines had turned back a serious threat to their precarious Guadalcanal position, but again a part of the thanks could go to Japanese bungling—on the battlefield as well as in planning at higher echelons. Although Kawaguchi salvaged enough pride to spare himself the *harakiri* fate of Colonel Ichiki, he still was only a slightly stronger boy whom Tokyo and Rabaul hopefully had sent away on a man's job.

RAIDERS' RIDGE *looks calm in this after-action shot, but it was the scene of a violent and bloody fight crucial to the defense of the perimeter. (USMC 50007)*

MARINES OF THE 2D RAIDER BATTALION *land at Aola Bay, starting point of their month-long operations behind the enemy lines east of the perimeter. (USMC 51359)*