

TOP OF THE LADDER:  
MARINE OPERATIONS IN THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS

MARINES IN  
WORLD WAR II  
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

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# Top of the Ladder: Marine Operations in the Northern Solomons

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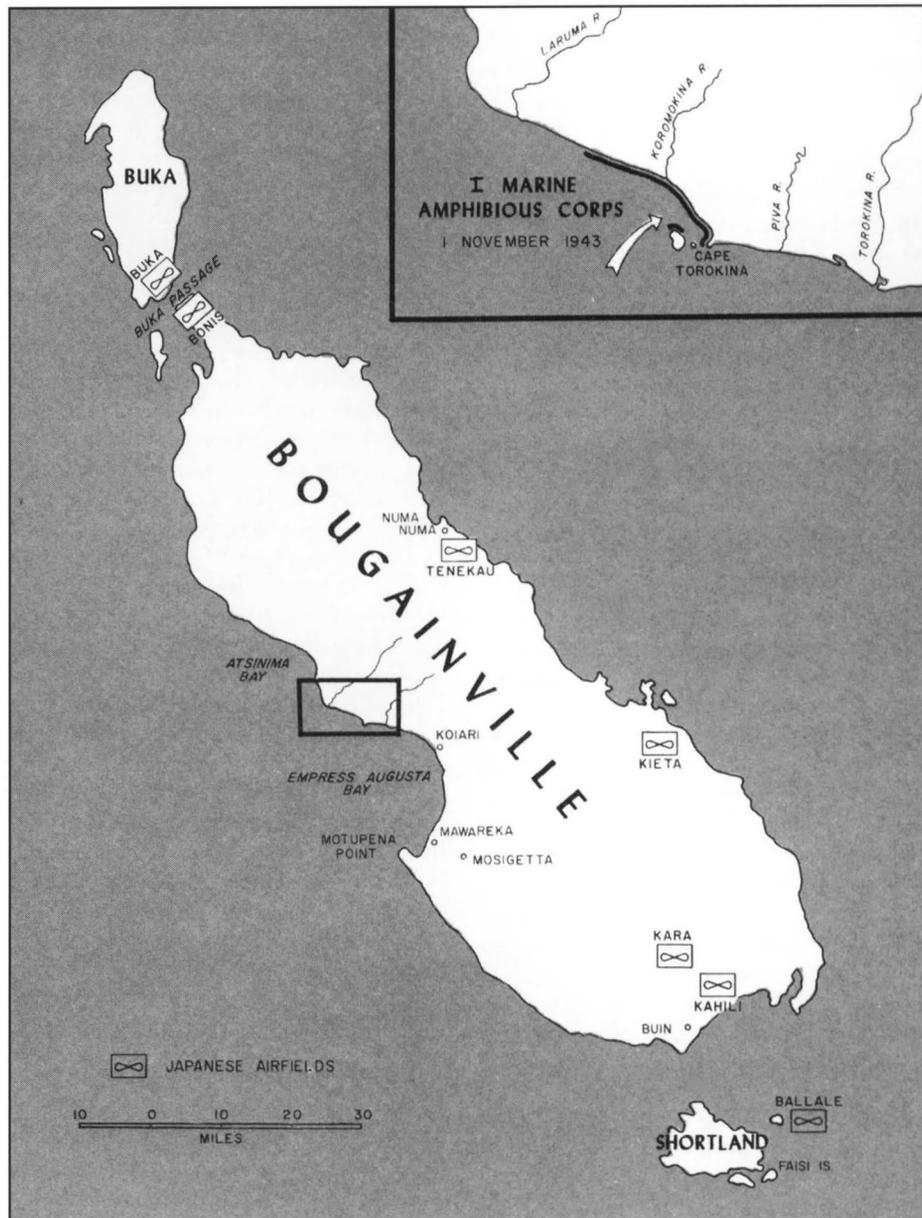
**A**ssault landings began for the men in the blackness of the early hours of the morning. On 1 November 1943, the troops of the 3d Marine Division were awakened before 0400, went to General Quarters at 0500, ate a tense breakfast, and then stood by for the decisive command, "Land the Landing Force." All around them the preinvasion bombardment thundered, as the accompanying destroyers poured their 5-inch shells into the target areas, and spotters in aircraft helped to adjust the fire.

As the sun rose on a bright, clear day, the word came at 0710 for the first LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel) to pull away from their transport ships and head for the shore, a 5,000-yard run across Empress Augusta Bay to the beaches of an island called Bougainville.

Almost 7,500 Marines were entering their LCVPs (with Coast Guard crew and coxswains) for an assault on 12 color-coded beaches. Eleven of these extended west from Cape Torokina for 8,000 yards to the Koromokina Lagoon. The 12th was on Puruata Island just offshore from the beaches.

**On the Cover:** Riflemen clad in camouflage dungarees await the lowering of their landing craft from George Clymer (APA 27) for their dash to the beaches in their amphibious assault landing on Bougainville. (National Archives Photo 80-G-55810)

**At Left:** Raiders, up to their hips in water, man a machine gun along a jungle trail. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 70764



The six beaches on the right were assigned to Colonel George W. McHenry's 3d Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Alan Shapley's 2d Raider Regiment (less one battalion). The five on the left and Puruata Island were the objectives of Colonel Edward A. Craig's 9th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Fred D. Bean's

3d Raider Battalion.

As the men headed for shore, 31 Marine torpedo and scout bombers, covered by fighters, came screaming in from their base at Munda, bombing and strafing to give the beaches a final plastering. At 0726, the first wave touched ground, four minutes ahead of the official H-Hour. As



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 62751

*Marine riflemen keep their heads down as they get closer to the assault beach on D-Day.*

the other waves came in, it was immediately apparent that there was serious trouble in two ways. A high surf was tossing the LCVPs and LCMs (Landing Craft, Medium) around, and they were landing on the wrong beaches, broaching, and smashing into each other in the big waves. By the middle of the morning, 64 LCVPs and 22 LCMs were hulks littering the beaches. Three of the designated beaches had to be abandoned as unusable.

Major Donald M. Schmuck, commanding a company in the 3d Marines, later recalled how, in the "mad confusion" of the beachhead, his company was landed in the midst of heavy gunfire in the middle of another battalion's zone on the beach of Torokina. Running his company on the double through the other battalion and the 2d Raiders' zone across inlets and swamp, Major Schmuck got his men to the right flank of his own battalion where they were to have landed originally. His surprised battalion commander,

Lieutenant Colonel Hector de Zayas, stared at the bedraggled new arrivals exclaiming, "Where have you been?" Major Schmuck pointed back to Cape Torokina and replied, "Ask the Navy!"

The other trouble came from the Japanese defenders. While the 9th Marines on the left landed

unopposed, the 3d Marines on the right met fierce opposition, a deadly crossfire of machine gun and artillery fire. One Japanese 75mm gun, sited on Cape Torokina, was sending heavy enfilade fire against the incoming landing waves. It smashed 14 boats and caused many casualties. The boat group commander's craft took a direct hit, causing the following boat waves to become disorganized and confused. Machine gun and rifle fire, with 90mm mortar bursts added, covered the shoreline. Companies landed in the wrong places. Dense underbrush, coming right down to the beaches, shrouded the defenders in their 25 bunkers and numerous rifle pits. The commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, Major Leonard M. "Spike" Mason, was wounded and had to be evacuated, but not before he shouted to his men, "Get the hell in there and fight!" Nearby, the executive officer of the 2d Raider Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph J. McCaffery, was directing an assault when he was severely wounded. He died that night.

*As seen from a beached landing craft, these Marines are under fire while wading in the last few yards to the beach.*





Department of Defense Photo (USMC)  
*Sgt Robert A. Owens was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.*

In spite of the chaos, the intensive training of the Marines took hold. Individuals and small groups moved in to assault the enemy, reducing bunker after bunker, dropping grenades down their ventilators. For an hour, the situation was in doubt.

The fierce combat led to a wry comment by one captain, Henry Applington II, comparing "steak and eggs served on white tablecloths by stewards . . . and three and a half hours and a short boat ride later . . . rolling in a ditch trying to kill another human being with a knife."

The devastating fire from the 75mm cannon on Cape Torokina was finally silenced when Sergeant Robert A. Owens, crept up to its bunker, and although wounded, charged in and killed the gun crew and the occupants of the bunker before he himself was killed. A posthumous Medal of Honor was awarded to him for this heroic action which was so crucial to the landing.

Meanwhile, on Puruata Island, just offshore of the landing beaches, the noise was intense; a well-dug-in contingent of Japanese offered stiff resistance to a reinforced company of the 3d Battalion, 2d Raiders. It was midafternoon of D plus one before the defenders in pill boxes, rifle

pits, and trees were subdued, and then some of them got away to fight another day. A two-pronged sweep and mop-up by the raiders on D plus 2 found 29 enemy dead of the 70 Japanese estimated to have been on that little island. The raiders lost five killed and 32 wounded.

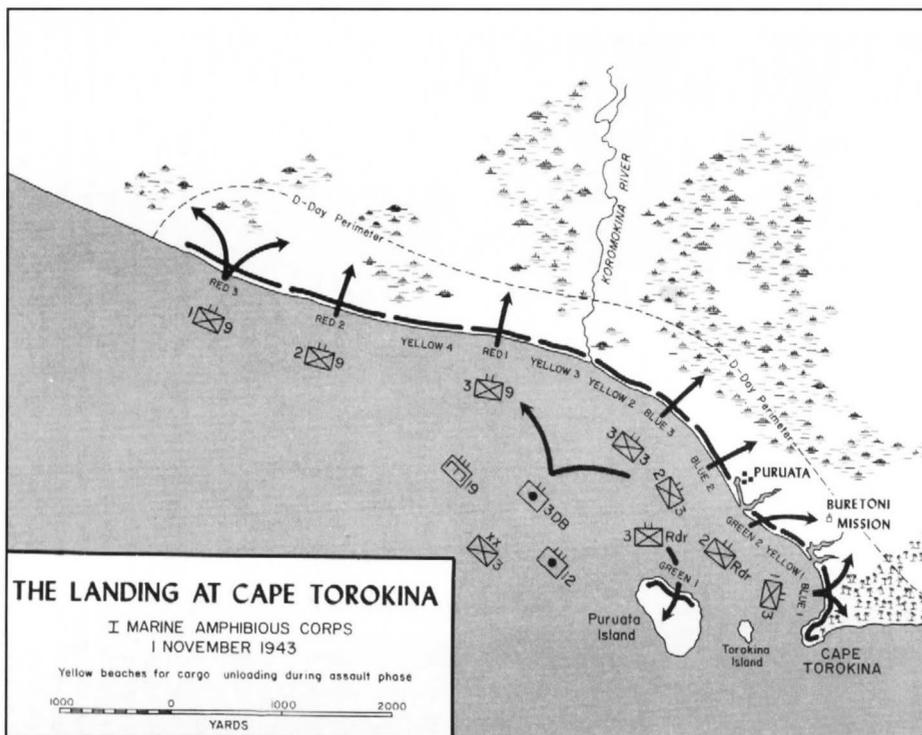
An hour after the landings on the main beaches a traditional Marine signal was flashed from shore to the command and staff still afloat, "Situation well in hand." This achievement of the riflemen came in spite of the ineffective prelanding fire of the destroyers. The men in front-line combat found that none of the 25 enemy bunkers on the right-hand beaches had been hit. Some of the naval bombardment had begun at a range of over seven miles, and the official Marine history summarized, "The gunfire plan . . . had accomplished nothing."

Unloading supplies and getting them in usable order on the chaotic beaches was a major problem. Seabees, sailors, and Marines all

*On a beach, rifles pointing toward the enemy, Marines get ready to fight their way inland.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 69782





firing positions. Amtracs (amphibian tractors), supplemented by rubber boats, were used to ferry the men and ammunition to the beaches. The 90mm anti-aircraft guns of the 3d Defense Battalion were also brought ashore early to defend against the anticipated air attacks.

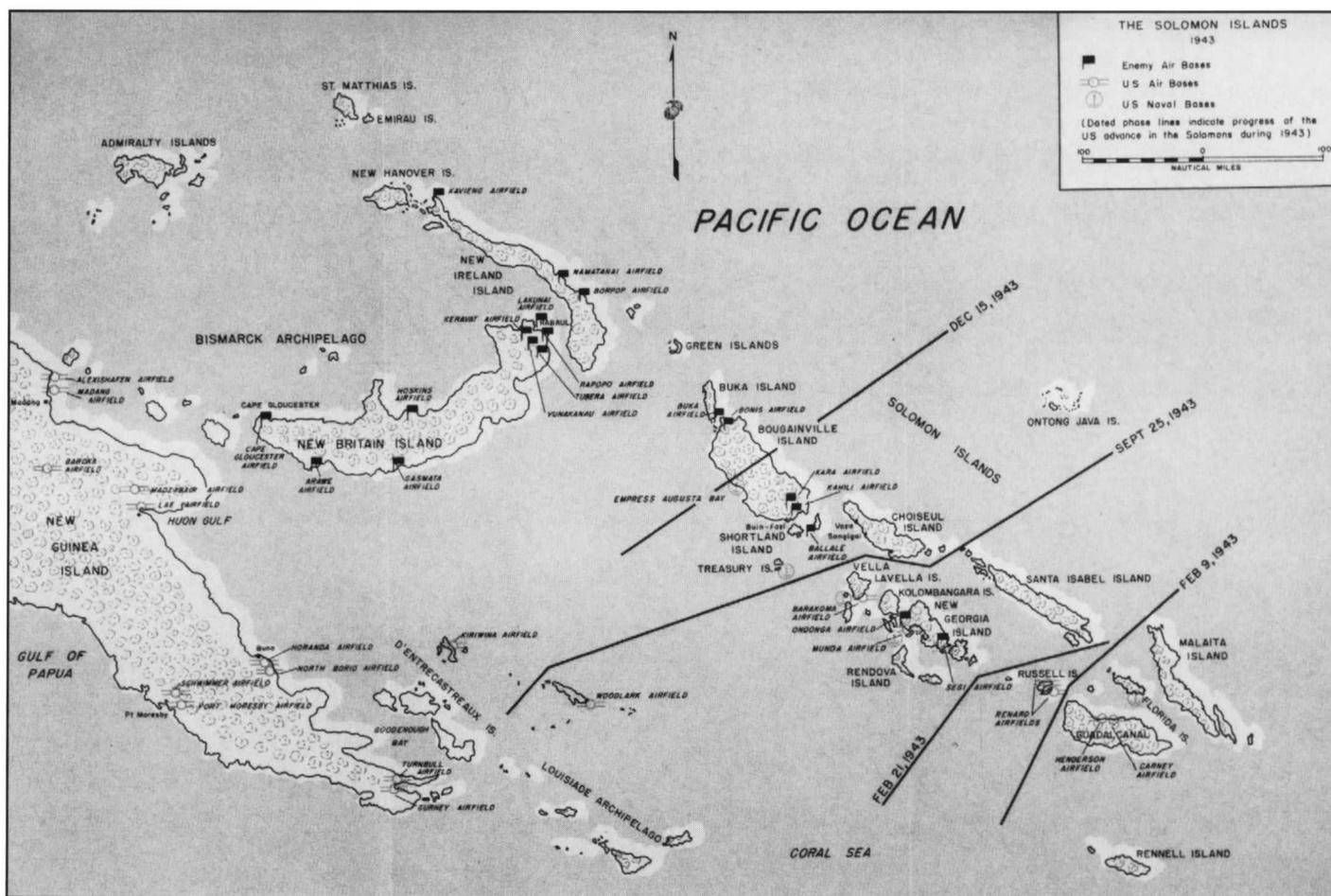
The Japanese had been quick to respond to this concentration of American ships. Before the first assault boats had hit the beach, a large flight of enemy carrier planes was on its way to attack the Marines and their supporting ships. New Zealand and Marine fighters met them in the air and the covering destroyers put up a hail of anti-aircraft fire, while the transports and cargo ships took evasive action. Successive Japanese flights were beaten off; 26 enemy planes were shot down.

The men in the rifle battalions long remembered the sight. On

turned to the task, with 40 percent of the entire landing force laboring as the shore party. They sweated 6,500 tons of supplies ashore.

Simultaneously, the batteries of

the 12th Marines were struggling to get their artillery pieces ashore and set to fire. One battery, in support of the 2d Raider Battalion, waded through a lagoon to find



# Major General Allen H. Turnage, USMC

**A**llen Hal Turnage was born in Farmville, North Carolina, on 3 January 1891. After attending Horner Military Academy and then the University of North Carolina, at age 22 he was appointed a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps. Sent to Haiti, he served with the 2d Marine Regiment from 1915 to 1918, becoming a company commander in the Haitian Gendarmerie.

A captain in 1917, Turnage did get to France where he commanded the 5th Marine Brigade Machine Gun Battalion. Home in 1919, he was assigned to the 5th Marines at Quantico and became regimental adjutant and an instructor for the first Field Officers School, 1920-22.

A major in 1927, Turnage had three years with the Pacific fleet, and then he served with the U.S. Electoral Mission in Nicaragua (1932). He came back to Washington, made lieutenant colonel in 1934 and full colonel in 1939. He was director of the Basic School at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and, in the spring of 1939, he was sent to China to head Marine forces in North China.

In summer of 1941, on the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he returned to Headquarters in Washington. In 1942, as a brigadier general, he commanded the burgeoning Marine Base and Training Center at New River, North Carolina.

When the 3d Marine Division was formed in September 1942, he was named assistant division commander. In the summer of 1943 Turnage was promoted to major general and selected to head the division. He then led the division on Bougainville and in the liberation of Guam, the first American territory to be recaptured from the enemy.

After the war, he was appointed Assistant



Commandant, followed by promotion to lieutenant general and command of FMFPac (Fleet Marine Force, Pacific). He retired 1 January 1948, and died 22 October 1971.

His awards included the Navy Cross, the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, and the Presidential Unit Citation (which his men received for both Guam and Iwo Jima).

one occasion, a Marine Corsair was about to pull the trigger on an enemy Zeke ("Zero") fighter set up perfectly in the pilot's sights when a burst of fire from Marine .50-caliber machine guns on the beach, meant for the Zeke, shot the American down. One of the riflemen later recalled that the Marine pilot fell into the ocean and surfaced with a broken leg. "We waded out to get him. He was ticked off—mostly because he missed the Jap."

In spite of all these problems, the assault battalions had, by the end of D-Day, reached their objectives

on the Initial Beachhead Line, 600 – 1,000 yards inland. One enormous unexpected obstacle, however, had now become painfully clear. Available maps were nearly useless, and a large, almost impenetrable swamp, with water three to six feet deep, lay right behind the beaches and made movement inland and lateral contact among the Marine units impossible.

The night of D-Day was typical for the ground troops. By 1800, darkness had set in and the men all knew the iron-clad rule: be in your foxhole and stay there.

Anyone moving around out there was a Japanese soldier trying to infiltrate. John A. Monks, Jr., quoted a Marine in his book, *A Ribbon and a Star*:

From seven o'clock in the evening till dawn, with only centipedes and lizards and scorpions and mosquitoes begging to get acquainted—wet, cold, exhausted, but unable to sleep—you lay there and shivered and thought and hated and prayed. But you stayed there. You didn't cough, you didn't snore, you changed your



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 61899  
*LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift was an early commander of IMAC.*

position with the least amount of noise. For it was still great to be alive.

At sea, the transports and cargo ships were withdrawn; there was intelligence that enemy naval forces were on the move.

### *Planning the Operation*

This kind of strong enemy reaction, in the air and at sea, had been expected by American staff officers who had put in long weeks planning the Bougainville operation. Looking at a map of the Solomon Islands chain, it was obvious that this largest island (130 by 30 miles) on the northwest end was a prime objective to cap the long and painful progress northward from the springboard of Guadalcanal at the south end. As Guadalcanal had been the beginning of the island chain, so now Bougainville would mark the top of the ladder in the Northern Solomons. From Bougainville airfields, American planes could neutralize the crucial Japanese base of Rabaul less than 250 miles

away on New Britain. From Bougainville, the enemy could defend his massive air-naval complex at Rabaul. "Viewed from either camp, the island was a priority possession."

There were the usual sequences of high level planning conferences, but, on 1 October 1943, Admiral William F. Halsey, Commander, South Pacific Area, notified General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, that the beaches on Empress Augusta Bay in the middle of Bougainville's west coast would be the main objective. This location was selected as the point to strike because with the main Japanese forces 25 miles away at the opposite north and south ends of the island, it would be the point of least opposition. In addition, it provided a natural defensive region once the Marines had landed and their airfields had been gouged out of the swamp and jungle. Finally, the target area would provide a site for a long-range radar installation and an advanced naval base for PT (patrol torpedo) boats.

It promised to be a campaign in a miserable location. And it was. There were centipedes three fingers wide, butterflies as big as little birds, thick and nearly impenetrable jungles, bottomless mangrove swamps, crocodile infested rivers, millions of insects, and heavy daily torrents of rain with enervating humidity.

Major General Allen H. Turnage, the 3d Marine Division commander, summarized these horrors. "Never had men in the Marine Corps had to fight and maintain themselves over such difficult terrain as was encountered on Bougainville."

To carry out this operation, Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, Commanding Gen-



Photo courtesy of Cyril J. O'Brien  
*LtGen Haruyoshi Hyakutake, commanded the Japanese forces on Bougainville.*

eral, I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC),\* had in his command for the operation:

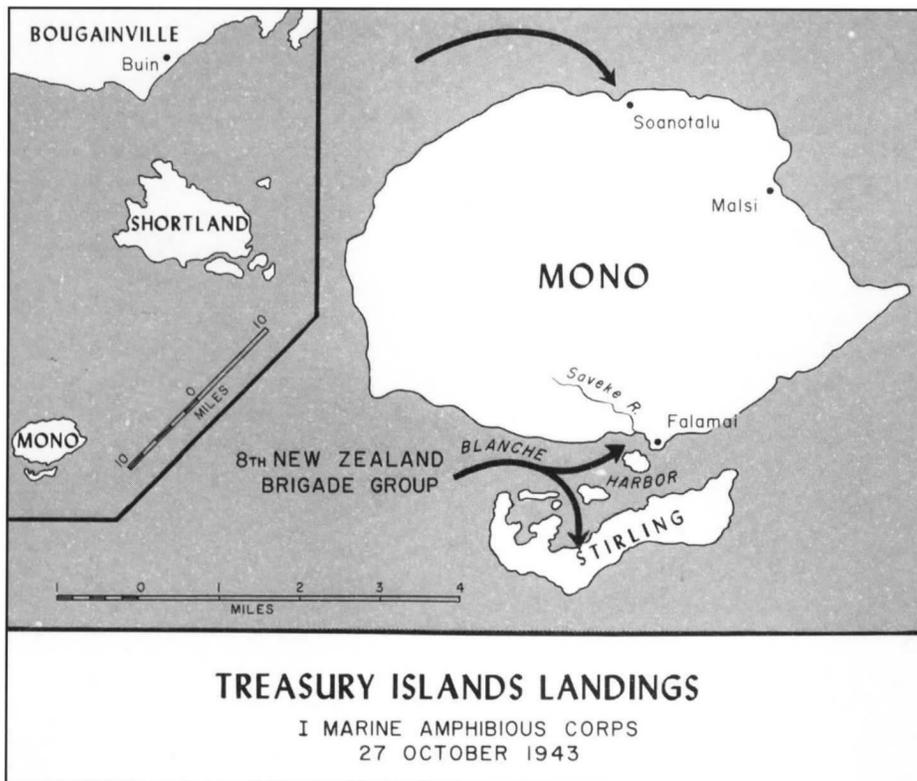
- 3d Marine Division
- 1st Marine Parachute Regiment
- 2d Marine Raider Regiment
- 37th Infantry Division, USA  
 (in reserve)

The Marine riflemen in these units were supplemented by a wide range of support: 155mm artillery; motor transport; amphibian tractor; and signal, medical, special weapons, Seabee, and tank battalions. The 3d Division had its own engineers and pioneers in the 19th Marines and artillery in the 12th Marines.

Immediately following Vandegrift's operation order, practice landing exercises were conducted in the New Hebrides and on Guadalcanal and Florida Islands.

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\* Gen Vandegrift, 1st Marine Division commander on Guadalcanal, relieved MajGen Clayton B. Vogel as IMAC commander in July 1943. He in turn was relieved as IMAC commander by MajGen Charles D. Barrett on 27 September. Gen Vandegrift was on his way home to Washington to become 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps when, on the sudden death of Gen Barrett on 8 October, he was recalled to the Pacific to resume command of IMAC and lead it in the Bougainville operation. He, in turn, was relieved by MajGen Roy S. Geiger on 9 November.



The objectives assigned on Bougainville were to seize a substantial beachhead and build airstrips. Then American planes could assure final neutralization of the Japanese airfields at Kahili, Buka, and Bonis airfields at the north and south ends of Bougainville. (By 31 October, American planes had initially rendered the Japanese fields inoperable.) After that would come a massive increase in air operations against Rabaul.

Facing the invading Marines was a formidable enemy force dispersed on the island. At Buin, for instance, there were 21,800 Japanese. Responsible for the defense was an old adversary, Lieutenant General Haruyoshi Hyakutake, commander of the *Seventeenth Army*, and the man the Marines had defeated at Guadalcanal. His main force was the *6th Division*.

Working with the ground U. S. forces were the aviators of Air Solomons: New Zealand fighters, Army Air Force bombers, and the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings.

As early as 15 August fighter planes from VMF-214 (the famous Black Sheep squadron) had strafed the Kahili airfield at the southern end of Bougainville. Now, in October, there were repeated strikes against the Japanese planes at other Bougainville airfields.

At sea, Halsey had designated LtCol Victor H. Krulak as commander of the *Choiseul operation*.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)



Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson as commander of Task Force 31. Under him were Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman with the carriers (TF 38) and Rear Admiral Aaron S. "Tip" Merrill with the cruisers and destroyers (TF 39). Their job was to soften up the defenders before the landing and to safeguard the Marine-held beachhead.

### *Diversionsary Landings*

There was another key element in the American plan: diversion. To mislead the enemy on the real objective, Bougainville, the IMAC operations order on 15 October directed the 8th Brigade Group of the 3d New Zealand Division to land on the Treasury Islands, 75 miles southeast of Empress Augusta Bay. There, on 27 October, the New Zealanders, under Brigadier R. A. Row, with 1,900 Marine support troops, went ashore on two small islands.

One was named Mono and the other Sterling. Mono is about four miles wide, north to south, and seven miles long. It looks like a pancake. Sterling, shaped like a hook, is four miles long, narrow in places to 300 yards, but with plenty of room on its margins for airstrips.

In a drizzly overcast, the 29th NZ Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel F. L. H. Davis) and the 36th (Lieutenant Colonel K. B. McKenzie-Muirson) hit Mono at Falami Point, and the 34th (under Lieutenant Colonel R.J. Eyre) struck the beach of Sterling Island off Blanche Harbor. There was light opposition. Help for the assault troops came from LCI (landing craft, infantry) gunboats which knocked out at least one deadly Japanese 40mm twin-mount gun and a couple of enemy bunkers.

A simultaneous landing was

## 3d Marine Division

With Japan's initial conquests spread over vast reaches of the Pacific, it quickly became obvious that additional Marine divisions were sorely needed. Accordingly, a letter from the Commandant on 29 August 1942 authorized the formation of the 3d Marine Division.

There was the 3d Marines, which had been activated first on 20 December 1916 at Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Deactivated in August 1922, the regiment was again brought to life on 16 June 1942 at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and strengthened by boots from Parris Island. Its commander, Colonel Oscar R. Cauldwell, soon led it to Samoa, arriving there in September 1942. Intensive training in jungle tactics and practice landings took place there. Then, in March 1943, it received a substantial number of reinforcing units and became a full-fledged regimental combat team, beefing up its strength to 5,600. Finally, in May 1943, it sailed for New Zealand, where the 3d Marine Division would come together.

Also with World War I roots, the 9th Marines was born 20 November 1917 at Quantico, Virginia, and was sent to Cuba. From there it moved to Texas, before being deactivated at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in April 1919. Reactivated on 12 February 1942 at Camp Elliott, California, under Colonel Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., it underwent training at the new Camp Pendleton. Similarly reinforced, by 1 January 1943 it was ready as a regimental combat team with 5,500 men. Movement overseas brought it to New Zealand on 5 February 1943.

The third infantry regiment that would make up the division was the 21st Marines. It was formed from a cadre of well-trained men from the 6th Marines, who had just returned from duty in Iceland. Arriving at Camp Lejeune on 15 July 1942, the cadre was augmented by boots from Parris Island and officers from Quantico. Colonel Daniel E. Campbell assumed command and the training began. Moving to join the other

elements, the regiment arrived in New Zealand 11 March 1943.

The reinforcing of the infantry regiments to make them into self-sustaining regimental combat teams drew heavily on their two complementary regiments: the 12th Marines and the 19th Marines. The 12th Marines was a salty old unit, led by Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler in China in the 1920s. Its antecedent was a small provisional contingent sent to protect American interests in China and designated the 12th Regiment (infantry), 4 October 1927. The 12th was reactivated at Camp Elliott on 1 September 1942 for World War II as an artillery regiment under command of Colonel John B. Wilson. Concluding its training, the regiment arrived in New Zealand on 11 March 1943.

The 19th Marines was different. It was made up of Seabees, engineers, bakers, piledrivers, pioneers, paving specialists, and many old timers from the 25th Naval Construction Battalion at the U.S. Naval Advance Base, Port Hueneme, California. It, too, was formed at Camp Elliott and its birthday was 16 September 1942. This was the regiment with pontoons for bridges, power plants, photographic darkrooms, bulldozers, excavators, needles, thread, and water purification machinery. No landing force would dare take an island without them. Colonel Robert M. Montague took command of the unit in New Zealand on 11 March 1943.

The division's first commander was Major General Charles D. Barrett, a veteran of World War I. He assumed command in September 1942, but left a year later to take charge of IMAC and the planning for the Bougainville operation.

His assistant division commander had been Brigadier General Allen H. Turnage, and, upon Barrett's death, he was promoted to major general and given command of the division which he would soon lead at Bougainville.

then made on the opposite or north side of Mono Island at Soanotalu. This was perhaps the most important landing of all, for there New Zealand soldiers, American Seabees, and U.S. radar specialists would set up a big long-range radar station.

The Japanese soon reacted to the Soanotalu landing and hurled themselves against the perimeter. On one occasion, 80-90 Japanese attacked 50 New Zealanders who waited until they saw "the whites

of their eyes." They killed 40 of the Japanese and dispersed the rest.

There was unexpected machine gun fire at Sterling. One Seabee bulldozer operator attacked the machine gun with his big blade. An Army corporal, a medic, said he couldn't believe it, "The Seabee ran his dozer over and over the machine gun nest until everything was quiet . . . It all began to stink after a couple of days."

Outmanned, the Japanese drew

back to higher ground, were hunted down, and killed. Surrender was still not in their book. On 12 November, the New Zealanders could call the Treasuries their own with the radar station in operation. Japanese dead totaled 205, and the brigade took only eight prisoners. The operation had secured the seaside flank of Bougainville, and very soon on Sterling there was an airfield. It began to operate against enemy forces on Bougainville on

Christmas Day, 1943.

A second diversion, east of the Treasury Islands and 45 miles from Bougainville, took place on Choiseul Island. Sub-Lieutenant C. W. Seton, Royal Australian Navy and coastwatcher on Choiseul, said the Japanese there appeared worried. The garrison troops were shooting at their own shadows, perhaps because American and Australian patrols had been criss-crossing the 80-miles-long (20-miles-wide) island since September, scouting out the Japanese positions. There were also some 3,500 transient enemy troops on Choiseul, bivouacked and waiting to be shipped the 45 miles north to Buin on Bougainville, where there was already a major Japanese garrison force. Uncertainty about the

American threat of invasion somewhere was enough to make the Japanese, especially Vice Admiral Jinichi Kusaka, Commander, Southeast Area Fleet, at Rabaul jittery. It was he who wanted much of the Japanese *Seventeenth Army* concentrated at Buin, for, he thought, the Allies might strike there.

General Vandegrift wanted to be sure that the Japanese were focused on Buin. So, on 20 October, he called in Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams, commanding the 1st Parachute Regiment, and Lieutenant Colonel Victor H. Krulak, commanding its 2d Battalion. Get ashore on Choiseul, the general ordered, and stir up the biggest commotion possible, "Make sure they think the invasion has commenced . . ."

It was a most unusual raid, 656 men, a handful of native guides, and an Australian coastwatcher with a road map. The Navy took Krulak's reinforced battalion of parachutists to a beach site near a hamlet called Voza. That would be the CP (command post) location for the duration. The troops slipped ashore on 28 October at 0021 and soon had all their gear concealed in the bush.

By daylight, the Marines had established a base on a high jungle plateau in the Voza area. The Japanese soon spotted the intruders, sent a few fighter planes to rake the beach, but that did no harm. They did not see the four small landing craft which Krulak had brought along and hidden among some mangroves with their Navy crews on call.

## The Coastwatchers

It was on Bougainville, as well as on other islands of the Solomons chain, that the Australian coastwatchers played their most decisive role in transmitting vital advance warnings to Allied forces in the lower Solomon Islands. Japanese war planes and ships summoned in urgency to smash the beachhead at Guadalcanal had to pass over Bougainville, the big island in the middle of the route from Rabaul.

Paul Mason, short, bespectacled, soft spoken, held an aerie in the south mountains over Buin, and dark, wiry W. J. "Jack" Read watched the ship and aircraft movements of the Japanese in and around Buka in the north. One memorable Mason wireless dispatch: "Twenty-five torpedo bombers headed yours." The message cost the Japanese Imperial Navy every one of those airplanes, save one. Read reported a dozen or so Japanese transports assembling at Buka before their trip to Guadalcanal, with enough troops loaded on board to take the island back. All of the transports were lost or beached under the fierce attack of U.S. warplanes.

In 1941, as the war with Japan commenced, there were 100 coastwatchers in the Solomons. There were 10 times that number as the war ended, later including Americans. Assembled first as a tight group of island veterans in 1939 (although there had been coastwatchers after World War I) under Lieutenant Commander A. Eric Feldt, Royal Australian Navy, their job was to cover about a half million miles of land, sea, and air.

The very first moves of the Japanese on Guadalcanal

were observed by coastwatchers in the surrounding hills. The coastwatchers could count the Japanese hammer strokes, almost see the nails. When the Japanese began the airfield (later to be called Henderson Field), the report of the coastwatchers went all the way up the American Joint Chiefs of Staff and across the desk of Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet.

Later, General Alexander A. Vandegrift on Guadalcanal banked heavily on the intelligence coming in from the radios of the coastwatchers. The attacks on the Treasuries and Choiseul were based on the information provided them. On New Georgia, long before Americans decided to take it, a coastwatcher had set up a haven for downed Allied pilots. And if the Americans needed a captured Japanese officer or soldier for interrogation, the local scouts were often able to provide one.

The key to coastwatching was the tele-radio or wireless, good to 600 miles by key, 400 by voice. Cumbersome, heavy, the set took more than a dozen men to carry it—an indication of how much the Allies depended upon the local natives.

The risks were great. Death would come after torture. But Mason recalled the risk was worth it, seeing the sleek, orderly formations heading for Guadalcanal, then limping back home with gaping holes in their hulls. Mason and Read were highly decorated by both the Australians and Americans for their vital services.

Krulak then outlined two targets. Eight miles south from their CP at Voza there was a large enemy barge base near the Vagara River. The Australian said some 150 Japanese were there. The other objective was an enemy outpost in the opposite direction, 17 miles north on the Warrior River. Then Krulak took his operations officer, Major Tolson A. Smoak, 17 men, and a few natives as scouts, and headed for the barge basin. On the way, 10 unlucky Japanese were encountered unloading a barge. The Marines opened fire, killing seven of them and sinking the barge. After reconnoitering the main objective, the barge basin, the patrol returned to Voza.

The following morning, Krulak sent a patrol near the barge basin to the Vagara River for security and then to wave in his small landing craft bringing up his troops to attack. But, back at Voza, along came a flight of American planes which shot up the Marines and sank one of their vital boats. Now Krulak's attack would have to walk to the village of Sangigai by the Japanese barge basin. To soften up Sangigai, Krulak called in 26 fighters escorting 12 torpedo bombers. They dropped two tons of bombs and it looked for all the world like a real invasion.

Krulak then sent a company to attack the basin from the beach, and another company with rifles, machine guns, rockets, and mortars to get behind the barge center. It was a pincer and it worked. The Marines attacked at 1400 on 30 October. What the battle didn't destroy, the Marines blew up. The Japanese lost 72 dead; the Marines, 4 killed and 12 wounded.

All was not so well in the other direction. Major Warner T. Bigger, Krulak's executive officer, had been sent north with 87 Marines

toward the big emplacement on Choiseul Bay near the Warrior River. His mission was to destroy, first the emplacement, with Guppy Island, just off shore and fat with supplies, as his secondary target.

Bigger got to the Warrior River, but his landing craft became stuck in the shallows, so he brought them to a nearby cove, hid them in the jungle, and proceeded on foot north to Choiseul Bay. Soon his scouts said that they were lost. It was late in the day so Bigger bivouacked for the night. He sent a patrol back to the Warrior where it found a Japanese force. Slipping stealthily by them, the patrol got back to Voza. This led Krulak to call for fighter cover and PT boats to try to get up and withdraw Bigger.

But Bigger didn't know he was in trouble, and he went ahead and blasted Guppy island with mortars, because he couldn't get to the main enemy emplacement. When Bigger and his men barely got back to the Warrior River, there were no rescue boats, but there were plenty of Japanese. As the men waited tensely, the rescue

boats came at the last moment, the very last. Thankfully, the men scrambled on board under enemy fire. Then two PT boats arrived, gun blazing, and provided cover so Bigger's patrol could get back to Voza. One of the PT boats was commanded by Lieutenant John F. Kennedy, USN, later the President of the United States, who took 55 Marines on board when their escape boat sank.

Krulak had already used up all his time and luck. The Japanese were now on top of him, their commanders particularly chagrined that they had been fooled, for the big landing had already occurred at Empress Augusta Bay. Krulak had to get out; Coastwatcher Seton said there was not much time. On the night of 3 November, three LCIs rendezvoused off Voza. Krulak gave all his rations to the natives as the Marines boarded the LCIs. They could hear their mines and booby traps exploding to delay the Japanese. Within hours after the departure, a strong Japanese pincer snapped shut around the Voza encampment, but the Marines had gone, having suffered 9 killed, 15

