wounded, and 2 missing, but leaving at least 143 enemy dead on Choiseul.

Battle at Sea

A final part of the planning for the main landing on Bougainville had envisioned the certainty of a Japanese naval sortie to attack the invasion transports. It came very early on the morning of D plus 1. On the enemy side, Japanese destroyer Captain Tameichi Hara, skipper of the *Shigure*, later recalled it was cold, drizzly, and murky, with very limited visibility as his destroyer pulled out of Simpson Harbor, Rabaul. He was a part of the interception force determined to chew up the U.S. invasion troops that had just landed at Empress Augusta Bay. The *Shigure* was one of the six destroyers in the van of the assigned element of the *Southeast Area Fleet*, which included the heavy cruisers *Myoko* and *Haguro*, together with the light cruisers *Agano* and *Sendai*. At 0027, 2 November 1943, he would run abreast of U.S. Task Force 39 under Rear Admiral Merrill, who stood by to bar the enemy approach with four light cruisers and eight destroyers. Among his captains was the daring and determined Arleigh Burke on board the *Charles S. Ausburne* (DD 570) commanding DesDiv (Destroyer Division) 45.

This encounter was crucial to the Bougainville campaign. At Rabaul, Rear Admiral Matsuji Ijuin had told his sailors, "Japan will topple if Bougainville falls."

At 0250, the American ships were in action. Captain Burke (later to become Chief of Naval Operations) closed in on the nearest of the enemy force under Vice Admiral Sentaro Omori. Burke's destroyers fired 25 torpedoes, and then Merrill maneuvered his cruiser to avoid the expected "Long Lance" torpedo response of the Japanese and to put his ships in position to fire with their six-inch guns.

"I shuddered," Hara wrote later, "at the realization that they must have already released their torpedoes. The initiative was in the hands of the enemy. In an instant, I yelled two orders: 'Launch torpedoes! Hard right rudder.'" Not a single Japanese or American torpedo found its mark in the first exchange. Merrill then brought all his guns to bear. The Japanese answered in kind. The Japanese eight-inch gun salvos were either short or ahead. The Americans were luckier. One shell of their first broadside slammed amidships into the cruiser *Sendai* which carried Admiral Ijuin. There was frantic maneuvering to avoid shells, with giant warships, yards apart at times, cutting at speeds of 30 knots. Still *Sendai* managed to avoid eight American torpedoes, even with her rudder jammed. Then a Japanese torpedo caught the U.S. destroyer *Foote* (DD 511) and blew off her stern, leaving her dead in the water.

Samuel Eliot Morison in *Breaking the Bismarck Barrier*, tells how "Merrill maneuvered his cruisers so smartly and kept them at such range that no enemy torpedoes could hit." Admiral Omori showed the same skill and judgement, but he was a blind man. Only the American had radar. Hara afterwards explained, "Japan did not see the enemy, failed to size up the enemy and failed to locate it . . . The Japanese fleet was a blind man swinging a stick against a seeing opponent. The Japanese fleet had no advantage at all . . . . "

What Japan had lacked in electronic sight, however, it partially made up with its super-brilliant airplane-dropped flares and naval gunfire star shells. Commander Charles H. Pollow, USN, a former radio officer on the *Denver* (CL 58), recalled the "unblinking star shells that would let you read the fine print in the bible . . . ." The Japanese also had a range advantage in their eight-inch guns, "Sometimes we couldn't touch them . . . . " Three shells hit his *Denver* — not one detonated, but the ship was damaged. *Columbia* (CL 56) also took an eight-inch hole through her armor plate.

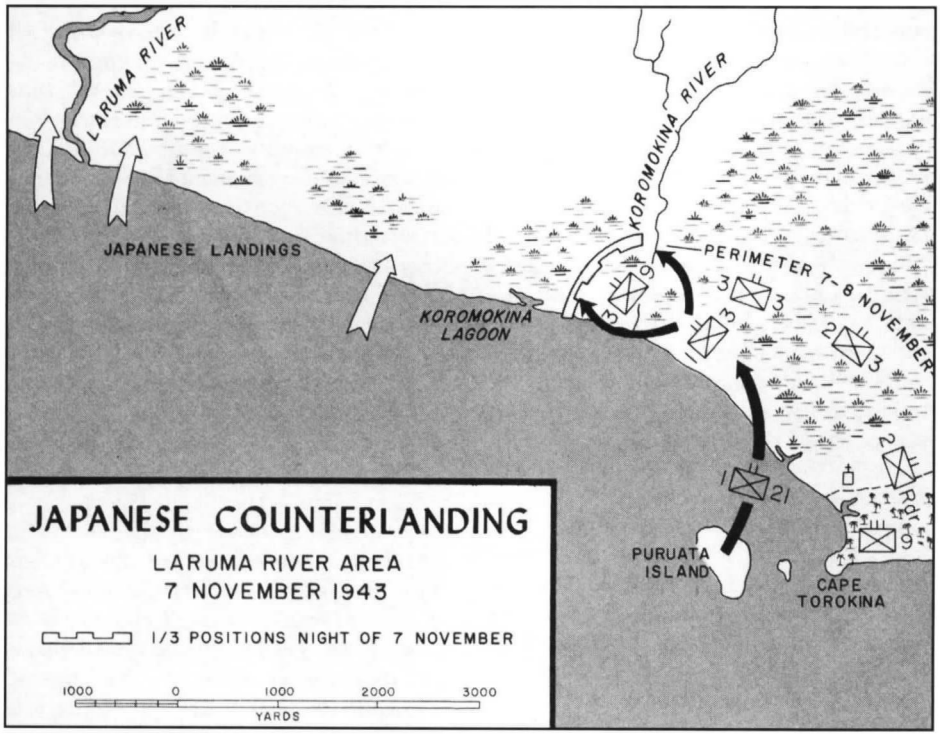
Then Merrill confused the enemy ships with smoke so dense that the Japanese believed the Americans were heading one way when they were in fact steaming in another direction. But before Admiral Omori could break away, Burke and his destroyer division of "Little Beavers" was in among them. First the *Sendai* was sent to the bottom with 335 men, then *Hatsukaze*, brushed in an accident with *Myoko*, was finished off by Burke's destroyers and sank with all hands on board—240 men. Damaged were the cruisers *Haguro*, *Myoko*, and destroyers *Shiratsuyu* and *Samidare*. But, most important, the threat to the beachhead had been stopped.

The Americans got off with severe damage to the *Foote* and light damage to the *Denver*, *Spence* (DD 512), and *Columbia*. Hara later wrote, "had they pursued us really hot[ly] . . . practically all the Japanese ships would have perished." The Americans had left the fight too soon.

And Admiral Ijuin's prediction that Japan would topple after the loss of Bougainville proved to be accurate, but not because of this loss, particularly. It was just one of the number of defeats which were to doom Japan.

Action Ashore: Koromokina

Back on Bougainville, following the landing, the days D plus 1 to D



plus 5 saw the initiation of Phase II of the operation, involving shifting of units' positions, reorganizing the shambles of supplies, incessant patrols, road building, the beginning of the construction of a fighter airstrip, and the deepening of the beachhead to 2,000 yards.

Then, at dawn on the morning of 7 November (D plus 6) , the Japanese struck. Four of their destroyers put ashore 475 men well west of the Marine perimeter, between the Laruma River and the Koromokina Lagoon. They landed in 21 craft: barges, ramped landing boats, even a motor boat, but, to their disadvantage, along too wide a front for coordinating and organizing a strike in unison and immediately. A Marine Corps combat correspondent, Sergeant Cyril J. O'Brien, saw the skinny young Japanese who scampered up the beach with 80-pound packs two-and-a-half miles from the Laruma to near the Koromokina, left flank of the Marines, to join their comrades.

They were eager enough, even to die. A little prayer often in the pockets of the dead voiced the fatalistic wish that "whether I float a corpse under the waters, or sink beneath the grasses of the mountainside, I willingly die for the Emperor."

The first few Japanese ashore near the Laruma, however, did not die. An antitank platoon with the 9th Marines did not fire because the landing craft in the mist looked so much like their own, even to the big white numbers on the prow. Near Koromokina, they seemed to be all over the beach. One outpost platoon, which included Private First Class John F. Perella, 19 years old, was cut off on the beach. Perella swam through the surf 1,000 yards to Marine lines and came with a Navy rescue boat and earned a Silver Star Medal.

Lieutenant Colonel Walter Asmuth, Jr., commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, ordered a company attack, called on mortars and the artillery of the 12th Marines. The Japanese were well equipped with the so-called knee mortars (actually grenade launchers) and Nambu machine guns and fought back fiercely. In that jungle, you could not see, hear, or smell a man five feet away. Private First Class Challis L. Still found a faint trail and settled his machine gun beside it. An ambush was easy. The lead Japanese were close enough to touch when Still opened up. He killed 30 in the column; he was a recipient of the Silver Star Medal.

Yet, the Japanese didn't give way. Ashore only hours, they had already dug strong defenses. Even a Marine double envelopment in water, sometimes up to the waist, did not work. By 1315, the weakened 9th Marines company was relieved by the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, coming in from the beachhead's right flank.

During darkness on that night of 7 November, enemy infiltrators got through to the hospital. Bullets ripped through tents as surgeons performed operations. The doctors of the 3d Medical Battalion, under Commander Robert R. Callaway, were protected by a makeshift line of cooks, bakers, and stretcher bearers. (As a memorable statistic, less than one percent died of wounds on Bougainville after having arrived at a field hospital.)

Sgt Herbert J. Thomas was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Department of Defense (USMC) 302918

37th Infantry Division

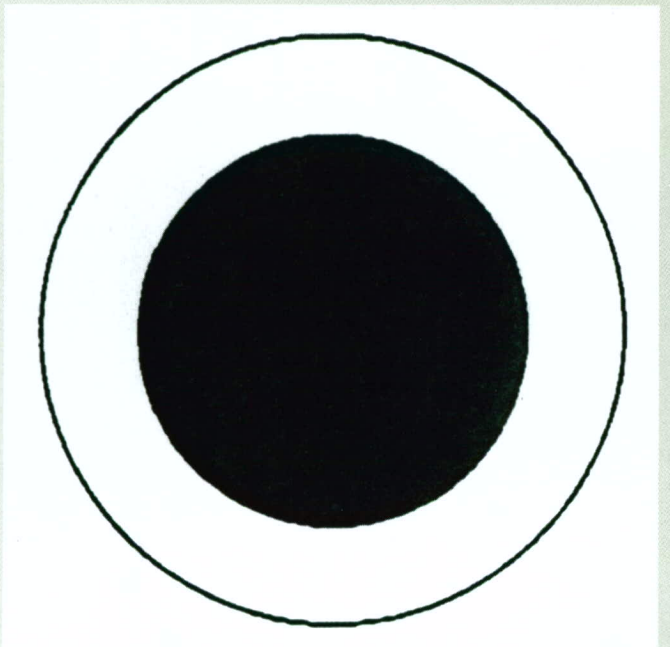
Called the "Buckeye" Division, the 37th was among the very first American troops sent to the Pacific at the beginning of the war.

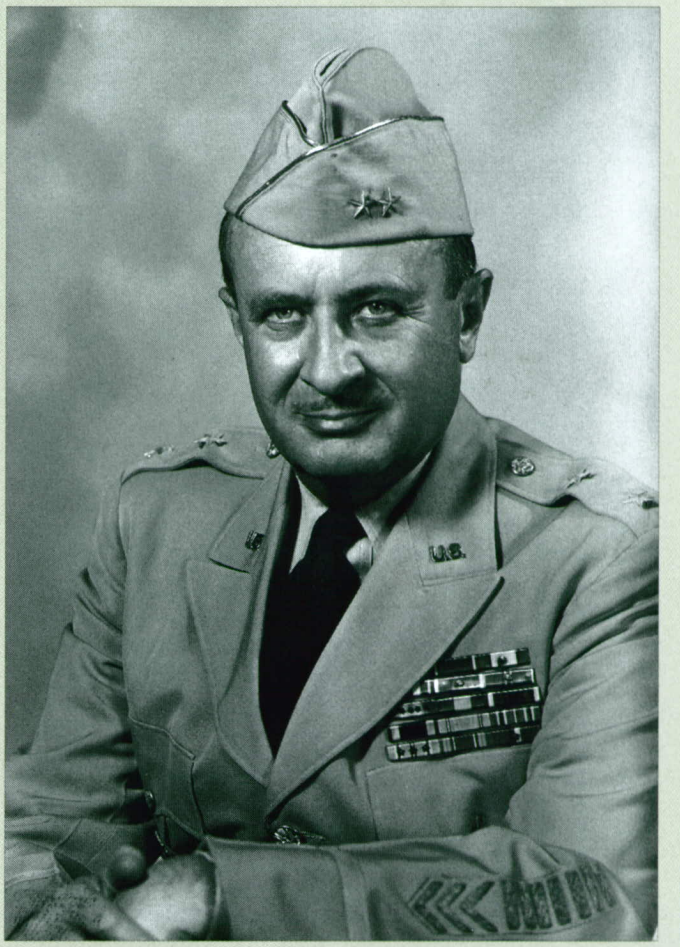
The 37th was an outfit with a long history and many battle streamers, dating from August 1917, when it was formed at Camp Sheridan, Alabama. It left for overseas in 1918, and took part in five major operations in France before returning in 1919, and facing demobilization that same year.

As an Ohio National Guard unit, the "Buckeye" Division was inducted into federal service in 1940, and by June of 1942, it was heading into the Pacific war, sent to garrison the Fiji Islands. First combat was on New Georgia, which included taking the critical Munda airfield. The 37th joined the 3d Marine Division on Bougainville, and then trained on the island for the campaign on Luzon Island in the Philippines.

Landing with the Sixth Army at Lingayen Gulf, 9 January 1945, the 37th raced inland to Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg. It entered Manila, and its commander, Major General Robert S. Beightler, accepted the surrender of General Tomoyuki Yamashita. Next came the capture of Baguio and liberation there of 1,300 internees at the Bilibid Prison. The division came home for demobilization in November 1945.

Its commander, Major General Beightler, was born 21 March 1892, and enlisted in the U.S. Army as a private in 1911. Promoted quickly to corporal, sergeant, and then first sergeant of his company, he was then commissioned as a second lieutenant in March 1914. After service on the Mexican border, he took part in five major campaigns in World War I with the famous 42d (Rainbow) Division.





Major General Robert S. Beightler, USA

A graduate of Ohio State University, Beightler finished first in his class in the Reserve Officers' Course of the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1926. After that he served as a member of the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff (1932-36).

After World War II, he assumed command of the Fifth Service Command at Fort Hayes, Ohio, and then was assigned (1947) to the Personnel Board of the Secretary of War. In 1949, he was sent to the Far East and took over the Marianas-Bonins Command on Guam. In 1950 he was named Deputy Governor of the Ryukyus Command on Okinawa.

Major General Beightler received the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest honor, for his leadership in the Philippine campaign, as well as a Distinguished Service Medal for the New Georgia operation, with an Oak Leaf Cluster as a second award for his outstanding service on Bougainville and then on Luzon in the Philippine Islands. He also wore the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Silver Star Medal, and the Purple Heart.

He died 12 February 1978.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12756

PFC Henry Gurke was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

The 1st Battalion was close to the enemy, close enough to exchange shouts. The Japanese yelled "Moline you die" . . . and the Marines made earthy references to Premier Tojo's diet. Marine Captain Gordon Warner was fluent in Japanese, so he could quickly reply to the Japanese, even yell believable orders for a bayonet charge. He received the Navy Cross for destroying machine gun nests with a helmet full of hand grenades. He lost a leg in the battle.

Sergeant Herbert J. Thomas gave his life near the Koromokina. His platoon was forced prone by machine gunfire, and Thomas threw a grenade to silence the weapon. The grenade rebounded from jungle vines and the young West Virginian smothered it with his body. He posthumously was awarded the Medal of Honor.

General Turnage saw that reinforcements were needed. The day before (6 November) the first echelon of the 21st Marines had come ashore. Now the battle command was transferred to Lieutenant Colonel Ernest W. Fry, Jr., of the 1st Battalion. With two companies, he was set for a counterattack, but not until after two intense saturations of the Japanese positions by mortars and five batteries of artillery. They slammed into a concentrated area, 300 yards wide and 600 deep, early on 8 November. Light tanks then moved in to support the attack.

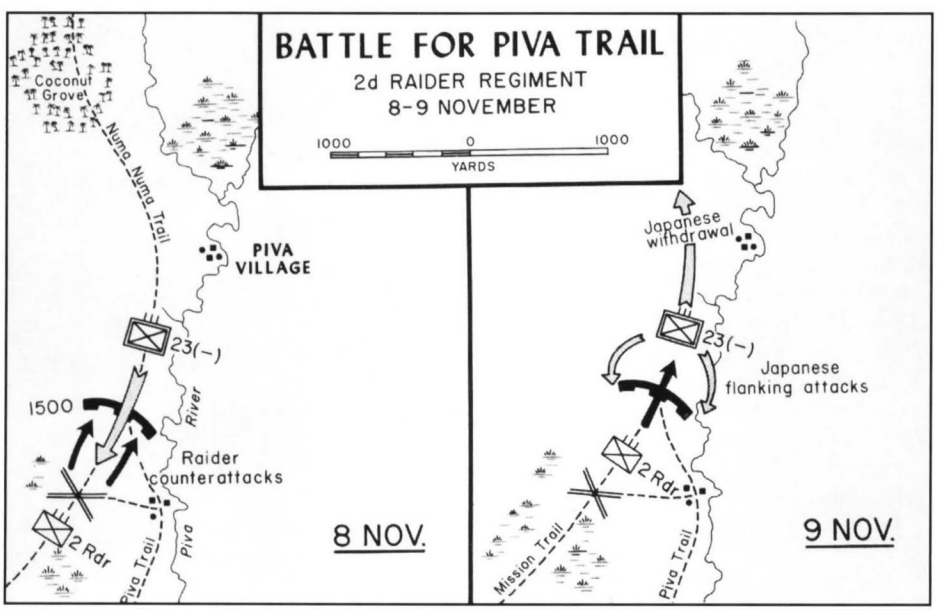
When Colonel Fry's advancing companies reached the area where the Japanese had been, there was stillness, desolation, ploughed earth, and uprooted trees. Combat correspondent Alvin Josephy wrote of men hanging in trees, "Some lay crumpled and twisted beside their shattered weapons, some covered by chunks of jagged logs and jungle earth, [by] a blasted bunker . . . . " In that no-man's land, Colonel Fry and his men walked over and around the bodies of over 250 enemy soldiers. To complete the annihilation of the Japanese landing force, Marine dive bombers from Munda bombed and strafed the survivors on 9 November.

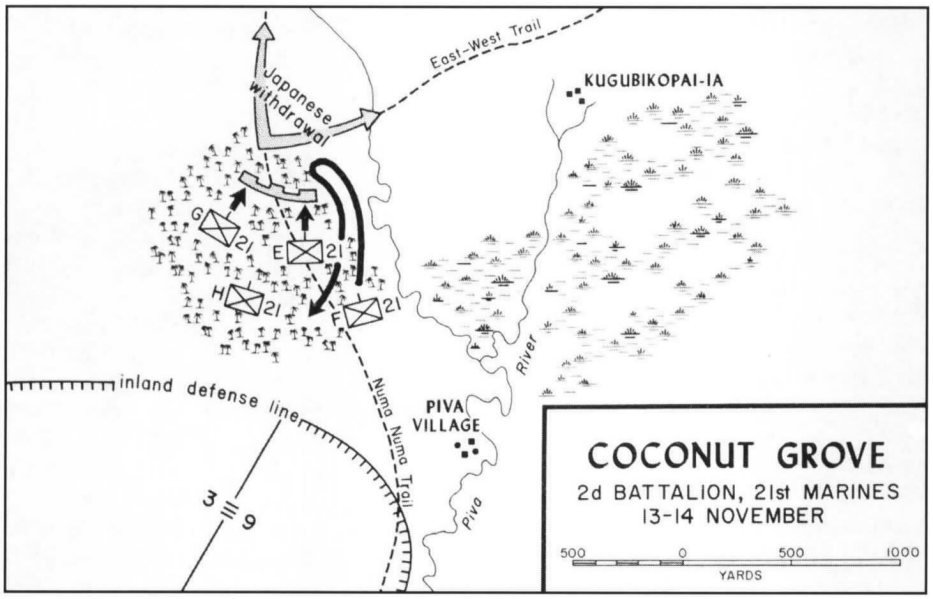
By now, the veteran 148th Infantry, the first unit of the Army's 37th Infantry Division, was coming ashore, seasoned in the Munda campaign on New Georgia. Later, to take over the left flank of the beachhead, would come its other infantry regiments, the 129th on 13 November and the 145th on 19 November. The Army's 135th, 136th, and 140th Field Artillery came ashore, too, and would be invaluable in supporting later advances on the right flank. Major General Robert S. Beightler, USA, was division commander.

The Battle for Piva Trail

Captain Conrad M. Fowler, a company commander in the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, later recalled how an attack down the trails was expected: "They had to come our way to meet us face-to-face. The trails were the only way overland through that rainforest." His company would be there to meet them. He was awarded a Silver Star Medal.

With just such a Japanese attack anticipated, General Turnage had dispatched a company of the 2d Raider Regiment up the Mission (Piva) trail on D-Day to set up a road block—just up from the old Buretoni Catholic Mission (still in operation today). At first the raiders had little business, and by 4 November elements of the 9th Marines had arrived to join them. The enemy, the *23rd Infantry* up from Buin, struck on 7 November. Their attack was timed to coincide





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 52622

MajGen Roy S. Geiger assumed command of IMAC on 9 November 1943.

with the Koromokina landings. The raiders held, but "the woods were full of Japs, dead . . . . The most we had to do was bury them."

At this point General Turnage told Colonel Edward A. Craig, commanding officer of the 9th Marines, to clear the way ahead and advance to the junction of the Piva and Numa-Numa trails. That mission Craig gave to the 2d Raider Regiment under Lieuteant Colonel Alan B. Shapley. The actual attack would be led by Lieutenant Colonel Fred D. Beans, 3d Raider Battalion, just in from Puruata Island and would include elements of the 9th Marines and weapons companies.

The Japanese didn't wait for a Marine attack; they came in on 5

Adm William F. Halsey (pith helmet) and MajGen Geiger ("fore and aft" cover) watch Army reinforcements come ashore at Bougainville.

National Archives Photo 127-N-65494

War Dogs

In an interview with Captain Wilcie O'Bannon long after the war, Captain John Monks, Jr., gained an insight into one of the least known aspects of Marine tactics. It was an added asset that the official Marine history called "invaluable": war dogs. O'Bannon, the first patrol leader to have them, related:

> One dog was a German Shepherd female, the other was a Doberman male, and they had three men with them. The third man handled the dogs all the time in the platoon area prior to our going on patrol—petting the dogs, talking to them, and being nice to them. The other two handlers—one would go to the head of the column and one would go to the rear with the female messenger dog . . . . If the dog in front received enemy fire and got away, he could either come back to me or circle to the back of the column. If I needed to send a message I would write it, give it to the handler, and he would pin it on the dog's collar. He would clap his hands and say, "Report," and the dog would be off like a gunshot to go to the third man in the rear who had handled him before the patrol.

The war dogs proved very versatile. They ran telephone wire, detected ambushes, smelled out enemy patrols, and even a few machine gun nests. The dog got GI chow, slept on nice mats and straw, and in mud-filled foxholes. First Lieutenant Clyde Henderson with one of the dog platoons recalled how the speed and intelligence of dogs was crucial in light of the abominable communications in the jungle, where sometimes communications equipment was not much better than yelling.

Under such circumstances, a German Shepherd named "Caesar" made the difference between life and death for at least one company. With all wires cut and no communication, Caesar got through repeatedly to the battalion command post and returned to the lines. One Japanese rifle wound didn't stop him, but a second had Caesar returned to the rear on a stretcher. A memorable letter from Commandant Thomas B. Holcomb described how Caesar another time had saved the life of a Marine when the dog attacked a Japanese about to throw a hand grenade. The Commandant also cited in letters four other dogs for their actions on Bougainville.

Sergeant William O. McDaniel, in the 9th Marines, remembered, "One night, one of the dogs growled and Slim Livesay, a squad leader from Montana, shot and hit a Jap right between the eyes. We found the Jap the next morning, three feet in front of the hole."

One Marine said that what Marines liked most was the security dogs gave at night and the rare chance to sleep in peace. No enemy would slip through the lines with a dog on guard.

There were 52 men and 36 dogs in the K-9 company on Bougainville.

November and threatened to overrun the trailblock. It soon became a matter of brutal small encounters, and battles raged for five days. They were many brave acts. Privates First Class Henry Gurke and Donald G. Probst, with an automatic weapon, were about to be overwhelmed. A grenade plopped in the foxhole between them. To save the critical position and his companion, Gurke thrust Probst aside and threw himself on the grenade and died. He was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously; Probst, the Silver Star Medal.

Mortars and artillery dueled from each side. The Japanese would creep right next to the Marine positions for safety. Marines had to call friendly fire almost into their laps. On the narrow trail, men often had to expose themselves. The Japanese got the worst of it, for suddenly, shortly after noon on 9 November the enemy resistance crumbled. By 1500, the junction of the Piva and Numa-Numa trails was reached and secured. Some 550 Japanese died. There were 19 Marines dead and 32 wounded.

To consolidate the hard-won position, Marine torpedo bombers from Munda blasted the sur-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 65162

A bloody encounter on 14 November at the junction of the Numa Numa and Piva Trails: Marine infantrymen had been stopped by well dug -in and camouflaged enemy troops. Five Marine tanks rushed up and attacked on a 250-yard front through the jungle.

rounding area on 10 November. This allowed two battalions of the 9th Marines to settle into good defensive positions along the Numa-Numa Trail with, as usual, "aggressive" patrols immediately fanning out. The battle for the Piva Trail had ended victoriously.

The key logistical element in this engagement–and nearly all others on Bougainville–was the amtrac. There were vast areas where tanks and half-tracks, much less trucks, simply could not negotiate the bottomless swamps, omnipresent streams, and viscous mud from the daily rains. The amtracs proved amazingly flexible; they moved men, ammunition, rations, water, barbed wire, and even radio jeeps to the front lines where they were most needed. Heading back, they evacuated the wounded to reach the desperately needed medical centers in the rear.

Other developments came at this juncture in the campaign. As noted, the 37th Infantry Division was fed into the perimeter. At the top of the command echelon Major General Roy S. Geiger relieved Vandegrift as Commanding General, IMAC, on 9 November and took charge of Marine and Army units in the campaign from an advanced command post on Bougainville.

The Seabees and Marine engineers were hard at work now. Operating dangerously 1,500 yards ahead of the front lines, guarded by a strong combat patrol, they managed to cut two 5,000–foot survey lanes east to west across the front of the perimeter.

The Coconut Grove Battle

On D plus 10, 11 November, a new operation order was issued. "Continue the attack with the 3d Marine Division on the right (east) and the 37th Infantry Division on the left (west)." An Army-Marine artillery group was assembled under IMAC control to provide massed fire, and Marine air would be on call for close support.

The first objective in the renewed push was to seize control of the critical junction of the Numa-Numa Trail and the East-West trail. On 13 November a company of the 21st Marines led off the advance at 0800. At 1100 it was ambushed by a "sizeable" enemy force concealed in a coconut palm grove near the trail junction. The Japanese had won the race to the crossroads, and the situation for the lead Marine company soon became critical. The 2d Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Eustace R. Smoak, sent up his executive officer, Major Glenn Fissell, with 12th Marines' artillery observers. They reported the situation as all bad. Then Major Fissell was killed. Disdaining flank security, Smoak moved closer to the fight and fed in reinforcing companies. (By now a lateral road across the front of the perimeter had been built.)

The next day tanks were brought up and artillery registered around the battalion. Smoak also called in 18 torpedo bombers. The reorganized riflemen lunged forward again in a renewed attack. The tanks proved an ineffective disaster, causing chaos at one point by firing on fellow Marines on their flank and running over several of their own men. Nevertheless, the Japanese positions were overrun by the end of the day, with the enemy survivors driven off into a swamp. The Marines now commanded the junction of the two vital trails. As a result, the entire beachhead was able to spring forward 1,000 to 1,500 yards, reaching Inland Defense Line D, 5,000 yards from the beach.

One important result of this advance was that the two main airstrips could now be built. The airfields would be the work of the

Photo courtesy of Cyril J. O'Brien.

"Marine Drive" constructed by the 53d Naval Construction Battalion enabled casualties to be sent to medical facilities in the rear and supplies to be brought forward easily.

Seabees. The 25th, 53d, and 71st Naval Construction Battalions ("Seabees") had landed on D-Day with the assault waves of the 3d Marine Division—to get ready at once to build roads, airfields, and camp areas. (They had a fighter strip operating at Torokina by December). Always close to Marines, the Seabees earned their merit in the eyes of the Leathernecks. Often Marines had to clear the way with fire so a Seabee could do his work. Many would recall the bold Seabee bulldozer driver covering a sputtering machine gun nest with his blade. Marines on the Piva Trail later saw another determined bulldozer operator filling in holes in the tarmac of his burgeoning bomber strip as fast as Japanese artillery could tear it up. Any Marine who returned from the dismal swamps toward the beach would retain the wonderment of the "Marine Drive." It was a two-lane asphalt highway, complete with wide shoulders and drainage ditches. It lay across jungle so dense that the tired men had had to hack their way through it only a week or so before.

Meanwhile, back on the beach, the U.S. Navy had been busy pouring in supplies and men. By D plus 12 it had landed more than 23,000 cargo tons and nearly 34,000 men. Marine fighters overhead provided continuous cover from Japanese air attacks. The Marine 3d Defense Battalion was set up with long range radar and its antiaircraft guns to give further protection. (This battalion also had long-range 155mm guns that pounded Japanese attacks against the perimeter.)

By now, the 37th Infantry Division on the left was on firm

Navajo Code Talkers

Marines who heard the urgent combat messages said Navajo sounded sometimes like gurgling water. Whatever the sound, the ancient tongue of an ancient warrior clan confused the Japanese. The Navajo code talkers were busily engaged on Bougainville, and had already proved their worth on Guadalcanal. The Japanese could never fathom a language committed to sounds.

Originally there were many skeptics who disdained the use of the Navajo language as infeasible. Technical Sergeant Philip Johnston, who originally recommended the use of Navajo talkers as a means of safe voice transmissions in combat, convinced a hardheaded colonel by a two-minute Navajo dispatch. Encoding and decoding, the colonel then admitted, would have engaged his team well over an hour.

When the chips were down, time was short, and the message was urgent, Navajos saved the day. Only Indians could talk directly into the radio "mike" without concern for security. They would read the message in English, absorb it mentally, then deliver the words in their native tongue—direct, uncoded, and quickly. You couldn't fault the Japanese, even other Navajos who weren't codetalkers, couldn't understand the codetalkers' transmissions because they were in a code within the Navajo language.

'Corpsman!'

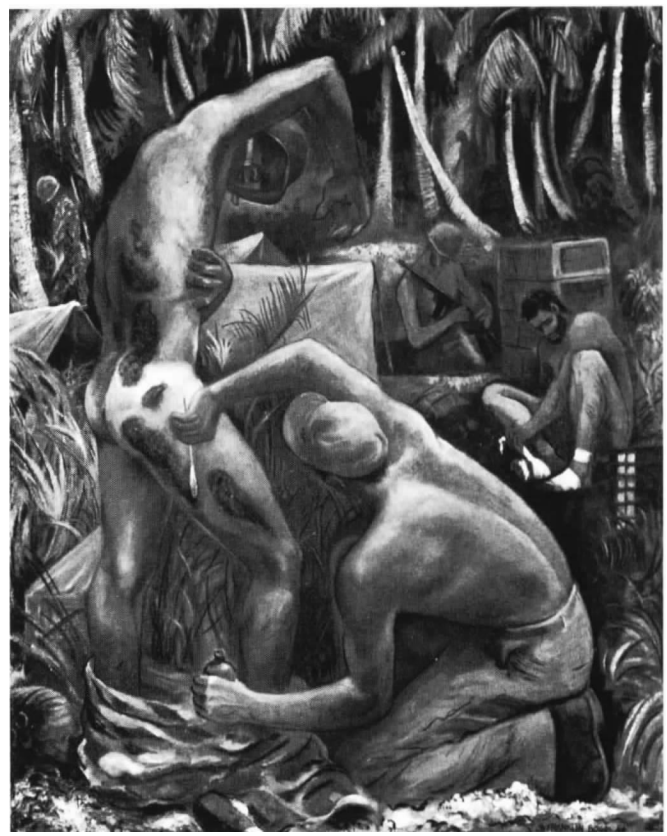
Less than one percent of battle casualties on Bougainville died of wounds after being brought to a field hospital, and during 50 operations conducted as the battle of the Koromokina raged and bullets whipped through surgeons' tents, not a patient was lost.

Those facts reflect the skill and dedication of the corpsmen, surgeons, and litter bearers who performed in an environment of enormous difficultly. Throughout the fight for the perimeter, the field hospitals were shelled and shaken by bomb blasts, even while surgical operations were being conducted.

Every day there was rain and mud and surgeons practiced their craft with mud to their shoe laces. Corpsmen were shot as they treated the wounded right at the battle scene; others were shot as the Japanese ignored the International Red Cross emblem for ambulances and aid stations.

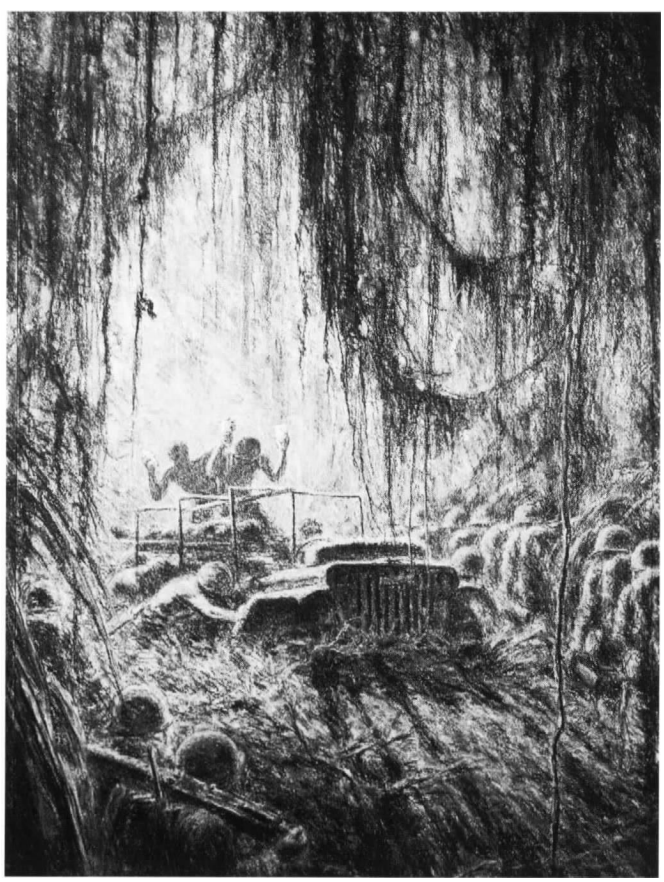
Bougainville was the first time in combat for the corpsmen assigned to the 3d Marine Division. Two surgeons were with each battalion and, as in all other battles, a corpsman was with each platoon. Aid stations were as close as 30-50 yards behind the lines. The men from the division band were the litter bearers, always on the biting edge of combat.

Many young Marines were not aware until combat just how close they would be to these corpsmen who wore the Marine uniform, and who would undergo every hardship and trial of the man on the line. The corpsman's job required no commands; he was simply always there to patch up the wounded Marine enough to have him survive and get to a field hospital.



Painting by Franklin Boggs in *Men Without Guns* (Philadelphia:/The Blakiston Company, 1945

Painting by Kerr Eby in the Marine Corps Art Collection



Naval officers seldom had command over the corpsman. He was responsible directly to the platoon, company, and battalion to which he was assigned.

Ashore on D-Day with the invading troops, Pharmacist's Mate Second Class Andrew Bernard later remembered setting up his 3d Marines regimental aid station, just inland in the muck off the beach beside the "C" Medical Field Hospital. Later, as action intensified, Bernard saw 15 to 20 wounded Marines waiting at the hospital for care, and commented, "this was when I noticed Dr. Duncan Shepherd . . . . The flaps of the hospital tent went open, and there was Dr. Shepherd operating away, so calm, so brave, so courageous—as though he was back in the Mayo Clinic, where he had trained."

On 7 December, the Japanese attacked around the Koromokina. The official history of the 3d Marine Division described the scene:

> The division hospital, situated near the beach, was subjected to daily air raids, and twice to artillery shelling . . . . Company E of

the 3d Medical Battalion, which was the division hospital under Commander R. R. Callaway, USN, proved that delicate work could be carried on even in combat. During the battle the field hospital was attacked, bullets ripped through the protecting tent, seriously wounding a pharmacist's mate.

Hellzapoppin Ridge was the most intense and miserable of the battles for the corpsmen of Bougainville, according to Pharmacist's Mate First Class Carroll Garnett. He and three other corpsmen were assigned to the forward aid station located at the top of that bloody ridge. The two battalion surgeons were considered indispensable and discouraged from taking undue risks. Regardless, Assistant Battalion Surgeon Lieutenant Edmond A. Utkewicz, USNR, insisted on joining the corpsmen at the forward station and remained there throughout the entire battle. The doctor and his four assistants were often in the open, exposed to fire, and showered with the dust thrown up by mortar explosions.

The corpsmen's routine was: stop the bleeding, apply sulfa powder and battle dressing, shoot syrette of morphine, and administer plasma. The regular aid station was located at the bottom of the ridge where the battalion surgeon, Lieutenant Commander Horace L. Wolf, USNR, checked the wounded again, before sending them off in an ambulance, if available, to a better equipped station or a field hospital.

Corpsmen (and Marines) were in deadly peril atop the ridge. Corpsman John A. Wetteland described volunteers bringing in a wounded paramarine who was still breathing when he and the medical team were hit anew by a shell. One corpsman was killed, another badly wounded, and Wetteland was badly mauled by mortar fragments, though he tried, he said, "to bandage myself."

Dr. Wolf later painted a grim picture of the taut circumstances under which the medics worked:

> Several of my brave corpsmen were killed in this action. The regimental band musicians were the litter bearers. I still remember the terrible odor of our dead in the tropical heat. The smell pinched one's nostrils and clung to clothing . . . . During combat in the swamps, about all one could do to try to purify water to drink was to put two drops of iodine solution in a canteen. Night was the worst, when we could not evacuate our sick and wounded. But, if one could get a ride to the air strip on the jeep ambulance to put the sick and wounded on evacuation planes, one could see a female (Navy or Army nurses) for the first time in many months.

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ground, facing scattered opposition, and able to make substantial advances. It was very different for the 3d Marine Division on the right. Lagoons and swamps were everywhere. The riflemen were in isolated, individual positions, little islands of men perched in what they sarcastically called "dry swamps." This meant the water and/or slimy mud was only shoetop deep, rather than up to their knees or waists, as it was all around them. This nightmare kind of terrain, combined with heavy, daily, drenching rains, precluded digging foxholes. So their machine guns had to be lashed to tree trunks, while the men huddled miserably in the water and mud. They carried little in their packs, except that a variety of pills was essential to stay in fighting shape in their oppressive, bug-infested environment: salt tablets, sulfa powder, aspirin, iodine, vitamins, atabrine tablets (for supressing malaria), and insect repellent.

Colonel Frazer West, who at Bougainville commanded a company in the 9th Marines, was interviewed by Monks 45 years later. He still remembered painfully what constantly living in the slimy, swamp water did to the Marines: "With almost no change of clothing, sand rubbing against the skin, stifling heat, and constant immersion in water, jungle rot was a pervasive problem. Men got it on their scalps, under their arms, in their genital areas, just all over. It was a miserable, affliction, and in combat there was very little that could be done to alleviate it. The only thing you could do was with the jungle ulcers. I'd get the corpsman to light a match on a razor blade, split the ulcer open, and squeeze sulfanilamide powder in it. I must have had at one time 30 jungle ulcers on me. This was fairly typical." Corpsmen painted many Marines with skin infections with tincture of merthiolate or a potassium permanganate solution so that they looked like the Picts of long ago who went into battle with their bodies daubed with blue woad.

The Marines who had survived the first two weeks of the campaign were by now battlewise. They intuitively carried out their platoon tactics in jungle fighting whether in offense or defense. They understood their enemy's tactics. And all signs indicated that they were winning.

Piva Forks Battle

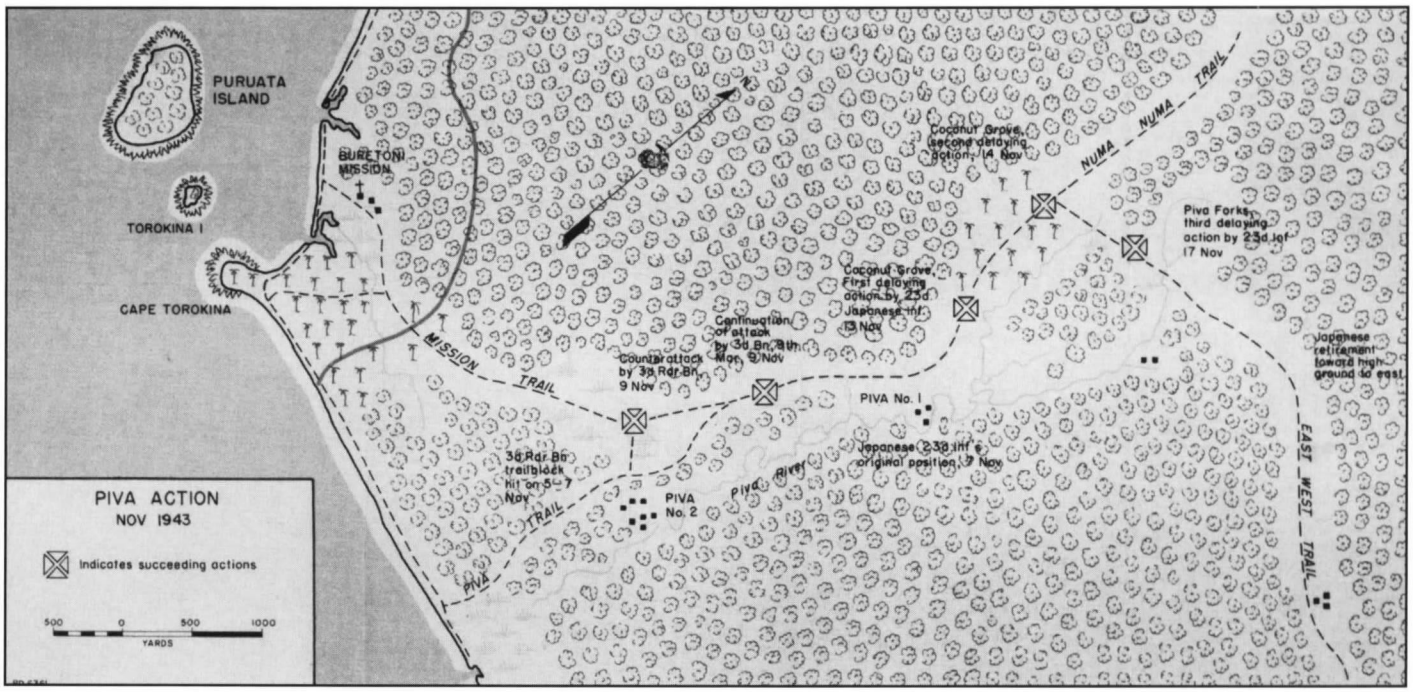
The lull after the Coconut Grove fight did not last long. On 18 November, the usual flurry of patrols soon brought back information that the Japanese had set up a road block on both the

National Archives Photo 111-5C-190032

The 155mm guns of the Marine 3d Defense Battalion provided firepower in support of Marine riflemen holding the Torokina perimeter.

Just getting to your assigned position meant slow, tiring slogging though endless mud.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 68247



Numa-Numa Trail and the East-West Trail.

To strike the Numa-Numa position, the 3d Marines sent in its 3d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Ralph M. King), to lead the attack. It hit the Japanese flanks, routed them, and set up its own road block on 19 November.

The 2d Battalion of the 3d Marines immediately went after the Japanese block on the East-West Trail between the two forks of the Piva River. After seizing that position, the next objective was a 400-foot ridge that commanded the whole area—and, in fact, provided a view all the way to Empress Augusta Bay. (As the first high ground the Marines had found, it would clearly produce a valuable observation post for directing the artillery fire of the 12th Marines.)

Lieutenant Colonel Hector de Zayas, commanding the battalion, summoned one of his company commanders and gave a terse order, "I want you to take it." Thus a patrol under First Lieutenant Steve J. Cibik was immediately sent to occupy it. This began a four-day epic, 20-23 November. The Marines got to the top, realized the importance of the vantage point to the Japanese, dug in defensive positions, and got ready for the enemy counterattacks that were sure to come. And they came, and came, and came. There were "fanatical attempts by the Japanese to reoccupy the position" in the form of "wild charges that sometimes carried the Japanese to within a few feet of their foxholes on the crest of the ridge." Cibik called in Marine artillery bursts within 50 yards of his men. The Marines held and were finally relieved, exhausted but proud. Cibik was awarded a Silver Star Medal, and the hill was always known thereafter as "Cibik Ridge."

While the firestorm roared where Cibik stood, the 3d Marines were pursuing its mission of driving the Japanese from the first and nearest of Piva's forks. The 2d Battalion caught up with Cibik, and Lieutenant Colonel de Zayas moved it out down the reverse slope of Cibik Ridge. The Japanese struck hard on 21 November and de Zayas pulled back. Then, in true textbook fashion, the Japanese followed right behind him. The Marines were ready, machine guns in place. One of them killed 74 out of 75 of the enemy attackers within 20-30 yards of the gun.

The 3d Marines was supported by the 9th, and 21st Marines, and the raiders, while the 37th Infantry Division provided roadblocks, patrols, and flank security. Support was also provided by the Army's heavy artillery, the 12th Marines, and the defense battalions. All the troops were now be entering a new phase of the campaign, during which the fight would be more for the hills than for the trails.

Reconnaissance patrols provided a good idea of what was out there, but they also discovered that the enemy was not alert as he could or should be. A Marine rifle company, for instance, came upon a clearing where the Japanese were acting as if no war was on—the troops were lounging, kibitzing, drinking beer. The Marine mortars tore them apart. Another patrol waited until the occupants of a bivouac lined up for chow before cutting them down with