



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 60616

While Marine antiaircraft artillery dealt with air raids, 155mm Long Toms were fired at targets some eight miles or more away round-the-clock, in all weather, taking a toll of the defenders.

the Allied combat air patrol overhead and penetrated the area on the same course followed before. Zeke fighters roared in at tree-top level strafing defenses. As the enemy planes came in, several light antiaircraft guns opened fire and a few seconds later Captain Tracy's E Battery on Kokorana Island began firing. Tracy recalled "bursts were right on target, requiring no correc-

tion . . . the flight entered a large cloud. Pieces of planes were noted falling out of the cloud." This fire caught the enemy by surprise and of the 16 bombers only four got their bombs away. Battery E had expended 88 rounds of ammunition and a world's record was established. Twelve bombers and a fighter were destroyed by the 9th's fire, the bombers and the Zeke

chalked up to Battery E and Special Weapons Group respectively. That day cheers were heard all over Rendova "like a Babe Ruth homer in Yankee Stadium." Credit was given the operators of the range section, though Frank LaMountain said if he had not kept the generator going this would not have been the case. The battalion had one officer killed and three enlisted Marines wounded; a heavy machine gun and the remote control system of one 40mm gun were destroyed.

A fire direction center processed target information from observation posts and air spotters, which group commander LtCol Archie E. O'Neil and executive officer Maj Robert C. Hiatt translated into firing data on Rendova.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 60596



On 5 July, a detachment of 52 men with four 40mm guns and four .50-caliber machine guns under the command of First Lieutenant John R. Wismer moved to Zanana Beach on New Georgia to provide antiaircraft and beach defense protection for the 43d Infantry Division which had landed in that area.

Major naval surface actions occurred on 12 July as the U.S. Navy intercepted Japanese destroyers and cruisers attempting to resupply forces on Vila and Munda. The ships' gunfire, sounding like massive thunder and looking like a lightning storm, permitting little sound sleep, was observed from

Rendova. The next day, a 90mm battery, three searchlights, and a light anti-aircraft detachment arrived from the 11th Defense Battalion. The 90mm battery was staged on Kokorana until the 9th Defense Battalion displaced to New Georgia, then it went into firing positions. Light anti-aircraft guns were positioned on both Kokorana and Rendova. Marines from the 11th Defense Battalion assisted the 9th in manning the radars and the 11th's sound locator supported Battery E.

At 0800, 13 July, U.S. Army infantry units landed at Laiana Beach, about 2½ miles east of Munda airfield, and continued the drive towards Munda Point. A detachment of 22 men with one 40mm gun, one twin 20mm gun, and two .50-caliber machine guns from the 9th Defense Battalion under First Lieutenant Colin J. Reeves, went to Laiana



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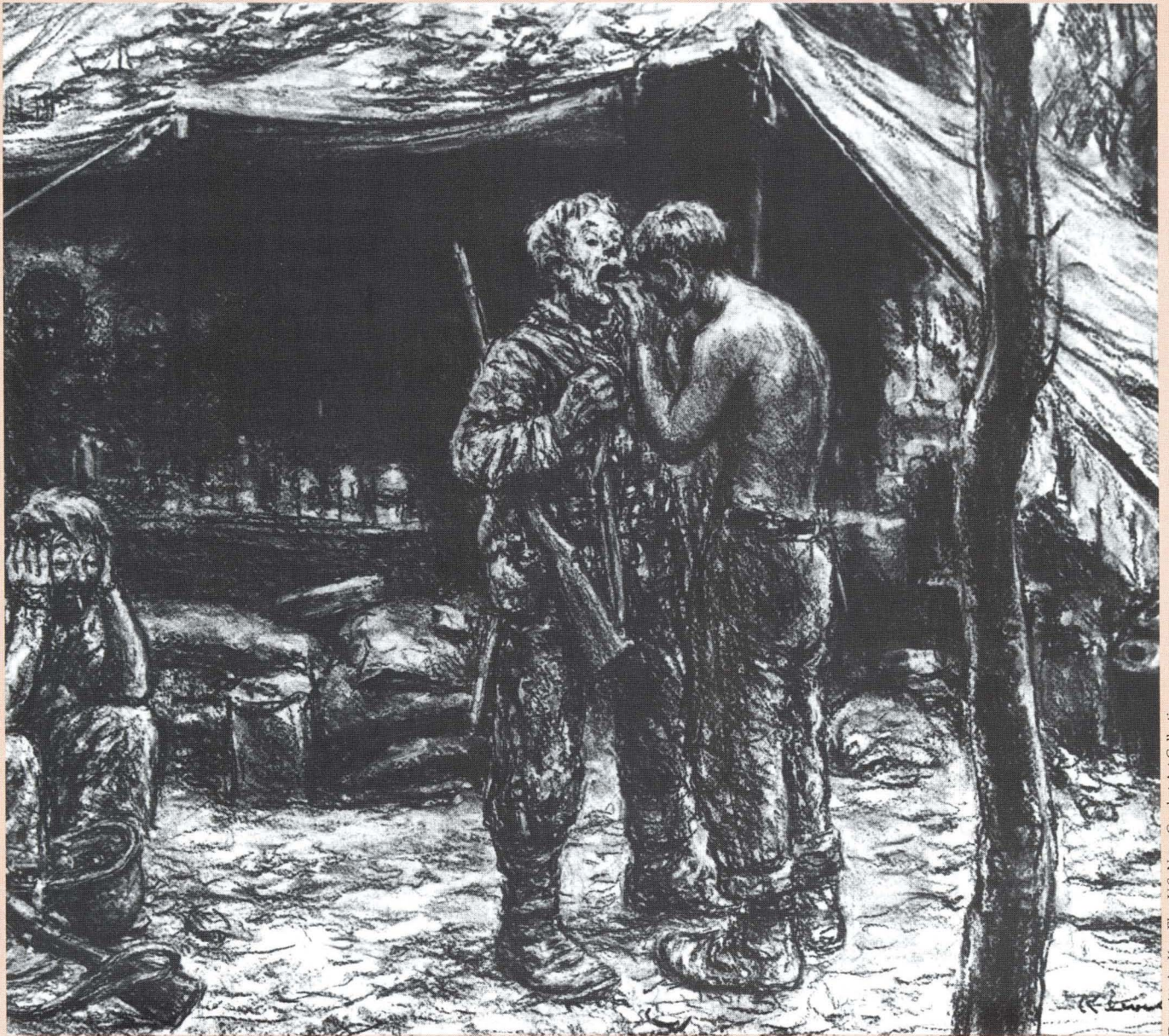
*The Northern Landing Group, built around the 1st Marine Raider Regiment, landed at Rice Anchorage on 5 July and proceeded cross-country to take Enogai on Dragons Peninsula. The Marine third from the left hefts a Boys rifle used by the raiders as an antitank weapon.*

*Camouflaged Japanese 140mm naval guns with their ammunition intact were found and put out of action at Enogai by the raiders' landward attack.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 127G59009A







Drawing by Kerr Eby, U.S. Navy Combat Art Collection

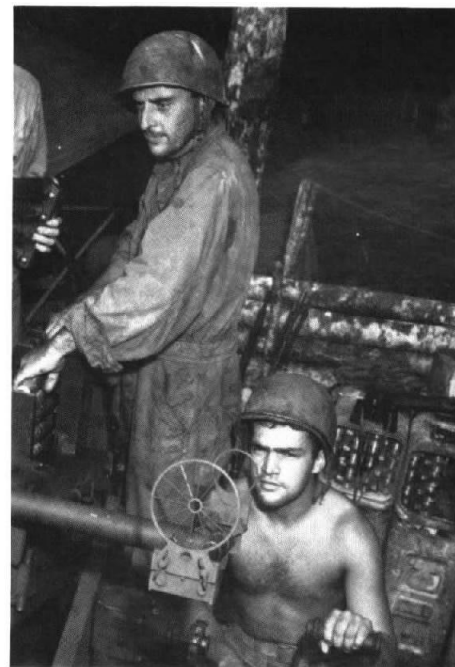
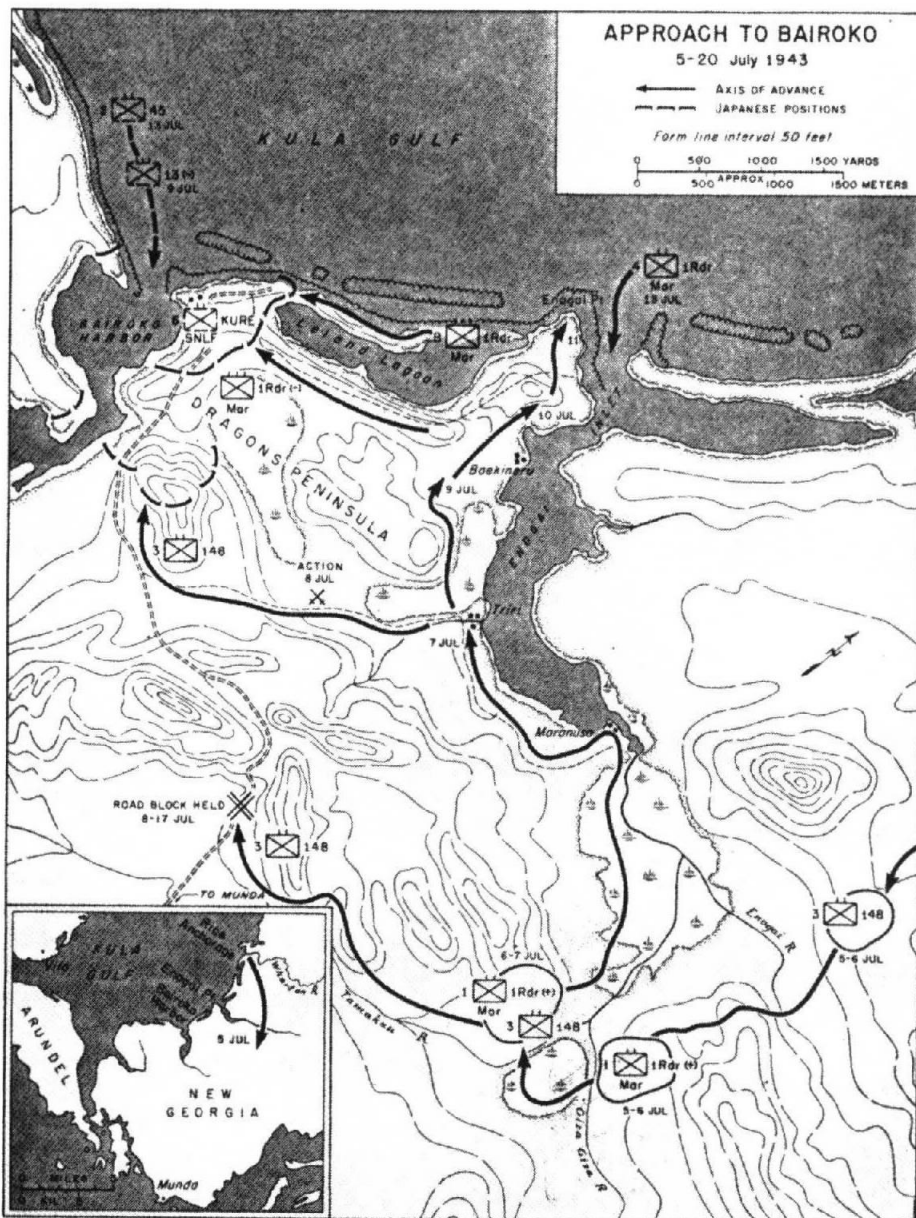
## Field Medicine

**M**edical care of Marine units in the Central Solomons was provided by U.S. Navy medical officers and corpsman assigned to these units. Combat casualties were not the only medical concern because of the primitive conditions that existed during the campaign. The 9th Defense Battalion lost an average of 2.42 men a day, or 65.17 a month, to causes other than combat injuries. The 1st Marine Raider Regiment found itself on 11 August 1943, with 436 men of its 956 Marines fit for duty. Other than those wounded in action, it became necessary to evacuate malaria cases also. Getting casualties to the beach or airfield through the jungle or over the muddy roads and trails was extremely difficult. After the landings on New Georgia, only the most serious malarial cases were evacuated. Much of the recurring malaria was

undoubtedly brought on by the combination of hard work under combat conditions, lack of sleep, and inadequate diet. Besides malaria, there was a considerable amount of dysentery, diarrhea, minor fevers, fungus infections, and boils. There were even a few cases of psychoneurosis or "combat fatigue."

Note: The Kerr Eby charcoal drawings in this pamphlet are from the U.S. Navy Combat Art Collection. Kerr Eby studied at the Art Students League in New York and the Pratt Institute. He served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army in World War I and was accredited as an artist-correspondent for Abbot Laboratories in World War II. In 1943 through 1944, he went to the Solomons and the Gilberts and produced these and many other drawings, since reproduced widely in this country and abroad.





Marine Corps Historical Collection  
 With Wismer's detachment were Cpl Maier J. Rothschild, at left, and Pvt John Wantuck, at right. Both earned the Navy Cross during the fighting at Zanana in defense of the beachhead. Wantuck died there.

Beach on New Georgia to defend the landing site.

Captain Robert W. Blake's platoon of light tanks now played an important part in the assault and capture of Munda Airfield. The airfield was defended by various aviation personnel, antiaircraft units, and the 229th Infantry Regiment. During the next five days, 9th Defense Battalion tanks spearheaded the advance, knocking out enemy log bunkers, pillboxes, and other strong points. On a number of occasions during the assault on the enemy's final defense positions north of Ilanana, the tank platoon operated in the densely wooded and irregular terrain, under condi-

tions believed highly unsuitable for tank employment. For the first time, the Japanese attacked the tanks with magnetic mines and Molotov cocktails, bottles of gasoline with lit wicks. On the morning of 15 July, the tanks broke through the enemy's strong positions after Army infantry had repeatedly been thrown back. The XIV Corps attack on Munda was stalled by both the dogged resistance of the defenders and the rugged terrain.

The "Murderers Row" of 155mm guns continued shelling the Munda Airfield, Baanga Island, and other outlying islands throughout this phase. The primary targets were

antiaircraft and field artillery positions, and ammunition dumps. Directed by both ground and air observers, this firing proved very effective. "The artillery shelling's accuracy has become a real thing. We can never tell when we are to die," wrote a Munda defender. On 15 July, landing craft carried Battery A to Tambusolo Island where it was assigned the mission of covering the western approach to Blanche Channel with 155s against the incursion of still dangerous Japanese ships. On the night of 17 July at Zanana, 9th Defense Battalion Marines were involved in some memorable fighting. A few days earlier, Lieutenant Wismer led a patrol which killed four members of an enemy patrol and captured a fifth, from whom they learned that a Japanese force of 150 men was in the vicinity. A rear command post of the 43d Infantry Division with approximately 125 troops, nearly all specialists commanded by a legal officer, was in the beachhead area. The Marines under Wismer de-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 60625

*Other defense battalion Marines skillfully employed their 90mm gun batteries and their radar-operated fire control systems to keep enemy aircraft high and away from their ground targets. Gun positions were built above the water table as seen here.*

ployed for ground defense and Private John Wantuck and Corporal Maier J. Rothschild manned two salvaged Army .30-caliber light machine guns covering trails leading to the perimeter of the Zanana area. Colonel Satoshi Tomonari's 13th Infantry Regiment attacked with several groups during the night, forcing Lieutenant Wismer's defenders back to their gun pits, while Wantuck and Rothschild remained forward of the lines engaging the Japanese with machine-gun fire on

each assault. The Marines were attacked by a regiment that had "the determination of a suicide squad and under the command of the Regimental Commander they are determined to fight to the last man."

The following morning, Wantuck was found dead from gunshot and sword wounds. Rothschild was wounded in a hand-to-hand encounter with an enemy officer, whom he killed. Wantuck and Rothschild killed 18, wounded 12 to 15 others, and put a 90mm mor-

tar crew out of action. The senior Army officer present, Major Charles C. Cox, credited these two Marines and timely artillery fire with saving the division rear and beachhead area. Rothschild and Wantuck each received a Navy Cross for their action. In all, Wismer's detachment had repulsed four different columns, killing 18, wounding others, and capturing a prisoner. Over 100 Japanese bodies were found later on the field by Army units.

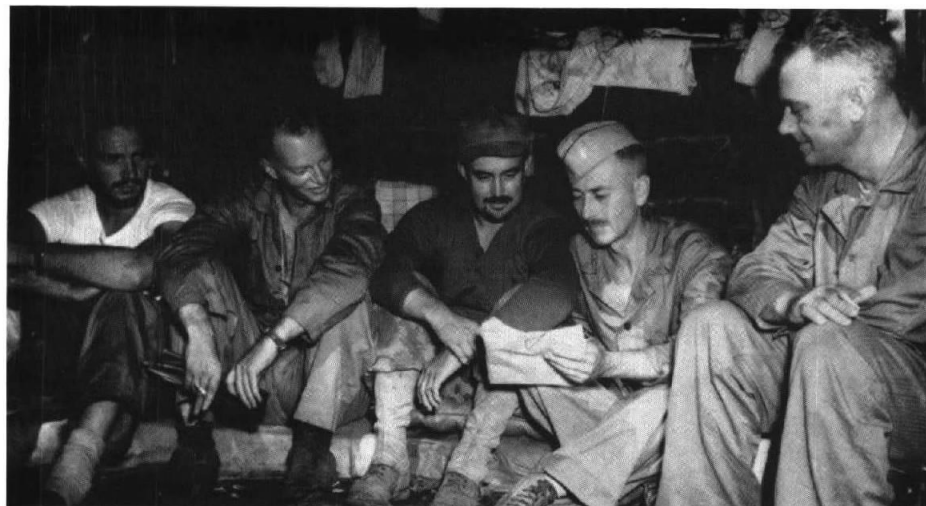
Pharmacist's Mate First Class Francis G. Peters was with the Zanana detachment. While with the unit, he performed as a one-man clearing station for evacuating the wounded, mainly Army personnel, who were taken from the beach by boat. He remembered the attack of 17 July because the Japanese "penetrated as close as 25 yards and I could see them shooting at our men on the AA guns." After the attack, his work really began, tending to the wounded, including a couple of Japanese soldiers.

While the fighting for New Georgia was ongoing, there were several changes in the command structure of the campaign. Major General Oscar W. Griswold relieved General Hester as commander of XIV Corps, and Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson relieved Admiral Turner as commander of Task Force 31. The buildup of forces on New Georgia continued with the arrival of elements of Major General J. Lawton Collins' 25th Infantry Division on 21 July and the arrival the next day of the remainder of the 37th Infantry Division. What one division failed to accomplish would now be attempted by two, the 43d and the 37th.

After their initial daytime air losses, the Japanese relied on air attacks at night with only infrequent daylight bombings. One was mounted against the Rendova area on 20 July by 6 planes, one on 1 August by another 6 planes, and an-

*To keep the pressure on Munda and to prevent Japanese reinforcement from Bairoko, plans were made for the Northern Landing Group to attack on 20 July 1943. The commanders involved review the plan: left to right, Maj Charles L. Banks, LtCol Samuel B. Griffith II, LtCol Michael S. Currin, LtCol George G. Freer, and LtCol Delbert E. Shultz, the last two both U.S. Army.*

U.S. Army. Marine Corps Historical Collection





Marine Corps Historical Collection

*The 9th Defense Battalion's 90mm Group had four gun batteries, each with its own range-finder, computer, and radar. This weapons system continued in use through the war and into the 1950s. Note the "kill" flags stencilled on the barrel.*

other on 7 August by a formation of 15 aircraft. Nightly harassing raids were made over the area by different planes and pilots all dubbed "Washing Machine Charlie." Several larger flights were turned back by 90mm fire. Marines of Battery F, the searchlight battery, remained at their posts despite Japanese strafing, and radar men at their exposed, above ground posts remained at their stations throughout the raids, also. At dawn, after one all-night raid, a Battery C Marine was at the fuze pot stark naked, "he hadn't had time to dress." A total of 26 enemy planes were downed by battalion anti-aircraft fire over Rendova.

On 26 July 1943, the 9th's tanks, reinforced by six others from the 10th Defense Battalion, led the assault on enemy positions near Lambetti Plantation. Tank operations were conducted over difficult terrain consisting of steep slopes, heavy underbrush, and closely spaced trees. The Japanese were in a strongly fortified defensive position, which consisted of a number of heavy bunkers and pillboxes in a clearing. In this action, which lasted approximately five hours, one of the tanks was disabled by a magnetic mine, and two men were killed and four wounded. A second assault on



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*The 9th Defense Battalion's tank platoon lead by Capt Robert W. Blake supported the infantry attack. This vehicle is shown knocked out on top of a position at the Laiana water point. The Japanese bunker is all but indistinguishable from the debris that covered it.*

*A tank crewman examines the damage to his vehicle which put it out of commission. The Japanese employed a mix of antitank weapons and individual close-in tactics to counter the light tanks. Because of the loss of 9th Battalion tanks in the drive on Munda, tanks of the 10th and 11th Defense Battalions' armored platoons were fed in as replacements.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection







Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 60096

Another defense battalion detachment went to Laiana, where this emplaced 40mm gun of 1stLt Colin J. Reeves' battery merges with the dense jungle growth backdrop.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 57564

The high ground at Munda airfield fell on 5 August 1943. This picture is taken at the site of the former mission on Kokengolo Hill looking towards Bibolo Hill to the north.

this position on 28 July by a battalion of infantry and four Marine tanks, was successful. Approximately 40 heavily fortified bunkers and pillboxes were destroyed and a large number of Japanese killed or wounded by tank fire.

On 1 August, a Japanese air raid hit the torpedo boat mooring basin at Rendova. Nearby on Tombusolo was Edwin Jakubowski with 9th Defense Battalion Special Weapons, firing at the attacking aircraft. "A PT Boat was strafed and blew up next to my little island. Plywood flying all over me and one of its torpedoes went by," he recalled. Captain Theron A. Smith, com-

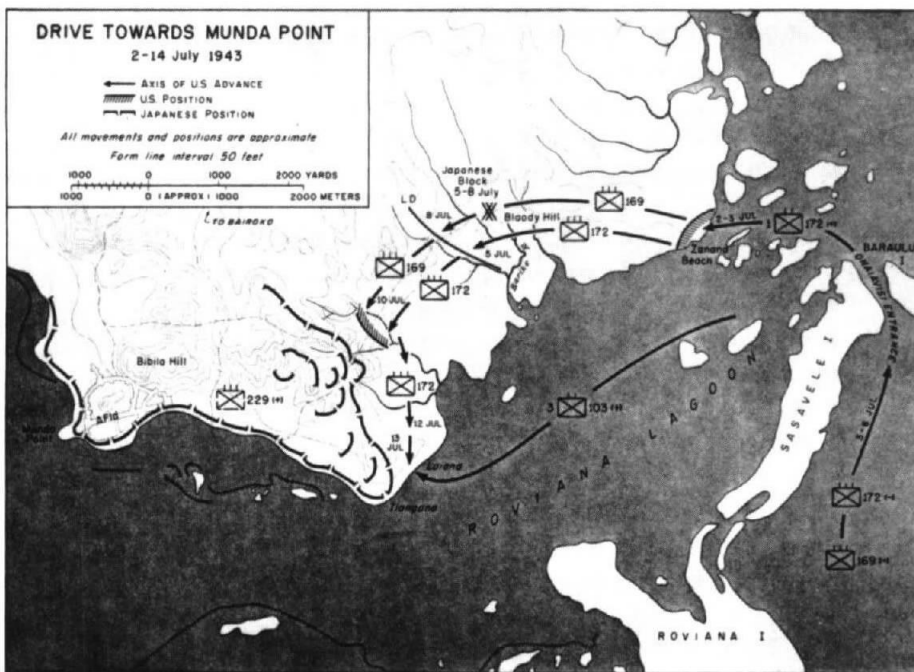
manding Battery F, had just inspected his Number 3 Searchlight Section when the attack occurred and later wrote "some Sunday, alerts and [Condition] Reds all last night and most of the day. Attacked by two dive bombers and Zeros (estimated 50) about 1600. Two PTs destroyed, another sunk and beyond salvage." In a footnote to the campaign, Lieutenant (jg) John F. Kennedy's PT 109 was rammed and sunk early the next morning while operating from the Rendova base.

Field artillery firing missions against the New Georgia area continued to be conducted by Battery B until 3 August. The tank platoon of the 10th Defense Battalion, reinforced by five tanks from the 11th Defense Battalion and the surviving tank of the 9th Defense Battalion, led the assault on Kokengolo and Bilbilo Hills on 4 and 5 August. After two days of heavy fighting, they routed the defending forces. The Marine tanks then cleared the way to the principal objective of the entire New Georgia campaign, the Munda airfield, which was captured and occupied by XIV Corps Army troops on 5 August 1943. Regiments of the 25th Infantry Division pursued the Japanese as they

Wreckage and debris were soon pushed aside in the rapid progress to open the field for American use. The captured airfield included aircraft, in this case a Zero fighter in a coconut and coral enclosure, that could not take off after the American landing.

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Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 60460

*The engineering effort pushed forward and built upon the Japanese construction that remained. The work was completed within 10 days after the airfield was captured.*

ported largely by various types of landing craft, which made the displacement a slow, laborious process. Captain Well's Battery B of the 155mm Group moved to Kindu Point on New Georgia on 8 August and was assigned the mission with its large guns of guarding the western approaches to Blanche Channel. On landing, Battery B and an Army antitank platoon cleared the area of remaining Japanese stragglers.

At Munda Airfield, immediately after the area was cleared of Japanese, construction units moved in to repair and enlarge the "emergency" field built by the enemy. By the evening of 13 August, this work had progressed sufficiently to permit four Army Curtiss P-40 Warhawks to make an unscheduled landing and to "christen" the field with a brief fly-over. This was soon followed by the arrival of Marine air units, including VMF-123 and -124. Other Marine squadrons soon arrived, including the VMF-214 "Black Sheep" of Major Gregory Boyington, who became a grudging admirer of the 9th's anti-aircraft marksmanship and a source of entertainment with his radio transmissions while flying over Munda.

Instead of attacking the main Japanese force on Kolombangara at

withdrew north from Munda Point. On the night of 6 August a naval battle was fought in Vella Gulf, where Japanese destroyers and barges bringing in supplies and reinforcements were turned back.

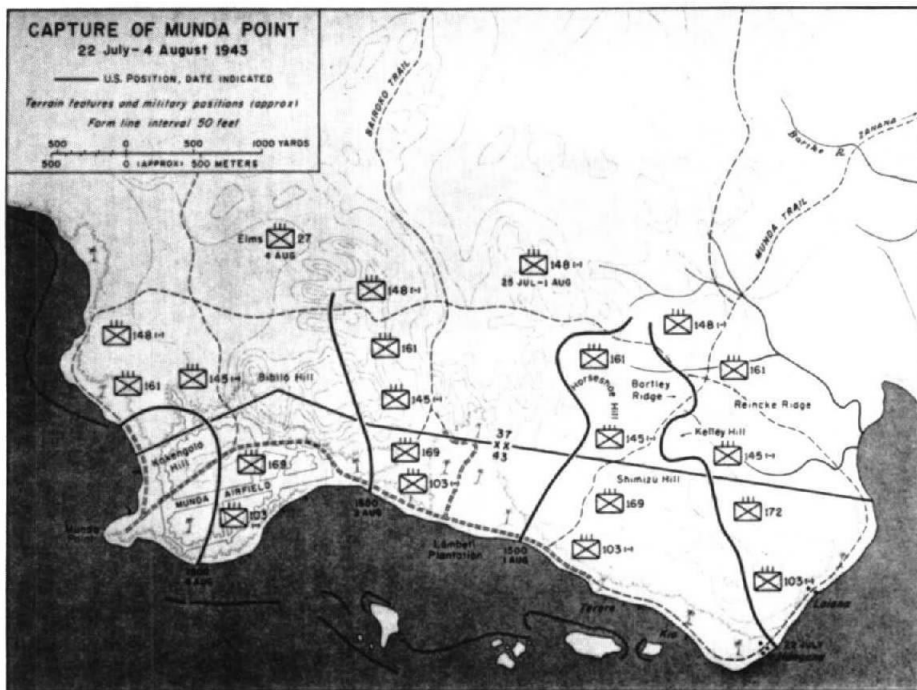
The battle for Munda airfield over, the Zanana Beach and Laiana Beach detachments moved on 6 August to participate in the Munda defenses. The detachments destroyed 12 enemy planes while at these locations. A day later, the 9th Defense Battalion began moving to the Munda area. The moves were so organized that there was no more than a quarter of the battalion's weapons out of action at any one time. The battalion was trans-

*Seabees clear a Japanese tunnel at the base of Kokengolo Hill for use in the face of the still present Japanese menace. This threat made the discomfort of the cave, filled with refuse and corpses, seem a small price to pay for the security of overhead cover from artillery and air attack.*

Marine Corps Historical Collection







tenant Colonel Harold S. Fassett, defended the beachhead against 121 attacks and downed 42 Japanese planes. The Allied occupation of these positions and pressure from Arundel and New Georgia put Vila on Kolombangara in a precarious position. In many ways, this was a prelude to the Marine Bougainville campaign as it brought I Marine Amphibious Corps and new units not involved in the fighting into the New Georgia area. American fighter cover came from the Munda and Segi Airfields.

By 15 August, the 9th Defense Battalion was set up and emplaced in new dispersed positions. Three days later, another major naval surface action occurred off Vella Lavella as the U.S. Navy combatants intercepted destroyers and barges attempting to evacuate Japanese troops. From 16 through 19 August, Japanese artillery on Baanga Island shelled Munda Airfield and Kindu Point causing several casualties and some minor damage. Friendly aircraft and artillery operated against these elusive cannon and finally silenced them. The battalion suffered no casualties from this shelling, though one gun crew's tent was demolished by a direct hit and there were several hits on other positions. The 9th's antiaircraft guns were now fully placed to protect the air-



Commander Aircraft New Georgia, BGen Francis P. Mulcahy, expanded airfield operations on Munda with the construction of more secure shelters than those the Japanese left behind. A heavily sandbagged sickbay is on the left and the personnel office is in the center. The frame of a prefabricated Quonset hut is being assembled to the right rear.

Vila, the American force isolated the enemy by landings on nearby Vella Lavella on 15 August. Admiral Halsey did not want another slugging match like Munda. A landing force was built around the uncommitted Army 35th Regimental Combat Team, commanded by the 25th Infantry Division's assistant commander, Brigadier General Robert B. McLure, and supported by the Marine 4th Defense Battalion. The Japanese resisted in the air and sea, but enemy ground forces were too busy withdrawing to put up a determined resistance. The 4th Defense Battalion, led by Lieu-

*The first fighter plane to land on Munda was a VMF-215 Corsair flown by Maj Robert G. Owens, Jr., on 14 August 1943. Flight operations began immediately to cover the Vella Lavella landings.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 60270



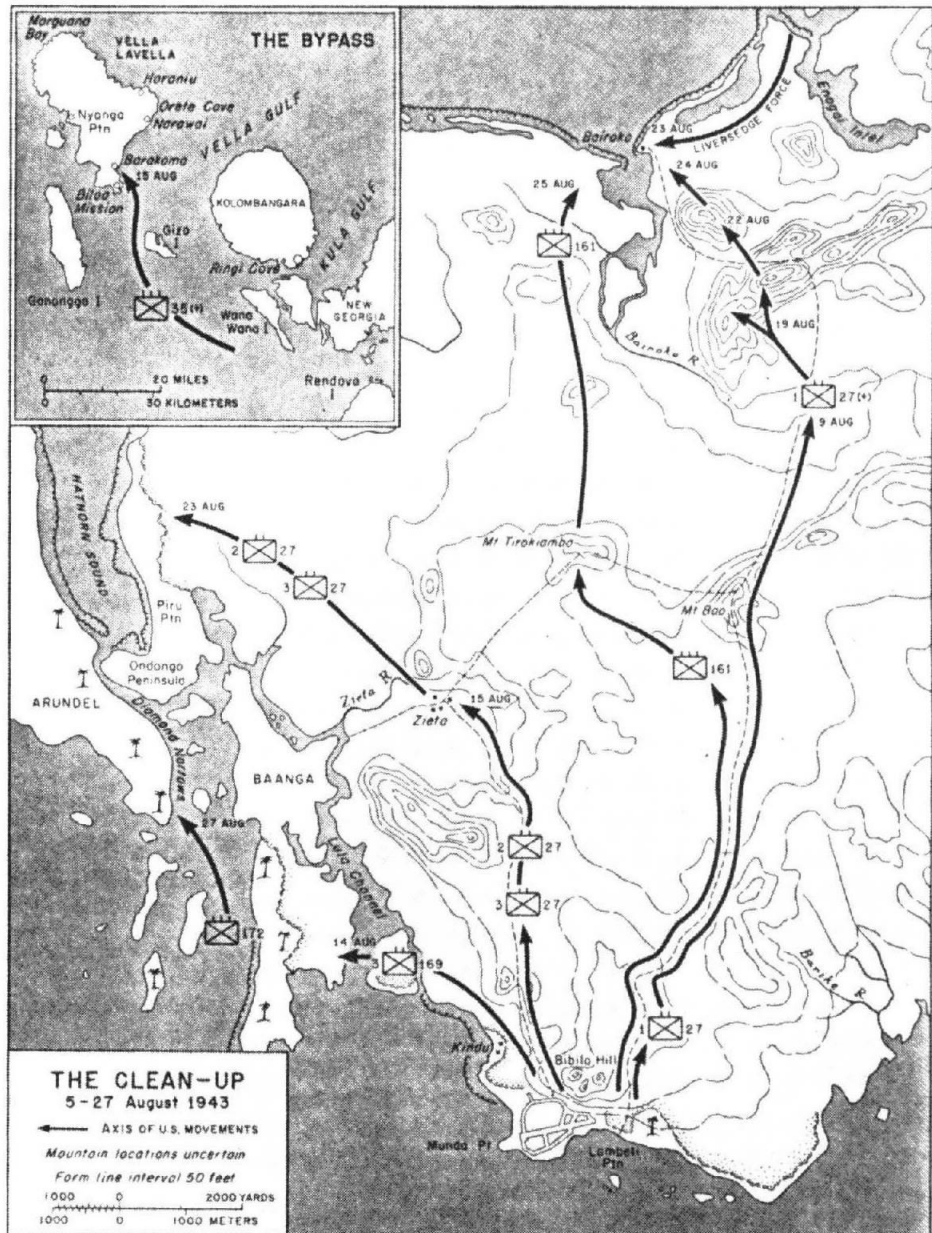


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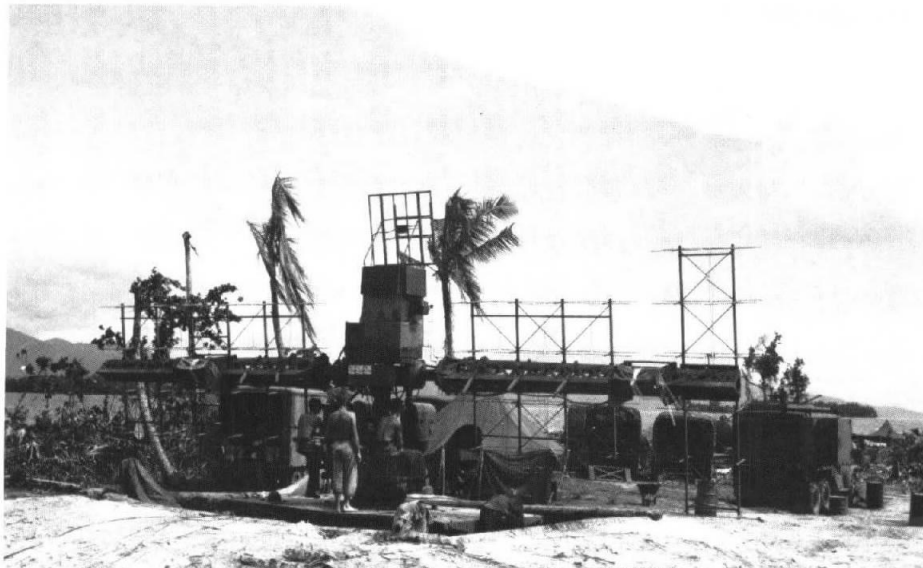
The Munda drive moved into a final phase with attacks on 4 and 5 August 1943, again using Marine tanks in the lead. Tank commander Capt Robert W. Blake examines some of the improvised antitank weapons faced by his unit—a Molotov cocktail and a magnetic mine.

field. Enemy air attacks on the Munda area, carried out at night or in the early morning, continued throughout the rest of the month. Captain Ervin's three Battery G 40mm positions seaward of the airfield were straddled by a string of Japanese bombs that managed to just miss everyone.

The landing and occupation of Arundel Island, on 27 August, further tightened the noose around Kolombangara. Army troops were



An essential element in the defensive air war was the use of radar by the Americans for surveillance, target acquisition, and ground-controlled intercepts. This is one of the 9th Defense Battalion's SCR268s installed on New Georgia.



supported by Captain Blake and tanks from the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions. Major General Collins, commanding the 25th Infantry Division carrying out this assignment, commended the Marines "for the whole-hearted cooperation and assistance rendered this division" during the operations against the Japanese in the Arundel Island campaign. They performed all assigned tasks "in a splendid manner in support of the 27th Infantry, in its action . . . ."

Captain Reichner's Battery A moved to Piru Plantation on 29 August and two days later began shelling the Vila area of Kolombangara. The move was made by landing craft and foot. Recalled Captain