

fight during the conquest of Arundel Island.

On 1 November 1943, the offensive reached the northern Solomons, as the recently organized 3d Marine Division landed at Bougainville. The 3d Defense Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Edward H. Forney, followed the first waves ashore and had heavy machine guns and light anti-aircraft guns ready for action by nightfall. The battalion organized both anti-aircraft and beach defenses, taking advantage of the dual capabilities of the 90mm gun to destroy Japanese landing barges on the Laruma River. The 155mm artillery group supported Marine raiders and parachutists at Koiari and joined the 12th Marines, the 3d Marine Division's artillery regiment, in shelling Japanese positions at Torokina. The defense battalion would remain at Bougainville into the following year, earning the dubious honor of being "the last Fleet Marine Force ground unit" to be withdrawn from the Solomons.

Colonel William H. Harrison's 12th Defense Battalion supported the

*The 9th Defense Battalion deployed light anti-aircraft guns, as this Bofors 40mm weapon, in the Solomons on Rendova and*



Department of Defense photo (USMC) 60625

*The 90mm anti-aircraft guns on Rendova, as this one, threw up a barrier of fire to protect the troops attacking Munda airfield from enemy air raids and, in doing so, showered shell fragments on the Marines across New Georgia at Rice Anchorage.*

landing of the 1st Marine Division at Cape Gloucester, New Britain, in December 1943. The lodgment on New Britain marked the end of the Rabaul campaign—and of participation by major Marine Corps units in the South and Southwest Pacific—for the United States had decided to isolate and bypass the fortress instead of storming it. Radar operator Vic-

tor C. Bond, a member of Harrison's battalion at Cape Gloucester, remembered sitting on the exposed "plow seat" of an SCR-268, with 90mm guns barking nearby. "During an air raid," he said, "it was difficult to tell if all the noise and smoke was due to the 90mms or the enemy."

On New Britain, the 12th Defense Battalion suffered most of its casual-

*New Georgia, both to protect the Zanana beachhead and to support the accelerating advance against the Munda airfield.*

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 60095 by TSgt Jeremiah Sarno



# Antiaircraft Machine Guns

A number of "light" antiaircraft artillery weapons and "heavy" machine guns were placed in the weapons groups of the defense battalions to provide close-in defense against low-flying aircraft.

These weapons were flexibly employed and landed found on the beach with the assault waves. They were designated dual-purpose weapons as they were used against both air and surface targets. While organized into batteries by weapons' types, light antiaircraft weapons were often attached to task-organized teams.

The Bofors-designed 37mm and 40mm automatic guns were the backbones of these teams. The M1 40mm antiaircraft gun became the standard piece by July 1942. It was manufactured by Blaw-Knox, Chrysler, and York Safe & Lock in the United States. The M1 was recoil operated and designed for use against aircraft and could serve as an antitank weapon. It fired 1.96-pound shells at a rate of 120-per-minute with a maximum range of over four miles. Its M2 carriage had electric brakes and bullet-resistant tires, was towed at up to 50 miles an hour, and could be put in firing position within 25 seconds. Easily operated and maintained, the 40mm gun was credited with 50 percent of the enemy aircraft destroyed by antiaircraft weapons accord-

ing to statistics gathered between 1944 and 1945. Another light weapon in the defense battalion arsenal was the Oerlikon 20mm antiaircraft gun. It was made in the United States by Oerlikon-Gazda, Pontiac Motors, and Hudson Motor Car. These were Navy Mark 2 and Mark 4 weapons, first used on static pedestal mounts, but later mounted in pairs on wheeled carriages as a high-speed 'twin twenty.'

It was a simple blowback-operated gun capable of being put into action quicker than larger caliber weapons. It fired explosive, armor-piercing, and incendiary projectiles at a rate of 450 rounds a minute out to a maximum range of 4,800 yards. Mobility, reliability, and high volume of fire enabled it to account for 32 percent of identified antiaircraft shot down during the 1942 to 1944 period.

Finally, the battalions were liberally equipped with heavy .30- and .50-caliber machine guns. The Browning M2 water-cooled machine gun was used on an M2 mount as an antiaircraft weapon by special weapons groups to help defend artillery and antiaircraft artillery positions. The Browning M1917 water-cooled machine gun was used for ground and beach defense with crews made up from defense battalion personnel in contingencies.

ties from typhus and other diseases, falling trees, and lightning. "There is no jungle in the world worse than in southwestern New Britain," a member of the 1st Marine Division declared. The effort to limit the ef-

fects of malaria, prevalent in the swamps and rain forest, involved the use of atabrine, a substitute for scarce quinine. The remedy required hard selling by medical personnel and commanders to convince dubious

Marines to take a bitter-tasting medicine that was rumored to turn skin yellow and make users sterile. In a moment of whimsy, Second Lieutenant Gerald A. Waindel suggested adapting a slogan used to sell coffee

*Each Japanese flag painted on this 3d Defense Battalion 40mm gun on Bougainville represents a Japanese plane shot down.*  
Department of Defense photo (USMC) 74010





Department of Defense photo (USMC) 71623

*The light anti-aircraft artillery of the 12th Defense Battalion on the deck of an LST approaching Cape Gloucester, New Britain, is poised to fire on Japanese aircraft.*

back in the United States: "Atabrine – Good to the last drop."

In March 1944, a detachment from the 14th Defense Battalion landed at Emirau, St. Mathias Islands, in support of its occupation by Army troops. Technical Sergeant George H. Mattie reported that "the Marines sent some troops ashore, met no opposition, and in a matter of days the Seabees ripped up the jungle" for an airfield. The deadliest things about duty at Emirau, Mattie remembered, were "boredom and loneliness." Other detachments from the 14th Defense Battalion supported the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's occupation of Green Island, the coup de grace for bypassed Japanese forces at Rabaul and throughout the Bismarck Archipelago. The use of Green Island as an air base for hammering the bypassed stronghold of Rabaul signaled the attainment of the final rung in the so-called Solomons Ladder, which began at Guadalcanal and required the services of three Marine divisions, two Marine aircraft wings, and a variety of special units, including the defense battalions. In a year and a half of fighting, the Marines –

along with soldiers and sailors – had not taken any "real, honest-to-God towns," just "grass shacks and lizards and swamp 'gardens' of slimy banyan trees."

As the campaign against Japan gathered momentum, defense battalions on outlying islands like the Ellice group, Samoa, Johnston, Palmyra, and Midway found themselves increasingly in the backwash of war, struggling with boredom rather than fighting an armed enemy. Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, former commanding general of the 1st Marine Division and since July 1943 the commander of I Marine Amphibious Corps, noticed the fragile morale of some of the defense battalions, as did his chief of staff, Colonel Gerald C. Thomas, during their inspection tour of the Solomon Islands. "The war had gone beyond them," recalled Thomas, and a number of the junior field-grade officers were "pleading just to get into the war" and out of the defense battalions. As a result, some 35 officers received transfers to the Command and Staff College at Quantico, Virginia, for future assignments to corps

or division headquarters. The problem of the future of the defense battalions in a changing situation remained unresolved when the year 1944 began.

### *Fighting Boredom*

One technique used by a defense battalion's communications specialists in the battle against boredom consisted of eavesdropping on the radio nets used by the fighter pilots. The chatter among aviators, though discouraged by commanders, rivaled the dialogue in the adventure serials broadcast in late afternoon back in the United States – radio shows such as *Captain Midnight* or *Hop Harrigan*. First Lieutenant William K. Holt remembered hearing cries of: "I'm Deadeye Dick, I never miss"; or, borrowing directly from a yet another radio serial, "Here comes Jack Armstrong, the all-American boy." Imitations of machine gun fire punctuated the commentary.

By the end of 1943, as the program reached its peak wartime strength, 19 defense battalions had been organized. One of the early units, the 5th Defense Battalion, was redesignated as the 14th Defense Battalion, so that the 19 units accounted for 20 numbers. At the peak of the program, 26,685 Marines and sailors served in the 19 defense battalions, a figure that does not include the various replacement drafts that kept them at or near authorized strength. Since a Marine division in 1943 required some 19,000 officers and enlisted men, the pool of experienced persons assigned to the defense battalions made these units a target for reorganization and consolidation as the war approached a climax.

### *The Central Pacific Drive*

Defense battalions supported the attack by V Amphibious Corps across the Central Pacific, an offensive that began in November 1943 with the storming of two main objectives, Makin and Tarawa, in the Gilbert Islands. Long-range bombers



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Naval Institute

*In the jungle, Marines found no towns, few villages, and few permanent buildings to commandeer for shelter. As a result, the men of the defense battalions lived in pup tents and, when rain was not falling, took catnaps on uncomfortable surfaces.*

based in the Ellice Islands helped prepare the atolls for the impending assault, and the 5th and 7th Defense Battalions protected the bases these aircraft used from retaliatory air strikes by the Japanese.

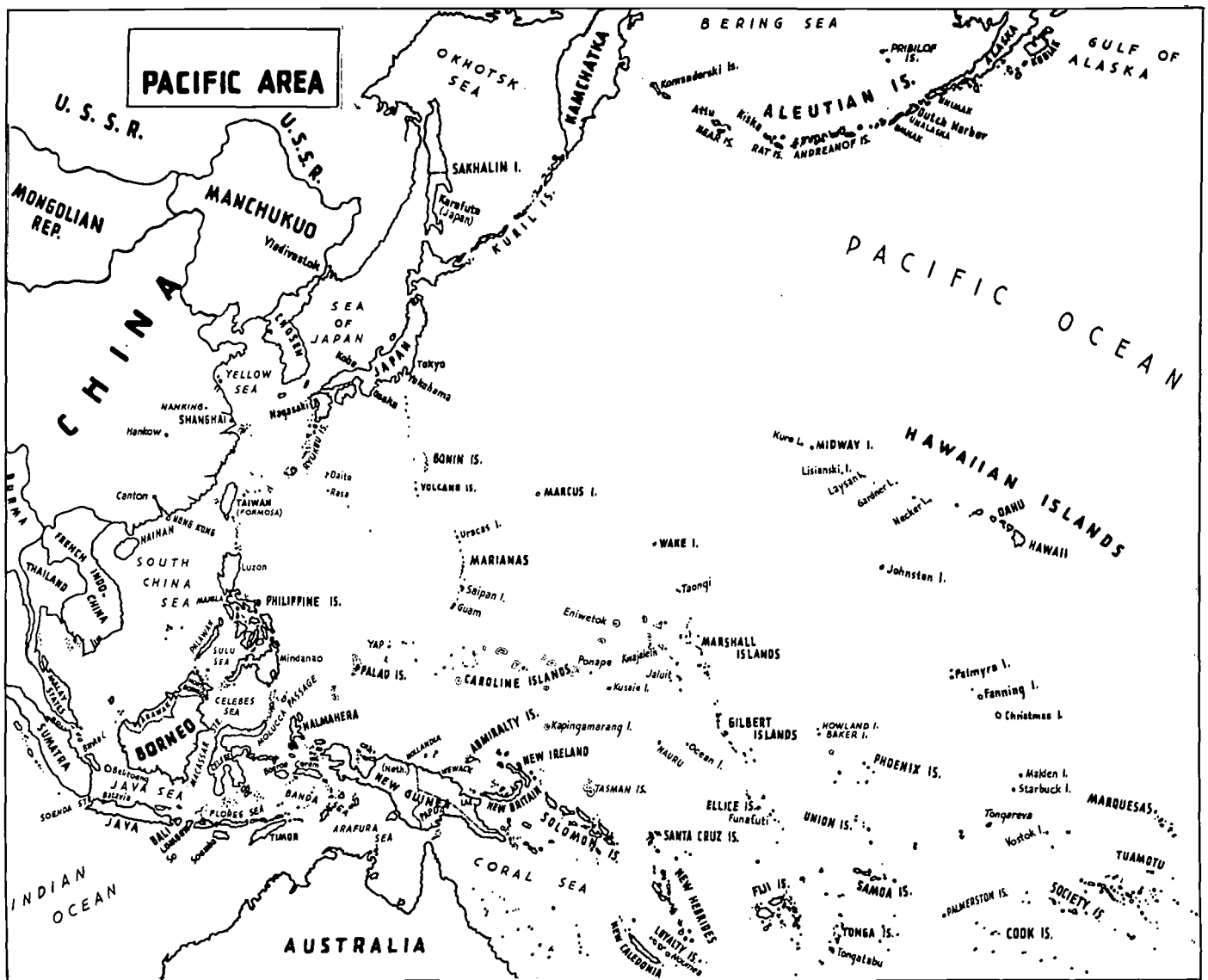
In the bloodiest fighting of the Gilberts operation, the 2d Marine Division stormed Betio Island in Tarawa Atoll on 20 November and overwhelmed the objective within four days. On 24 November, the last day of the fighting, Colonel Norman E. True's 2d Defense Battalion relieved the assault units that had captured Betio. The defense battalion set up guns and searchlights to protect the airstrip on Betio—repaired and named Hawkins Field after First Lieutenant William D. Hawkins, one of the 2d Marine Division's heroes killed in the battle—and another airfield built by Seabees at adjacent Bonkiri. The defenders emplaced radar and searchlights to guard against night bombing raids,

employing a combination of radar-directed and free-lance searchlights that could pick up approaching aircraft at a slant range of 60,000 feet. Between November 1943 and January 1944, the Japanese hurled 19 air raids against True's battalion, along with numerous harassing raids by lone airplanes known as "Washing-Machine Charlie." Only once did the enemy escape detection. According to one of the unit's officers, Captain John V. Alden, the Japanese raiders usually aimed for the airfields, often mistaking the beach for the runways at night and, in one instance, hitting gun positions on the coast of Bairiki.

On 28 November 1943, the 8th Defense Battalion, commanded by Colonel Lloyd L. Leech, went ashore at Apamama, an atoll in the Gilberts captured with a minimum of casualties, to relieve the Marine assault force that had landed there. Apamama lay just 80 miles from blood-drenched Tarawa, but for First Lieu-

tenant James G. Lucas, a Marine Corps combat correspondent, it was "difficult to imagine they were in the same world." Japanese bombers from the Marshall Islands sometimes raided Apamama, recalled Sergeant David N. Austin of the anti-aircraft group, and one moonlit night the gunners "fired 54 rounds before the cease-fire came over the phone."

The bold thrust through the Gilberts penetrated the outermost ring of Japanese defenses in the Central Pacific. The next objectives lay in the Marshall Islands, where in a fast-paced series of assaults V Amphibious Corps used Marine reconnaissance troops and Army infantry to attack Majuro on 30 January 1944 and, immediately afterward, two objectives in Kwajalein Atoll. The 4th Marine Division assaulted Roi-Namur—actually two islets joined by a causeway—on the 31st, and an Army infantry division landed at Kwajalein Island on 1 February. A



mixed force of Marines and soldiers stormed Eniwetok Atoll, at the western limit of the Marshall group, on 17 February. Those who watched from shipboard off Roi-Namur saw "pillars of greasy smoke billow upward." This awesome sight convinced an eyewitness, Master Technical Sergeant David Dempsey, a combat correspondent, that the preliminary bombardment by aircraft and naval guns must have blasted the objective to oblivion, but somehow the Japanese emerged from the shattered bunkers and fought back.

The 1st Defense Battalion, under Colonel Lewis A. Hohn, and the 15th, led by Lieutenant Colonel Francis B. Loomis, arrived in the Marshalls and initially emplaced their weapons at Roi-Namur and Majuro. On Roi, the defenders set up anti-air-

craft guns in some of the 50 or more craters gouged in the Japanese runways by American bombs and shells. Machine gunner Ed Gough recalled that his special weapons group came ashore "on the first or second day," remaining "through the first air raid when the Japanese succeeded in kicking our ass." The enemy could not, however, overcome the anti-aircraft defenses, and calm settled over the captured Marshalls. Marines from the defense battalions helped islanders displaced by the war to return to Roi-Namur, where, upon coming home, they helped bury the enemy dead and clear the wreckage from a "three-quarter-square-mile junk yard." Tractors, trucks, and jeeps ground ceaselessly across the airfield on Roi bringing in construction material for new installations and

removing the rubble.

Colonel Hohn's battalion moved on to Kwajalein Island and Eniwetok Atoll by the end of January, and Lieutenant Colonel Wallace O. Thompson's 10th Defense Battalion joined them on 21 February. The victory in the Marshalls advanced the Pacific battle lines 2,500 miles closer to Japan.

Far to the south, the African-American 51st Defense Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Curtis W. LeGette, landed at the Ellice Islands in February 1944. One glance at the isolated chain of desolate islands suggested that the white Marines of the departing 7th Defense Battalion "were never so glad to see black people" in their lives. The 51st took over airfield defense and engaged in gun drills and practice

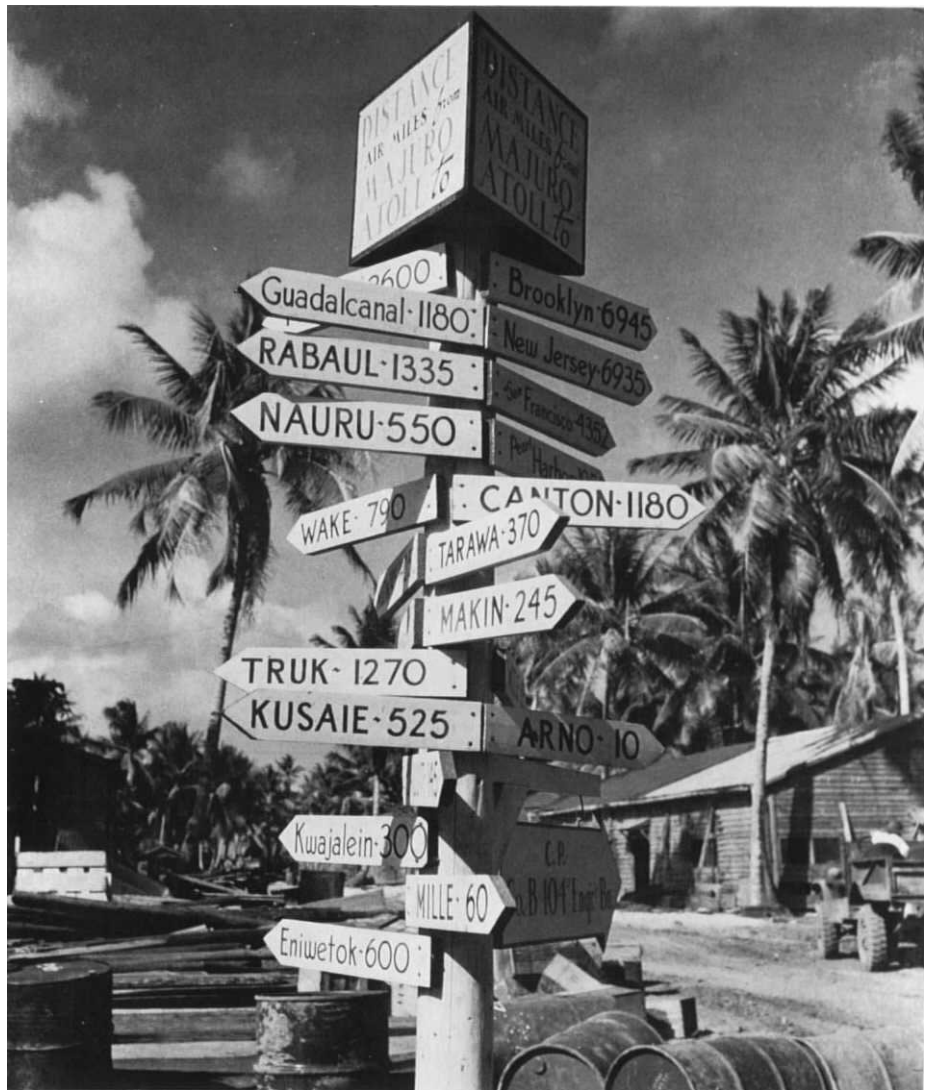
alerts, finally firing on a radar return from a suspected surfaced Japanese submarine on 28 March. The 51st assumed responsibility for defending Eniwetok in September, replacing the 10th Defense Battalion, but actual combat continued to elude the black Marines despite unceasing preparation.

### *Signs of the Times*

Once established ashore in the Gilberts and Marshalls, the defense battalions rarely, if ever, faced the threat of marauding Japanese ships or aircraft. As the active battlefields moved closer to Japan, the phenomenon of sign-painting took hold. One of them summarized the increasing isolation of the defense battalions from the fury of the island war. "Shady Acres Rifle and Gun Club," read the sign, "Where Life Is a 155mm Bore." Such was the forgotten war on the little islands, described as "almost microscopic in the incredible vastness of the Pacific;" which became stops on the supply lines that sustained other Marines fighting hundreds of miles away. According to one observer, the captured atolls served as "stopovers for the long, gray convoys heading westward," though some of them also became fixed aircraft carriers for bombing the by-passed enemy bases. While the defense battalions prepared for attacks that did not come, a relatively small number of airmen harassed thousands of Japanese left behind in the Marshall and Caroline Islands.

### *Reorienting the Defense Battalion*

At Marine Corps headquarters, General Vandegrift, now the Commandant, faced a problem of using scarce manpower to the greatest possible effect. Vandegrift's director of the Division of Plans and Policies, Gerald C. Thomas, promoted to brigadier general, received instructions to maintain six divisions and four aircraft wings, plus corps troops



Department of Defense photo (USN)

*As this sign on Majuro indicates, the advance in the Pacific war to this atoll in the Marshall Islands had many interesting and challenging stops along the way.*

and a service establishment—all without a substantial increase in aggregate strength. Most of the men that Thomas needed already were undergoing training, but he also recommended eliminating special units, including the defense battalions. Abolishing the defense battalions promised to be difficult, however, for the Navy Department felt it would need as many as 29 battalions to protect advance bases. General Vandegrift exercised his powers of persuasion on Admiral Ernest J. King, the Chief of Naval Operations, and talked the naval officer into agreeing not only to form no new defense battalions but also to accept deactivation of two of the existing 19 units, while reorienting the 17 survivors to meet the current

threat. The process began in April 1944, and five months later, the defense battalions that began the year had converted to antiaircraft artillery units, though a few retained their old designation, and in rare instances the 155mm artillery group remained with a battalion as an attachment rather than an integral component.

A new table of organization appeared in July 1944 and reflected the emphasis on 90mm and 40mm antiaircraft weapons, though it left the manpower level all but unchanged. The document called for a battalion of 57 officers and 1,198 enlisted men, organized into a headquarters and service battery, a heavy antiaircraft group, a light antiaircraft group, and a searchlight battery. Only three

# Coast and Field Artillery

**T**he first defense battalions were equipped with 5-inch/51-caliber naval guns which were originally designed for shipboard mounting and later extensively modified for use ashore. These weapons were then emplaced in static positions, but with great difficulty. The guns fired high explosive, armor piercing, and chemical shells.

Initially, the defense battalions were issued the standard M1918 155mm "GPF" guns, which had split trails, single axles, and twin wheels. These World War I relics deployed

to the South Pacific with the defense battalions. Later, the battalions were issued standard M1A1 155mm "Long Tom" guns. This piece weighed 30,600 pounds, had a split trail and eight pneumatic tires, was pulled by tractor, and was served by a combined crew of 15 men. It was pedestal mounted on the so-called "Panama" mount for its seacoast defense role. It combined great firepower with high mobility and proved to be a workhorse that remained in the inventory after World War II.

units retained the designation of defense battalion until they disbanded—the 6th, the 51st, and the 52d. In the end, most of the defense battalions became antiaircraft artillery outfits and functioned under the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

While these changes were taking place, defense battalions participated in the final phase of the Central Pacific campaign—three successive landings in the Mariana Islands by V Amphibious Corps and III Amphibious Corps, and the destruction by American carrier pilots of the naval air arm that Japan had reconstituted in the two years since the Battle of Midway. In the Marianas,

the Marines stormed large islands, with broken terrain overgrown by jungle, a battlefield far different from the compact, low-lying coral outcroppings of the Gilberts and Marshalls. The Marianas group also differed from the recently captured atolls in that the larger islands had a sizable civilian populace that had lived in towns flattened by bombs and artillery.

On 15 June 1944, the conquest of the Marianas began when V Amphibious Corps attacked Saipan with the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions, backed by the Army's 27th Infantry Division. The 17th Defense Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Tho-

mas G. McFarland, reached Saipan in July, where the 18th Defense Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel William J. Van Ryzin, joined it and became part of the island garrison. Although Saipan was by now officially secure, danger from various tropical maladies persisted. After a briefing on the island's innumerable health hazards, Technical Sergeant John B. T. Campbell heard a private ask the medical officer "Sir, why don't we just let the Japs keep the island?"

On 24 July, Marines boarded landing craft on Saipan and sailed directly to Tinian, the second objective in the Mariana Islands. McFarland's battalion landed at Tinian in August and

*On drab, desolate Eniwetok, the 10th Defense Battalion test fires a 155mm gun out across an empty ocean. Despite the lack of threat of any immediate enemy attack, the weapon was camouflaged just in case Japanese planes flew over.*

Department of Defense photo (USN)





Photo courtesy of the U.S. Naval Institute

*A violent barrage from the 12th Defense Battalion greets attacking Japanese aircraft over Cape Gloucester, New Britain. As the danger from Japanese surface ships diminished, the defense battalions became concerned with Japanese air raids.*

devoted its energy to building and improving gun positions, roads, and living areas. The battalion's historian, Charles L. Henry, Jr., recalled that "round-the-clock patrols were still a necessity, with many Japanese still on the island." Skirmishes erupted almost daily, as Marines from the battalion "cleaned up the island." The 18th Defense Battalion moved from Saipan to Tinian, where the 16th Defense Battalion joined it in September to help protect the new airfields.

On 21 July 1944, the 9th Defense Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Archie E. O'Neil, and the 14th, under Lieutenant Colonel William F. Parks, landed on Guam. The two units served with distinction in the recapture of the island by the 3d Marine Division, 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, and the Army's 77th Infantry Division under the overall control of III Amphibious Corps. The 9th Defense Battalion supported the Marine brigade at Agat Bay, and the 14th protected the 3d Marine Division on the Red Beaches, where

it landed under intense fire, prepared the beachhead defenses, set up anti-aircraft guns, and later helped rescue civilians made homeless by the war. An account prepared by the 3d Marine Division related that, although Guam was secured rapidly, "the fighting was not over" by August, for more than 10,000 disorganized Japanese stragglers held out in the northern part of the island until they fell victim to "the long,

*The fire from Marine anti-aircraft gunners defending the Saipan beachhead against a Japanese night air attack makes interesting "4th of July" patterns in the sky.*

Department of Defense photo (USCG)



grueling process of mopping up." Both defense battalions also bore the twin burdens of working as laborers and doubling as infantry in searching out the Japanese and killing or capturing them.

The captured Mariana Islands demonstrated their strategic value in November 1944, when Boeing B-29s based there began the systematic bombing of targets in Japan's Home Islands. From the outset, Marine anti-aircraft gunners helped defend these airfields. Eventually, the African-American 52d Defense Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel David W. Silvey, reached the Marianas after service at Roi-Namur and Eniwetok, where it had replaced the 1st and 15th battalions. The 52d set up its anti-aircraft weapons on Guam in the spring of 1945, patrolling for Japanese stragglers and providing working parties. The emphasis on labor caused one noncommissioned officer to observe that instead of "being a defense unit, we turned out to be nothing more than a working battalion," a complaint that members of other defense battalions would echo.

Despite constant patrolling and frequent clashes with the die-hard Japanese, duty in the Marianas became a matter of routine. The same pattern prevailed throughout the captured Gilberts and Marshalls, as well.

Aviation units manned the airfields;





Department of Defense photo (USMC) 93063

*Marines of Battery I, 14th Defense Battalion, man their twin-barreled, Mark IV, Oerlikon-designed 20mm guns on top of Chonito Ridge overlooking Adelup Point. In the initial stages of the Guam operation, these anti-aircraft guns were in support.*

anti-aircraft gunners peered into an empty sky, hoping the enemy would appear; those members of defense battalions not otherwise employed wrestled cargo between ship's holds and dumps ashore; and Seabees sweated over construction projects.

While the Central Pacific campaign moved through the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas, the 1st Marine Division, after wresting control of New Britain and isolating Rabaul,

prepared to seize Peleliu in the Palau Islands to protect MacArthur's flank as he reentered the Philippines. The division landed on 15 September 1944, triggering a bloody battle that tied down the bulk of the division until mid-October. Army troops did not crush the last organized Japanese resistance until the end of November. During the bitter fighting on Peleliu, the 12th Defense Battalion, now redesignated an anti-aircraft artillery

unit, supported the Marine division while it fought to conquer the island. Also present on Peleliu—described as “the most heavily fortified ground, square yard by square yard, Marines have ever assaulted”—was the light anti-aircraft group of the 4th Anti-aircraft Artillery (formerly Defense) Battalion. The 7th Defense Battalion, now an anti-aircraft outfit, worked with the Army's 81st Infantry Division on Anguar, remaining there after the soldiers took over the fighting on Peleliu.

The Marine anti-aircraft gunners at Peleliu dug in on what was described as “an abrupt spine of jagged ridges and cliffs—jutting dragon-tooth crags, bare and black, where Marine infantrymen fought maniacal Japs.” As the fury of the fighting abated, the 7th Battalion transferred personnel and equipment to the 12th, which—according to its logistics officer, Harry M. Parke—received newer material and “men with less time overseas,” who would not become eligible to return home when the units began preparing for the invasion of Japan.

By the end of 1944, with Peleliu and the Marianas firmly in American hands, 74,474 Marines and sailors served in island garrisons and

*An optical gun director is manned by Marines from one of the defense battalions participating in the Peleliu operation.*

*Fortunately for the attacking 1st Division Marines, no enemy air appeared overhead to hazard the ground operations.*

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 97571





Department of Defense photo (USMC) 97570

*This Army-developed SCR-584 radar took over the work of the optical gun director on Peleliu, to provide automatic target tracking and gun laying for the Marines.*

base defense forces. As the defense battalion program focused on anti-aircraft weapons, defense units—most of them by now redesignated as anti-aircraft artillery outfits—served in Hawaii (the 13th at Oahu with the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific; the 8th on Kauai with Fleet Marine Force, Pacific; and the 2d, 5th, 7th, and 16th with V Amphibious Corps) and at Midway (the 6th). In the Southwest Pacific, battalions were

stationed at Guadalcanal (the 3d and 4th with III Amphibious Corps), the Russell Islands (the 12th with III Amphibious Corps), and the Ellice Group (the 51st). Locations in the Central Pacific included Eniwetok (the 10th with V Amphibious Corps), Guam (the 9th and 14th with III Amphibious Corps), Majuro (the 1st with V Amphibious Corps), Roi-Namur (the 15th with V Amphibious Corps), and Saipan (the 17th and

18th with V Amphibious Corps). The 52d Defense Battalion, which would reach Guam in the spring of 1945, stood guard at Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls.

### *Tributes to the Defense Battalions*

Master Technical Sergeant Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., a Marine combat correspondent, wrote in 1944 that “since the beginning of the war many of the men . . . had seen action in units smaller than divisions—in defense and raider battalions and other special commands.” These Marines “had been fighting for a long time,” he said. *Leatherneck*, a magazine published by and for Marines, predicted in September 1944 that not until the war was won would the complete story of each defense battalion be told. Because of the vital part they played, “much information about them . . . must be withheld, but there are no American troops with longer combat records in this war.”

### *Pacific Victory*

MacArthur’s advance from the Southwest Pacific by way of the Philippines and Nimitz’s Central Pa-

## Fire Control

A combination of conventional optical sights, coincidence range finders, sound locaters, primitive radar sets, and searchlights comprised the fire control equipment in the early defense battalions. As the war progressed in the Pacific, most of these items were modified and improved.

The Sperry 60-inch searchlight fired up a 800-million-candlepower light beam with a slant range of 20,000 yards. Originally intended for illuminating ships at sea, the Sperry was soon employed in finding and tracking enemy aircraft overhead. The searchlights were also used to direct night fighters to intercept enemy

planes, to guide friendly aircraft back to their bases, and in support of ground forces as their beams were reflected off of low cloud cover in order to illuminate the battlefield.

Searchlights, radar, and sound detectors worked in conjunction with gun directors to convert tracking information into firing data. Gun directors functioned as computers in providing the trigonometric solutions which predicted flight paths and furnishing fuze settings for the anti-aircraft artillery. The input of height finders combined with information about the azimuth and elevation of the targets also was fed to remotely controlled 40mm and 90mm anti-aircraft guns.

The radar and fire control equipment employed by the defense battalions in turn allowed them to become an integral part of the overall air defense of a captured target area. Although dispersed throughout the beachhead, this equipment was linked primarily by telephone with a radio backup. A battalion fire control center coordinated the operations of each group of weapons and in turn was incorporated with other Allied radar nets. The effective ranges for fire control equipment was variously 20-45 miles for fire control gear and 120-200 miles for search radar.



Tracers fired by the 5th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion—formerly the 5th Defense Battalion—light up the night skies

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 08087 by TSgt C.V. Corkran over Okinawa during a Japanese air attack. A Marine fighter squadron's Corsairs are silhouetted against the spectacle.

cific campaign aimed ultimately at the invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. To prepare for the climactic battles, the 2d, 5th, 8th, and 16th Antiaircraft Artillery (formerly Defense) Battalions formed the 1st Provisional Antiaircraft Artillery Group. The group did not see action at Iwo Jima in February 1945, but at Okinawa, the final objective before the projected attack on Japan, it came under the operational control of the Tenth Army's 53d Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade.

The Marine and Army divisions of the Tenth Army landed across the Okinawa beaches on 1 April 1945. On the 13th, the first echelon of the newly redesignated 8th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion arrived at recently captured Nago, near the neck of Okinawa's Motobu Peninsula, to conduct "normal AA [antiaircraft]

defense operations." James H. Powers recalled that the battalion got credit for a Mitsubishi G4M bomber (nicknamed "Betty" by the Allies) and also helped secure a defensive perimeter against Japanese stragglers "making trouble in our vicinity." The 5th battalion set up in the Yontan-Kadena area by 6 May, where it received credit for making one kill and assisting in another. These antiaircraft battalions demonstrated that they had learned, in the six years since the first of the defense battalions was formed in 1939, to make good use of weapons, communications gear, and radar.

Technical Sergeant John Worth told of a Marine officer looking for firing positions and living quarters for his battery in one of the antiaircraft artillery battalions. The officer located a cave, free of booby traps,

that would provide adequate shelter, but he had to keep some other unit from taking it. To enforce his claim, he put up a sign: "Booby Traps. Keep Away." After he left to report his discovery and deploy the unit, a demolitions man saw the sign and, blew up the cave, sealing it shut.

Japanese air attacks attained unprecedented savagery in the waters off Okinawa, as the *Special Attack Corps* pressed home the suicidal kamikaze attacks first employed in the Philippines. Hoping to save Japan—much as a storm, the original *Kamikaze* or divine wind, had scattered a Mongol invasion fleet in the sixteenth century—the suicide pilots deliberately dived into American ships, hoping to trade one life for hundreds. Other vehicles for suicide attack included piloted bombs,



Marine Corps Historical Collection

*The 13th Defense Battalion passes in review at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1943. Marine historian and veteran defense battalion Marine Col Robert D. Heintz, Jr., described the men of*

*these battalions, who often endured months of waiting punctuated by days of savage action, as a "hard worked and frustrated species." The 13th was shortly to deploy to the Pacific*

manned torpedoes, and explosives-laden motorboats. These desperate measures could not prevail, however, and the United States seized an essential base for the planned invasion of Japan.

In the Marianas, Marines on Tinian witnessed the takeoff on 6 August of the B-29 *Enola Gay*, which dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, another B-29, also from Tinian's North Field, dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. The shock of the atomic weapons, the entry of the Soviet Union into the war against Japan, the cumulative effects of attrition throughout the vast Pacific, months of conventional bombing of the Home Islands, and an ever-tightening submarine blockade forced Japan to surrender. Members of the 8th An-

tiacraft Artillery Battalion on Okinawa recall tracking the last air attack of the war, a raid that turned back short of the target when the Japanese government agreed to surrender. The formal cessation of hostilities, effective 15 August 1945, also put an end to the systematic mopping-up in northern Okinawa. The dour prediction of the early days in the South Pacific, "Golden Gate in '48," gave way to a new slogan, "Home Alive in '45." The actual homecoming would be delayed, however, for those Marines scheduled for occupation duty in Japan or North China.

### *Gone But Not Forgotten*

Defense battalions deployed early and often throughout the Pacific campaigns, serving in a succession of

distant places, some dangerous, others boring. They did not benefit from post-battle rest—though few rest areas lived up to their name—nor were their accommodations comparable to those of an aircraft wing sharing the same location. The Marines of the defense battalions endured isolation, sickness, monotonous food, and primitive living conditions for long periods, as they engaged in the onerous task of protecting advance bases in areas that by no stretch of the imagination resembled tropical paradises. After putting up with these conditions for months, many of these same Marines went on to serve as replacements in the six Marine divisions in action when the war ended.

Throughout their existence, the defense battalions demonstrated a

## Armor and Support

**W**hile defense battalions could defend themselves with small arms and machine guns, they lacked maneuver elements which, in turn, made them vulnerable when deployed independently of other ground forces. In 1941, the Marine Corps decided not to form separate infantry units to support the defense battalions. For the most part, they would have to depend upon the infantry elements with which they landed in an

amphibious assault. In some cases, however, infantry, armor, and artillery support was provided to reinforce defense battalions in certain operations. During the Pacific War, provisional rifle companies were formed and assigned to the 6th, 7th, 51st, and 52d Defense Battalions, and tank platoons were assigned at various times to the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions.

fundamental lesson of the Pacific War—the need for teamwork. As one Marine Corps officer has pointed out, the Marine Corps portion of the victorious American team was “itself the embodiment of unification.” The Corps had “molded itself into the team concept without the slightest difficulty . . . Marine tank men, artillerymen, and antiaircraft gunners of the defense battalions, interested only in doing a good job, gave equal support to . . . [the] Army and Navy . . . .

Relations with other combat services, arms, and units defined the role of the defense battalions in the Pacific, for they functioned as a part of a combined effort at sea, in the air, and on the ground. During the war, there were examples of independent deployment, as at Wake Island and Midway. It was equally common, however, for battalions or their components to serve with brigades or divisions, as at Iceland, Samoa, or Guadalcanal, or to operate under corps-level commands, as at New Georgia. Finally, especially after the transition to antiaircraft artillery battalions, the units tended to perform base-defense or garrison duty under the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. The shift of the defense battalions from fighting front to backwater of the war reflected changing strategic reality and not an arbitrary decision to deemphasize. Some of the Marines in these units may have felt that the spotlight of publicity passed them by and focused on the assault troops, even though antiaircraft gunners and even artillerymen sometimes accompanied the early waves to an embattled beachhead, but the apportionment of press coverage stemmed from the composition of the Marine Corps and the nature of the fighting.

Because the defense battalion could train and serve as an essentially independent organization, it became a logical choice for the first African-American unit formed by the Marines. Although segregation prevailed

in the Corps throughout World War II, the creation of the 51st and 52d Defense Battalions signaled a break with racist practices and became a milestone on the road toward today’s racially integrated Marine Corps.

Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., a Marine historian who had helped shape the concept of the defense battalion and served in one of the wartime units, described the members as a “hard-worked and frustrated species.” He felt that the defense battalions represented the culmination of Marine Corps thinking that could trace its evolutionary course back to the turn of the century. The weapons, radars, and communications equipment in the battalions at times represented the cutting edge of wartime technology, and the skill with which they were used paid tribute to the training and discipline of the members of these units. Charles A. Holmes, a veteran of the defense battalion that fought so gallantly at Wake Island, said that, in his opinion, anyone could serve somewhere in a division or aircraft wing, but “it was an honor to have served in a special unit of the U.S. Marines.”

### *Battalion Summaries*

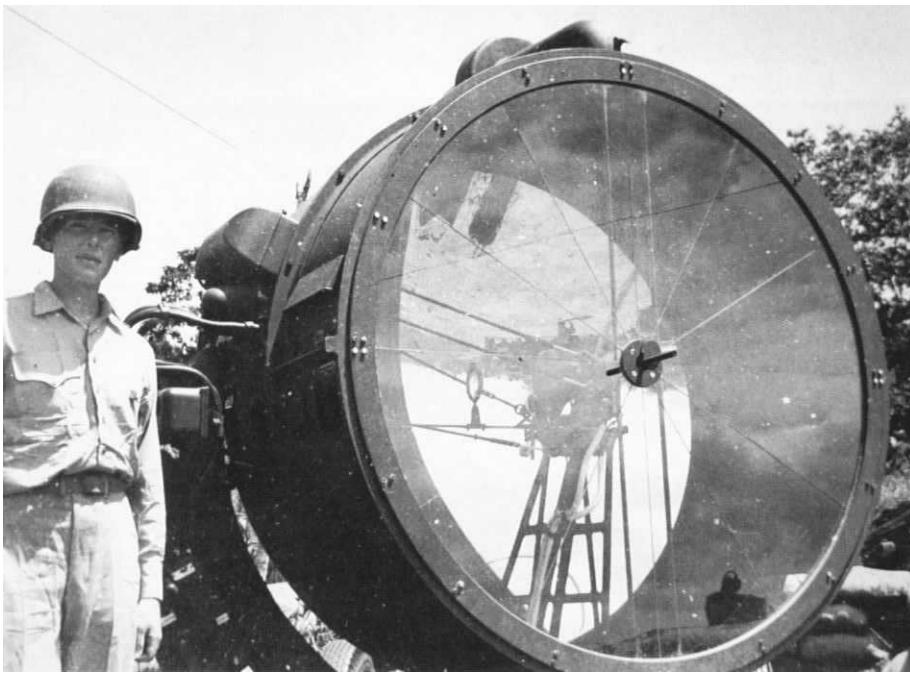
Defense battalion war diaries, muster rolls, and the unit files held by the Marine Corps Historical Center provide the basis for the following brief accounts of the service of the various defense battalions. The actions of some units are well documented: for example, the 1st Defense Battalion on Wake Island in 1941; the 6th at Midway in 1942; and the 9th in the Central Solomons during 1943. Few of the battalions received group recognition commensurate with their contributions to victory, although the 1st, 6th, and 9th were awarded unit citations. Each defense battalion created its own distinctive record as it moved from one island to another, but gaps and discrepancies persist nevertheless.

#### **1st Defense Battalion (November 1939–May 1944)**

The unit, formed at San Diego, California, deployed to the Pacific as one of the Rainbow Five, the five defense battalions stationed there in accordance with the Rainbow 5 war plan when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Under Lieutenant Colonel Bert A. Bone, elements of the battalion arrived in Hawaii in March 1941. The unit provided defense detachments for Johnston and Palmyra Islands in March and April of that year and for Wake Island in August. The Wake Island detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion received the Presidential Unit Citation for the defense of that outpost—which earned the battalion the nickname “Wake Island Defenders”—and other elements dealt with hit-and-run raids at Palmyra and Johnston Islands. In March 1942, the scattered detachments became garrison forces and a reconstituted battalion took shape in Hawaii. Command passed to Colonel Curtis W. LeGette in May 1942 and to Lieutenant Colonel John H. Griebel in September. Lieutenant Colonel Frank P. Hager exercised command briefly; his successor, Colonel Lewis H. Hohn, took the unit to Kwajalein and Eniwetok, in the Marshall Islands, in February 1944. The following month found the battalion on Majuro, also in the Marshalls, where it became the 1st Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 7 May 1944, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jean H. Buckner. As an antiaircraft unit, it served as part of the Guam garrison, remaining on the island through 1947.

#### **2d Defense Battalion (March 1940–April 1944)**

The battalion was formed at San Diego, California, under Lieutenant Colonel Bert A. Bone. By the time the unit deployed to Hawaii in December 1941, five officers had exercised command; Major Lewis A. Hohn took over from Colonel Bone in July 1940, followed in August of that year by Colonel Thomas E. Bourke, in November 1940 by Lieutenant Colonel Charles I. Murray, and in February 1941 by Lieutenant Colonel Raymond E. Knapp. Under Knapp, who received a promotion to colonel, the battalion deployed in January 1942 from Hawaii to Tutuila, Samoa. Lieutenant Colonel Norman E. True briefly took over, and Knapp succeeded him from October 1942 to May 1943, but True again commanded the battalion when it deployed in November 1943 to Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. True remained in command when the unit was redesignated the 2d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 16 April 1944. The organization subsequently served in Hawaii and Guam before land-



National Archives Photo 127-N-62097

*The Sperry 60-inch searchlight was employed by the 3d Defense Battalion both to illuminate incoming enemy aircraft and to spot approaching surface vessels.*

ing on Okinawa in April 1945. It returned to the United States in 1946 and was deactivated.

### 3d Defense Battalion (October 1939-June 1944)

Activated at Parris Island, South Carolina, with Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Pepper in command, the battalion deployed in May 1940 to Hawaii where it became one of the Rainbow Five. Colonel Harry K. Pickett took command in August of that year, and in September approximately a third of the battalion, under Major Harold C. Roberts, went to Midway and assumed responsibility for the antiaircraft defense of the atoll. Lieutenant Colonel Pepper brought the rest of the unit to Midway in 1941, but the battalion returned to Hawaii in October and helped defend Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked on 7 December. A detachment of 37mm guns and the 3-inch antiaircraft group joined the 6th Defense Battalion at Midway, opposed the Japanese air attack on 4 June 1942, and shared in a Navy Unit Commendation awarded the 6th Battalion for the defense of that atoll. In August 1942, the battalion, still led by Lieutenant Colonel Pepper, participated in the landings at Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. During 1943, the unit experienced a change of commanders, with Harold C. Roberts, now a lieutenant colonel, taking over in March 1943, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth W. Benner in May, and Lieutenant Colonel Samuel G. Taxis in August. After a stay in New Zealand, the battalion returned

to Guadalcanal in September 1943 and in November of that year, while commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Edward H. Forney, landed at Bougainville, remaining in the northern Solomons until June 1944. Redesignated the 3d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 15 June 1944, the organization was disbanded at Guadalcanal on the last day of that year.

*Marines of the 7th Defense Battalion, one of the "Rainbow Five," give their new M3 Stuart light tank a trial run at Tutuila, American Samoa, in the summer of 1942.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 54082



### 4th Defense Battalion (February 1940-May 1944)

The organization took shape at Parris Island, South Carolina, under Major George F. Good, Jr.; Colonel Lloyd L. Leech took over in April; and Lieutenant Colonel Jesse L. Perkins in December 1940. Colonel William H. Rupertus commanded the unit when it deployed in February 1941 to defend the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Under Colonel Harold S. Fasset, the battalion arrived in the Pacific in time to become one of the Rainbow Five. Its strength was divided between Pearl Harbor and Midway, and helped defend both bases against Japanese attacks on 7 December. The unit deployed in March 1942 to Efate and Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. It moved in July 1943 to New Zealand and then to Guadalcanal before landing in August 1943 at Vella Lavella in support of the I Marine Amphibious Corps. After becoming the 4th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 15 May 1944, the unit returned to Guadalcanal in June but ended the war on Okinawa, arriving there in April 1945.

### 5th Defense Battalion (December 1940-April 1944)

Organized at Parris Island, South Carolina, under Colonel Lloyd L. Leech, the 5th Defense Battalion subsequently became the 14th Defense Battalion, thus earning the un-

official title of "Five: Fourteenth." Colonel Leech took the 5th Defense Battalion (minus the 5-inch artillery group) to Iceland with the Marine brigade sent there to relieve the British garrison. He brought the unit back to the United States in March 1942, and in July it sailed for the South Pacific, where one detachment set up its weapons at Noumea, New Caledonia, and another defended Tulagi in the Solomons after the 1st Marine Division landed there in August 1942. The bulk of the battalion went to the Ellice Islands; there Colonel George F. Good, Jr., assumed command in November, and was relieved in December by Lieutenant Colonel Willis E. Hicks. On 16 January 1943, the part of the unit located at Tulagi was redesignated the 14th Defense Battalion, while the remainder in the Ellice group became the Marine Defense Force, Funafuti. In March 1944, the Marine Defense Force, Funafuti, sailed for Hawaii, where, on 16 April, it became the 5th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, seeing action under the designation during the latter stages of the Okinawa campaign.

**6th Defense Battalion**  
(March 1941-February 1946)

Lieutenant Colonel Charles I. Murray formed the battalion at San Diego, California, but turned it over to Colonel Raphael Griffin, who took it to Hawaii in July 1941. It relieved the 3d Defense Battalion at Midway in September. In June 1942, the 6th, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Harold D. Shannon, helped fight off a Japanese air attack and repair bomb damage, thus earning a Navy Unit Commendation. The battalion remained at Midway until redesignated Marine Barracks, Naval Base, Midway, on 1 February 1946. The wartime commanders who succeeded Shannon were Lieutenant Colonels Lewis A. Hohn, Rupert R. Deese, John H. Griebel, Charles T. Tingle, Frank P. Hager, Jr., Robert L. McKee, Herbert R. Nusbaum, and Wilfred Weaver, and Major Robert E. Hommel.

**7th Defense Battalion**  
(December 1940-April 1944)

Lieutenant Colonel Lester A. Dessez formed the unit at San Diego, California, as a composite battalion of infantry and artillery. In March 1941, he took the outfit to Tutuila, Samoa, as one of the Rainbow Five. The 7th later deployed to Upolu and established a detachment at Savaii. Colonel Curtis W. LeGette took command in December 1942, and in August of the following year, the battalion moved to Nanoumea in the Ellice Islands in preparation for supporting operations against the Gilbert Islands. Lieutenant Colonel Henry R. Paige took over in December 1943 and brought the unit to



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 56812  
*This Browning M2 watercooled anti-aircraft machine gun, operated by 9th Defense Battalion Marines, shot down the first attacking Japanese aircraft at Rendova.*

Hawaii where, on 16 April 1944, it became the 7th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion. As an antiaircraft outfit, it deployed to Anguar, Palau Islands, in September 1944, where it served in the garrison force for the remainder of the war.

**8th Defense Battalion**  
(April 1942-April 1944)

Lieutenant Colonel Augustus W. Cockrell raised this battalion from Marine units at Tutuila, Samoa. In May 1942, the battalion deployed to the Wallis Islands, where it was redesignated the Island Defense Force. Lieutenant Colonel Earl A. Sneeringer assumed command for two weeks in August 1943 before turning the unit over to Colonel Clyde H. Hartsel. Colonel Lloyd L. Leech became battalion commander in October 1943, a month before the unit deployed to Apamama in the Gilberts. On 16 April 1944, after moving to Hawaii, the organization became the 8th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion and, as such, took part in the Okinawa campaign, remaining on the island until November 1945 when the unit returned to the United States.

**9th Defense Battalion**  
(February 1942-September 1944)

Formed at Parris Island, South Carolina, and known as the "Fighting Ninth," the battalion was first commanded by Major Wallace O. Thompson, who brought it to Cuba where it helped defend the Guantanamo naval base. Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Dubel and his successor, Colonel David R. Nimmer, commanded the battalion while it served in Cuba, and Nimmer remained in command when the unit landed in Novem-

ber 1942 to reinforce the defenses of Guadalcanal. In preparation for further action, the battalion emphasized mobility and artillery support of ground operations at the expense of its coastal defense mission. Lieutenant Colonel William Scheyer commanded the 9th during the fighting in the central Solomons. Here it set up antiaircraft guns and heavy artillery on Rendova to support the fighting on neighboring New Georgia before moving to New Georgia itself and deploying its light tanks and other weapons. The battalion's tanks also supported Army troops on Arundel Island. Lieutenant Colonel Archie E. O'Neil was in command when the unit landed at Guam on D-Day, 21 July 1944. The battalion was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for its service in action at Guadalcanal, Rendova, New Georgia, and Guam. Redesignated the 9th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion in September 1944, the unit returned to the United States in 1946.

**10th Defense Battalion**  
(June 1942-May 1944)

Formed under Colonel Robert Blake at San Diego, California, the unit arrived in the Solomon Islands in February 1943, and participated in the defense of Tulagi in that group and Banika in the Russell Islands. The battalion's light tanks saw action on New Georgia and nearby Arundel Island. Under Lieutenant Colonel Wallace O. Thompson, who assumed command in July 1943, the 10th landed at Eniwetok, Marshall Islands, in February 1944. The unit was redesignated the 10th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 7 May 1944.

**11th Defense Battalion**  
(June 1942-May 1944)

This battalion was activated at Parris Island, South Carolina, under Colonel Charles N. Muldrow and deployed during December 1942 to Efate in the New Hebrides. Beginning in January 1943, it helped defend Tulagi in the Solomons and Banika in the Russells group. During the Central Solomons campaign, it fought on Rendova, New Georgia, and Arundel Islands. In August, the entire battalion came together on New Georgia and in March 1944 deployed the short distance to Arundel Island. Redesignated the 11th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 16 May 1944, the unit moved in July to Guadalcanal where it was deactivated by year's end.

**12th Defense Battalion**  
(August 1942-June 1944)

Colonel William H. Harrison activated this unit at San Diego, California, and took it to Hawaii in January 1943. After a brief stay in Australia, the 12th landed in June 1943 at Woodlark Island off New Guinea. Next the 12th took part in the assault on Cape Gloucester, New Britain in December 1943. Lieutenant Colonel Merlyn D. Holmes assumed command in February 1944, and on 15 June the defense battalion was redesignated the 12th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion. It moved to the Russell Islands in June and in September to Peleliu, where it remained through 1945.

**13th Defense Battalion**  
(September 1942-April 1944)

Colonel Bernard Dubel formed the battalion at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where it defended the naval base throughout the war. In February 1944, Colonel Richard M. Cutts, Jr., took command. The unit became the 13th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 15 April and was disbanded after the war.

**14th Defense Battalion**  
(January 1943-September 1944)

Colonel Galen M. Sturgis organized this battalion from the elements of the 5th Defense Battalion on Tulagi, which inspired the nickname "Five: Fourteenth." Lieutenant Colonel Jesse L. Perkins took command in June 1943, and during his tour of duty, the battalion operated on Tulagi and sent a detachment to Emirau, St. Mathias Islands, to support a landing there in March 1944. Lieutenant Colonel William F. Parks took over from Perkins that same month and in April brought the unit to Guadalcanal to prepare for future operations. The organization

landed at Guam in July and in September became the 14th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, remaining on the island until after the war had ended.

**15th Defense Battalion**  
(October 1943-May 1944)

Organized in Hawaii by Lieutenant Colonel Francis B. Loomis, Jr., from the 1st Airdrome Battalion at Pearl Harbor, the unit bore the nickname "First: Fifteenth." Beginning in January 1944, it served at Kwajalein and Majuro Atolls in the Marshalls. Lieutenant Colonel Peter J. Negri assumed command in May 1944, shortly before the unit, on the 7th of that month, became the 15th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion.

**16th Defense Battalion**  
(November 1942-April 1944)

Lieutenant Colonel Richard P. Ross, Jr., formed the unit on Johnston Island from elements of the 1st Defense Battalion that had been stationed there. Lieutenant Colonel Bruce T. Hemphill took over in July 1943 and turned the unit over to Lieutenant Colonel August F. Penzold, Jr., in March of the following year. Redesignated the 16th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 19 April 1944, the outfit went to Hawaii by the end of August. It subsequently deployed to Tinian, remaining there until moving to Okinawa in April 1945.

**17th Defense Battalion**  
(March 1944-April 1944)

At Kauai in Hawaii, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas G. McFarland organized this unit from the 2d Airdrome Battalion, which had returned from duty in the Ellice Islands. The redesignation gave rise to the nickname "Two: Seventeen," and the motto "One of a Kind." On 19 April, the defense battalion became the 17th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion. It moved to Saipan in July and to Tinian in August. At the latter island, it provided antiaircraft defense for both Tinian Town and North Field, from which B-29s took off with the atomic bombs that leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**18th Defense Battalion**  
(October 1943-April 1944)

Activated at New River, North Carolina, by Lieutenant Colonel Harold C. Roberts, who was replaced in January 1944 by Lieutenant Colonel William C. Van Ryzin, the unit became the 18th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion on 16 May of that year. By August, echelons of the battalion were located at Saipan and Tinian, but by September it had

come together on the latter island, where it remained until the end of the war.

**51st Defense Battalion**  
(August 1942-January 1946)

Organized at Montford Point Camp, New River, North Carolina, this was the first of two defense battalions commanded by white officers, but organized from among African-American Marines who had trained at Montford Point. Colonel Samuel Woods, Jr., who commanded the Montford Point Camp, formed the battalion and became its first commanding officer. Lieutenant Colonel William B. Onley took over in March 1943 and Lieutenant Colonel Floyd A. Stephenson in April. The initial plan called for the 51st to be a composite unit with infantry and pack-howitzer elements, but in June 1943 it became a conventional defense battalion. Lieutenant Curtis W. LeGette assumed command in January 1944 and took the battalion to Nanoumea and Funafuti in the Ellice Islands, where it arrived by the end of February 1944. In September, the 51st deployed to Eniwetok in the Marshalls where, in December, Lieutenant Colonel Gould P. Groves became battalion commander, a post he would hold throughout the rest of the war. In June 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Groves dispatched a composite group to provide antiaircraft defense for Kwajalein Atoll. The battalion sailed from the Marshalls in November 1945 and disbanded at Montford Point in January 1946.

**52d Defense Battalion**  
(December 1943-May 1946)

This unit, like the 51st, was organized at Montford Point Camp, New River, North Carolina, and manned by African Americans commanded by white officers. Planned as a composite unit, the 52d took shape as a conventional defense battalion. It absorbed the pack howitzer crews made surplus when the 51st lost its composite status and retrained them in the employment of other weapons. Colonel Augustus W. Cockrell organized the unit, which he turned over to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph W. Earnshaw in July 1944. Under Earnshaw, the 52d the unit deployed to the Marshalls, arriving in October to man the antiaircraft defenses of Majuro Atoll and Roi-Namur in Kwajalein Atoll. Lieutenant Colonel David W. Silvey assumed command in January 1945, and between March and May the entire battalion deployed to Guam, remaining there for the rest of the war. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Moore, Jr., replaced Silvey in May 1945, and in November, the 52d relieved the 51st at Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls before returning to Montford Point, where in May 1946 it became the 3d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion (Composite).



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Available in the archives at the Marine Corps Historical Center is an impressive body of primary source material prepared by individual defense battalions during the Pacific War. Also in the Marine Corps Historical Center are the Oral History and Personal Papers Collections, containing many first-hand accounts of World War II.

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A Marine for 25 years, 1967-1992, Major Melson served in Vietnam, during the Gulf War, and carried out a variety of assignments in the Fleet Marine Force. He also taught at the United States Naval Academy and served at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. For six years, he was a historian at the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, and he continues to deal with the past as a writer and teacher.



**WORLD WAR II**



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