

FROM MAKIN TO  
BOUGAINVILLE:  
MARINE RAIDERS IN  
THE PACIFIC WAR

MARINES IN  
WORLD WAR II  
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY MAJOR JON T. HOFFMAN  
U.S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE





# From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War

by Major Jon T. Hoffman, USMCR

**I**n February 1942, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, ordered the creation of a new unit designated the 1st Marine Raider Battalion. This elite force, and its three sister battalions, went on to gain considerable fame for fighting prowess in World War II. There is more to the story of these units, however, than a simple tale of combat heroics. The inception, growth, and sudden end of the raiders reveals a great deal about the development and conduct of amphibious operations during the war, and about the challenges the Corps faced in expanding from 19,000 men to nearly a half million. The raiders also attracted more than their share of strong leaders. The resulting combination of courage, doctrine, organization, and personalities makes this one of the most interesting chapters in Marine Corps history.

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**On the Cover:** The Browning air-cooled .30-caliber machine gun was the weapon of choice for raider battalions because of its low weight in comparison to other available machine guns. The raider battalions were not armed with heavy weapons. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 56108

**At left:** Marine riflemen take on Japanese snipers while others put a captured 37mm field gun into operation during the raid on Koiari. Parachutists and raiders expected to surprise the enemy, but were themselves surprised instead when they landed in the midst of a well-defended supply dump. The enemy pinned the Marines to the beach with heavy fire, until evening. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 69783

## *Creating the Raiders*

Two completely independent forces were responsible for the appearance of the raiders in early 1942. Several historians have fully traced one of these sets of circumstances, which began with the friendship developed between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Evans F. Carlson. As a result of his experiences in China, Carlson was convinced that guerrilla warfare was the wave of the future. One of his adherents in 1941 was Captain James Roosevelt, the president's son. At the same time, another presidential confidant, William J. Donovan, was pushing a similar theme. Donovan had been an Army hero in World War I and was now a senior advisor on intelligence matters. He wanted to create a guerrilla force that would infiltrate occupied territory and assist resistance groups. He made a formal proposal along these lines to President Roosevelt in December 1941. In January, the younger Roosevelt wrote to the Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps and recommended creation of "a unit for purposes similar to the British Commandos and the Chinese Guerrillas."

These ideas were appealing at the time because the war was going badly for the Allies. The Germans had forced the British off the continent of Europe, and the Japanese were sweeping the United States and Britain from much of the Pacific. The military forces of the Allies were too weak to slug it out in conventional battles with the Axis powers, so guerrilla warfare and quick raids appeared to be viable alternatives. The British commandos had already con-

ducted numerous forays against the European coastline, and Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill enthusiastically endorsed the concept to President Roosevelt. The Marine Commandant, Major General Thomas Holcomb, allegedly succumbed to this high-level pressure and organized the raider battalions, though he himself thought that any properly trained Marine unit could perform amphibious raids.

That scenario is mostly accurate, but it tells only half of the story. Two other men also were responsible for the genesis of the raiders. One was General Holland M. Smith. Although the Marine Corps Schools had created the first manual on amphibious operations in 1935, during the early days of World War II Smith faced the unenviable task of trying to convert that paper doctrine into reality. As a brigadier general he commanded the 1st Marine Brigade in Fleet Landing Exercise 6, which took place in the Caribbean in early 1940. There he discovered that several factors, to include the lack of adequate landing craft, made it impossible to rapidly build up combat power on a hostile shore. The initial assault elements would thus be vulnerable to counterattack and defeat while most of the amphibious force remained on board its transports.

As a partial response to this problem, Smith seized upon the newly developed destroyer transport. During FLEX 6, his plan called for the *Manley* (APD 1) to land a company of the 5th Marines via rubber boats at H-minus three hours (prior to dawn) at a point away from the primary assault beach. This force

# Major General Merritt A. Edson, USMC

**M**erritt A. Edson's military career began in the fall of 1915 when he enlisted in the 1st Vermont Infantry (a National Guard outfit). In the summer of 1916 he served in the Mexican border campaign. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, he earned a commission as a Marine officer, but he did not arrive in France until just before the Armistice.

He ultimately more than made up for missing out on "the war to end all wars." In 1921 he began his long career in competitive shooting as part of the 10-man team that won the National Rifle Team Trophy for the Marine Corps. He earned his pilot's wings in 1922 and flew for five years before poor depth perception forced him back into the infantry. In 1927, he received command of the Marine detachment on board the *Denver* (CL 16). He and his men soon became involved in the effort to rid Nicaragua of Augusto Sandino. Edson spent 14 months ashore, most of it deep in the interior of the country. In the process, he won a reputation as an aggressive, savvy small-unit leader. He bested Sandino's forces in more than a dozen skirmishes, earned his first Navy Cross for valor, and came away with the nick-

name "Red Mike" (in honor of the colorful beard he sported in the field).

Edson spent the first half of the 1930s as a tactics instructor at the Basic School for new lieutenants, and then as ordnance officer at the Philadelphia Depot of Supplies. During the summers he continued to shoot; ultimately he captained the rifle team to consecutive national championships in 1935 and 1936. In the summer of 1937 he transferred to Shanghai to become the operations officer for the 4th Marines. He arrived just in time for a ringside seat when the Sino-Japanese War engulfed that city. That gave him ample opportunity to observe Japanese combat techniques at close range. In June 1941, Red Mike assumed command of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines at Quantico.

After his stint with the 1st Raiders and the 5th Marines on Guadalcanal, Edson remained in the Pacific. He served as chief of staff of the 2d Marine Division at Tarawa, and as assistant division commander on Saipan and Tinian. During each of these campaigns he again distinguished himself under fire. Ultimately, the Marine Corps discovered that Edson's courage was matched by his skill as a staff officer. He spent nine months as chief of staff for the Fleet Marine



Force Pacific and closed out the war in charge of the Service Command.

Following the war Edson headed the effort to preserve the Marine Corps in the face of President Truman's drive to "unify" the services. He waged a fierce campaign in the halls of Congress, in the media, and in public appearances across the nation. Finally, he resigned his commission in order to testify publicly before committees of both houses of Congress. His efforts played a key role in preserving the Marine Corps. After stints as the Commissioner of Public Safety in Vermont, and as Executive Director of the National Rifle Association, Edson died in August 1955.

would advance inland, seize key terrain dominating the proposed beachhead, and thus protect the main landing from counterattack. A year later, during FLEX 7, Smith had three destroyer transports. He designated the three companies of the 7th Marines embarked on these ships as the Mobile Landing Group. During the exercise these units again made night landings to protect the main assault, or conducted diversionary attacks.

Smith eventually crystallized his new ideas about amphibious operations. He envisioned making future assaults with three distinct echelons. The first wave would be composed of fast-moving forces that could seize key terrain prior to the main assault. This first element would consist of a parachute regiment, an air infantry

regiment (gliderborne troops), a light tank battalion, and "at least one APD [highspeed destroyer transport] battalion." With a relatively secure beachhead, the more ponderous combat units of the assault force would come ashore. The third echelon would consist of the reserve force and service units.

In the summer of 1941 Smith was nearly in a position to put these ideas into effect. He now commanded the Amphibious Force Atlantic Fleet (AFAF), which consisted of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 1st Infantry Division. During maneuvers at the recently acquired Marine base at New River, North Carolina, Smith embarked the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, in six APDs and made it an independent command reporting

directly to his headquarters. The operations plan further attached the Marine division's sole company of tanks and its single company of parachutists to the APD battalion. The general did not use this task force to lead the assault, but instead landed it on D plus 2 of the exercise, on a beach well in the rear of the enemy's lines. With all aviation assets working in direct support, the mobile force quickly moved inland, surprised and destroyed the enemy reserves, and took control of key lines of communication. Smith called it a "spearhead thrust around the hostile flank."

The AFAF commander had not randomly selected the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, for this role. In June 1941 he personally had picked Lieu-

tenant Colonel Merritt A. "Red Mike" Edson to command that battalion and had designated it to serve permanently with the Navy's APD squadron. Smith began to refer to Edson's outfit as the "light battalion" or the "APD battalion." When the 5th Marines and the other elements of the 1st Marine Division moved down to New River that fall, the 1st Battalion remained behind in Quantico with Force headquarters. Reports going to and from AFAF placed the battalion in a category separate from the rest of the division of which it was still technically a part. Lieutenant Colonel Gerald C. Thomas, the division operations officer, ruefully referred to the battalion as "the play-

thing of headquarters."

Edson's unit was unique in other ways. In a lengthy August 1941 report, the lieutenant colonel evaluated the organization and missions of his unit. He believed that the APD battalion would focus primarily on reconnaissance, raids, and other special operations—in his mind it was a waterborne version of the parachutists. In a similar fashion, the battalion would rely on speed and mobility, not firepower, as its tactical mainstay. Since the APDs could neither embark nor offload vehicles, that meant the battalion had to be entirely foot mobile once ashore, again like the parachutists. To achieve rapid movement, Edson

recommended a new table of organization that made his force much lighter than other infantry battalions. He wanted to trade in his 81mm mortars and heavy machine guns for lighter models. There also would be fewer of these weapons, but they would have larger crews to carry the ammunition. Given the limitations of the APDs, each company would be smaller than its standard counterpart. There would be four rifle companies, a weapons company, and a headquarters company with a large demolitions platoon. The main assault craft would be 10-man rubber boats.

The only thing that kept Smith from formally removing the 1st Bat-

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## Brigadier General Evans F. Carlson, USMC

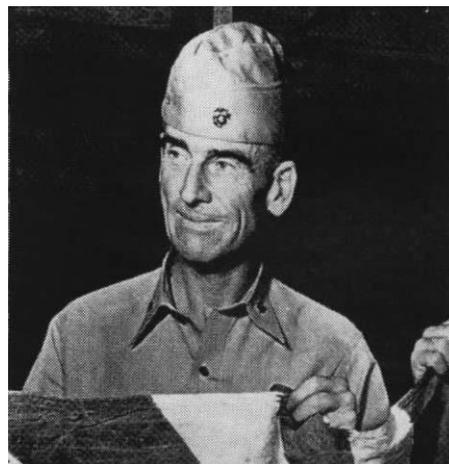
Evans F. Carlson got an early start in his career as a maverick. He ran away from his home in Vermont at the age of 14 and two years later bluffed his way past the recruiters to enlist in the Army. When war broke out in 1917, he already had five years of service under his belt. Like Merritt A. Edson, he soon won a commission, but arrived at the front too late to see combat. After the war he tried to make it as a salesman, but gave that up in 1922 and enlisted in the Marine Corps. In a few months he earned a commission again. Other than a failed attempt at flight school, his first several years as a Marine lieutenant were unremarkable.

In 1927 Carlson deployed to Shanghai with the 4th Marines. There he became regimental intelligence officer and developed a deep interest in China that would shape the remainder of his days. Three years later, commanding an outpost of the *Guardia Nacional* in Nicaragua, he had his first brush with guerrilla warfare. That became the second guiding star of his career. In his only battle, he successfully engaged and dispersed an enemy unit in a daring night attack. There followed a tour with the Legation Guard in Peking, and a stint as executive officer of the presidential guard detachment at Warm Springs, Ge-

orgia. In the latter job Carlson came to know Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Captain Carlson arrived in Shanghai for his third China tour in July 1937. Again like Edson, he watched the Japanese seize control of the city. Detailed to duty as an observer, Carlson sought and received permission to accompany the Chinese Communist Party's 8th Route Army, which was fighting against the Japanese. For the next year he divided his time between the front lines and the temporary Chinese capital of Hangkow. During that time he developed his ideas on guerrilla warfare and ethical indoctrination. When a senior naval officer censured him for granting newspaper interviews, Carlson returned to the States and resigned so that he could speak out about the situation in China. He believed passionately that the United States should do more to help the Chinese in their war with Japan.

During the next two years Carlson spoke and wrote on the subject, to include two books (*The Chinese Army* and *Twin Stars of China*), and made another trip to China. With war looming for the United States, he sought to rejoin the Corps in April 1941. The Commandant granted his request, made him a major in the reserves, and prompt-



ly brought him onto active duty. Ten months later he created the 2d Raider Battalion.

After his departure from the raiders in 1943, Carlson served as operations officer of the 4th Marine Division. He made the Tarawa landing as an observer and participated with his division in the assaults on Kwajalein and Saipan. In the latter battle he received severe wounds in the arm and leg while trying to pull his wounded radio operator out of the line of fire of an enemy machine gun. After the war Carlson retired from the Marine Corps and made a brief run in the 1946 California Senate race before a heart attack forced him out of the campaign. He died in May 1947.

# Destroyer Transports

The origins of the destroyer transports are relatively obscure. The first mention of them came in the 1st Marine Brigade's after action report on Fleet Landing Exercise 3 (FLEX 3). Brigadier General James J. Meade suggested in that February 1937 document that destroyers might solve the dual problem of a shortage of amphibious transports and fire support. With such ships "troops could move quickly close into shore and disembark under protection of the ships' guns." The Navy apparently agreed and decided to experiment with one of its flush-deck, four-stack destroyers. It had built a large number of these during World War I and most were now in mothballs.

In November 1938 the Navy reclassified *Manley* (DD 74) as a miscellaneous auxiliary (AG 28). After a few weeks of hasty work in the New York Navy Yard, the ship served as a transport for Marine units in the Caribbean. In the fall of 1939 *Manley* went back into the yards for a more extensive conversion. Workers removed all torpedo tubes, one gun, two boilers, and their stacks. That created a hold amidships for cargo and troops. The Chief of Naval Operations made it a rush job so the ship would be available for FLEX 6 in early 1940. Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, was the first unit to use the revamped *Manley*. It used rubber boats to execute its 23 February 1940 assault landing against Culebra in the Caribbean.

Satisfied by the utility of the destroyer transport, the Navy redesignated *Manley* yet again, this time as the lead ship of a new class, APD-1. The APD designation denoted a highspeed transport. By the end of 1940 the Navy yards had reactivated five of *Manley's* sister ships and converted them in the same fashion. In its haste, the Navy had left out any semblance of amenities for embarked Marines. When Lieutenant Colonel Edson took his battalion on board the APD squadron in the summer of 1941, each troop compartment was nothing more than an empty



space – no ventilation, no bunks, and just four washbasins for 130 men. It took a high-level investigation, launched by one Marine's letter to his congressman, to get the billeting spaces upgraded.

These original six APDs would be the only ones available until the Navy rushed to complete more in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. As the two raider battalions moved out into the Pacific, so did the APDs. All six ships saw service in the Solomons campaign, but only *Manley* and *Stringham* (APD 6) survived. Japanese bombers sank *Colhoun* (APD 2) on 30 August 1942, just after it had transferred a company of the 1st Raiders from Tulagi to Guadalcanal. Enemy destroyers sank *Gregory* (APD 3) and *Little* (APD 4) in the early morning hours of 5 September 1942 after the two transports had participated with the 1st Raiders in a reconnaissance of Savo Island. A torpedo bomber ended the existence of *McKean* (APD 5) on 17 November 1943 as she ferried troops to Bougainville. Before the war was over, the Navy would convert another 133 destroyers and destroyer escorts to the transport role.

tion, 5th Marines, from the 1st Marine Division was the lack of troops to make the regiment whole again. As it was, many units of the division still existed only on paper in the fall of 1941. At the very beginning of 1942, with the United States now at war and recruits pouring into the Corps, Smith wrote the Major General Commandant and asked him to redesignate the battalion. On 7 January Edson received word that he now headed the 1st Separate Battalion.

A week later James Roosevelt wrote his letter to the Commandant about raid forces. On 14 January

General Holcomb sought the reaction of his senior generals to the President's plan to place Donovan in charge of a Marine Corps version of the commandos. In his 20 January reply to the younger Roosevelt, the Major General Commandant pointed out that "the APD Battalion . . . is organized, equipped, and trained for this duty, including in particular the use of rubber boats in night landings." He expressed the hope that the Navy would make destroyer transports available on the West Coast in the near future to support organization of a second APD battalion there. Holcomb obviously intended to use

Smith's new force as a convenient means to channel outside interference toward a useful end. His plan did not entirely work.

On 23 January the Navy leadership, undoubtedly in response to political pressure, directed the Pacific Fleet to put together a commando-type unit. The 2d Separate Battalion officially came to life on 4 February. To ensure that this new organization developed along proper lines, the Commandant ordered Edson to transfer a one-third slice of his unit to California as a cadre for the 2d Separate Battalion, which initially existed only on paper. Headquarters

also adopted Red Mike's recommended tables of organization and promulgated them to both battalions. The only change was the addition of an 81mm mortar platoon (though there was no room on the ships of the APD squadron to accommodate the increase). Holcomb even offered to transfer Edson to the 2d Separate, but in the end the Commandant allowed the commanding general of the 2d Marine Division, Major General Charles F. B. Price, to place Major Carlson in charge. James Roosevelt became the executive officer of the unit. In mid-February, at Price's suggestion, the Major General Commandant redesignated his new organizations as Marine Raider Battalions. Edson's group became the 1st Raiders on 16 February; Carlson's outfit was redesignated to the 2d Raiders three days later.

### *Shaping the Raiders*

The raider battalions soon received first priority in the Marine Corps on men and equipment. Edson and Carlson combed the ranks of their respective divisions and also siphoned off many of the best men pouring forth from the recruit depots. They had no difficulty attracting volunteers with the promise that they would be the first to fight the Japanese. Carlson's exactions were much greater than those required to fill out Edson's battalion, but both generated resentment from fellow officers struggling to flesh out the rapidly expanding divisions on a meager skeleton of experienced men. The raiders also had *carte blanche* to obtain any equipment they deemed necessary, whether or not it was standard issue anywhere else in the Corps.

Carlson and Roosevelt soon broke the shackles that Holcomb had attempted to impose on them. They rejected most of the men whom Edson sent them, and they adjusted the organization of their battalion to suit their purposes. They also inculcated the unit with an unconventional military philosophy that was an admix-

ture of Chinese culture, Communist egalitarianism, and New England town hall democracy. Every man would have the right to say what he thought, and their battle cry would be "Gung Ho!"—Chinese for "work together." Officers would have no greater privileges than the men, and would lead by consensus rather than rank. There also would be "ethical indoctrination," which Carlson described as "giv[ing] conviction through persuasion." That process supposedly ensured that each man knew what he was fighting for and why.

The 2d Raiders set up their pup tents at Jacques Farm in the hills of Camp Elliot, where they remained largely segregated from civilization. Carlson rarely granted liberty, and sometimes held musters in the middle of the night to catch anyone who slipped away for an evening on the town. He even tried to convince men to forego leave for family emergencies, though he did not altogether prohibit it.

Training focused heavily on weapons practice, hand-to-hand fighting, demolitions, and physical conditioning, to include an emphasis on long hikes. As the men grew tougher and acquired field skills, the focus shifted to more night work. Carlson also implemented an important change to the raider organization promulgated from Washington. Instead of a unitary eight-man squad, he created a 10-man unit composed of a squad leader and three fire teams of three men each. Each fire team boasted a Thompson submachine gun, a Browning automatic rifle (BAR), and one of the new Garand M-1 semiautomatic rifles. To keep manpower within the constraints of the carrying capacity of an APD, each rifle company had just two rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. Carlson's system of organization and training was designed to create a force suited "for infiltration and the attainment of objectives by unortho-

dox and unexpected methods." He and Roosevelt were developing the guerrilla unit they had envisioned.

Edson's battalion retained the table of organization he had designed. It was based on an eight-man squad, with a leader, two BAR men, four riflemen armed with the M-1903 Springfield bolt-operated rifle, and a sniper carrying a Springfield mounting a telescopic sight. (Later in the war he would champion the four-man fire team that became the standard for all Marine infantry.) With smaller squads, his companies contained three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. His weapons company provided additional light machine guns and 60mm mortars. (The 81mm mortar platoon, added to the headquarters company by the Commandant, would not deploy overseas with the battalion.)

Training was similar to that in the 2d Raiders, except for more rubber boat work due to the convenient location of Quantico on the Potomac River. The 1st Raiders also strove to reach a pace of seven miles per hour on hikes, more than twice the normal speed of infantry. They did so by alternating periods of double-timing with fast walking. Although Red Mike emphasized light infantry tactics, his men were not guerrillas. Instead, they formed a highly trained battalion prepared for special operations as well as more conventional employment.

Edson's style of leadership contrasted starkly with that of his counterpart. He encouraged initiative in his subordinates, but rank carried both responsibility and authority for decision-making. He was a quiet man who impressed his troops with his ability on the march and on the firing ranges, not with speeches. His raiders received regular liberty, and he even organized battalion dances attended by busloads of secretaries from nearby Washington.

The two raider battalions bore the same name, but they could hardly

have been more dissimilar. What they did have in common was excellent training and a desire to excel in battle.

### *Getting to the Fight*

It did not take long for the raiders to move toward the sound of the guns. In early April 1942 the majority of the 1st Raiders boarded trains and headed for the West Coast, where they embarked in the *Zeilin*. They arrived in Samoa near the end of the month and joined the Marine brigades garrisoning that outpost. Company D, the 81mm mortar platoon, and a representative slice of the headquarters and weapons companies remained behind in Quantico. This rear echelon was under the command of Major Samuel B. Griffith II, the battalion executive officer. (He had recently joined the raiders after spending several months in England observing the British commandos.) This small force maintained some raider capability on the East Coast, and also constituted a nucleus for a projected third raider battalion.

The 2d Raiders spent the month of April on board ship learning rubber boat techniques. The Navy had transferred three of its APDs to the West Coast, and Carlson's men used them to conduct practice landings on San Clemente Island. In May the 2d Raiders embarked and sailed for Hawaii, arriving at Pearl Harbor on 17 May.

Carlson's outfit hardly had arrived in Hawaii when Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet and the Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPac/CinCPOA), ordered two companies of raiders to Midway to reinforce the garrison in preparation for an expected Japanese attack. They arrived on 25 May. Company C took up defensive positions on Sand Island, while Company D moved to Eastern Island. Trained to fight a guerrilla campaign of stealth and infiltration, these raiders had to conduct a static defense of a small area. In the end, Navy and Marine



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 54087

*The 10-man rubber boat was designed to be the primary assault landing craft of the Marine raiders. These members of the 1st Raider Battalion sprint ashore after a practice landing through the surf on the island of Samoa in the summer of 1942.*

aircraft turned back the invading force in one of the great naval victories of the war. Combat for the Marines on the ground consisted of a single large enemy air attack on the morning of 4 June. Although the Japanese inflicted considerable damage on various installations, the raiders suffered no casualties. Not long after the battle, the two companies joined the rest of the battalion back in Hawaii.

### *Makin*

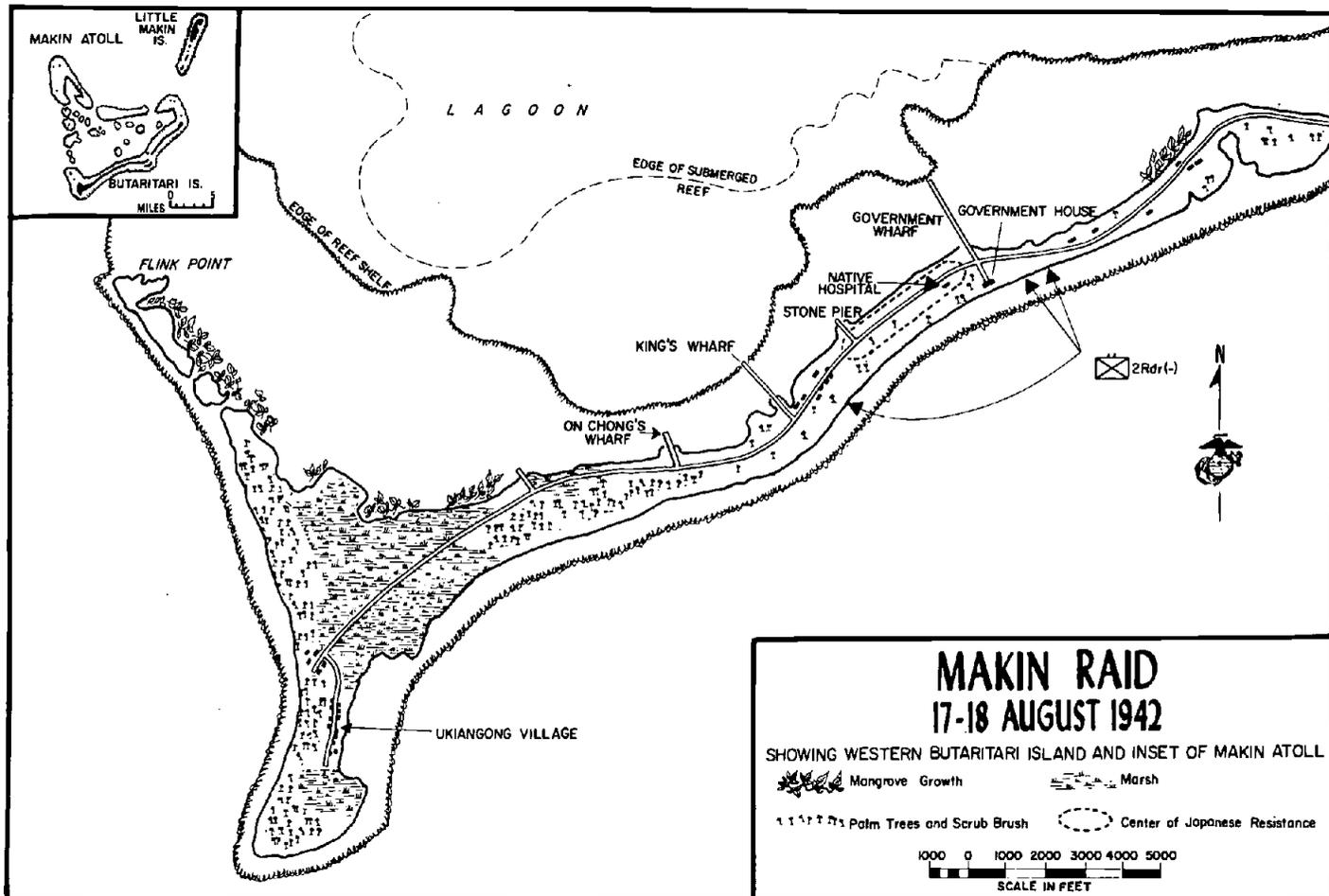
During the summer of 1942 Admiral Nimitz decided to employ Carlson's battalion for its designated purpose. Planners selected Makin Atoll in the Gilbert Islands as the target. They made available two large mine-laying submarines, the *Nautilus* and the *Argonaut*. Each one could carry a company of raiders. The force would make a predawn landing on Butaritari Island, destroy the garrison (estimated at 45 men), withdraw that evening, and land the next day on Little Makin Island. The scheduled D-day was 17 August, 10 days after the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Raiders assaulted the lower Solomons. The objectives of the operation were diverse: to destroy installations, take prisoners, gain intelligence on the area, and divert Japanese attention and reinforce

ments from Guadalcanal and Tulagi.

Companies A and B drew the mission and boarded the submarines on 8 August. Once in the objective area, things began to go badly. The subs surfaced in heavy rain and high seas. Due to the poor conditions, Carlson altered his plan at the last minute. Instead of each company landing on widely separated beaches, they would go ashore together. Lieutenant Oscar F. Peatross, a platoon commander, did not get the word; he and the squad in his boat ended up landing alone in what became the enemy rear. The main body reached shore in some confusion due to engine malfunctions and weather, then the accidental discharge of a weapon ruined any hope of surprise.

First Lieutenant Merwyn C. Plumley's Company A quickly crossed the narrow island and turned southwest toward the known enemy positions. Company B, commanded by Captain Ralph H. Coyt, followed in trace as the reserve. Soon thereafter the raiders were engaged in a firefight with the Japanese. Sergeant Clyde Thomason died in this initial action while courageously exposing himself in order to direct the fire of his platoon. He later was awarded the Medal of Honor, the first enlisted Marine so decorated in World War II.

The raiders made little headway



Sgt Clyde Thomason was posthumously decorated with the Medal of Honor for his leadership in turning back a Japanese counterattack during the Makin raid. He was the first enlisted Marine so decorated in World War II. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 310616

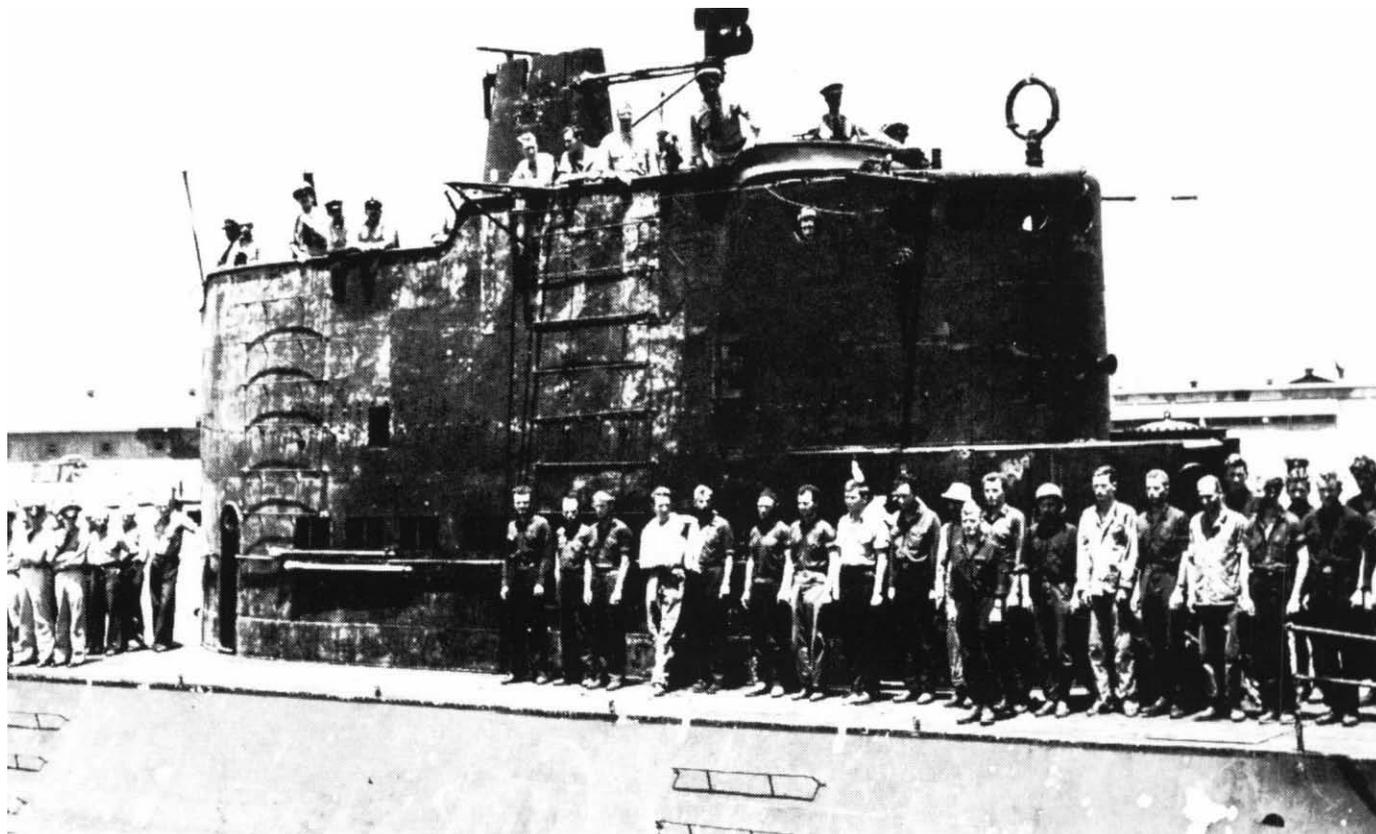


against Japanese machine guns and snipers. Then the enemy launched two banzai attacks, each announced with a bugle call. Marine fire easily dispatched both groups of charging enemy soldiers. Unbeknownst to the Americans, they had nearly wiped out the Japanese garrison at that point in the battle.

At 1130 two enemy aircraft appeared over the island and scouted the scene of action. Carlson had trained his men to remain motionless and not fire at planes. With no troops in sight and no contact from their own ground force, the planes finally dropped their bombs, though none landed within Marine lines. Two hours later 12 planes arrived on the scene, several of them seaplanes. Two of the larger flying boats landed in the lagoon. Raider machine guns and Boys antitank rifles fired at them. One burst into flame and the other crashed on takeoff after receiving numerous hits. The remaining aircraft bombed and strafed the is-

land for an hour, again with most of the ordnance hitting enemy-occupied territory. Another air attack came late in the afternoon.

The natives on the island willingly assisted the Americans throughout the day. They carried ammunition and provided intelligence. The latter reports suggested that enemy reinforcements had come ashore from the seaplanes and from two small ships in the lagoon. (The submarines later took the boats under indirect fire with their deck guns and miraculously sunk both.) Based on this information, Carlson was certain there was still a sizable Japanese force on the island. At 1700 he called several individuals together and contemplated his options. Roosevelt and the battalion operations officer argued for a withdrawal as planned in preparation for the next day's landing on Little Makin. Concerned that he might become too heavily engaged if he tried to advance, Carlson decided to follow their recommendation.



*Nautilus (SS 168) enters Pearl Harbor on 26 August 1942 following the 2d Raider Battalion raid on Makin. On deck besides the crew are members of Companies A and B, some wearing Navy-issue clothing to replace that which was lost in the surf attempting to return to the sub. A number of raiders are dressed in black-dyed khaki that they wore in the raid.*

This part of the operation went smoothly for a time. The force broke contact in good order and a group of 20 men covered the rest of the raiders as they readied their rubber boats and shoved off. Carlson, however, forgot about the covering force and thought his craft contained the last men on the island when it entered the water at 1930. Disaster then struck in the form of heavy surf. The outboard engines did not work and the men soon grew exhausted trying to paddle against the breakers. Boats capsized and equipment disappeared. After repeated attempts several boatloads made it to the rendezvous with the submarines, but Carlson and 120 men ended up stranded on the shore. Only the covering force and a handful of others had weapons. In the middle of the night a small Japanese patrol approached the perimeter. They wounded a sentry, but not before he killed three of them.

With the enemy apparently still full of fight and his raiders disor-

ganized and weakened, Carlson called another council of war. Without much input from the others, he decided to surrender. His stated reasons were concern for the wounded, and for the possible fate of the president's son (who was not present at the meeting). At 0330 Carlson sent his operations officer and another Marine out to contact the enemy. They found one Japanese soldier and eventually succeeded in giving him a note offering surrender. Carlson also authorized every man to fend for himself—those who wished could make another attempt to reach the submarines. By the next morning several more boatloads made it through the surf, including one with Major Roosevelt. In the meantime, a few exploring raiders killed several Japanese, one of them probably the man with the surrender note.

With dawn the situation appeared dramatically better. The two-man surrender party reported that there appeared to be no organized enemy

force left on the island. There were about 70 raiders still ashore, and the able-bodied armed themselves with weapons lying about the battlefield. Carlson organized patrols to search for food and the enemy. They killed two more Japanese soldiers and confirmed the lack of opposition. The raider commander himself led a patrol to survey the scene and carry out the demolition of military stores and installations. He counted 83 dead Japanese and 14 of his own killed in action. Based on native reports, Carlson thought his force had accounted for more than 160 Japanese. Enemy aircraft made four separate attacks during the day, but they inflicted no losses on the raider force ashore.

The Marines contacted the submarines during the day and arranged an evening rendezvous off the entrance to the lagoon, where there was no surf to hinder an evacuation. The men hauled four rubber boats across the island and arranged for the use of a native outrigger. By 2300 the re-

mainder of the landing force was back on board the *Nautilus* and *Argonaut*. Since the entire withdrawal had been so disorganized, the two companies were intermingled on the submarines and it was not until they returned to Pearl Harbor that they could make an accurate accounting of their losses. The official tally was 18 dead and 12 missing.

Only after the war would the Marine Corps discover that nine of the missing raiders had been left alive on the island. These men had become separated from the main body at one point or another during the operation. With the assistance of the natives the group evaded capture for a time, but finally surrendered on 30 August. A few weeks later the Japanese beheaded them on the island of Kwajalein.

The raid itself had mixed results. Reports painted it as a great victory and it boosted morale on the home front. Many believed it achieved its original goal of diverting forces from Guadalcanal, but the Japanese had immediately guessed the size and purpose of the operation and had not let it alter their plans for the Solomons. However, it did cause the enemy to worry about the potential for other such raids on rear area installations. On the negative side, that threat may have played a part in the subsequent Japanese decision to fortify heavily places like Tarawa Atoll, the scene of a costly amphibious assault later in the war. At the tactical level, the 2d Raiders had proven themselves in direct combat with the enemy. Their greatest difficulties had involved rough seas and poor equipment; bravery could not fix those limitations. Despite the trumpeted success of the operation, the Navy never again attempted to use submarines to conduct raids behind enemy lines.

Carlson received the Navy Cross for his efforts on Makin, and the public accorded him hero status. A few of those who served with him were not equally pleased with his

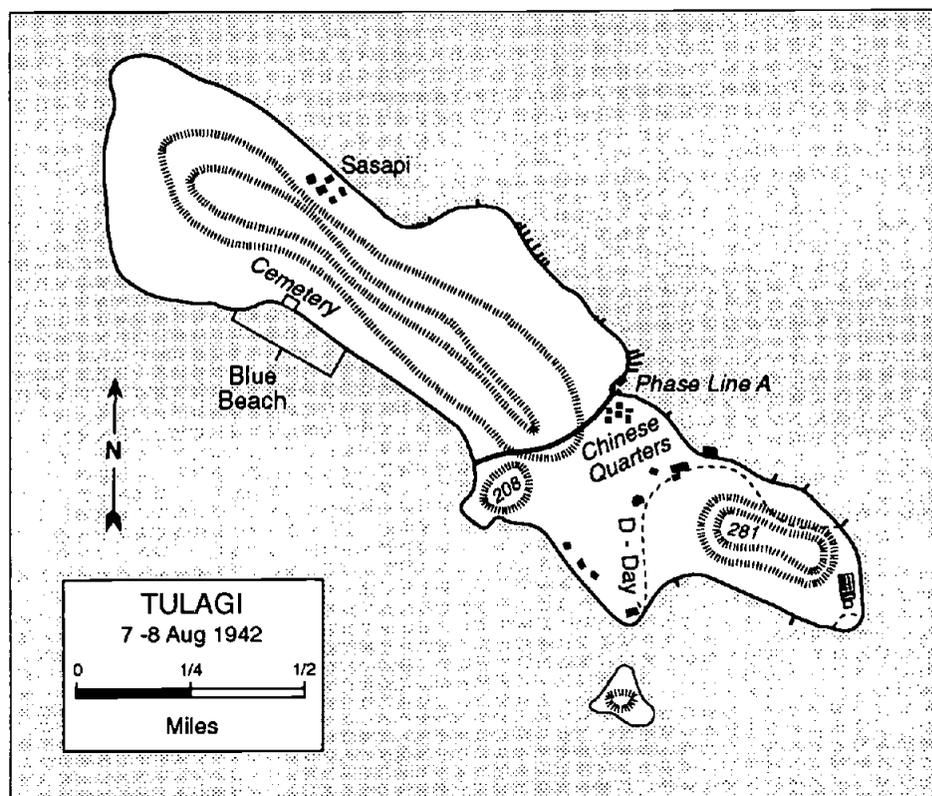
performance. No one questioned his demonstrated bravery under fire, but some junior officers were critical of his leadership, especially the attempt to surrender to a non-existent enemy. Carlson himself later noted that he had reached "a spiritual low" on the night of the 17th. And again on the evening of the 18th, the battalion commander contemplated remaining on the island to organize the natives for resistance, while others supervised the withdrawal of his unit. Those who criticized him thought he had lost his aggressiveness and ability to think clearly when the chips were down. But he and his raiders would have another crack at the enemy in the not too distant future.

### Tulagi

The Makin operation had not been Nimitz's first choice for an amphibious raid. In late May he had proposed an attack by the 1st Raiders against the Japanese seaplane base on Tulagi, in the lower Solomon Islands. The target was in the Southwest Pacific Area, however, and General Douglas MacArthur opposed the plan. But Tulagi remained a signifi-

cant threat to the maritime lifeline to Australia. After the Midway victory opened the door for a more offensive Allied posture, the Japanese advance positions in the Solomons became a priority objective. In late June the Joint Chiefs of Staff shifted that region from MacArthur's command to Nimitz's Pacific Ocean Areas command, and ordered the seizure of Tulagi. The Americans soon discovered that the Japanese were building an airfield on nearby Guadalcanal, and that became the primary target for Operation Watchtower. The 1st Marine Division, with the 1st Raider Battalion attached, received the assignment.

In answer to Edson's repeated requests, the rear echelon of his battalion (less the 81mm mortar platoon) finally joined up with him on 3 July in Samoa. The entire unit then moved on to New Caledonia. The 1st Raiders received definitive word on Watchtower on 20 July. They would seize Tulagi, with the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in support. The 1st Parachute Battalion would take the conjoined islets of Gavutu-Tanambogo. The 1st Marine Divi-



sion, less one regiment in reserve, would capture the incomplete airfield on Guadalcanal.

Edson offered to make amphibious reconnaissance patrols of the objectives, but the naval commander rejected that idea. Most of the information on Tulagi would come from three Australians, all former colonial officials familiar with the area. Tulagi was 4,000 yards long and no more than 1,000 yards wide, and a high ridge ran along its length, except for a low, open saddle near the southeast end. The only suitable landing beaches from a hydrographic standpoint were those on either side of this low ground, since coral formations fringed the rest of the island. Intelligence officers estimated that the island held several hundred men of the Japanese *Special Naval Landing Force*; these were elite troops of proven fighting ability. Aerial reconnaissance indicated they were dug in to defend the obvious landing sites. Planners thus chose to make the assault halfway up the western coast at a place designated as Beach Blue. They wisely decided to make the first American amphibious assault of the war against natural obstacles, not enemy gunfire.

The raiders sailed from New Caledonia on 23 July and joined up with the main task force for rehearsals on Koro Island in the Fijis. These went poorly, since the Navy boat crews and most of the 1st Marine Division were too green. On the morning of 7 August the task force hove to and commenced unloading in what would become known as Ironbottom Sound. Although Edson's men had trained hard on their rubber boats, they would make this landing from Higgins boats. After a preliminary bombardment by a cruiser and destroyer, the first wave, composed of Companies B and D, headed for shore. Coral forced them to debark and wade the last 100 yards, but there was no enemy opposition. Companies A and C quick-

ly followed them. The four rifle companies spread out across the waist of the island and then advanced in line to the southeast. They met only occasional sniper fire until they reached Phase Line A at the end of the ridge, where they halted as planned while naval guns fired an additional preparation on the enemy defenses.

The attack jumped off again just before noon, and promptly ran into heavy Japanese resistance. For the remainder of the day the raiders fought to gain control of the saddle from the entrenched enemy, who would not surrender under any circumstances. The Marines quickly discovered that their only recourse was to employ explosives to destroy the men occupying the caves and bunkers. As evening approached, the battalion settled into defensive lines that circled the small ridge (Hill 281) on the tip of the island. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, had already scoured the remainder of the island and now took up positions in the rear of the raiders.

The Japanese launched their classic banzai counterattack at 2200 that night. The initial effort punched a small hole in the raider lines between Companies A and C. A second assault, which might have exploited this gap, instead struck full against Company A's front. This time the raiders held their ground. For the remainder of the night the Japanese relied on infiltration tactics, with individuals and small groups trying to make their way into the American rear by stealth. By this means they attacked both the 2d Battalion's command post (CP) and the aid station set up near Blue Beach. They also came within 50 yards of the raider CP. Edson tried to call for reinforcements, but communications were out.

In the morning things looked much better, just as they had on Makin. At 0900 two companies of the 5th Marines passed through raider lines and swept over the southern

portions of Hill 281. The remaining enemy were now isolated in a ravine in the midst of the small ridge. After a lengthy barrage by the 60mm mortars of Company E and their heavier 81mm cousins of the rifle battalion, infantrymen from both outfits moved through the final enemy pocket. Grenades and dynamite were the weapons of choice against the Japanese still holed up in their caves and dugouts. At 1500 Edson declared the island secured. That did not mean the fighting was entirely over. For the next few days Marines scoured the island by day, and fended off occasional infiltrators at night, until they had killed off the last enemy soldier. In the entire battle, the raiders suffered losses of 38 dead and 55 wounded. There were an additional 33 casualties among other Marine units on the island. All but three of the 350 Japanese defenders had died.

On the night of 8 August a Japanese surface force arrived from Rabaul and surprised the Allied naval forces guarding the transports. In a brief engagement the enemy sank four cruisers and a destroyer, damaged other ships, and killed 1,200 sailors, all at minimal cost to themselves. The American naval commander had little choice the next morning but to order the early withdrawal of his force. Most of the transports would depart that afternoon with their cargo holds still half full. The raiders were in a particularly bad way. They had come ashore with little food because the plan called for their immediate withdrawal after seizing the island. Moreover, since they had not cleared the enemy from the only usable beaches until D plus 1, there had been little time to unload anything. The result would be short rations for some time to come.

The 1st Raiders performed well in their initial exposure to combat. Like their compatriots in the 2d Raiders, they were both brave and daring.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 50969

*This enemy Model 92 7.7mm Lewis machine gun was sited to cover the obvious landing beaches on the southeastern shore of Tulagi. The 1st Raider Battalion made a safe landing by assaulting unfavorable but undefended terrain elsewhere.*

Major Kenneth D. Bailey demonstrated the type of leadership that was common to both units. When an enemy machine gun held up the advance of his company on D-day, he personally circled around the bunker, crawled on top, and pushed a

*Marine Gunner Angus H. Goss (shown here training other raiders in 1943) played an unexpected lead role in the seizure of Tulagi. When Japanese holed up in caves, Goss and his demolition platoon attached TNT charges to ends of poles and fashioned the techniques needed to root out the remaining defenders on the island.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 55268



grenade into the firing port. In the process he received a gunshot wound in the thigh. Edson established his reputation for fearlessness by spending most of his time in the front lines, where he contemptuously stood up in the face of enemy fire. More im-

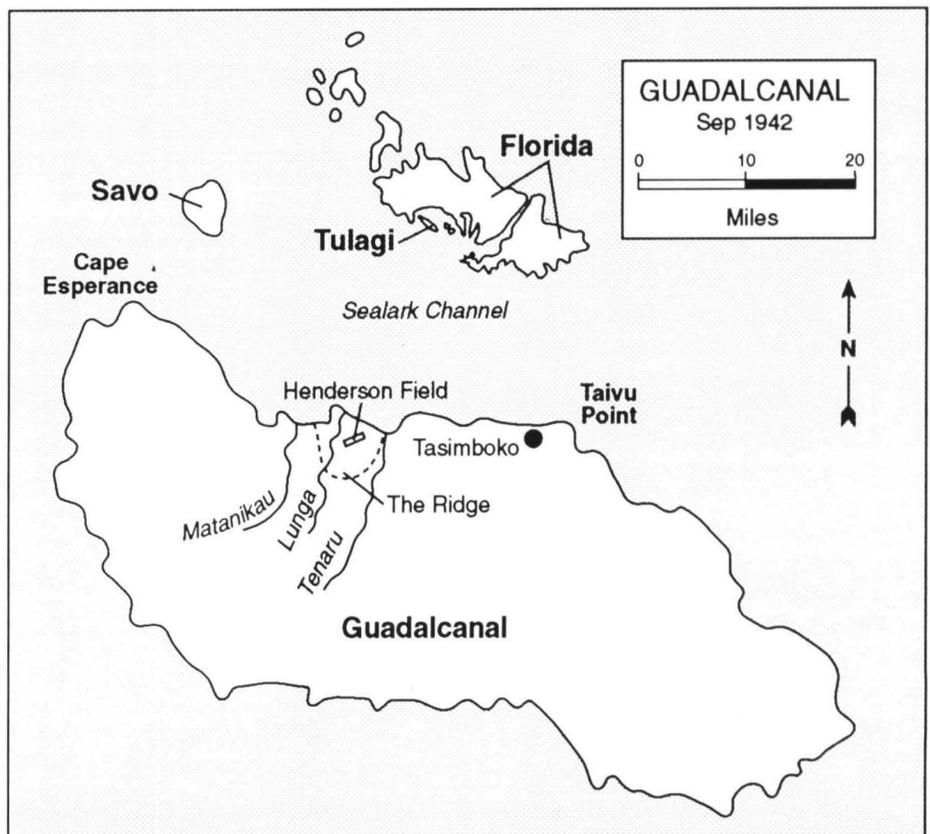
portant, he aggressively employed his force in battle, while many other senior commanders had grown timid after years of peacetime service. Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, commander of the 1st Marine Division, soon wrote Commandant Holcomb that "Edson is one of the finest troop leaders I ever saw."

### *Tasimboko*

As August progressed the Japanese moved a steady stream of reinforcements to Guadalcanal in nightly runs by destroyers and barges, a process soon dubbed the "Tokyo Express." The Marines repulsed the first enemy attack at the Tenaru River on 21 August, but Vandegrift knew that he would need all the strength he could muster to defend the extended perimeter surrounding the airfield. At the end of the month he brought the raiders and parachutists across the sound and placed them in reserve near Lunga Point. The latter battalion had suffered heavily in its assault on Gavutu-Tanambogo, to include the loss of its commander, so Vandegrift attached the parachutists to Red Mike's force.

Edson quickly established a rap-

port with Lieutenant Colonel Thomas, the division operations officer, and convinced him to use the raiders offensively. The first product of this effort was a two-company patrol on 4 September to Savo Island, where intelligence believed the enemy had an observation post. While Griffith commanded that operation, Red Mike planned a reconnaissance-in-force against Cape Esperance for the next day. When the Savo patrol returned in the late afternoon on *Little* (APD 4) and *Gregory* (APD 3), the men began debarking before they received the order to remain on board in preparation for the next mission. Once he became aware of the mix-up, Edson let the offload process proceed to completion. That night Japanese destroyers of the Tokyo Express sank the two APDs. It was the second close escape for the raiders. During the shift to Guadalcanal, ene-



*This photo, taken on Guadalcanal in 1942, captured three men who figured prominently in the brief history of the raiders. LtGen Thomas Holcomb, left front, authorized the activation of the raiders in February 1942. Col Merritt A. Edson, right*

*rear, played a major hand in creating the raider concept. Maj-Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, left rear, relied heavily on the raiders in winning the Guadalcanal campaign, then disbanded them in early 1944 when he became Commandant.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 5132



my planes had sunk the *Colhoun* (APD 2) just after it had unloaded a company.

Marine attention soon shifted from Cape Esperance as it became evident that the primary terminus of the Tokyo Express was the village of Tasimboko. On 6 September Edson and Thomas won permission from Vandegrift to raid the area on the eighth. After the loss of three of their APDs, shipping was at a premium, so the raiders boarded the *McKean* (APD 5), *Manley* (APD 1), and two converted tuna boats for the operation. The raider rifle companies would comprise the first echelon; the ships then would shuttle back to the Lunga for the weapons company and the parachutists. Native scouts reported there were several thousand Japanese in the area, but division planners discounted that figure. However, Edson did rely on their reports that the enemy defenses faced west toward Marine lines. He decided to land beyond the village at Taivu Point and then advance overland to take the target from the rear.

When the raiders went ashore just prior to dawn on 8 September, they quickly realized the scouting reports had been accurate. As they moved along the coast toward Tasimboko, they discovered more than a thousand life preservers placed in neat rows, a large number of foxholes, and even several unattended 37mm antitank guns. In previous days Major General Kiyotaki Kawaguchi had landed an entire brigade at Tasimboko, but it was then advancing inland. Only a rearguard of about 300 men secured the village and the Japanese supply dumps located there, though this force was nearly as big as the raider first echelon. The Marines soon ran into stubborn resistance, to include 75mm artillery pieces firing pointblank down the coastal road and the orderly rows of a coconut plantation. While Edson fixed the attention of the defenders with two companies,

he sent Griffith and Company A wide to the left flank.

Concerned that he might be facing the enemy main force, Red Mike radioed a plea for a supplemental landing to the west of Tasimboko. The last part of the message indicated there was trouble: "If not, request instructions regarding my embarkation." Forty-five minutes later Edson again asked for fresh troops and for more air support. Division responded the same way each time — the raiders were to break off the action and withdraw. Red Mike ignored that order and continued the attack. Not long afterwards, enemy resistance melted away, and both wings of the raider force entered the village around noon. The area was stockpiled with large quantities of food, ammunition, and weapons ranging up to 75mm artillery pieces. Vandegrift radioed a "well done" and repeated his order to withdraw yet again.

The raider commander chose to stay put for the time being, and his men set about destroying as much of the cache as they could. Troops wrecked a powerful radio station, bayoneted cans of food, tore open bags of rice and urinated on the contents or spilled them on the ground, tied guns to landing boats and towed them into deep water, and then finally put the torch to everything that was left. They also gathered all available documents. As the sun went down, the men reembarked and headed for the perimeter, many of them a little bit heavier with liberated chow, cigarettes, and alcohol.

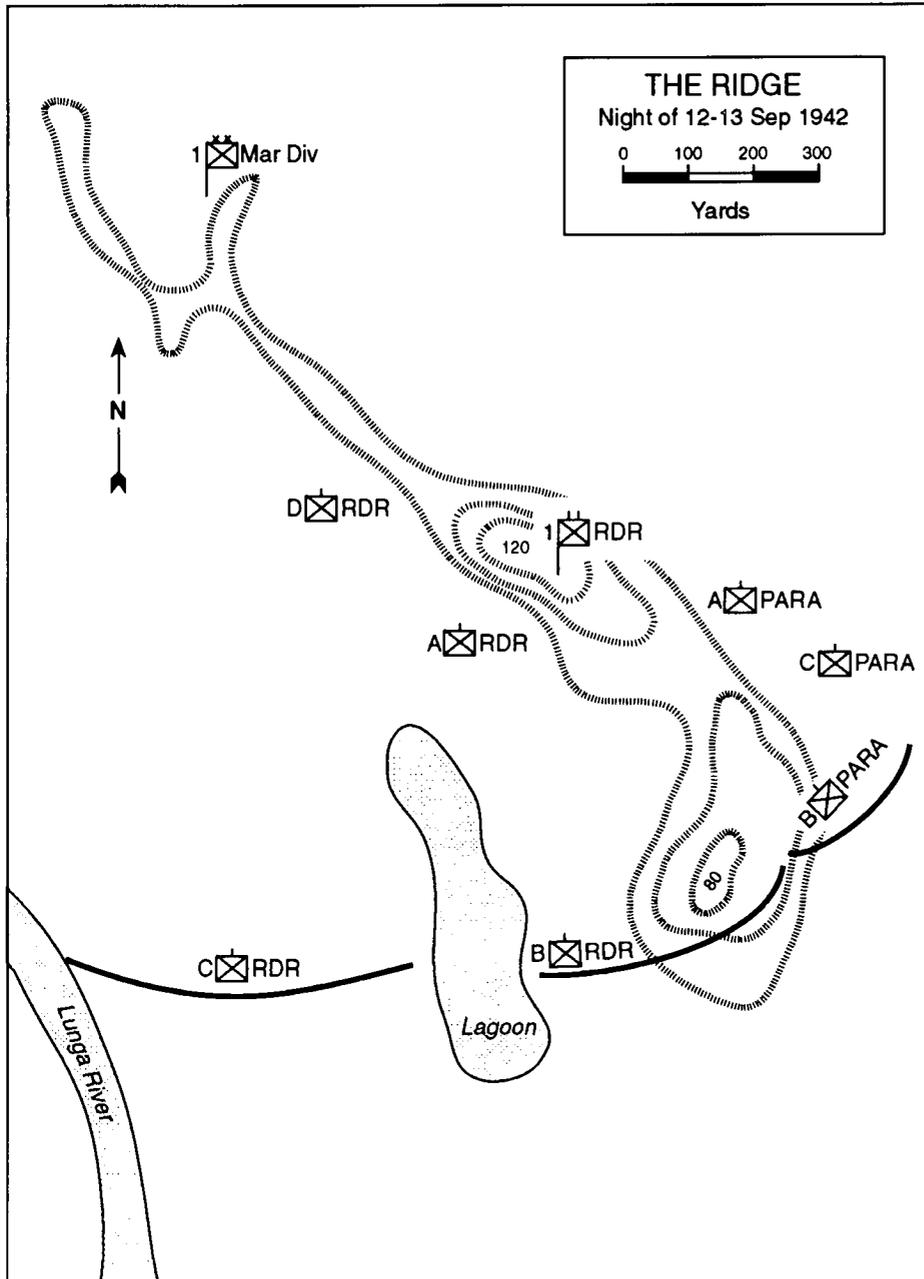
The raid was a minor tactical victory in terms of actual fighting. The Marines counted 27 enemy bodies and estimated they had killed 50. Their own losses were two dead and six wounded. But the battle had important repercussions. The raiders had put a serious dent in Japanese logistics, fire support, and communications. The intelligence gathered had more far-reaching consequences,

since it revealed many of the details of the coming Japanese offensive. Finally, the setback hurt the enemy's morale and further boosted that of the raiders. They had defeated the Japanese yet again, and were literally feasting on the fruits of the victory.

### *Edson's Ridge*

The next day Red Mike discussed the situation with division planners. Intelligence officers translating the captured documents confirmed that 3,000 Japanese were cutting their way through the jungle southwest of Tasimboko. Edson was convinced that they planned to attack the currently unguarded southern portion of the perimeter. From an aerial photograph he picked out a grass-covered ridge that pointed like a knife at the airfield. His hunch was based on his own experience in jungle fighting and with the Japanese. He knew they liked to attack at night, and that was also the only time they could get fire support from the sea. And a night attack in the jungle only had a chance if it moved along a well-defined avenue of approach. The ridge was the obvious choice. Thomas agreed. Vandegrift did not, but they convinced the general to let the raiders and parachutists shift their bivouac to the ridge in order to get out of the pattern of bombs falling around the airfield.

The men moved to the new location on 10 September. Contrary to their hopes, it was not a rest zone. Japanese planes bombed the ridge on the 11th and 12th. Native scouts brought reports of the approaching enemy column, and raider patrols soon made contact with the advance elements of the force. The Marines worked to improve their position under severe handicaps. There was very little barbed wire and no sandbags or engineering tools. Troops on the ridge itself could not dig far before striking coral; those on either flank were hampered by thick jungle that would conceal the movement of the enemy. Casualties had thinned ranks,



while illness and a lack of good food had sapped the strength of those still on the lines.

Edson and Thomas did the best they could with the resources available. Red Mike used the spine of the ridge as the dividing point between his two rump battalions. One company of parachutists held the left of his line, with the rest of their comrades echeloned to the rear to protect that flank. Two companies of raiders occupied the right, with that flank anchored on the Lunga River. A lagoon separated the two raider units. Edson attached the machine guns to the forward companies and kept the remaining raiders in reserve. (Com-

pany D was no larger than a platoon now, since Red Mike had used much of its manpower to fill holes in the other three rifle companies.) He set up his forward command post on Hill 120, just a few hundred yards behind the front lines.

Thomas placed the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in reserve between the ridge and the airfield. Artillery forward observers joined Edson and registered the howitzers. The Marines were as ready as they could be, but the selection of the ridge as the heart of the defense was a gamble. To the west of the Lunga there were only a few strongpoints occupied by the men from the pioneer and amphib-

ous tractor battalions. To the east of Red Mike's line there was nothing but a mile of empty jungle.

Kawaguchi was having his own problems. In addition to the setback at Tasimboko, his troops were having a tough time cutting their way through the heavy jungle and toiling over the many ridges in their path. Some of his difficulties were self-inflicted. His decision to attack from the south had required him to leave his artillery and most of his supplies behind, since they could not be hauled over the rough jungle trail. Thus he would go into battle with little fire support and poor logistics. He then detailed one of his four battalions to make a diversionary attack along the Tenaru. This left him with just 2,500 men for the main assault. Finally, he had underestimated the time needed to reach his objective.

On the evening of 12 September, as the appointed hour for the attack approached, Kawaguchi realized that only one battalion had reached its assigned jumpoff point, and no units had been able to reconnoiter the area of the ridge. He wanted to delay the attack, but communications failed and he could not pass the order. Behind schedule and without guides, the battalions hastily blundered forward, only to break up into small groups as the men fought their way through the tangled growth in total darkness. At 2200 a Japanese plane dropped a series of green flares over the Marine perimeter. Then a cruiser and three destroyers opened up on the ridge. For the next 20 minutes they poured shells in that direction, though most rounds sailed over the high ground to land in the jungle beyond, some to explode among the Japanese infantry.

When the bombardment ceased, Kawaguchi's units launched their own flares and the first piecemeal attacks began. The initial assault concentrated in the low ground around the lagoon. This may have been an attempt to find the American flank,

or the result of lack of familiarity with the terrain. In any case, the thick jungle offset the Marine advantage in firepower, and the Japanese found plenty of room to infiltrate between platoon strongpoints. They soon isolated the three platoons of Company C, each of which subsequently made its way to the rear. The Marines on the ridge remained comparatively untouched. As daylight approached the Japanese broke off the action, but retained possession of Company C's former positions. Kawaguchi's officers began the slow process of regrouping their units, now scattered over the jungle and totally disoriented.

In the morning Edson ordered a counterattack by his reserve companies. They made little headway against the more-numerous Japanese, and Red Mike recalled them. Since he could not restore an unbroken front, he decided to withdraw the entire line to the reserve position. This had the added benefit of forcing the enemy to cross more open ground on the ridge before reaching Marine fighting holes. In the late afternoon the B Companies of both raiders and parachutists pulled back and anchored themselves on the ridge midway between Hills 80 and 120. Thomas provided an engineer company, which Edson inserted on the right of the ridge. Company A of the raiders covered the remaining distance between the engineers and the Lunga. The other two parachute companies withdrew slightly and bulked up the shoulder of the left flank. The remains of Companies C and D assumed a new reserve position on the west slope of the ridge, just behind Hill 120. Red Mike's command post stayed in its previous location.

The Japanese made good use of the daylight hours and prepared for a fresh effort. This time Kawaguchi would not make the mistake of getting bogged down in the jungle; he would follow the tactics Edson had originally expected and concentrate



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 310563  
*Maj Kenneth D. Bailey was awarded the Medal of Honor for his part in the battle of Edson's Ridge, which saved Henderson Field and the entire Marine perimeter. Although he survived that intense fight, he died just two weeks later leading his men against a Japanese position along the Matanikau River.*

his attack on the open ground of the ridge. The new assault kicked off just after darkness fell. The initial blow struck Company B's right flank near the lagoon. A mad rush of screaming soldiers drove the right half of the raider company out of position and those men fell back to link up with Company C on the ridge. Inexplicably, Kawaguchi did not exploit the gap he had created. Possibly the maneuver had been a diversion to draw Marine reserves off the ridge and out of the way of the main effort.

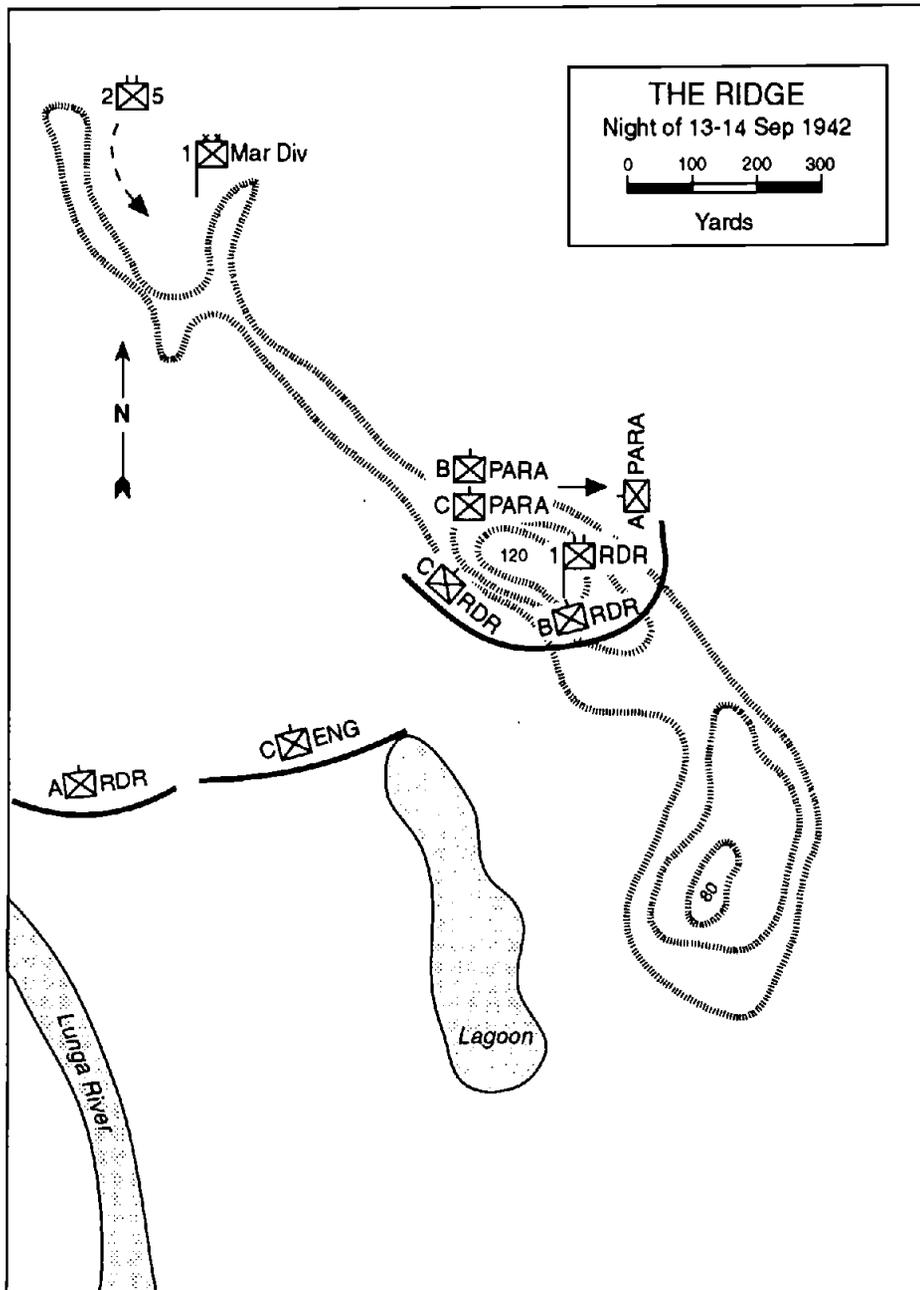
Edson had to decide quickly whether to plug the hole with his dwindling reserve or risk having the center of his line encircled by the next assault. The enemy soon provided the answer. By 2100 Japanese soldiers were massing around the southern nose of the ridge, making their presence known with the usual barrage of noisy chants. They presumably were going to launch a frontal assault on the center of the Marine line. Red Mike ordered Company C of the raiders and Company A of the parachutists to form a

reserve line around the front and sides of Hill 120. Japanese mortar and machine-gun fire swept the ridge; the Marines responded with artillery fire on suspected assembly areas.

The assault waves finally surged forward at 2200. The attack, on a front all across the ridge, immediately unhinged the Marine center. As Japanese swarmed toward the left flank of his Company B, Captain Harry L. Torgerson, the parachute battalion executive officer, ordered it to withdraw. The parachutists in Company C soon followed suit. Torgerson gathered these two units in the rear of Company A's position on Hill 120, where he attempted to reorganize them. The remaining Company B raiders were now isolated in the center. The situation looked desperate.

At this point, the Japanese seemed to take a breather. Heavy fire raked the ridge, but the enemy made no fresh assaults. Edson arranged for more artillery support, and got his own force to provide covering fire for the withdrawal of the exposed raiders of Company B. For a time it looked like the series of rearward movements would degenerate into a rout. As a few men around Hill 120 began to filter to the rear, Red Mike took immediate steps to avert disaster. From his CP, now just a dozen yards behind the front, he made it known that this was to be the final stand. The word went round: "Nobody moves, just die in your holes." Major Bailey ranged up and down the line raising his voice above the din and breathing fresh nerve into those on the verge of giving up. The commander of the Parachute Battalion broke down; Edson relieved him on the spot and placed Torgerson in charge.

The new position was not very strong, just a small horseshoe bent around the hill, with men from several units intermingled on the bare slopes. Red Mike directed the artillery to maintain a continuous bar-



rage close along his front. When the Japanese renewed their attack, each fresh wave of Imperial soldiers boiled out of the jungle into a torrent of steel and lead. In addition to the firepower of artillery and automatic weapons, men on the lines tossed grenade after grenade at whatever shapes or sounds they could discern. Supplies of ammunition dwindled rapidly, and division headquarters pushed forward cases of belted machine gun ammunition and grenades.

One of the Japanese assaults, probably avoiding the concentrated fire sweeping the crest, pushed along the jungle edge at the bottom of the slope and threatened to envelop the left

flank. Edson ordered Torgerson to launch a counterattack with his two reorganized parachute companies. These Marines advanced, checked the enemy progress, and extended the line to prevent any recurrence. Red Mike later cited this effort as "a decisive factor in our ultimate victory."

At 0400 Edson asked Thomas to commit the reserve battalion to bolster his depleted line. A company at a time, the men of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, filed along the top of the ridge and into place beside those who had survived the long night. By that point the Japanese were largely spent. Kawaguchi sent in two more attacks, but they were hit by artillery

fire as the troops assembled and never presented much of a threat. A small band actually made it past the ridge and reached the vicinity of the airfield; the Marines providing security there dealt with them.

The onset of daylight brought an end to any organized effort, though remnants of Japanese assault units were scattered through the fringing jungle to the flanks and rear of the Marine position. Squads began the long process of rooting out these snipers. Edson also ordered up an air attack to strike the enemy units clinging to the southern end of the ridge. A flight of P-400s answered the call and strafed the exposed enemy groups. Kawaguchi admitted failure that afternoon and ordered his tattered brigade to retreat.

The raiders and parachutists had already turned over the ridge to other Marines that morning. The 1st Raiders had lost 135 men, the 1st Parachute Battalion another 128. Of those, 59 men were dead or missing-in-action. Seven hundred Japanese bodies littered the battlefield, and few of Kawaguchi's 500 wounded would survive the terrible trek back to the coast.

The battle was much more than a tremendous tactical victory for the Marines. Edson and his men had turned back one of the most serious threats the Japanese were to mount against Henderson Field. If the raiders and parachutists had failed, the landing strip would have fallen into enemy hands, and the lack of air cover probably would have led to the defeat of the 1st Marine Division and the loss of Guadalcanal. Such a reversal would have had a grave impact on the course of the war and the future of the Corps.

Vandegrift wasted no time in recommending Edson and Bailey for Medals of Honor. Red Mike's citation noted his "marked degree of cool leadership and personal courage." At the height of the battle, with friendly artillery shells landing just 75

yards to the front, and enemy bullets and mortars sweeping the knoll, Edson had never taken cover. Standing in the shallow hole that passed for a CP, he had calmly issued orders and served as an inspiration to all who saw him. War correspondents visiting the scene the day after the battle dubbed it "Edson's Ridge."

### *Matanikau*

The depleted parachutists (55 percent casualties in the campaign) left Guadalcanal on 17 September on board the convoy that brought in the 7th Marines. The 1st Raiders (33 percent casualties) remained, and received precious little rest. Just six days after the battle, Vandegrift ordered them to make a reconnaissance south of Edson's Ridge and destroy any Japanese stragglers. The raiders passed through their old position, now strongly defended by the 7th Marines, and followed the track of their beaten foe, a trail marked by abandoned weapons and bodies. Edson made liberal use of artillery and his crew-served weapons against the slightest sign of resistance. At a cost of three wounded, the raiders captured a single dismantled howitzer and killed 19 enemy soldiers. The greatest point of danger in the operation turned out to be the return trip. As the battalion neared friendly lines, the jittery new arrivals of the 7th Marines opened fire on the raiders. Luckily no one was hit.

That same day Vandegrift shipped out several excess colonels and reorganized the senior ranks of the division. Edson took command of the 5th Marines and Griffith succeeded him as head of the 1st Raiders. Red Mike's departure did not take the raider battalion out of the spotlight. Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller's 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, departed the perimeter on 23 September with the mission of clearing enemy units from the vicinity of the Matanikau River. Once that was accomplished, division wanted to place the raiders in a patrol base near Kokumbona to pre-

vent the enemy's return. That would keep Japanese artillery out of range of the airfield.

On the 24th Puller's men surprised a Japanese unit and routed it, but lost seven killed and 25 wounded in the process. Division sent out the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, as a relief force, since Puller had to use most of his battalion to get the casualties safely back into the perimeter. Puller then continued on with his one remaining rifle company and the 2d Battalion. The combined force reached the Matanikau on 26 September, proceeded down the east bank, then tried to cross the sandbar at the river's mouth. A Japanese company blocked the way and drove the Marines back with heavy fire. Meanwhile another enemy company moved into defensive positions on the eastern end of the single-log bridge that served as the only crossing upstream. The Marines remained ignorant of that move. That afternoon Vandegrift ordered Edson to take charge of the operation, and sent the raiders along to assist him.

Puller and Edson jointly devised a new plan that evening. In the morning the raiders would move upriver, cross at the bridge, and then come back downriver on the far bank to take the Japanese at the river mouth in the flank. To ensure that the enemy force did not retreat out of the trap, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, would pressure them with its own attack across the sandbar. Finally, the bulk of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, then in the perimeter after the casualty evacuation, would make an amphibious landing beyond Point Cruz to slam shut any possible escape route. The ambitious plan received division's blessing.

After a night of heavy rain, the 2d Battalion launched its assault at the river mouth, but made no progress against continuing strong opposition. The raiders, reinforced by Puller's lone company, advanced upriver, but soon found themselves wedged into

a narrow shelf between the water and a steep ridge. The Japanese had placed a tight stopper in this bottle with infantry supported by machine guns and mortars. Bailey responded in his typical fashion and tried to lead the assault—he soon fell mortally wounded. Griffith ordered Company C up the ridge in an effort to outflank the enemy. The Japanese had this approach covered too. When the battalion commander appeared on the ridgeline to observe the action firsthand, a sniper put a bullet in his shoulder. With no outside fire support, the raiders could make no headway against the dug-in Japanese.

Poor communications made things worse. Edson misinterpreted a message from the raiders and thought they were across the river. He launched the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in yet another assault, this time with help from additional mortars and 37mm antitank guns, but it met the same fate as all previous attempts. Upon landing in the enemy's rear, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, was surrounded by a large-force enemy bivouaced in the vicinity. The unit had brought no radios ashore and consequently could not immediately inform division of its plight. Eventually the Marines used air panels to signal supporting aircraft. When that word reached Puller, he wanted the 2d Battalion to renew the assault to take pressure off his men, but Edson refused to incur further casualties in a hopeless frontal attack.

Puller eventually extricated his beleaguered force with naval gunfire and messages passed by semaphore flags. Red Mike then ordered the raiders to pull back to the river mouth to join 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, after which both units withdrew to the division perimeter. The units engaged had lost 67 dead and 125 wounded in the course of the operation. This aborted action along the Matanikau was the only defeat the Marines suffered during the

Guadalcanal campaign.

Raider casualties during the all-day action had been comparatively light – two killed and 11 wounded – but that total included both senior officers in the battalion. Command now devolved upon Captain Ira J.

“Jake” Irwin. The battalion was worn down by two months of steady fighting, and by the ravages of the tropics. Large numbers of men were ill with malaria and other diseases. The battalion had seen more action than any other on the island, and rumors per-

sisted that they would soon ship out like the parachutists. One raider later recalled that “a more sickly, bedraggled, miserable bunch of Marines would have been hard to find.”

The 1st Raiders had one more battle to go on Guadalcanal. In early

## Raider Weapons and Equipment

**G**iven their special priority early in the war, the raider battalions had ample opportunity to experiment with weapons and equipment. The result was an interesting collection of items that were often unique to the raiders. The most famous of these were the various models of raider knives. One was a heavy Bowie-type knife with a blade more than nine inches long. These were manufactured specifically for the 2d Raiders and consequently came to be known as “Gung Ho” knives. An entirely different version, a lighter stiletto-type, was modeled on the Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife used by the British commandos. These raider stilettos were issued to all four battalions for the later campaigns.

The emphasis on rapid movement on foot drove both Carlson and Edson to emphasize the acquisition of light weapons with a lot of firepower. Both men rejected the standard heavy machine guns and 81mm mortars carried by regular infantry and adopted lighter models. The 2d Raider Battalion was one of the first Marine units to receive the semiautomatic M1 Garand .30-caliber rifle as standard issue; most units, including the 1st Raiders, started the Guadalcanal campaign with the old bolt-action Springfield M1903. The Browning automatic rifle, the reviled Reising sub-machine gun, and the more dependable Thompson

*A two-man Boys antitank rifle crew mans their weapon during a training exercise in 1943. Two other raiders pro-*

sub-machine gun, were favored weapons, particularly in the 2d Raiders, where each fire team boasted a BAR and a Thompson.

Perhaps the oddest weapon carried by the raiders was the Boys antitank rifle, a 35-pound behemoth firing a .55-caliber round. Edson adopted these Canadian weapons to provide his men with a light but serviceable capability against enemy armor. The rifle eventually saw use with other raider battalions. The heavy round was accurate at more than 1,000 yards, and the 2d Raiders used a Boys on Makin to destroy two Japanese seaplanes.

The raiders experimented with a number of odd items of equipment, everything from collapsible bicycles to belly bands. Carlson introduced the latter, a cloth rectangle that could be wrapped around the midsection, where it supposedly prevented intestinal disorders. The 2d Raiders also employed a hunting jacket that could double as a pack – inevitably it was dubbed the “Gung Ho” jacket. Edson’s men tried out portable individual field stoves, toggle ropes, and other innovative items. The eight-foot toggle ropes had a loop at one end and a peg at the other; they were helpful when it came time to scale cliffs. The raiders also pioneered the use of camouflage-patterned uniforms and of burlap strips to break up the distinctive outline of their helmets.

*vide flank protection against enemy infantry. The Boys rifle fired a .55-caliber round guaranteed to penetrate armor.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 56107



October intelligence indicated that the Japanese were building up their forces west of the Matanikau in preparation for another offensive against the perimeter. Division headquarters decided to strike first to secure the crossings over the river. In a plan reminiscent of the beginnings of the previous operation, two battalions of the 5th Marines would move down the coast road, seize the near bank of the Matanikau, and fix the attention of the Japanese forces on the far side. Three other battalions would cross the Matanikau at the single-log bridge and attack north toward the sea. Once they cleared the far side of the river, a force would garrison Kokumbona and prevent further enemy operations in the vicinity. In addition to strengthening the assault forces, this time division provided ample fire support. All units were to move into position on 7 October in preparation for launching that attack the next morning.

When the 5th Marines deployed forward on 7 October, they ran into a Japanese company dug in on the near side of the river just inland from the sandbar. Edson's 2d Battalion managed to secure most of its assigned frontage farther upriver, but his 3d Battalion was unable to break the enemy resistance centered on a well-fortified defensive position. He committed Company L to the battle and then radioed division for reinforcements so he could reconstitute a regimental reserve. Division assigned Company A, 1st Raiders to the task and the unit marched off down the coast road to bivouac next to Red Mike's CP.

That night the Japanese on the near side of the river probed the lines of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, and mauled the company nearest the sandbar. Early in the morning of 8 October, Edson decided to commit the raiders of Company A to the task of reducing the Japanese pocket. He placed Major Lewis W. Walt in charge of the effort. (Walt had been

Company A's commander until Edson had brought him over as operations officer for the 5th Marines.) The raiders drove in a few enemy outposts, but could make little headway against the interlocking fires of the concealed Japanese positions. Meanwhile, heavy rains during the night had continued into the day, and division delayed the move across the river for 24 hours. Vandegrift also decided to alter his original plan to a quick envelopment of the west bank and a return to the perimeter.

Based on these changed circumstances and his own observation at close range of Company A's predicament, Edson halted the attack on the strongpoint. His 3d Battalion would continue to encircle most of the enemy position, while Company A went into the defense on their right flank. The latter's position was shaped like a horseshoe, with the left linking up with the 3d Battalion and facing south toward the bunker complex, the center facing west toward the sandspit, and the right on the beach facing north toward the sea. To fill out the thin line, mortarmen and company headquarters personnel occupied the left flank positions. The raiders expected a Japanese assault across the river mouth to relieve the surrounded bridgehead, so the Marines strung barbed wire at the friendly end of the sandbar. The remainder of the raider battalion came up the coast road and went into reserve.

Just after dusk the Japanese in the strongpoint rushed from their positions in an effort to break through to their own lines. They quickly overran the surprised left flank of Company A and hit the center of the raider line from the rear. The enemy who survived the close-quarters fighting in both locations then ran headlong into the wire, where fire from the remaining Marines cut them down. The lieutenant commanding the raider company tried to recover from the confusion and establish a

fresh line farther back along the coast road. In the morning there was some more fighting with a handful of Japanese who had sought refuge in Marine foxholes. Company C of the raiders moved up to occupy the abandoned enemy position and killed three more Japanese still holed-up there. They found an elaborate complex of trenches and bunkers connected by tunnels to an underground command post. The Marines counted 59 bodies stacked up against the wire or strewn about the perimeter. The battalion lost 12 dead and 22 wounded during this stint on the Matanikau.

The raiders suffered one additional casualty during the operation. When Red Mike had gone over to the 5th Marines, he had taken with him his longtime runner, Corporal Walter J. Burak. While carrying a message along the river on the afternoon of 9 October, Japanese machine-gun fire killed the former raider. He was the last member of the 1st Raiders to die in action on Guadalcanal. On 13 October a convoy delivered the Army's 164th Infantry to the island and embarked the raider battalion for transport to New Caledonia. There were barely 200 effectives left in the unit—just a quarter of the battalion's original strength.

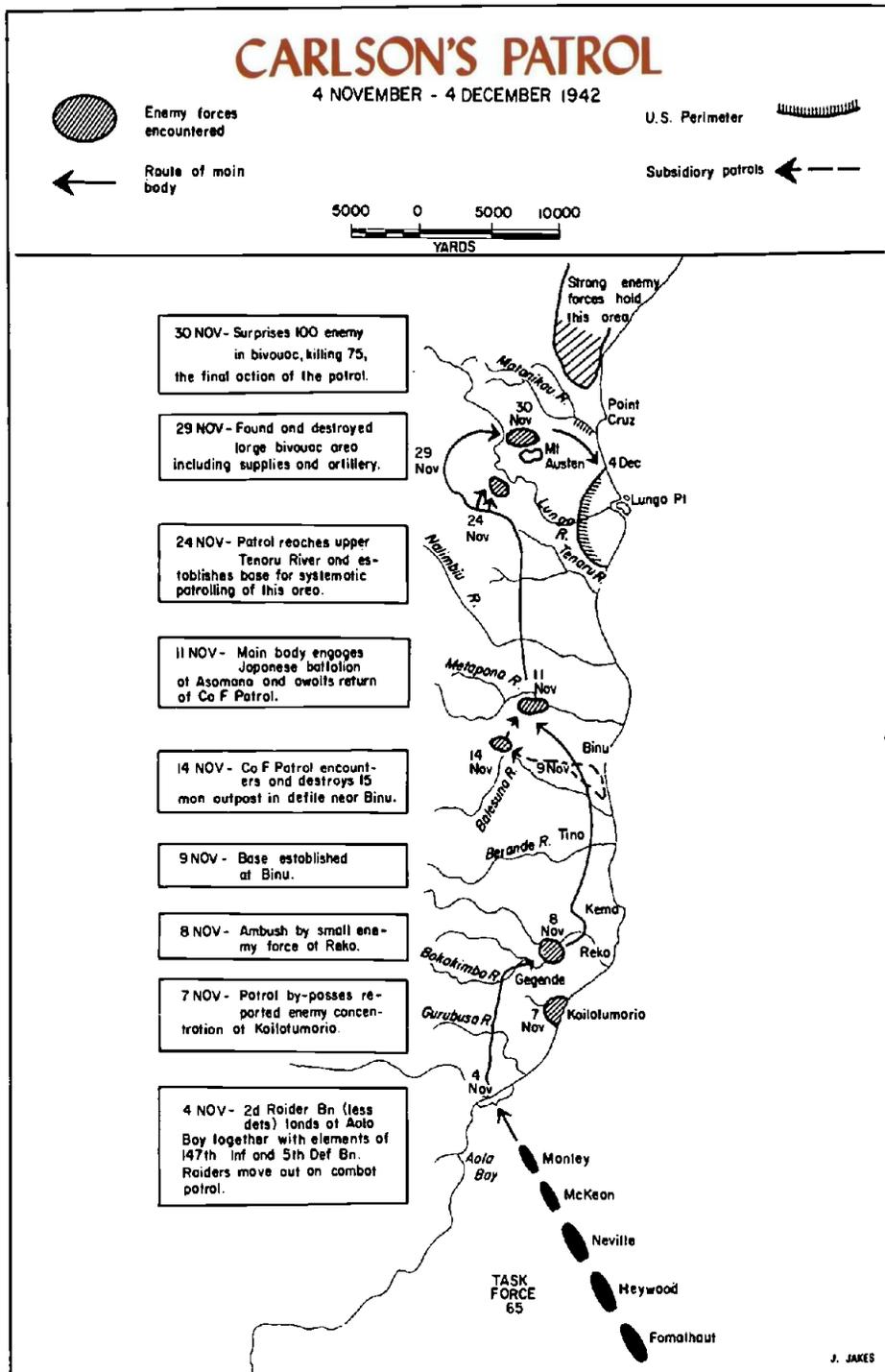
### *The Long Patrol*

Not long after the departure of the 1st Raiders, it was the turn of the 2d Raiders to fight on Guadalcanal. Carlson's outfit had been refitting in Hawaii after the Midway and Makin battles. In early September the unit boarded a transport for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, the primary staging area for most reinforcements going to the southern Solomons. There they continued training until Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner (Commander, Amphibious Force, South Pacific) decided to land a force at Aola Bay on the northeast coast of Guadalcanal to build another airfield. He assigned Carlson and two

companies of raiders to secure the beachhead for an Army battalion, Seabees, and a Marine defense battalion. The *McKean* and *Manley* placed Companies C and E ashore on the morning of 4 November. There was no opposition, though it soon became apparent the swampy jungle was no place to put an airfield.

On 5 November Vandegrift sent a message to Carlson by airdrop. Army and Marine elements were moving east from the perimeter to mop up a large force of Japanese located near the Metapona River. This enemy unit, the *230th Infantry Regiment*, had cut its way through the jungle from the west as part of a late-October attack on Edson's Ridge by the *Sendai Division*. For various reasons, the *230th* had failed to participate in the attack, and then had completed a circumnavigation of the Marine perimeter to reach its current location in the east. The Tokyo Express had recently reinforced it with a battalion of the *228th Infantry*. Vandegrift wanted the raiders to march from Aola and harass the Japanese from the rear. Carlson set out with his force on 6 November, with a coastwatcher and several native scouts as guides. Among the islanders was Sergeant Major Jacob Vouza, already a hero in the campaign. The men initially carried four days of canned rations.

The raiders moved inland before heading west. The trails were narrow and overgrown, but the native scouts proved invaluable in leading the way. On 8 November the point ran into a small Japanese ambush near Reko. The Marines killed two Japanese; one native suffered wounds. The next day the column reached Binu, a village on the Balesuna River eight miles from the coast. There Carlson halted while his patrols made contact with Marine and Army units closing in on the main Japanese force. On 10 November Companies B, D, and F of the 2d Raiders landed at Tasimboko and moved overland to join up with



their commander. (Company D was only a platoon at this point, since Carlson had used most of its manpower to fill out the remaining companies prior to departing Espiritu Santo.) From that point on the raiders also received periodic resupplies, usually via native porters dropped on the coast by Higgins boats. Rations were generally tea, rice, raisins, and bacon—the type of portable guerrilla food Carlson thrived on—reinforced by an occasional D-ration chocolate bar.

On the nights of 9 and 10 November about 3,000 Japanese escaped from the American ring encircling them on the Metapona. They were hungry and tired, and probably dispirited now that they had orders to retrace their steps back to the western side of the perimeter. But they were still a formidable force.

On the 11th the 2d Raiders had four companies out on independent patrols while the fifth guarded the base camp at Binu. Each unit had a TBX radio. At mid-morning one out-