The Dragons Peninsula Campaign

RICE ANCHORAGE [1]

Munda's eventual capture was a triumph over initial frustration and failure. Admittedly, the campaign to take the airfield had been costly and time-consuming. But while the spotlight was focused on the New Georgia Occupation Force as it fought its way from Zanana Beach to the airstrip, another tense struggle was waged simultaneously in the northern part of the island in which the jungle combat was as bitter and as deadly. The results were much less conclusive. From the initial ship-to-shore movement of the Northern Landing Group through the following six weeks of fighting, this phase of the New Georgia campaign contributed as much to the feeling of disappointment and futility as the first Munda attacks.

Early plans of the NGOF called for Colonel Harry B. Liversedge's 1st Marine Raider Regiment (less two battalions) to be a ready reserve. When intelligence reported a garrison of some 500 enemy troops with coast defense guns at Bairoko Harbor, the Kula Gulf landing was written into the attack order. Of prime concern to the Allied planners was the road connecting Bairoko with Munda airfield. Scarcely more than an improved jungle trail, the road was nevertheless a vital link between Munda and Vila, the main source of Japanese reinforcements and supplies. Bairoko Harbor was the knot which tied the overland route to the Kula Gulf barge system. An Allied ground force between Munda and Bairoko Harbor would have the double-barreled effect of cutting off the flow of enemy supplies and reinforcements to Munda as well as keeping the airfield forces and the Bairoko garrison from reinforcing one another.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: ComInCh Rept of SoPac Action, 2Dec42–31Jan44, hereafter *ComInCh Rept of SoPac Action;* WesternForO No. A11–43, dtd 28Jun43; TG 36.1 OpO No. 10–43, dtd 1Jul43; *New Georgia Campaign; NGOF Account;* 1st RdrRegt SAR 4Jul–29Aug43, dtd 6Oct43, hereafter *1st RdrRegt SAR;* 1st RdrRegt R–2 Est of Situation, *c.* 23Jun43; 1st RdrRegt R–2 Jnl 2Jan–31Aug43, hereafter *1st RdrRegt Jnl;* 1st RdrRegt MsgFile 5Jul–28Aug43, hereafter *1st RdrRegt MsgFile*; 1st RdrRegt PtlRepts 23Jul–14Aug43; 1st RdrBn WarD, 20Jun–29Aug 43, dtd 14Sept43, hereafter *1st RdrBn WarD;* 3/148 URepts, 7Jul–3Aug43, hereafter *3/148 Rept; SE Area NavOps—I; SE Area NavOps—II;* Maj Clay A. Boyd interview by HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 16Feb51; Col Samuel B. Griffith, II, ltr to DirPubInfo, HQMC, dtd 12Feb51; Col Samuel B. Griffith, II, ltr to Maj John N. Rentz, dtd 12Feb51, hereafter *Griffith ltr;* Col Samuel B. Griffith, II, ltr to Col Eustace R. Smoak, dtd 3Mar52; Lt Robert B. Pape ltr to CMC, dtd 22Feb51; LtCol William D. Stevenson ltr to CMC, dtd 22Feb51, hereafter *Stevenson ltr;* Adm Richmond K. Turner ltr to CMC, dtd 22Feb51; Col Samuel B. Griffith, II, "Corry's Boys," *Marine Corps Gazette,* v. 36, no. 3 (Mar52) and "Action at Enogai," *Marine Corps Gazette,* v. 38, no. 3 (Mar54); TSgts Frank J. McDevitt and Murrey Marder, "Capture of Enogai," *Marine Corps Gazette,* v. 27, no. 9 (Sep43); Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* ONI, *Combat Narratives X;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons.*

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Factors involved in risking a secondary attack north of the airfield had been carefully considered before a decision to land at Rice Anchorage at the mouth of the Pundakona (Wharton) River in Kula Gulf had been reached. Two areas—the Pundakona and the Piraka River in Roviana Lagoon—were scouted before the former was selected. Admiral Turner's staff reasoned that a landing from Roviana Lagoon would be unopposed but that the resultant overland trek would be excessively slow, fatiguing, and difficult to resupply. Further, this landing would not bring the enemy under immediate attack. Despite the native trails crossing the island, a large force could not travel fast enough through the jungle to give assistance to the expected rapid seizure of Munda.

On the other hand, a landing at Rice Anchorage would likewise be unopposed, and the enemy could be taken under attack almost immediately. This would force the Japanese into one of three courses of action: withdrawal to either Munda or Vila, a counterattack in strength, or an attempt at defending the Bairoko Harbor area. The latter course, it was believed, would be the logical enemy reaction to such a threat to the Munda-Vila link. Defense by the enemy at Bairoko would keep that garrison from reinforcing Munda. Though the disadvantages of making a landing on a narrow, confined beach on the Pundakona River nearly outweighed the advantages, the Rice Anchorage attack held the most hope for success in dividing the Munda-Bairoko forces. (See Map 8.)

Liversedge's group, augmented by the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, was given a multiple mission in NGOF orders. After landing at Rice, the Northern Landing Group was to move overland to the southwest, capturing or killing any enemy forces encountered in the Bairoko and Enogai Inlet area. After establishing road blocks across all roads leading from Bairoko to Munda, the NLG was to advance along the Munda-Bairoko trail as far as possible to prevent any enemy supplies or reinforcements reaching Munda, and also to block any withdrawal from that area. Contact with the right (north) flank of the 169th Infantry was to be maintained by Liversedge's command.

The Marine-Army force had only a limited knowledge of the terrain between Rice and Enogai Inlet and practically no information on Dragons Peninsula, the area between Bairoko and Enogai. For one thing, no oblique angle aerial photographs of the area were available. This type of aerial intelligence was particularly desirable, since jungle terrain photographed from high altitudes directly overhead rarely revealed anything of tactical value. In addition, the peninsula had not been scouted. The New Georgia guides had been reluctant to enter this area, fearing treachery because of vague rumors that the natives of this area were hostile to men from Roviana Lagoon.

Most of the SoPac reconnaissance patrols had been more concerned with Munda where the main effort of the NGOF was to be made. Those few patrols which ventured into the vicinity of Enogai Inlet were forced to turn back by close brushes with Japanese patrols. Only the long, narrow Leland Lagoon which borders the north shore of Dragons Peninsula had been patrolled, and this had been done in canoes. As a result, the dark stretches of jungle between Bairoko and Enogai were still an unknown area.

With the date of the landing set for 4 July, a one-day postponement was granted to allow another 37th Division unit, the 3d Battalion of the 145th Infantry, to join Liversedge's force. Unexpectedly, the 4th Raider Battalion was still engaged in the Viru Harbor attack and could not be withdrawn in time to join the NLG.

It was a lightly armed force. The only weapons carried, other than individual arms and light machine guns, were the 60mm mortars of the raiders and the 81mm mortars and heavy machine guns of the Army battalions. Noticeably lacking in artillery support, the NLG expected to have air power available upon request.

Shortly after midnight, 5 July, a covering bombardment of Kolombangara and Bairoko by a cruiser-destroyer force began on schedule. Prompt retaliatory fire from enemy shore batteries at Enogai surprised the task force, however, because the presence of large guns at Enogai as well as Bairoko had not been reported. In a matter of moments, part of the covering fires was shifted to these new targets and the bombardment continued. The destroyer *Strong* was the only task force casualty; it was hit at 0046, not by shellfire but by a torpedo fired by a Japanese destroyer running along Kolombangara's northeast shore.[2] The ship sank fast, but most of the crew was saved.

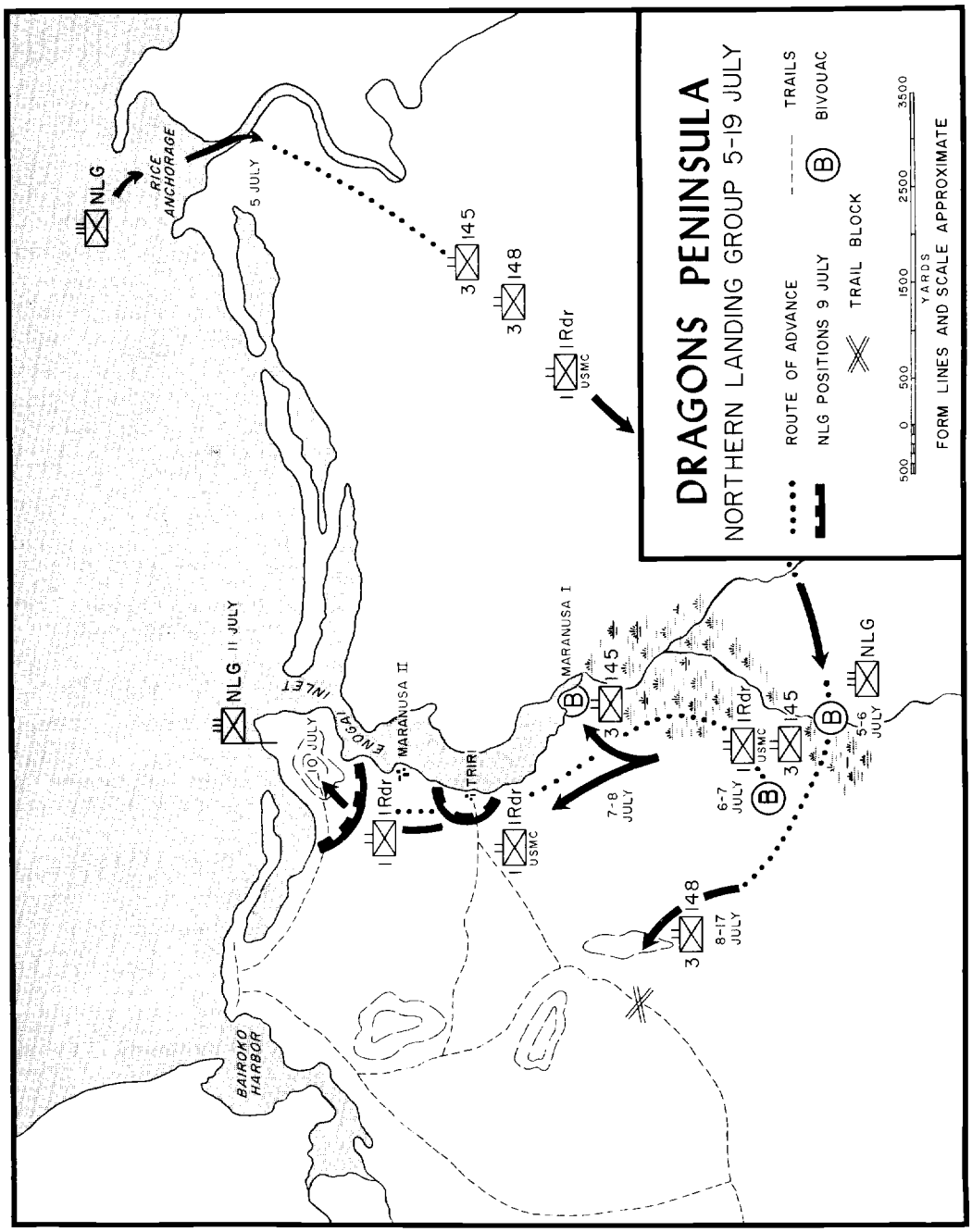
The actual landing of the Liversedge group started about 0130 in the midst of a torrential downpour and sporadic shellfire. For a short time the success of the amphibious venture seemed in serious doubt. Rice Anchorage could not be located in the darkness and rain. The transport group slowed and waited—uncomfortably remembering warnings of a lurking enemy submarine force—while one destroyer with a sweep radar probed ahead, seeking the anchorage. After a short delay, the Pundakona River mouth was located and the transport group moved into debarkation positions. As Marines and soldiers clambered into landing craft alongside the APDs, enemy star shells glimmered through the rainy darkness and shells splashed among the transports. This fire the raiders shrugged off with the comment, "erratic and inaccurate,"[3] but it was disconcerting, too.

A shallow bar blocking the entrance to Rice Anchorage further delayed the landing operation. The landing craft, each towing 10 men on a rubber raft, were forced to return to the transports to lighten loads before crossing the reef. Some of the rations were unloaded before the boats returned for a second try. Scouting reports had termed the beach as "small." The raiders found this almost an understatement to describe the narrow stretch of landing area hacked out of the jungle on the south side of the river, about 500 yards upstream from the anchorage. While four boats at a time beached to unload troops and supplies, the other boats jammed the river mouth or idled in Rice Anchorage waiting for a turn to unload. The black night obligingly curtained the milling confusion.

Ashore, drenched Marines and soldiers stumbled about the confined beach, slipping in the mud and tripping over hidden banyan roots. Since enemy shellfire ranged overhead to hit about 2,000 yards

[2] Most sources credit this successful torpedoing to enemy destroyers which were fleeing the task force; however, one official postwar source assigns credit to a submarine. NavHistDiv, Off of the CNO, ND, *United States Naval Chronology in World War II* (Washington, 1955), p. 53.

[3] *1st RdrBn WarD*, p. 1.


DRAGONS PENINSULA
NORTHERN LANDING GROUP 5-19 JULY
ROUTE OF ADVANCE
TRAILS
NLG POSITIONS 9 JULY
BIVOUAC
TRAIL BLOCK
FORM LINES AND SCALE APPROXIMATE
500 0 500 1500 2500 3500
YARDS
NLG
RICE ANCHORAGE
5 JULY
3/145
3/148
I Rdr USMC
NLG 11 JULY
INLET
10 JULY
ENOGAI
MARANUSA II
TRIRI
I Rdr
I Rdr USMC
MARANUSA I
B
3/145
7-8 JULY
6-7 JULY
I Rdr USMC
3/145
B
5-6 JULY
NLG
3/148
8-17 JULY
BAIROKO HARBOR

MAP 8

farther up the coast, Liversedge's officers decided that the Japanese at Enogai were not aware of the exact location of the landing and risked the use of hooded flashlights. Thereafter, the unloading and reorganization proceeded more smoothly. Near dawn, with almost all supplies ashore, Colonel Liversedge broke radio silence with one uncoded word, "Scram." The anxious APDs and destroyers, unhappily expecting enemy retaliation at any moment, quickly turned and headed back for the southern Solomons. The landing, although delayed, had been accomplished without serious mishap. One unit, an Army company, was taken to the wrong landing area; it went ashore farther north along the coast. The company rejoined the main body later in the day.

The NLG had been welcomed ashore by a mixed greeting committee. Heading a large group of native guides and carriers—who were obviously frightened and bewildered by the sudden influx of so many white men to their island—were an Australian coastwatcher, Flight Lieutenant J. A. Corrigan, and a Marine raider patrol leader, Captain Clay A. Boyd of Liversedge's regiment. Corrigan had been on the island for some time, radioing reports of enemy activity in Kula Gulf and recruiting a labor force of nearly 200 natives. Small, wiry men with powerful arm, back, and leg muscles, the native carriers were to receive one Australian shilling, a stick of trade tobacco, and two bowls of rice and tea each day for carrying ammunition and rations for the NLG. A few spoke pidgin English, a jargon of simple words which bridged the language barrier. Colorful in cotton "lap laps" wrapped around their waists, they were intensely loyal to the coastwatchers.

Boyd had made several scouting trips to New Georgia. The last time, in mid-June, he and his men had remained with coastwatcher Harry Wickham to direct the landings at Onaiavisi Entrance and Zanana Beach before cutting across the island to link up with Liversedge. After the arrival of the NLG at Rice Anchorage, he resumed command of his company in the 1st Raider Battalion.

On one of his earlier trips, Boyd had scouted a trail leading from Rice to Enogia, and Corrigan's natives had then chopped a parallel trail on each side of this track. After the NLG stacked all excess ammunition, equipment, rations, and blanket rolls in assembly areas prepared by the natives, the march to Enogai started over these three trails. Companies A and B of the 1st Raider Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Samuel B. Griffith, II) were assigned to move along the left trail (southern) with the demolitions platoon of the raiders heading along the right (northern) path. Thus protected on each flank, the main elements of the NLG started along the center trail with the remaining Marine companies leading and the two Army battalions following. Two companies, M and I, of Lieutenant Colonel George G. Freer's 3/145 with a medical detachment, communications unit, and the antitank platoon remained behind to guard the supply dump.

Scouting reports had termed the Rice-Enogai area an open jungle with small, broken hills and few swamps. Rain-soaked Marines and soldiers, struggling over the sharp, irregular slopes made treacherous by the mud and hidden roots, could not agree. The meager trails, hardly more than narrow defiles gashed through the thick, sodden jungle, were trapped with sprawling banyan roots slick with

green moss, coral outcroppings, vines, and underbrush. The rain continued unabated.

The Army battalions, carrying heavier weapons and more ammunition and gear than the lightly equipped raiders, were forced either to travel at a slower pace or to stop to establish another supply dump. The soldiers, choosing to keep going, pushed on but dropped steadily behind. The leading NLG units, heading deeper into the New Georgia jungle on a course roughly south from Rice, reached the Giza Giza River late in the afternoon and set up a perimeter defense. Shortly after dark, all units were in bivouac on both sides of the Giza Giza. The NLG estimated that it had traveled eight miles during the first day. Actually, progress had been only about five miles, but undoubtedly the hardship of jungle travel had helped give every indication of greater distance. (See Map 8.)

That night, men of the Northern Landing Group listened to the distant sounds of a naval battle in Kula Gulf. A U.S. cruiser-destroyer force had intercepted a group of 10 Japanese destroyers, 7 of them transporting reinforcements. In a short but violent action, the U.S. force lost the light cruiser *Helena*. The Japanese lost two destroyers but managed to land 850 troops at Vila.

At daybreak on 6 July, the NLG stirred from its wet bivouac and resumed winding its way through the dripping jungle toward Enogai. The trails chopped by Corrigan's natives ended abruptly at the river, and the Marines were forced to slash their way through the mangrove swamp lying between the Giza Giza and the Tamakau Rivers. Rain continued to drizzle through the jungle canopy. The battalions became one thin, straggling line snaking its way through the swamp on an indistinct trail. The rains drowned the radio equipment, and communication wire laid along the trail was grounded as the protective covering peeled off in the hands of the infantrymen who used the wires as guidelines. Runners carrying field messages kept Liversedge in contact with his base at Rice.

The NLG had divided into two segments early that morning. Lieutenant Colonel Delbert E. Schultz had been directed to take his 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, along another trail to the southwest to cut the Munda-Bairoko road and establish a block there. The remainder of the NLG continued toward the Tamakau River. Captain Boyd, leading Marine Company D, reached the river shortly before noon. Much to his dismay, the small stream he had scouted early in June was now a raging, flooded torrent. The raiders and soldiers paused while equipment was carried across or ferried on rafts made from branches and ponchos. Then the infantrymen began crossing the river, single-file, over a fallen tree which bridged the swollen stream. A rope stretched from bank to bank provided an unsteady guideline, and strong swimmers fished from the river those individuals who were unfortunate enough to slip and plunge into the water.

The crossing delayed the NLG until late in the afternoon. While intermittent rains continued, the Liversedge force bivouacked for the night of 6–7 July in the midst of a swamp. Muddy and tired, the raiders and soldiers swallowed canned rations and huddled in wet ponchos under banyan roots, waiting for dawn.

Late that night, in answer to a plea from NGOF headquarters, Liversedge broke radio silence to give a progress report. A

listening watch had been set up at all halts, but the NLG commander had not used the radio in the hope that his cross-country march was still a secret. Although Liversedge carried medium-powered radios (TBX), contact with Hester some 20 miles away was made with difficulty. Such communication problems were to seriously handicap NLG operations. A high-powered radio, deck-loaded on one of the APDs, had not been unloaded during the anxious landing operations and was now back at Guadalcanal — a logistics oversight which was to be regretted many times.

First contact with the enemy came shortly before noon on the 7th of July. Liversedge's wet and hungry men struggled out of the swamp early in the morning and moved along a tortuous ridge paralleling the west bank of Enogai Inlet. The delay caused by the Tamakau and the swamps was emphasized when the sounds of an air strike at Enogai were heard. This had been the designated day for Liversedge's assault of that strongpoint. After moving through the native village of Maranusa I without incident, the point platoon of the NLG suddenly encountered seven Japanese riflemen. Surprise to both forces was apparent, but the Marines recovered first. In a brief fight, two of the enemy were killed before the rest fled. Uniforms identified the dead as members of the SNLF, probably from the *Kure 6th* at Enogai.

Realizing that the fight had warned the Enogai garrison of an attack through the back door, Liversedge increased the speed of the advance. Griffith was directed to take his raider battalion forward as quickly as possible to take advantage of any remaining element of surprise and to screen the advance of the rest of the force. The next brush with the enemy came as suddenly as the first. The demolitions platoon, meeting a strong enemy patrol, withdrew slightly to high ground and engaged the Japanese in a hot fire fight. Boyd's Company D then flanked the enemy and killed 10 before the Japanese fled. The brief fight cost the raiders three killed and four wounded. By nightfall, Griffith's Marines had occupied the native village of Triri on Enogai Inlet. Liversedge's CP was set up at Maranusa I with the NLG reserve units, Companies K and L of the 145th Infantry. Hasty perimeters were placed around each village.

The absence of defensive works at Triri further convinced the Marines that the Japanese at Enogai had not been expecting an attack from the direction of the inlet. The only item of value found at Triri was a detailed enemy map which pinpointed the location of four 140mm guns at Enogai. As Griffith's battalion prepared hasty defensive positions, the document was rushed to Liversedge at Maranusa I. The NLG commander immediately radioed for an air strike to knock out these weapons, but his message failed to raise a response from either NGOF headquarters or the 43d Division. An Army radio station at Viru, hearing the request for a relay, accepted the message for transmission to ComAir New Georgia.

Early on the morning of 8 July, Griffith hurried two platoons down divergent paths north and west from Triri to ambush any enemy probing attacks. The Marines on the west trail scored first. A Japanese patrol of near-company strength, blundering along the trail without advance security, walked into the trap.

Premature firing, however, spoiled any surprise effect and the enemy withdrew without difficulty. Within a few minutes, a full-scale counterattack had been directed at the Marine ambushing party, and Griffith rushed Boyd's Company D forward to help hold the trail. In the meantime, Colonel Liversedge picked up his command post and the two Army companies and rushed to Triri to be closer to the conflict.

The fight continued for three hours, the close jungle terrain handicapping the observation and maneuvering of both forces. Company C (Captain John P. Salmon), moving forward to relieve Company D under fire, broke the deadlock with a 60mm mortar barrage and continuous machine gun fire. As the raiders moved forward, the enemy disengaged and fled down the trail. Fifty dead Japanese were left littered about the scene of the fight.

The Marines did not pursue. Enogai was the first objective. While the Army companies took over the defense of Triri, the raider battalion hastily reorganized and resumed the march toward Enogai along the north trail where the second ambush force had set up. The trail, however, ended abruptly in an impassable swamp. Reluctantly, after considerable time had been spent in trying to find an acceptable trail to Enogai, the battalion commander ordered the return to Triri for another start the following day.

Meanwhile, the Japanese force had reinforced and reorganized for another attack on Triri. Late on the afternoon of the 8th, an estimated 400 Japanese struck quickly at the left flank of the thin perimeter established by the two Army companies. The lines of Company K of the 145th slowly began to give way under the continuing pressure of the enemy assaults. Company L, on the right, received only scattered sniper fire. The demolitions platoon of the raider battalion, which had remained behind with Liversedge's CP, rushed to assist Company K in its defense just as Griffith's battalion returned. On orders from Liversedge for a quick counterattack, Griffith directed First Lieutenant Robert Kennedy's platoon from Company B to circle back and hit the left flank and rear of the Japanese. Kennedy's countermove completely surprised and crushed the enemy's left flank. The Japanese fled once more. Another 20 enemy dead were left behind. Company K, which had three soldiers wounded, estimated that 75 additional Japanese had been killed in the attempted breakthrough. Kennedy's platoon suffered no casualties.

CAPTURE OF ENOGAI[4]

After a quiet night at Triri, the Marines again started toward Enogai the following morning. A radio team with a TBX and headquarters personnel of the raider regiment remained behind with the Army companies, but Liversedge moved out with Griffith's battalion. The raiders had more luck this day. A good trail, apparently unknown to the Enogai garrison, was discovered and rapid progress was made by the Marines. Sounds of an air strike at Enogai indicated that the request for the destruction of the enemy guns there was

[4] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *NGOF Account; New Georgia Campaign; 1st RdrRegt MsgFile; 1st RdrRegt SAR; 1st RdrRegt Jnl; 1st RdrBn WarD; Griffith ltr; Stevenson ltr;* Pape ltr, *op. cit.;* Boyd interview, *op. cit.;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons;* Griffith, "Action at Enogai," *op. cit.*; McDevitt and Marder, "Capture of Enogai," *op. cit.*

CASUALTIES *from the fighting on Dragons Peninsula are readied for evacuation from Enogai by PBY.* (*USMC 182121*)

COLUMN OF MARINE RAIDERS *crosses a jungle stream near Enogai during the active patrolling in August.* (*USMC 60166*)

being executed. Shortly before noon, Leland Lagoon was sighted and the Marine battalion turned east toward the enemy defenses at Enogai Point. After several hours of cautious approach, the raiders were halted by the stutter of two light machine guns. The Marines paused for battle orders. As they waited, the volume of enemy fire picked up. The Enogai defense line was being reinforced.

The attack was made without mortar preparation—Company A (Captain Thomas A. Mullahey) with its left flank resting on the lagoon, Salmon's Company C in the center, and Company B (Captain Edwin B. Wheeler) on the right flank. Boyd's Company D was held in reserve. The frontal assault, made with grenades and machine guns, was beaten back. With the jungle daylight fast closing into deep twilight, Liversedge called off the assault. Griffith was told to hold in place and resume the attack the following morning.

The Marines' defensive positions, facing commanding ground, were not to Liversedge's liking, but the NLG commander wanted to keep the pressure on the enemy during the night and decided to risk a Japanese counterattack. The gamble paid off. The night passed without incident except for the sudden crash of a huge, bomb-weakened banyan tree in the command post area which crushed one raider, injured three others, and completely smashed the command's TBX.

Breakfast on the morning of the 10th was not a problem for the raiders who had not eaten since the morning of the 9th. There was no food. After a few quiet orders from Griffith, the 1st Raider Battalion renewed the attack. Wheeler's Company B on the right front reported no opposition and moved forward rapidly. Companies A and C, as expected, however, were hit by intense fire from rifles and automatic weapons. The two companies paused for a 60mm mortar barrage to soften the enemy line before plunging on. Company B, at last meeting strong defensive fire, raced through a small native village on the inlet's shore south of Enogai. Dead enemy were sprawled throughout the village. A number of machine guns were taken and turned about to put more fire on the fleeing Japanese. The breakthrough put raiders almost in the rear of the enemy lines. Opposition facing Company C in the center abruptly faltered, then scattered.

As enemy resistance began to crumble, the raider attack gained momentum. Behind a withering fire of automatic weapons and machine guns, the raiders moved through Enogai. Mortarmen, in positions on the high ground overlooking the village, dropped 60mm mortar shells along the shoreline of Kula Gulf, trapping the village defenders between two fires. Stragglers, attempting to swim across Leland Lagoon, were machine gunned by the raiders. By early afternoon, the coast defense positions were in raider hands, and only two small pockets of enemy resistance remained. These the Marines contained, postponing mopping-up operations until the next day. Late that afternoon, Company L of the 145th struggled into Enogai, each soldier carrying rations, bandoleers of ammunition, and three extra canteens of water. Without food for more than 30 hours, the raiders had been reduced to catching drinking water in ponchos during the intermittent rains.

The food was part of an air drop which the rear headquarters at Triri had received early on the morning of the 10th. Liversedge had requested the drop the previous day. The original three-day supply of ra-

tions carried ashore at Rice Anchorage had been stretched over five days, and fresh water was also scarce. Wounded were fed wormy rice which had been found at Triri. The situation had become tense—so serious, in fact, that the Marines were far more concerned with the prospect of continued diminished rations than they were with the threat of having another enemy garrison in their rear at Bairoko.

Anxiety increased when the planes appeared over Triri on schedule but could not locate the purple smoke grenades marking the NLG positions. An air liaison officer finally made contact with the planes and directed the air drop. Parachutes drifted down, and soldiers and Marines dodged the welcome "bombing" to collect the bulky packages. The first containers opened held only mortar shells, and the troops howled their disappointment. K-rations and chocolate bars soon followed, however. An immediate relief party was organized to carry supplies and water to Griffith's battalion, then hotly engaged at Enogai.

That night the Marines dined on K-rations and Japanese canned fish, rice, and *sake*. The captured enemy rations were liberally seasoned with soy sauce found in several large barrels. Articles of Japanese uniforms were used to replace the muddy and tattered Marine uniforms. The evening passed without further activity, the Marines resting easily behind a perimeter defense anchored on Leland Lagoon on the right flank and Enogai Inlet on the left. The defenses faced toward Bairoko. During the night, Japanese barges were heard in Kula Gulf and the raiders scrambled for positions from which to repel an enemy counterlanding. The Japanese barges, however, were only seeking to evacuate stragglers from the sandspit between Leland Lagoon and Kula Gulf.

The following morning, mop-up operations began with Companies A and D moving quickly through the two remaining points of opposition, although Company D was hard-hit initially. Only a few Japanese were flushed by the other patrols, and these the Marines killed quickly. The 1st Raiders now owned all of Enogai Point between Leland Lagoon and the inlet. Japanese casualties were estimated at 350. The raiders, in moving from Triri, had lost 47 killed in action and 74 wounded. Four others were missing and presumed dead. The wounded were placed in aid stations housed in the thatched huts at Enogai.

The four 140mm naval guns, three .50 caliber antiaircraft guns, and numerous machine guns, rifles, and small mortars were captured, in addition to large stocks of ammunition, food, clothing, two tractors, and a searchlight. Allied bombardments and bombings had not materially damaged any of the Enogai installations.

The Japanese retaliated quickly on the morning of the 11th with a bombing attack which lasted for more than an hour and left the Marines with 3 more men killed and 15 wounded. Three American PBYs were called in that afternoon to evacuate the more seriously injured, and, after landing at Rice Anchorage, the big flying boats taxied along the shoreline to Enogai where the wounded were loaded aboard from rubber rafts. Shortly before takeoff, the PBYs were bombed and strafed by two enemy floatplanes. The Marines on shore fired everything they had at the attackers, including small arms and captured weapons, but the Japanese

went unscathed and the PBYs hastily departed for Guadalcanal. On the same afternoon, headquarters personnel of Liversedge's CP arrived at Enogai and, at 2100, seven landing craft from Rice made the initial supply run into the inlet.

TRAIL BLOCK ACTION [5]

After splitting with Liversedge's main force early on the morning of 6 July, Lieutenant Colonel Schultz started his 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry down a trail which his sketch map showed would put him in position to intercept Japanese traffic over the Munda-Bairoko trail and establish the road block which Liversedge had directed. The Army battalion was hardly on its way down the new trail when one of Corrigan's native guides—looking at Schultz' map—insisted that the map was wrong. The Army commander, relaying this information to Liversedge by field message, reported that he was going to press on in the hope that the trail would cross the Munda-Bairoko trail at some point.

The soldiers moved down the inland trail without undue difficulty; the ground was more rolling and less swampy than in the coastal area. Crossing the Tamakau proved no problem farther upstream, and, late on the afternoon of 7 July, Schultz informed Liversedge that he had reached a trail junction which he believed to be the main Munda-Bairoko trail and that a block would be established the following morning. Footprints on the trail, evidence of recent use, convinced Schultz that he had indeed reached his objective. He also requested that rations be carried to him, and reported that the native carriers had become apprehensive and had returned to Rice.

The next morning, 8 July, Schultz set up his road block. Company I defended the approach from the north and Company K the approach from the south. Company L filled in a thin perimeter between I and K.

The first enemy contact was made shortly after 1300 when a squad of Japanese, sighted coming down the trail from the north, was taken under fire. The fight was brief, the enemy quickly fleeing back toward Bairoko. Two hours later a full-scale attack by 40 to 50 Japanese hit Company I's outposts, driving them back into the perimeter, but the enemy did not penetrate the battalion's defenses. The afternoon's engagement cost the Japanese about 7 killed and 15 to 20 wounded. One American was killed and three others wounded.

After a quiet night, Schultz sent patrols forward on each trail in an attempt to locate the enemy. No contact was made in either direction, although an abandoned enemy bivouac area was discovered about two miles down the Munda fork of the trail. Schultz also tried to contact the 169th Regiment, by this time supposed to be well on its way to Munda field. Unknown to Schultz, neither force was in position to make contact. That night, after listening to reports from his patrols, Schultz reported to Liversedge that he believed himself to be about six miles north of Munda.

Early on the morning of 10 July, the battalion was hit on the right flank by about 50 Japanese and then on the left flank by a larger force of about 80 men. Both probing attacks were repulsed, the

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[5] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *NGOF Account*; *New Georgia Campaign*; *1st RdrRegt SAR*; *1st RdrRegt Jnl*; *1st RdrRegt MsgFile*; *3/148 Rept*; Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons*.

Japanese losing 14 killed in the two skirmishes. After a number of similar searching attacks, the Japanese suddenly unleashed a strong attack on the right flank at the junction of Companies I and L. The Army positions were quickly overrun, but an orderly withdrawal was made. The Japanese force, estimated at more than two companies, quickly occupied a small ridge and set up a number of automatic weapons and heavy machine guns.

Company K hurriedly organized a strong counterattack with the battalion's reserves, but the enemy's hold on the rise remained intact. An 81mm mortar barrage, which Schultz directed to be placed along the ridge, kept the enemy from continuing the attack further. The following day, 11 July, Company K attacked again toward the ridge, but was driven back. A later attempt by the same company was also repulsed. Casualties, however, in both attacks were few. That night, Company K was hit in return by a bayonet charge. The *banzai* attack was beaten back with only three soldiers being wounded.

Schultz' force, by now just as ill-fed and unkempt as Griffith's battalion, was on ⅓ rations. The food problem had become more acute on the afternoon of the 11th when Company I of the 145th Infantry arrived from Triri to reinforce Schultz' battalion. A food drop that same afternoon had been greatly disappointing. As Schultz had predicted in an early report to Liversedge, the jungle prevented aircraft from spotting either flares or colored panels. Consequently, the air drop was wide of the mark. Schultz' men, engaged closely with the enemy, could recover only a few of the packages, and these contained mostly mortar shells. Most of the ammunition was found to be outdated and of the wrong caliber, and nearly all the rations were spoiled. Little of either could be used.

The next morning, Company I of the 145th moved up to the rear of the 148th's positions and then lunged forward toward the ridgeline, following a heavy machine gun and mortar preparation. The position had been abandoned. The absence of any dead or wounded enemy indicated that the withdrawal had been effected during the night. The positions around the trail block were restored, and, with the arrival of some natives with rations from Triri, the situation began to look brighter. Defense of this area had cost Schultz 11 killed and 31 wounded. Japanese casualties were estimated at 150.[6]

ENOGAI: 12–19 JULY[7]

Another attempt by the Japanese to reinforce Vila and Munda through Kula Gulf was partially blocked shortly after midnight on 12–13 July. An Allied force of 3 cruisers and 10 destroyers ambushed 4 enemy transports escorted by several destroyers and a light cruiser. Enemy torpedos damaged two U.S. cruisers, the *Honolulu* and *St. Louis*, and the New Zea-

[6] Trail block casualties reported by Schultz in 148th Infantry's After Action Report, quoted in *New Georgia Campaign* p. V–21, totaled 11 killed and 29 wounded with 250 estimated Japanese casualties. The figures given here are from the original day-to-day reports from the trail block.

[7] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *NGOF Account; New Georgia Campaign; 1st RdrRegt SAR; 1st RdrRegt Jnl; 1st RdrRegt MsgFile; 1st RdrBn WarD; 4th RdrBn Jul43 WarD; SE Area NavOps—I; SE Area NavOps—II;* ONI, *Combat Narratives X;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons.*

land cruiser *Leander*. The U.S. destroyer *Gwin* was sunk, and two others were damaged slightly in a collision. The Japanese lost only one cruiser in the engagement, and managed to land 1,200 troops on Kolombangara. The battle, however, persuaded the Japanese to abandon further attempts to run the gantlet of Kula Gulf. Thereafter, the enemy resorted to attempts to sneak barges through the waters west of Kolombangara. The battle also lessened the threat of a counterlanding against Liversedge's force.

At Enogai, the possibility of such an enemy attempt had been considered and the defenses of the captured village strengthened and extended. Marines strung captured barbed wire from Enogai Inlet across the point to Leland Lagoon and constructed defensive positions behind this line, but the Japanese did not attempt to regain the area. Enemy bombing attacks, too, became less frequent.

Enogai became the new NLG command post. Liversedge directed that supplies at Rice Anchorage be moved to the new CP, and, with the exception of a small detail, 3/145 moved to Triri. Rice then became a relay point where APDs anchored to unload supplies into landing craft. The busy small boats then skirted the shoreline to Enogai, carrying supplies to the NLG and evacuating wounded on the return trip.

For some time, Liversedge had been concerned about his tactical situation. His original orders had given him the dual mission of capturing or destroying Japanese in the Bairoko-Enogai area while blocking the Munda-Bairoko trail, but the distance between his command post at Enogai and Schultz' trail block was too great for effective control. A new landing area on the upper reaches of Enogai Inlet made resupply and evacuation of the trail block easier by eliminating much of the overland hike, but the combined boat trip and march still took considerable time. Moreover, General Hester on 9 July had insisted that Liversedge keep his battalions within supporting distance of each other. So, as soon as Enogai had been captured and a defensive perimeter established at Triri, the Marine colonel turned his attention to the trail block where Schultz' battalion had suddenly found itself facing first a determined enemy of considerable strength and then no enemy at all.

Following the withdrawal of enemy forces from the trail block area on 12 July, no further Japanese troops had been encountered. Combat patrols, hitting along the Munda-Bairoko trail in both directions, failed to make contact. With Munda under heavy attack, this seemed surprising since it appeared logical that the Japanese would make some attempt to reinforce the airfield. Disturbed by the reports from the trail block, Liversedge sent his operations officer Lieutenant Colonel Joseph J. McCaffery, to check Schultz' position. McCaffery left Triri on the morning of the 13th accompanied by part of the regimental staff and the 145th's Company K.

He later radioed Liversedge that the situation at the trail block was "okay," and that the defense of the trail was tight and not split as had been reported. Rations were needed badly, since natives could not carry enough supplies to support the augmented trail block force and the front lines could not be weakened to supply carriers. An air drop was requested.

By this time, however, Liversedge was already en route to the trail block for a

personal reconnaissance. The NLG commander left Enogai with a small patrol on the 15th of July and, after bivouac on the Triri trail, joined McCaffery and Schultz early on the morning of the 16th. One day at the defensive position was enough to convince Liversedge that the trail block should be abandoned. Schultz' battalion, unable to contact the 169th and at a considerable distance by boat and foot from the supply base at Enogai, was definitely out on a shaky tactical limb. Moreover, 3/148 was in a weakened condition, and many soldiers were ill from eating contaminated food. Their ability to ward off a sustained attack was questionable. Resupply was a problem, too; very little of the rations dropped were recovered. The intended purpose of the trail block seemed to have been served:

> The presence of our force at the road block since 8 July had materially assisted in the capture of Enogai by holding enemy forces at Bairoko in position and preventing them from reinforcing their Enogai garrison. It further established the fact that the enemy was not using the Bairoko-Munda trail as a supply route.[8]

On the morning of the 17th, executing Colonel Liversedge's orders, Schultz directed his battalion to abandon the trail block, and the two companies of the 145th Regiment and 3/148 retraced the path to Triri. There the soldiers changed clothes, bathed, and ate a good meal after nearly two weeks in the jungle. Their rest was to be short-lived, though.

At Enogai, the Marines, now rested and well-supplied, had been actively patrolling the trails toward Bairoko. Enemy contacts after the capture of Enogai had been limited to an occasional brush between opposing patrols, which resulted in brief fire fights with few casualties to either side. The raiders lost one killed and one wounded during the period 13–17 July. Japanese planes, however, continued to make Rice Anchorage and Enogai a favored target. Each night enemy floatplanes droned over the NLG positions to drop bombs from altitudes of about 500 feet. No damage was inflicted, and no casualties resulted.

Patrol reports definitely established the fact that the Japanese intended to defend Bairoko Harbor. Several patrols reported glimpses of Japanese working parties constructing emplacements and digging trenches east of the harbor. Two-man scouting teams, attempting to get as close to Bairoko as possible, returned with the information that the high ground east of the Japanese positions had not been occupied by the enemy and that two good trails leading to this area had been found. The scouts reported that a battalion could reach this position in two and one-half hours. There was still no reliable estimate of the size of the defending force at Bairoko, however.

Upon his return from the trail block on the 17th, Liversedge was greeted with the news that Lieutenant Colonel Currin's 4th Raider Battalion would arrive the next day to augment the NLG. The NLG commander had requested this reinforcement shortly after the capture of Enogai. Major William D. Stevenson, the regiment's communication officer, had hitchhiked a ride on one of the PBYs carrying casualties out of Enogai on 11 July and had gone to Guadalcanal to relay Liversedge's request personally to Admiral Turner. Ten-

[8] *1st RdrRegt SAR*, p. 4. The Army's official history of this campaign notes in regard to this contemporary judgment that "knowledge gained after the event indicates that none of these beliefs was warranted." Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*, p. 104.

tative approval for the reinforcement was given. After conferring with Currin, Stevenson returned to Enogai with supplies and mail.[9]

Early on the morning of the 18th, four APDs anchored off Enogai Point and the 4th Marine Raiders debarked, bringing additional supplies and ammunition with them. Liversedge, who had expected a full battalion, was taken aback when Currin reported his battalion nearly 200 men understrength. The captures of Viru Harbor and Vangunu, as well as recurring malaria, had taken their toll. Liversedge put the NLG sick and wounded aboard the APDs to return to Guadalcanal and turned his attention toward the seizure of Bairoko Harbor. The orders were issued late that afternoon, after a conference with his battalion commanders at the Enogai CP.

Approach to Bairoko was to be made by two columns. Two full-strength companies (B and D) of the 1st Raider Battalion and the four companies of the 4th Raider Battalion were to make the main effort, advancing along the south shore of Leland Lagoon straight toward Bairoko and the north flank of the Japanese positions. Schultz' battalion was to move from Triri toward Bairoko to hit the south flank of the Japanese positions. Freer's 3/145 was to remain in reserve at Triri and Enogai. The departure time was set for 0730, with an air strike scheduled for 0900 to precede the actual attack on the harbor defenses.

As soon as Liversedge's orders had been given, Schultz and Freer returned to Triri, and Currin and Griffith began a last reconnaissance. A reinforced platoon from Wheeler's Company B under the command of Second Lieutenant William J. Christie moved down the sandspit between Leland Lagoon and Kula Gulf to get into position for the morning's attack and to protect the seaward flank. At 1600, an air strike by 18 scout bombers and 19 torpedo bombers pounded the east side of Bairoko Harbor while 8 mediums strafed Japanese supply dumps and bivouac area. The strike marked the fourth time since 15 July that Bairoko had been worked over by ComAirSols planes.

That night Enogai was rocked in return by enemy bombing and strafing attacks that lasted nearly seven hours. Ten Marines were wounded. The NLG wondered: Had the enemy accurately guessed the date for the NLG attack or were the Japanese just giving as good as they had received in the air attacks of the previous days? If the former, enemy intelligence work had been much better than the NLG's.

Although the Liversedge force knew the general location and nature of the Japanese defenses at Bairoko, there was a disturbing lack of intelligence about the size of the Japanese garrison. The pre-landing estimate had been about 500 enemy at the harbor. The 350 Japanese encountered and killed at Triri and Enogai were identified as members of the *Kure 6th SNLF*. Schultz' attackers at the road block had not been identified, but were believed to have been from the Bairoko garrison. The NLG concluded—wrongly—that only about two reinforced companies held Bairoko.

At the time of the Rice Anchorage landing, Enogai was lightly defended by a detachment from Commander Okumura's *Kure 6th SNLF*. When Liversedge's force split on the second day, the Japa-

[9] *Stevenson ltr.*

nese believed that two regiments were attacking Dragons Peninsula and ordered half of the *2d Battalion, 13th Regiment* from Vila to Okumura's assistance. The reinforcements included a machine gun company. The new troops were to have been rushed to Enogai to defend the coast defense guns but the move was made too late. By the time the *2d Battalion* units reached Bairoko, Enogai had been captured. When Liversedge's intentions to continue the attack toward Bairoko became more evident, more reinforcements were rushed to the harbor. These included several companies of the *2d Battalion, 45th Regiment* and the *8th Battery* of the *6th Field Artillery Regiment* which had recently arrived from Bougainville.

Since contact with the enemy had been negligible after the capture of Enogai, the NLG had no basis for comparison of strength and were not aware of the added enemy capability to defend Bairoko. Patrols did not aggressively test the Japanese defenses; in fact, no probing attacks against the outposts guarding Bairoko were attempted. The only enemy prisoner taken during this period was a badly burned pilot, rescued from an offshore island and immediately evacuated. In effect, the NLG was facing an unknown quantity in its attack against the harbor.

"*I HAVE COMMITTED THE WORKS*" [10]

The approach to Bairoko by the raiders began over trails and terrain now familiar through much patrolling. Wheeler's Company B led the approach march with Company D (now commanded by First Lieutenant Frank A. Kemp, Captain Boyd having been evacuated with malaria), the demolitions platoon, Currin's 4th Raider Battalion, and the regimental command post following in column. The two companies in the 1st Battalion had been brought up to near-full strength for the attack by taking men from Companies A and C. These understrength companies remained behind with the 145's Company L at Enogai. (See Map 9.)

As the NLG file moved through the dripping jungle, scrambling over sharp coral rocks and climbing low but steep hills and ridges, the Marines waited to hear the first sounds of bombing and strafing which would indicate that the 0900 air strike on Bairoko's defenses was being executed. The raiders waited in vain—there would be no strike.

Unknown to Liversedge, his request was apparently made too late. The support strikes by ComAirSols for 20 July were already scheduled and the planes allotted. The NLG commander, however, did not know this. Considerable difficulty was encountered in transmitting the message on the afternoon of the 19th, but the message was finally cleared. Scheduling of the strike was not confirmed, Liversedge's communication officer recalls:

> Acknowledgment was requested, as I remember, but this acknowledgment did not come until night. It was actually nothing more than an acknowledgment of the re-

[10] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *New Georgia Campaign; NGOF Account;* ComAirSols WarD, Jul43; ComAir New Georgia SAR, 29Jun–13Aug43; *1st RdrRegt SAR; 1st RdrRegt Jnl; 1st RdrRegt MsgFile;* 1st RdrRegt PtlRepts, *op. cit.; 4th RdrBn Jul43 WarD; Griffith ltr;* LtCol Anthony Walker ltr to CMC, dtd 23Feb51; LtCol Edwin B. Wheeler ltr to CMC, dtd 20Mar52; ONI, *Combat Narratives X;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons.*

ceipt of the message by the staff officer on duty at the headquarters addressed.[11]

Without air support, the odds for success in capturing Bairoko lengthened considerably. Disappointed but determined, the two Marine battalions kept moving forward.

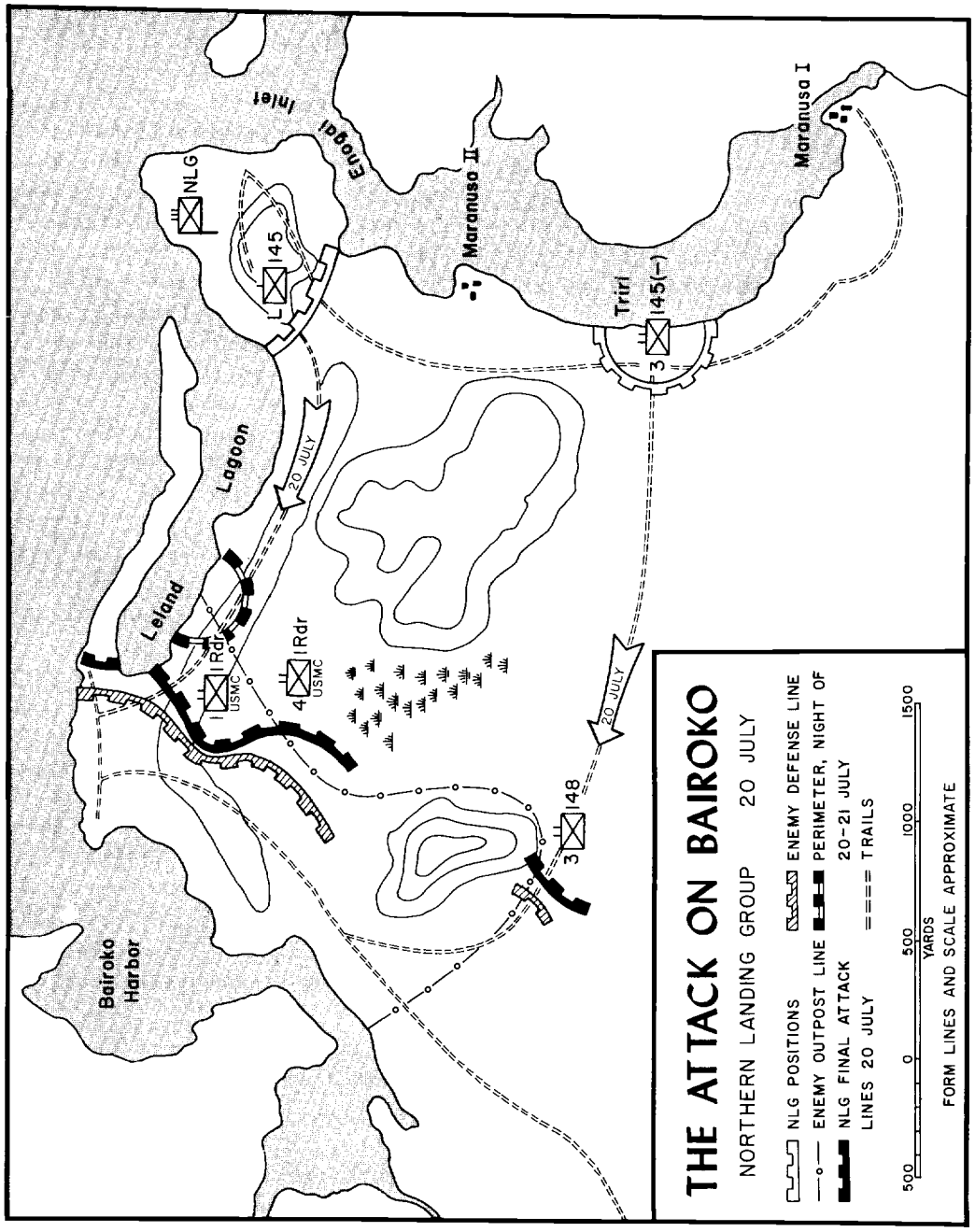
The first shots came shortly after 1015. A Japanese outpost opened fire on the NLG column, and Wheeler and Kemp quickly deployed their companies into attack formation. The outpost was overrun. Without pause, the raiders continued forward, feeling their way through the tangled jungle. At 1040, Griffith informed Liversedge by message that he was deployed and pushing forward against several machine guns.

Five minutes later, the raiders were in a violent, all-out battle. A sudden eruption of intense and accurate fire from close range raged at them. The Marine attackers were pinned down, closely pressed against banyan roots, logs, and coral outcroppings, unable to move against the withering fire from automatic weapons and machine guns which raked the jungle. Recovering quickly, the Marines returned the fire, the battle racket becoming louder. As the intensity of the firing increased, the din was punctured by hoarse shouts and curses as the Marines tried to maneuver against the murderous fire pouring from the jungle facing them.

Confronting the raiders was a series of log and coral bunkers dug into the rising ground under banyan roots, and well camouflaged with palm fronds and branches. The ridge ahead blazed with fire from these low fortifications. Similar to those encountered by the NGOF in its approach to Munda, the emplacements supported each other with lanes of interlocking fire. Further protection was furnished by Japanese soldiers in trees overhead who sniped at the Marines with Nambu (.25 caliber) light machine guns. Okumura had prepared his defenses well.

The pitched battle went on, both sides firing at a rapid rate. Wheeler's company, with its right flank near the end of the lagoon, was unable to move forward and could not make contact with Christie's platoon on the sandspit. Heavy firing across the lagoon indicated that Christie, too, was engaged. Kemp's company, on the left, finally regained fire superiority, however, and began to inch forward in an attempt to take high ground to the front. As casualties began to mount in both companies, Griffith moved his sole reserve unit —the demolitions platoon under Marine Gunner Angus R. Goss—to the left flank for protection from attacks from that direction. At 1105, after 20 minutes of furious combat, Griffith reported to Liversedge: "Harry: I have committed the

[11] *Stevenson ltr.* All NLG records, both Marine and Army, indicate that such a strike was expected. ComAirSols and ComAir New Georgia records, however, do not reveal any notation of the request. This particular incident, which illustrates NLG liaison difficulties with higher echelons, remains unresolved. Evidently a staff officer at ComAirSols, adhering to a policy that air support requests had to be received before 1600 on the day prior to the date of execution, took no action on the request. The XIV Corps G–3 Journal of 19 July contains a message from Liversedge, sent at 2235, 18 July, requesting a 12-plane strike on the 19th and a "large strike to stand by for July 20 A M and SBD's to stand by for immediate call remainder of day." Corps headquarters replied that a "large strike standby" for the 20th was "impracticable." Quoted in Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*, p. 130*n*.


THE ATTACK ON BAIROKO
NORTHERN LANDING GROUP 20 JULY
NLG POSITIONS
ENEMY DEFENSE LINE
ENEMY OUTPOST LINE
PERIMETER, NIGHT OF 20-21 JULY
NLG FINAL ATTACK LINES 20 JULY
TRAILS
500 0 500 1000 1500
YARDS
FORM LINES AND SCALE APPROXIMATE
Bairoko Harbor
Leland Lagoon
Enogai Inlet
Maranuso II
Maranuso I
Triri
NLG
145
145(-)
148
1 Rdr USMC
4 1 Rdr USMC
3
20 JULY
20 JULY

MAP 9

works. . . . Movement forward continues. Sam." [12]

By noon, the first line of enemy resistance crumbled, broken under the relentless pressure of the raider units. Unable to use the 60mm mortars because of the jungle canopy, lacking the new flame-thrower weapons, and without air or artillery support, the Marines breached Okumura's defensive line by knocking out first one pillbox and then another by demolitions and overwhelming small-arms fire. But losses were heavy and progress was slow.

Shortly after noon, with the 1st Battalion clearly needing quick assistance, Liversedge committed Currin's battalion to the fight. Company P (Captain Walker) was in close support behind Griffith's battalion, and thus able to move quickly into the line. Kemp's Company D, which had moved steadily ahead despite numerous casualties, was receiving heavy fire on its left flank and Walker now attacked toward this opposition. Goss' demolition platoon, in turn, circled through the rear of the 1st Battalion to take up a new position on Kemp's right flank to bridge the gap between Company D and Company B.

Walker's fresh company, under orders to attack southwest to the shores of the inlet before turning north to hit the enemy's right flank, was barely able to move forward before criss-crossing fire from both right and left flanks held it back. While Walker scouted his front lines to determine the location of the machine guns facing him, Captain Snell moved his Company N into position behind Walker's unit to refuse the left flank and support Walker's attack. The battle continued in full fury all along the line, the raider gains measured a yard at a time. Contact with the platoon on the sandspit still had not been made. Christie's unit, facing a marshy swamp backed by a strong line of Japanese fortifications, could not advance. Seven enemy machine guns, pouring a deadly fusilade over the swamp and along the shores of the sandspit, resisted every attempt at forward movement.

In the next two hours, the raider attack slowly punched through two different defensive lines, uncovering a number of bunkers on the reverse slopes. Company D, riddled with casualties by the heavy and continuous enemy fire, scrambled to the top of a ridge line which overlooked the harbor at Bairoko, about 500 yards away. But between the raiders and their objective lay another series of formidable fortifications. Hoping to cement Kemp's position on the commanding terrain, Liversedge directed First Lieutenant Raymond L. Luckel's Company O into the gap between Company D on the ridge and Company P. Both companies had been hit hard by several machine guns in this area, and Luckel's company was ordered to silence these weapons. As Company O lunged forward, the maneuver reduced fire on Company P and Company N. Walker and Snell then moved their companies forward to take a small ridgeline to the left front.

At this time, the NLG front lines arched in a wide U pointed towards the harbor with Company D as the leading unit. On the left flank, Currin had three companies, bent around to the southwest. Griffith's two companies and the demolitions platoon, on the right, had managed to move nearly to the end of the lagoon, but a slight gap still existed between the bat-

[12] *1st RdrRegt MsgFile*, Griffith to Liversedge, dtd 20Jul43.

talion and the lagoon's shoreline. Liversedge, in an attempt to plug this gap and try once more to contact Christie, moved First Lieutenant Leonard W. Alford with a reinforced platoon from Company O to this flank. Alford's platoon made a spirited attack, but the volume of enemy fire prevented movement beyond that of Wheeler's company. The move, however, tied Christie's platoon closer to the main NLG line.

At 1445, sporadic but accurate mortar fire from enemy positions on the inlet suddenly changed into an intense barrage that shook the attacking lines. The Marines, without weapons for counterbattery fire, could only press closer into their shallow positions behind scant cover on the ridge lines and try to weather the pounding. Estimated to be 90mm rounds, the shells inflicted further casualties, mainly from tree bursts overhead. The barrage was immediately followed by a screaming counterattack. Kemp's company, bearing the brunt of the enemy charge, was pinned between searing fire from the front and the mortar shelling. Withdrawing to the first ridge taken, Kemp organized a counterattack of his own, and with a badly depleted company stormed back to his old position in a sudden rush. The quick conquest was the first visible crack in the Japanese defenses. Marines reported the enemy fleeing, many of them without weapons. Griffith sent a hasty note to Liversedge, advising the NLG commander that the addition of just one company (L of 3/145) would take Bairoko by night. The Japanese, Griffith believed, were on the run, but casualties were heavy among the raiders and reinforcements would be needed.

Unfortunately, there were no ready reserve units. Nothing had been heard from the Army battalion which was supposed to hit the south flank of the enemy, but sounds of firing from that direction indicated that Schultz was engaged. Freer's battalion, scattered between Rice, Triri, and Enogai was not in position to help, even if those bases could have been left unguarded. Company L at Enogai had been ordered to the front lines with ammunition, rations, and blood plasma at 1400, but had not yet arrived. Liversedge would have to take the Japanese position with the troops already at hand.

Following Company D's return to its former position, the 4th Battalion found movement easier, and Companies N and P managed to move forward in the face of stiffening fire to extend the NLG lines more to the southwest. But the move was costly; both companies received heavy casualties. Company Q (Captain Lincoln N. Holdzkom), the sole remaining company as yet uncommitted, moved up to the rear of the other three 4th Battalion units to be in position for an attack when directed.

By 1600, the Japanese had been pushed, still defiant and dangerous, into an area on the Bairoko Harbor headlands about 300 yards wide and 800 yards long. Their back to the sea, the enemy defenders kept up a sustained and murderous machine gun and mortar fire that showed few signs of slackening. In an effort to strike one last, conclusive blow, Liversedge ordered Company Q into the lines. Holdzkom's company moved around the left flank of Company N in an attack straight into the teeth of heavy enemy fire. Action along the rest of the front line dwindled as the fury of the attack on the south flank increased. Now all combat units had been committed; only the demolitions platoon of Currin's battalion remained as security for the command posts in case of an enemy breakthrough. Wheeler's Company B, re-

questing reinforcements for a last attack, was told that no help was available.

The outcome of Liversedge's last attempt to take his objective was not long in doubt. Despite the vigor of Company Q's attack, the overwhelming fire of the enemy won. Badly depleted in a matter of moments, Company Q was forced to retire. Repulsed, the company reeled back, virtually noneffective through its losses. The tactical situation had been opportune for one last heavy punch to knock out the enemy defenders, but without artillery, air support, or other heavy weapons, the raider battalions could not deliver it.

During the early part of the Marines' attack, Colonel Liversedge heard nothing from Schultz, who was supposed to have hit the enemy's other flank. From his command post just behind the raiders' front lines, the NLG commander tried to contact Schultz by telephone to order registration of the battalion's 81mm mortars on the harbor's defenses. The wires, however, were dead, apparently grounded somewhere in the relay linking Liversedge to Enogai and then to Schultz. And, in this crucial moment, the TBXs carried by the raider regiment failed to reach even the short distance back to Enogai. Chagrined by the absence of contact with 3/148, and desperately needing assistance in his bid to capture Bairoko, Liversedge, at 1345, directed McCaffery to take a small patrol and try to contact Schultz as soon as possible. For the operations officer, this entailed a rugged trip to Enogai, then a boat ride to Triri, and a subsequent march to Schultz' position.

The first word Liversedge had from Schultz, a field message from Enogai at about 1500, was not encouraging:

> Harry: Steve [Stevenson] has contact with Dutch. Dutch has been hit 3,400 yards from Triri. Steve told Dutch to keep pushing and try to connect with our outfit. Artillery fire is falling between Rice and Triri. LaHue.[13]

Schultz' battalion had departed Triri on schedule that morning, Company K leading the column down the Triri-Bairoko trail. Progress was slow, the heavy machine guns and mortars carried by the soldiers adding to the difficulty of movement over the slippery jungle terrain. By noon, the battalion had reached a point on the trail where enemy positions had been reported, but the Japanese had apparently evacuated the area. The only enemy contact was a glimpse of a Japanese patrol of about 15 men moving hurriedly down the trail ahead of the column, but no shots were fired. Shortly afterwards, however, the chatter of an enemy light machine gun sent the column off the trail. Several probing attacks were made to determine the enemy position, and at 1515 Schultz sent a message to Enogai for relay to Liversedge:

> Light Horse Harry: Have met Nips about 3½ miles down trail. Have not yet hit Munda-Bairoko trail. Strength of enemy undetermined, but know they have four automatic weapons. We are attacking. Will keep you informed as situation develops. They hold high ground to our front. Dutch Del.[14]

Schultz then moved his companies into attack formation and ordered a mortar barrage on the Japanese positions. The

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[13] *Ibid.*, Capt Foster C. LaHue to Liversedge, dtd 20Jul43.

[14] *Ibid.*, Schultz to Liversedge, dtd 20Jul43. Liversedge, a former Olympic athlete, was widely known by the nickname used in the message. Lieutenant Colonel Schultz signed most of his messages with the name used here, evidently a coupling of a nickname and the contraction of his given name, Delbert.

pre-attack bombardment was to start at 1600. Enemy strength, Schultz decided, was about one company. Shortly after the mortar barrage began, Liversedge was able to contact Schultz directly by telephone and advise him of the situation that faced the Marines on the right flank. Schultz must establish contact with the main positions at Bairoko—and soon—Liversedge told him, or the attack on Bairoko would fail.

The Army commander, not knowing whether his present attack would succeed, reported that he did not think it possible that contact with the Marine units could be made before nightfall. McCaffery, who had reached Schultz after the attack had been started, could only urge that Schultz push forward as rapidly as possible. The battalion's attack carried forward only a few hundred yards before stiffening enemy resistance stopped the advance. Schultz then ordered his men to dig in and hold the ground taken. He had, he figured, reached a position from which he could launch an attack the following morning.

For Liversedge, Schultz' failure to attack aggressively on the left flank was the final blow in a series of sharp disappointments. To his front, the battle din had subsided into an uneasy calm broken occasionally by the stutter of a machine gun or the sharp report of a rifle. While both forces—the Japanese compressed into a corner and the Marines clinging tenaciously and tiredly to shell-pocked ridges won through sacrifice and courage—waited for the next move, Liversedge asked Griffith to reconnoiter the front lines and report what action could be taken. Griffith's recommendation: withdraw.

> By this time the Raiders (1st and 4th) had nearly 250 casualties, or about 30 percent of the force. We had another 150 men tied up getting them evacuated to aid stations and to Enogai. There was nothing to do but pull back to reorganize, re-equip, get some rest, try to get something to cope with the Jap 90mm mortars, and get the wounded out.
>
> The decision to pull back was made by Harry the Horse on recommendation from me after I had talked to Currin and his and my company commanders and had made a personal reconnaissance of the front. Harry had a mission and was understandably loath to abandon it. The final determining factor was the Japanese capability to reinforce from Vila Stanmore during the night by barge. We were already up against a stone wall, low on ammunition and out of water, and had a responsibility to 200 wounded men. In any case, reorganization was a paramount requirement. I feel that the decision to withdraw was entirely sound and the only sensible one to have made.[15]

Victory had been close. At 1630 Griffith had joined Kemp on his hard-won ridgeline overlooking Bairoko. The harbor was about 300 yards away—but still unattainable. For more than seven hours, the raiders had been in continuous attack, trading punch for punch with the enemy and had almost won. Exhausted and nearly out of ammunition, with almost as many men wounded as were still fighting, the raiders could only retire, carrying their dead and wounded. The positions won through courage and indomitable will could not be held during the night because there were no other troops ready to pick up the fight. Regretfully, Liversedge ordered the withdrawal of his forces.

The retirement began shortly after 1700. First to leave were the litter cases, about 90 in number. Marines from the battalion and regimental headquarters companies carried the wounded off the ridgeline in crude stretchers made from folded pon-

[15] *Griffith ltr.*

chos and tree branches. The walking wounded followed, a thin stream of lurching, bloody men who had remained in the fight despite injuries. While Companies N and P held the main positions, Company Q pulled back. Companies O and D disengaged next. Despite a continued spatter of enemy mortar and machine gun fire, the retirement was orderly, Marines assisting the wounded and each other whenever necessary. As they moved back, the men salvaged weapons and ammunition which had been dropped in the fight.

As the abrupt jungle darkness closed in, the rest of the raider companies disengaged to retire to the high ground east of the end of the lagoon. A rough defensive perimeter was set up both flanks resting on the lagoon. Company L of 3/145, which arrived at 1800 with badly needed medical supplies and water, also moved into the defensive line. Christie's platoon, pulled back a short distance on the sandspit, blocked a possible enemy counterattack from that direction.

After seeing 80 walking wounded start the long and tortuous night march back to Enogai, the Marines settled down into an uneasy rest in their shallow foxholes. That night Liversedge made another request for air support. To forestall any swift counterattack by the Bairoko defenders, the NLG commander asked that the area between the NLG perimeter and the harbor be worked over by a bombing and strafing attack the next morning. Liversedge then concluded his request with: "You are covering our withdrawal." [16]

The night of 20–21 July passed with only one enemy attack to test the hasty perimeter. A light Japanese force attempted to penetrate the defenses on the west flank, but was repulsed by Companies B and D in a sharp fight that wounded nine more Marines and killed another. Four dead Japanese were found the next morning.

At dawn on the 21st, another group of walking wounded started toward Enogai where three PBYs waited. The main body of the NLG followed, the Marines carrying the more seriously wounded men on stretchers. Shortly after the grueling march began, a group of Corrigan's natives appeared to take over the stretcher bearing. Progress was slow and exhausting as the natives and Marines, burdened with extra weapons and packs, labored over the rough terrain. A stop was made every 200 yards to rest the wounded and the carriers. The main body of troops had gone about halfway to Enogai when the Marines were met by Company I, 3/145, which had hurried from Triri to take over the rear guard. The rough march was further eased when a number of the wounded were transferred to landing craft about halfway down Leland Lagoon. After that, the march speeded and by 1400 all troops were within the defensive perimeter at Enogai. Christie's platoon, which retired down the spit, also arrived without incident.

Schultz, who had been surprised at the abrupt change of events, had kept his soldiers on the alert for a morning attack if a switch in orders came. When the order for withdrawal was repeated, Schultz turned his battalion around and within several hours was back at Triri.

During the march toward Enogai, the Marines had been heartened by the sounds of continuous bombing and strafing attacks

[16] *Stevenson ltr.*

at Bairoko. Although Liversedge's request for air support the night previous had been received at 2244, well past the required deadline for such requests, the ComAir New Georgia headquarters apparently read the appeal in the NLG message and the request was passed to ComAirSols. Every available plane, including some outmoded scout planes, was diverted to attack the enemy positions at Bairoko. The strikes began at 0950 on the 21st and lasted until 1710, long after the raiders had reached the base at Enogai. In all, 90 scout bombers, 84 torpedo bombers, 22 medium bombers, and 54 fighter planes took part in the continuous air attack. A total of 135 tons of bombs were dropped on enemy positions, and strafing attacks by the mediums started a number of fires in supply dumps and bivouac areas. The only resistance by the Japanese was a flight of 17 fighters which attempted to intercept the last flight of medium bombers, but was driven off by the Allied fighter cover.

Evacuation of the wounded from Enogai continued despite attempts by Japanese planes to strafe the big, lumbering PBYs which landed in Enogai Inlet. The interruptions delayed, but did not halt, the removal of wounded for hospitalization at Guadalcanal. With all the troops in bivouac at Triri or Enogai, a sobering count of wounded and dead was made. The 1st Battalion with two companies in the attack had lost 17 killed and 63 wounded. Currin's battalion counted 29 dead and 137 wounded. In the action along the trail south of Bairoko, Schultz lost 3 killed and 10 wounded.[17]

[17] *1st RdrRegt SAR; 1st RdrBn WD; 4th RdrBn Jul43 WD; 3/148 Rept.*

The raiders had faced an estimated 30 machine guns in coral and log emplacements, cleverly camouflaged with narrow, hard-to-detect firing slits. Only 33 enemy dead had been counted during the day-long attack, but the evidence of much blood in the bunkers which had been reduced indicated that the Japanese casualties had been considerably higher.

The following day, 22 July, Liversedge received orders from Griswold to remain at Enogai and Rice Anchorage. Active patrolling was to be continued, and the NGOF was to be apprised of any hostile troop movement from Bairoko to Munda. Evidently, no further attempt to take the well-fortified harbor would be made for a while. With these orders, the conflict on Dragons Peninsula settled down to a state of cautious but active watchfulness.

Occasional fire fights flared as opposing patrols bumped into each other, but close contact between the two forces was infrequent. The Japanese reclaimed the high ground overlooking Bairoko and reconstructed their fortifications. Evidently hoping to keep the NLG off balance, the enemy harassed the Enogai positions nightly with bombing attacks by one or more planes. Some nights the number of such attacks or alerts reached as high as seven. The Allies, meanwhile, pounded Bairoko with short-range shelling from three destroyers on 24 July and bombed the harbor defenses on 23 and 29 July and 2 August. For the most part, however, the operation reverted to a routine of enervating patrolling and air raid alerts. Of particular benefit was a rest camp established by Corrigan's natives near Rice Anchorage where Marines were able to relax for three days away from the weary monotony of patrols and air raids.

END OF A CAMPAIGN [18]

The virtual stalemate on Dragons Peninsula ended on 2 August. The XIV Corps, poised for a last headlong breakthrough to Munda field, directed the NLG to rush another blocking force between Munda and Bairoko to trap any retreating enemy. After a hurried night conference with his battalion commanders, Liversedge ordered Schultz' battalion on a quick march down the Munda-Bairoko trail from Triri. The 4th Raider Battalion, at Rice, returned to reserve positions at Enogai and Triri. Schultz' battalion, leaving Triri on the 3d, moved quickly past its old positions abandoned on 17 July to another trail junction farther southwest. Here he established a road block. On 5 August, as Munda fell, Liversedge joined him with a reinforcing group (Companies I and K) from the 145th Infantry and a reinforced platoon from each of the two raider battalions. The first enemy contact came on 7 August when a patrol from Schultz' battalion encountered Japanese building a defensive position and killed seven of them.

Contact between the forces capturing Munda and Liversedge's command was made on 9 August when a patrol from the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Ryneska, appeared at Schultz' road block.

The following day, 10 August, on Griswold's orders, operational control of the NLG passed to the 25th Division. Control of Schultz' battalion passed to the 27th Infantry, and Ryneska's battalion joined the NLG in Schultz' place. Leaving the road block position to be defended by Ryneska's outfit, Liversedge and his Marine-Army force returned to Triri and Enogai. There the Marines had been actively patrolling to determine if the enemy was preparing to make another determined stand at Bairoko. Heavy barge traffic, however, and lack of aggressive resistance indicated that Bairoko was being evacuated. Meanwhile, the nightly enemy air raids continued with practically the same results as before: "No casualties, no damage, no sleep." [19]

On 9 August, a light antiaircraft battery from the 11th Defense Battalion arrived at Enogai. The 50 Marines with 40mm antiaircraft guns and .50 caliber machine guns were a welcome addition to the base's defense. The first night that the battery was in action, the 40mm guns scored a hit on a surprised Japanese plane which hurried away trailing smoke. The gleeful Marines scored the hit as a "probable." Thereafter, the nightly enemy raiders climbed considerably higher; and as the altitude increased, the accuracy of the bombing decreased.

The final assault on Bairoko was made on 24 August after two regiments of the 25th Division (161st and 27th) had pushed inexorably toward the last Japanese stronghold. In the late afternoon of 24 August, Ryneska—whose battalion had advanced steadily toward the objective on the Munda-Bairoko trail—sent a message to Liversedge that he was one hour's

[18] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *New Georgia Campaign*; *NGOF Account*; *1st RdrRegt SAR*; *1st RdrRegt Jnl*; *1st RdrRegt MsgFile*; *1st RdrBn WarD*; 4th RdrBn WarD, Aug43; *11th DefBn WarD*; 11th DefBn Quarterly AA Rept, dtd 15Sep43; Maj Marvin D. Girardeau, USA, ltr to CMC, dtd 6Feb57; *Griffith ltr*; Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons*.

[19] *1st RdrRegt Jnl.*

march from the southern end of the harbor and that he was going into Bairoko on the following morning "come hell or high water." [20] Ryneska's message was followed by another message from the 3d Battalion, 145th (now commanded by Major Marvin D. Girardeau) which had advanced from Enogai over the raiders' route of 20 July. A company from that battalion reported that it had entered Bairoko without opposition. The harbor had been evacuated. Composite raider companies, formed from the effective members of each battalion, were in reserve at Triri and Enogai but were not needed for the final phases. The long fight for Bairoko was over.

On the 28th, General Collins, commanding the 25th Division, arrived at Enogai and after an appraisal of the situation ordered the Marines withdrawn. That night and early on the 29th of August, the raiders went aboard APDs. By 1130 on the 30th, the raiders were back at Guadalcanal. The last entry in the 1st Raider Regiment Journal, at midnight of 31 August 1943, is significantly eloquent: "1st Marine Raider Regiment relaxes (bunks, movies, beer, chow)." [21]

The Marine raider battalions which returned to Guadalcanal were a pale shadow of the two units which had originally been assigned to the NLG. Malnutrition, unavoidably poor sanitary conditions, exposure, fatigue, and continued loss of sleep and malaria had taken their toll. Battle casualties had been unexpectedly high—25 percent of the total command of the 1st Battalion, 27 percent of the 4th. Griffith's battalion had lost 5 officers killed and 9 wounded, with 69 enlisted men killed and 130 wounded. Currin's battalion, in three operations (Viru, Wickham, and Bairoko) had 2 officers killed and 8 wounded, 52 enlisted men killed and another 160 wounded. Of the 521 men remaining in the 1st Battalion, only 245 were judged effective by battalion medical officers. Only 154 Marines out of the 412 officers and men in the 4th Battalion could be classed as effective. The doctors concluded that further commitment to combat at this time was impossible:

> Not more than fifty percent of the present personnel would be able to move out on a march without extreme exhaustion and of these, the undermining of physical and nervous stamina has been so great as to render none of them capable of exerting sixty percent of their usual offensive effectiveness.[22]

CONCLUSIONS

The contributions of the NLG to the eventual success of the New Georgia campaign appear slight in a post-operational review. The trail block, as originally situated, lost all surprise value and usefulness after one engagement. The Japanese did not contest its presence further, and simply moved reinforcements to Munda over another route. As later reconnaissance proved, the actual location of the trail block should have been another 1,200 yards farther southwest at the junction of the main Munda-Bairoko trail.

Liversedge's force, in attacks on Enogai and Bairoko, inflicted a large number of casualties on the enemy and forced the Japanese to commit additional troops to the Dragons Peninsula area — troops which the enemy could have used to advantage in the defense of Munda. This,

[20] *1st RdrRegt MsgFile*, Ryneska to Liversedge, dtd 24Aug43.

[21] *1st RdrRegt Jnl*.

[22] InformalRept, Bn Surgeons to CO, 1st Rdr Regt, dtd 8Aug43.

perhaps, was the principal benefit derived from the NLG's operations at Enogai and Bairoko.

The failure of the attack on Bairoko can be ascribed to the burden of handicaps under which the NLG labored—lack of intelligence, poor communications, the vital need for supporting air and artillery, and insufficient support from higher echelons. Each handicap, in its turn, contributed to the eventual failure.

Operational planning was handicapped by the failure of the NGOF in making maps, mosaics, and aerial photographs available to the NLG prior to the landing. Other than the operational mosaic, the Liversedge force received only one high-level stereographic set of prints of Bairoko, which revealed nothing. And, as Liversedge later pointed out, no provision was made for the NLG to receive further intelligence.[23]

Realistic estimates as to enemy strength and reinforcement capabilities were lacking. On a par with the assumption that Munda would be captured in a matter of days was the equally poor reasoning that the Japanese would not stoutly defend against an attack on their major port of entry into New Georgia. Pre-attack patrolling by the Marine and Army battalions was extensive but, as Liversedge admitted, not aggressive enough to force the enemy to reveal the added strength of the Bairoko defenses.

The serious disadvantage imposed by communication failures in the dripping jungle balked the operation constantly. Contact with NGOF headquarters at Rendova was difficult, and NLG messages usually had to be relayed by a variety of stations, including those at Segi and Guadalcanal. Not all the communications woes were equipment failures, however. In some instances, transmission of messages was refused. After Enogai was captured, Liversedge reported, permission to transmit three urgent messages to the NGOF was not granted, and the NLG was directed to clear the message with another station, unknown to the NLG. The urgent messages to the NGOF were finally cleared after 15 hours of waiting.[24]

The attack on Bairoko, started and continued without air bombardment, the only supporting weapon available to the NLG, raises questions which existing records do not answer. Since his request for air preparation on the objective had apparently been rejected and there was no assurance that another request would be honored, Liversedge undoubtedly believed that a higher echelon had deemed air support unnecessary for the attack. As the next day, 21 July, was to prove, however, air support — and lots of it — was available. The only restriction, apparently, was that requests had to reach the headquarters of ComAirSols on Guadalcanal before the end of the working day.

Another question unanswered was the complete absence of any supporting artillery. Although it would have been impossible to pull artillery pieces through the jungle from Rice to Enogai, there seems to be no reason why artillery could not have been unloaded at Enogai after that village was captured. It is believed that one battalion of 105mm howitzers could have been spared from the many battalions then at Munda. Based at Enogai, these guns would have made a vast difference in the attack on Bairoko.

[23] *1st RdrRegt SAR*, p. 17.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

Naval gunfire support, as known later in the war, was at this point in mid-1943 still in the exploratory stages; "reliable, foolproof communications and the development of gunnery techniques for the delivery of accurate, indirect fire from afloat onto unseen targets" [25] ashore had not been fully worked out yet. As before, records do not indicate the reasons why Allied planners waited until after the repulse at Bairoko to plaster that enemy point with air and naval bombardments.

Although the Marine battalions were forced to admit failure in taking the assigned objective of Bairoko, the seven-hour attack by men armed with only grenades, rifles, and light machine guns [26] against an enemy of near equal numerical strength barricaded in heavily fortified bunkers stands as one of the finest examples of personal courage in Marine annals. It is to the raiders' credit that victory over these overwhelming odds was at one point very nearly in their grasp. Whether the harbor could have been taken by more aggressive action by the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry is pure conjecture. The records indicate that action of the left flank was not coordinated with the raider attack, and that apparently the urgency of the situation was not realized by Schultz. Why the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry was never used except as a support force and not committed to combat is another question which was unanswered in reports of the action. Equally puzzling is the fact that the Army battalion's 81mm mortars were not employed to support the raiders' attack.

In any event, an evaluation of the Dragons Peninsula campaign does not discredit the troops and their leaders who fought there. Rather than being remembered for failure, the Dragons Peninsula operation and the attack on Bairoko in particular are a testimonial to the personal courage of the Northern Landing Group, which achieved at least partial success, although almost hopelessly handicapped by innumerable shortcomings in the initial planning and in the support subsequently received. Faulty intelligence which underestimated the enemy, faulty task organization which neglected the inclusion of required fighting elements, and something less than full support by higher headquarters are the main shortcomings which analysis reveals.

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[25] Col Robert D. Heinl, Jr., ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 3May62.

[26] Major General Robert S. Beightler, who commanded the 37th Infantry Division at New Georgia, noted that he had "personally urged" Colonel Liversedge "to adequately equip the Marine battalions with heavy automatic weapons" before they left Guadalcanal. MajGen Robert S. Beightler, USA, ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 15Dec60, hereafter *Beightler ltr.*

End of a Campaign

BAANGA AND ARUNDEL[1]

In a matter of days after its seizure by the NGOF, the airfield at Munda—shell-cratered, with stripped and fire-blackened palm stumps outlining the runways—was converted to an Allied base for further operations in the Central Solomons. Almost as soon as enemy resistance around the airfield was ended, the busy bulldozers of the Navy's construction battalions were smoothing the coral landing strips and repairing revetments for use by ComAirSols planes. As the 25th Division turned north to follow the enemy's withdrawal toward Bairoko, the 43d Division took over defense of the airfield and began mop-up operations on the offshore islands.

Separated from New Georgia by only a few yards of shallow water, Baanga Island north of Munda Point was a ready-made sanctuary for Japanese fleeing the bigger island. As such, the densely-wooded appendage was a stepping stone along the Japanese route of retreat. The original island garrison had been small—about 100 Army and Navy troops—but the general exodus from Munda swelled the population. Tag ends and remnants of Munda's defenders fled to the island either to go overland toward Arundel or await evacuation by barge. (See Map II, Map Section.)

On 11 August, as the 43d Division widened its cleanup efforts around the airfield, a patrol confirmed reports of Japanese activity on Baanga. The following day, a company-sized unit moved by landing craft to the island. As the soldiers disembarked, a withering fire from the jungle felled about half of the force and forced its withdrawal. Two days later, while an artillery barrage from 155mm guns hastily emplaced at Munda paved the way, two battalions of the 169th made an unopposed dawn landing on the shore opposite the site of the ill-fated assault of the 12th. As the infantrymen moved inland, crossing the island from east to west, resistance stiffened. An estimated 400 Japanese manned a strong line of hastily-built fortifications blocking the advance.

On 16 August, two battalions of the 172d Regiment went to Baanga to reinforce the attack. As more artillery units (including the 155mm gun batteries of the 9th Marine Defense Battalion) moved into po-

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: CinCPac–CinCPOA Rept of Ops, POA, for Sep43, dtd 17Dec43; *CominCh Rept of SoPac Action; ComSoPac Aug–Sep43 WarDs; NGOF Account; 43d InfDivHist;* 9th DefBn WarD, Aug–Sep43; *11th DefBn WarD; 9th DefBn Tank Ops;* 10th DefBn Rept on Action of the TkPlat in the New Georgia Campaign, dtd 3Sep43; 43d InfDivRept to CG, XIV Corps, Employment of Tanks in Arundel Ops, dtd 23Sep43; *SE Area NavOps—II; Seventeenth Army Ops—I;* JICPOA Item No. 1973, Translation of Captured Japanese Document, dtd 22Nov43; CIC SoPacFor Item Nos. 799 and 814, dtd 26Oct43, Translation of Captured Japanese Documents; *New Georgia Campaign;* Karolevitz, *25th InfDivHist;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons;* Zimmer, *43d's History.*

sition at Munda and on the offshore islands, and systematically knocked out every known enemy gun emplacement, resistance dwindled. Increased barge traffic on the night of 19 August indicated that the Japanese were withdrawing. The following day, the southern part of the island was quickly occupied, and two battalions then moved north along opposite coastlines. Only scattered stragglers were encountered; the enemy had abandoned Baanga. The 43d Division lost 52 men killed and 110 wounded in the week-long battle.[2]

Contact with the Japanese was reestablished on Arundel. One of the smallest of the major islands in the group and virtually unoccupied by the Japanese except as a barge staging base, Arundel was within easy distance of both New Georgia and Kolombangara. Its eastern shore bordered Hathorn Sound and its northern fringe of narrow reef islands was just 1,200 yards from Kolombangara—a strategic position which became increasingly important to both forces. For the Japanese, the island was an important outpost to Kolombangara and an invaluable evacuation point. The NGOF wanted the island because Arundel in Allied hands would bring Vila airfield within range of artillery. (See Map 10.)

On 27 August, troops from the 172d Infantry crossed Diamond Narrows from New Georgia and landed unopposed on the southeastern tip. After securing the southern part of the island, the landing force split into two reinforced companies to begin extended patrol action north along the east and west coastlines of Arundel.

As on New Georgia, the dense jungle and large mangrove swamps made travel difficult. First enemy contact was made by the east shore patrol on 1 September south of Stima Lagoon. Pushing on, the patrol fought its way through brief skirmishes and delaying actions without trouble. To help cut off the retreating enemy, the 2d Battalion of the 172d established a beachhead near the lagoon and reinforced the eastern patrol. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion moved by LCMs through Wana Wana Lagoon to link up with the western patrol which had reached Bustling Point on the northwest coast without so much as seeing an enemy soldier. The beachhead on that coast was then expanded to include the extreme western end of Bomboe Peninsula.

When the 2d Battalion's attack near Stima Lagoon on 5 September was abruptly halted by fierce enemy resistance, the 3d Battalion was landed to reinforce the effort. Neither battalion, however, was able to penetrate the enemy's strong line of defense which included mine fields and booby traps as well as many machine guns. Artillery fire from Kolombangara supported the defense. The arrival of the 1st Battalion from Bustling Point, where a battalion of the 169th had assumed responsibility for the western beachhead, placed the entire 172d Infantry on the east coast and paved the way for the commitment of the 27th Regiment (25th Division) on Bomboe Peninsula. Two batteries of 155mm howitzers and a 4.2-inch chemical mortar company also landed at Bustling Point to support the 27th Regiment on that coast, while NGOF artillery on New Georgia emplaced on the shores of Hathorn Sound delivered counterbattery fire on Kolombangara to support the 172d's attack on the east coast. Of the two infantry regiments, however, only the 27th Infantry was relatively fresh, although its

[2] Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*, p. 172.

rifle companies were seriously understrength and its men "well seeded with malaria."[3] The 172d had been through nearly two months of arduous fighting and was badly understrength.

While troops from the 169th held the Bustling Point area, the 27th Infantry on 12 September opened a drive east along the length of Bomboe Peninsula. The leading battalion, restricted to a narrow strip of island only 400 yards wide and unable to make a flanking attack, could only grind straight ahead when it ran into stiff opposition. Small gains with mounting casualties were the inevitable results.

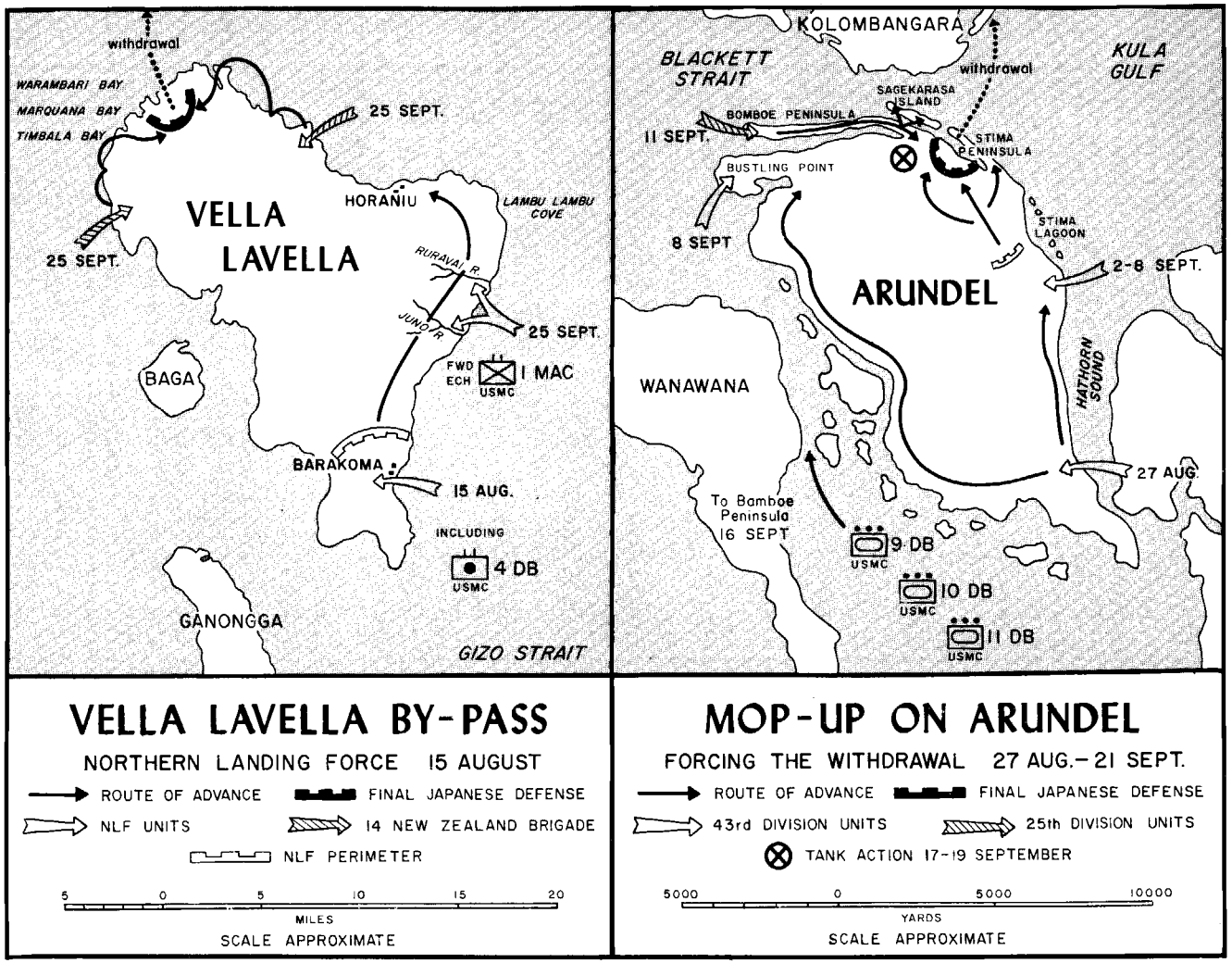
As the front lines inched abreast of Sagekarasa Island, which parallels Bomboe Peninsula, a second battalion swam and waded across a lagoon to establish another front on that island. Unable to erase the beachhead in a series of screaming counterattacks that night, the Japanese then hurriedly evacuated their barge base on the extreme western tip of the island. Sounds of barge traffic each night, however, indicated that the enemy still had other bases on Stima Peninsula which could be used to resupply and reinforce the Arundel defenders.

By dusk of 14 September, the two battalions of the 27th were in secure positions astride Sagekarasa Island and Bomboe Peninsula while the 172d Infantry pressed slowly northward along the east coast. In the gap between, stragglers from the *229th* and a battalion from Tomonari's *13th Regiment* fought determinedly to hold Stima Peninsula and a corner of Arundel's northeastern coast.

On the night of 14–15 September, the remaining battalions of the *13th Regiment* on Kolombangara were loaded on barges for transfer to Arundel to begin a counteroffensive which was supposed to regain the initiative in the Central Solomons. Undaunted by the loss of Colonel Tomonari and two battalion commanders who were killed by American artillery fire as their barge beached on the Arundel coast, the Japanese unleashed a near-fanatical attempt to break out of the perimeter. The desperation thrust failed. The 172d and 27th, reinforced quickly on line by troops from the 169th, contained the attack although the battle was touch-and-go for some time. As the attack subsided, the Japanese reverted once more to delaying tactics to preserve their thin foothold on Arundel. The repulse decided the Japanese upon withdrawal from Arundel and eventual evacuation of the Central Solomons.

The counterattack, however, resulted in Marine Corps tanks joining the 43d Division. Alerted earlier for possible commitment, the tank platoons of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions moved their remaining 13 serviceable machines by LCM from Munda to Bomboe Peninsula on the 16th. While the tanks of the 9th and 10th went into bivouac, five tanks of the 11th Defense Battalion moved up to help the 27th Regiment in the Bomboe Peninsula area. The armored attack on 17 September took the Japanese by complete surprise. The heavy jungle rains apparently drowned the noise of the tanks clanking into attack position. Moving forward in two waves with infantrymen following, the Marine tanks crunched through the enemy defenses before abruptly turning to the left in a flanking

[3] MajGen William W. Dick, Jr., USA, ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 31Oct60, including comments by MajGen David H. Buchanan, USA.


withdrawal
WARAMBARI BAY
MARQUANA BAY
TIMBALA BAY
25 SEPT.
25 SEPT.
VELLA LAVELLA
HORAÑIU
LAMBU LAMBU COVE
RURAVAI R.
JUNO R.
25 SEPT.
FWD ECH
I MAC
USMC
BAGA
BARAKOMA
15 AUG.
INCLUDING
4 DB
USMC
GANONGGA
GIZO STRAIT
KOLOMBANGARA
BLACKETT STRAIT
withdrawal
KULA GULF
SAGEKARASA ISLAND
BOMBOE PENINSULA
11 SEPT.
STIMA PENINSULA
BUSTLING POINT
8 SEPT
STIMA LAGOON
2-8 SEPT.
ARUNDEL
WANAWANA
HATHORN SOUND
27 AUG.
To Bamboe Peninsula 16 SEPT
9 DB
USMC
10 DB
USMC
11 DB
USMC
VELLA LAVELLA BY-PASS
NORTHERN LANDING FORCE 15 AUGUST
ROUTE OF ADVANCE
FINAL JAPANESE DEFENSE
NLF UNITS
14 NEW ZEALAND BRIGADE
NLF PERIMETER
5 0 5 10 15 20
MILES
SCALE APPROXIMATE
MOP-UP ON ARUNDEL
FORCING THE WITHDRAWAL 27 AUG.–21 SEPT.
ROUTE OF ADVANCE
FINAL JAPANESE DEFENSE
43rd DIVISION UNITS
25th DIVISION UNITS
TANK ACTION 17-19 SEPTEMBER
5000 0 5000 10000
YARDS
SCALE APPROXIMATE

MAP 10

maneuver to complete the rout of enemy in that sector. Infantry units advanced about 500 yards in the attack. The following day, however, as four tanks and an infantry company jumped forward in another assault, the enemy suddenly opened point-blank fire with 37mm antitank guns. Two of the 11th Defense Battalion tanks were knocked out of action, but quick and effective covering fire by the infantry allowed the tank crewmen to escape. The attack stalled.

On 19 September, the remaining effective tanks—two from the 9th, four of the 10th—joined those of the 11th. Lined up in two ranks virtually tread to tread they started toward the enemy lines. The rear rank covered the front with fire. Concentrated blasts of 37 mm canister rounds and bursts of machine gun fire from the leading tanks withered the jungle ahead, stripping foliage from the enemy positions and hewing out an avenue of attack. Behind this shield of firepower, the infantry advanced rapidly. Afterwards described by 27th Infantry officers as one of the finest examples of tank-infantry coordination they had seen, the attack moved quickly and steadily forward.

This fearsome mass assault, coupled with the Japanese decision to quit Arundel, settled the fight for the island. That night, despite near-continuous artillery and mortar barrages, Japanese barges began evacuating the bulk of Arundel's defenders. While enemy artillery fire from Kolombangara kept the two American regiments from closing in, the remainder of the *13th Regiment* was withdrawn the next night. On 21 September, with only a few overlooked stragglers to contend with, the NGOF declared Arundel secured.

Instead of being a routine mopping-up job, the fight for Arundel had unexpectedly developed into a major operation which required the principal elements of three infantry regiments as well as armored and artillery support. Japanese losses in three weeks of fighting were 345 counted dead, although the enemy must have lost considerably more. Countless shallow graves dotted Arundel's northern coast, and the lagoons and Blackett Strait yielded many other bodies of enemy dead who had been killed in evacuation attempts or had drowned attempting to swim to Kolombangara.

Allied losses for the island's capture were relatively light, 44 killed and 256 wounded. Army observers credited the timely support of Marine Corps tanks for abruptly terminating the campaign and preventing the loss of additional Allied lives.

VELLA LAVELLA[4]

With Munda taken and the Allied drive slowly turning toward Vila airfield, the Japanese in mid-August had every right to expect that the decisive battle in the Central Solomons would be fought on the big, volcanic island of Kolombangara. But Admiral Halsey, a former Naval Academy halfback, knew the value of an end run in warfare as well as in football. Ten days after Munda was captured, the Allies skirted the strongly defended positions prepared by the enemy on Kolombangara and hit at lightly-held Vella Lavella.

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[4] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: CinCPac Rept, Sep43, *op. cit.*; CinCPac–CinCPOA Rept of Ops, Oct43, dtd 20Jan44; *CominCh Rept of SoPac Action*; *ComSoPac Aug–Sep43 WarDs*; Com III PhibFor

The decision to switch targets was made a month earlier. On 12 July, just six days after asking for Admiral Turner's plans for Kolombangara, Halsey changed his mind and directed that this island be sidestepped and Vella Lavella taken instead. By this time it was obvious to the staff of ComSoPac that Munda was not going to be taken as quickly as estimated and that the island of Kolombangara, with nearly 10,000 entrenched defenders, would be even harder to take. Further, Vila airfield was reported to be poorly drained and poorly situated. If a better airfield site could be found, the chance to land virtually unopposed at Vella Lavella would be a much sounder tactical move.[5]

A reconnaissance team which scouted the island in late July returned to report that the southern end of the island near Barakoma drained sufficiently well to enable construction of an airfield there, and that there were adequate beaches, bivouac areas, and MTB anchorages in the area. Vella Lavella, the patrol reported, differed little from New Georgia. A dense jungle of tangled creepers and huge trees covered the island from coastline to the low but sharp mountain peaks in the interior. One of the most developed islands in the group before the war, Vella Lavella's European-type buildings included a hospital, several missions, and a leprosarium. (See Map 10.)

Coastwatchers on the island added to the report. Only about 250 Japanese were estimated to be occupying the northern part of the island where Vella Lavella's irregular coastline provided many coves for protection for barges shuttling between Kolombangara and Bougainville. The natives on the island had remained friendly to the Allies, and were well organized. They had, in fact, aided the many survivors of the USS *Helena* who had managed to swim to the island and had assisted in their evacuation by fast APDs on 16 July.[6]

On 11 August, orders were issued by ComSoPac for the seizure of Vella Lavella by Admiral Wilkinson's Task Force 31. The forces on New Georgia were directed to continue the cleanup operations in the Munda area and to interdict Vila airfield by artillery fire. The Allies had decided that enemy troop concentrations on Kolombangara did not necessitate an attack, that neutralization of the island would be as effective as occupation and not as costly in terms of troop casualties or supplies.

AR, 16–19Aug43, dtd 20Dec43; Com III PhibFor Rept of Occupation of Vella Lavella, 12Aug–3Sept43, dtd 20Sep43; CTF 31 OpO A12–43, dtd 11Aug43; *New Georgia Campaign*; *NGOF Account*; NLF FO No. 1, dtd 11Aug43; *Seventeenth Army Ops—I*; *SE Area NavOps—II*; Frankel, *37th InfDivHist*; O. A. Gillespie, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War—The Pacific* (Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1957), hereafter Gillespie, *New Zealand History*; Halsey and Bryan, *Halsey's Story*; Karolevitz, *25th InfDivHist;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*; ONI, *Combat Narratives, The Solomon Islands Campaign: XI—Kolombangara and Vella Lavella 6 August–7 October 1943* (Washington, 1944), hereafter ONI, *Combat Narratives XI*; Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons*; USSBS, *Campaigns.*

[5] This is not the first instance of successful bypass strategy. The amphibious force which landed in the Aleutians in May 1943 took Attu before forcing the evacuation by the enemy of strongly-held Kiska Island.

[6] U.S. ships picked up 93 men and 11 officers at one point and 59 men and 2 officers at another point on the island. Natives had protected and fed both groups. The rescue of these survivors from an enemy-held island in enemy waters was a distinct boost to morale to all South Pacific forces.

Further, soggy Vila airfield was no longer deemed worthy of capture.

The Northern Landing Force (NLF),[7] organized to attack and occupy Vella Lavella, comprised the Army's 35th Regimental Combat Team which included the 64th Field Artillery Battalion, the 58th Naval Construction Battalion, and the Marine 4th Defense Battalion, as well as additional Army and Navy support units. Brigadier General Robert B. McClure, the 25th Division's assistant commander, was named to head this organization.

Embarkation of major units began at Guadalcanal on 12 August. That same night, an advance force landed near Barakoma to mark channels and landing beaches and to select bivouac areas and defensive positions. After being forced to fight their way to shore, however, through fire from a motley collection of survivors from sunken barges, the reconnaissance group hurriedly requested reinforcements. The next night a infantry company landed to help them.

The main landing force departed Guadalcanal on 14 August on a split-second, staggered schedule. The slowest transport group, LSTs, started first and was passed later by the faster APDs. In this manner, the transports which had departed Gaudalcanal in reverse order arrived off Vella Lavella in the proper order and at the right time.

Debarkation of troops began at dawn on 15 August, the APDs unloading quickly in one hour. The first snag in the invasion schedule occurred when it was discovered that the beach could accommodate only 8 of the following 12 LCIs. The LSTs, which arrived later at the correct time, were forced to stand offshore waiting to unload. Limited beach areas had resulted in the very delay and exposure which it was hoped the staggered schedule would prevent. There was, however, no enemy opposition ashore. As the beachhead widened, soldiers reported scattered Japanese troops fleeing northward.

Shortly before 0800, just as the LCIs were in the unloading stage, the first of four frantic Japanese air attacks struck. After making one pass at the protective destroyer screen standing offshore, the enemy bombers and fighters turned their attack on the LCIs and LSTs, evidently figuring that the smaller transports carried the bulk of invasion troops and supplies. All four attacks were driven off by alert planes from ComAirSols and the fierce antiaircraft fire from the task force destroyers.

The fighter cover came from Munda airfield, which had begun operations only the day before. As a dividend for having won an airfield closer than Segi or Guadalcanal, the Allies were able to keep an umbrella over the beachhead most of the day. Despite the presence of this air cover, however, the Japanese persisted in sporadic attacks, striking from different altitudes and directions. The results were negligible. None of the ships in the convoy were damaged, and during the day more than 4,600 troops and 2,300 tons of equipment and supplies were unloaded at Barakoma. Twelve men were killed and 40 wounded in the day's attacks. That night, as the convoy withdrew slowly down Gizo Straits, the ships fought off repeated torpedo attacks. Enemy floatplanes kept the area lit with flares.

[7] This was a new echelon of the NGOF and is not to be confused with the Northern Landing Group commanded by Colonel Liversedge at Enogai and Bairoko.

The successful jump from Munda to Vella Lavella asserted Allied domination in the Central Solomons. Failing to repulse the landing, officers of the *Eighth Fleet* and the *Seventeenth Army* hastily called a conference to consider making a counterlanding on the island. One battalion was all that could be spared, it was decided. This proposal was promptly squelched by *Eighth Area Army*. Such a move would require at least two brigades, the higher headquarters decided; and, in view of the existing difficulties in reinforcing and resupplying other Central Solomons garrisons, the idea was better forgotten. The only help the stragglers on Vella Lavella received was reinforcement on 19 August by 290 Army and 100 Navy personnel.

The NLF beachhead expanded rapidly. Within the first 20 days of the operation, 6,505 troops, 1,097 tons of rations, 843 tons of gasoline and oil, 2,247 tons of ammunition, 547 vehicles, and 1,011 tons of other classes of supplies were landed. Shipping was to have been unloaded during night hours, but the attacks on the convoys in the narrow confines of Gizo Strait changed that schedule. After 18 August, the convoys arrived and departed Barakoma during daylight hours, protected during the unloading and passage through Gizo Strait by Allied planes from Munda.

There was little opposition to the advance of the NLF. By 18 August, the three battalions of the 35th Infantry had established a firm defensive perimeter across the southern end of the island. Behind this protective barrier, airfield construction began immediately. The Marine 4th Defense Battalion provided antiaircraft and seacoast defense.

As the fight for Vella Lavella progressed, the 35th began driving the enemy before it. Toward the end of August, increased resistance was met on the east coast near Lambu Lambu, and it was 15 September before the regiment's assault battalions broke through the Japanese defenses to overrun the barge base at Horaniu on the northeastern coast. The enemy, however, escaped and fled north.

At this point, the 14th Brigade of the New Zealand 3d Division landed at Barakoma with two infantry battalions, the 35th and 37th, as the main units. In a reshuffle of command, Major General H. E. Barrowclough of the 3d Division was named as commanding general of all Allied forces on Vella Lavella. With the arrival of a third New Zealand battalion, the 30th, the American frontline troops were relieved. On 25 September, the colorful New Zealanders—the majority of whom disdained the use of steel helmets to wear their distinctive flat visored field hats—began their attack.

While the 35th Battalion leapfrogged around the west side of the island in a series of landings, the 37th Battalion began moving by landing craft up the northeastern coast, making landings at various points to cut off the fleeing Japanese. When cornered, the enemy soldiers fought stubbornly and fiercely for survival, but it was apparent that they were not under a single command or organized into a single unit.

By early October, the New Zealanders were in position to put the squeeze on the Japanese, who had been backed into a jutting piece of land between Marquana and Watambari bays. The two battalions of the 14th Brigade made contact and joined for the final push to crowd the enemy into

the sea. A Japanese prisoner reported that the tired and hungry enemy force was willing to surrender, but that Japanese officers would not permit it.

On the night of 6–7 October, Allied troops heard voices and the sound of barges scraping coral, but the supporting fires were ordered too late. The next morning, only littered stocks of Japanese equipment and supplies were scattered over the peninsula. The enemy cornered on Vella Lavella—589 by Japanese accounts—had been successfully withdrawn.

The New Zealanders had estimated that the Vella Lavella campaign would end in less than two weeks. The conclusion came several days early—one of the few successful timetables in the Central Solomons fighting. The 14th Brigade casualties totaled 32 killed and 32 wounded. Japanese losses for the defense of the entire island were about 250.

The price for an island of considerable strategic and operational value was not exorbitant. Allied casualties for the seven weeks of fighting were less than 150 killed, most of these in air attacks. The practice of bypassing a strong point to hit at a weaker point somewhere else was now established. Future Pacific operations followed the strategy initiated in the Aleutians and used with success in the Central Solomons.

MARINES AT VELLA LAVELLA[8]

Success of the Rendova beachhead had proven the value of a Marine defense battalion in a landing effort. When the task organization to seize Vella Lavella was planned, the inclusion of a similar unit seemed logical. Closest and most available was the 4th Defense Battalion, then on Guadalcanal. Organized at Parris Island in 1940, the battalion was stationed at Efate, New Hebrides, before transfer to New Zealand, then Guadalcanal. Its organization was similar to other Marine defense battalions—155mm seacoast artillery group, 90mm antiaircraft group, a special weapons group of 40mm, 20mm, and .50 caliber weapons, and a tank platoon.

By nightfall of the first day ashore at Barakoma, about two-thirds of the light antiaircraft weapons were in temporary firing positions. Other guns of Major McDonald I. Shuford's special weapons group were kept set up on two LSTs in the harbor, an innovation which increased the firepower of the beachhead. The addition was effective. A total of five enemy planes were claimed by the 4th the first day.

During the next six days, other echelons of the battalion arrived and moved into positions to defend the beach. Only the air defense units of the battalion got into action, however. The 155mm gun groups, which moved ashore shortly after the original landings, were in coastal defense positions ready to fire within a few days, but the need never arose. The tank platoon

[8] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *NGOF Account;* 4th DefBn WarD, Aug–Oct43; 4th DefBn SAR, dtd 9Jan44; CO, Corps Troops and Staging Area, IMAC, Narrative Rept of Ops in Vella Lavella, dtd 30Jan44; Fwd Ech, Corps Troops, IMAC, OpO No. 1–43, dtd 23Sep43; Col John H. Cook, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 2Mar52; Col McDonald I. Shuford ltr to CMC, dtd 4Mar52; LtCol Donald M. Schmuck ltr to CMC, dtd 28Apr52; LtCol Charles T. Hodges ltr to CMC, dtd 21Mar52; LtCol Carl M. Johnson ltr to CMC, dtd 2Mar52; *New Georgia Campaign;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons.*

which landed on 21 August was never committed to action.

After the initial landings, the Japanese bombing attempts dwindled in frequency and ferocity. During the early part of the operation, the enemy attacks were pressed home with fanatical fury and many reckless planes were knocked spinning into Vella Gulf. Later the Japanese became more cautious, and fewer mass assaults were attempted. Since any activity at Barakoma was readily discernible from Kolombangara, the arrival of Allied ships was generally followed closely by a strike by a conglomerate force of enemy bombers, fighters, and float planes. Most of the attacks were less than vigorous, however, as the Japanese pilots soon gained a healthy respect for ComAirSols planes and the accurate shooting of the 4th Defense Battalion. By late August, those few enemy planes that did attack usually did not get close enough to bomb accurately.

During the Vella Lavella operation, 15 August to 6 October, the 4th Defense Battalion compiled an enviable accuracy record. During 121 different air attacks aimed at the island, the Marine antiaircraft gun crews knocked down the following: 90mm gun group—20 planes; 40mm batteries—10 planes; 20mm batteries—5 planes; the .50 caliber weapons of the special weapons groups—4 planes; and the .50 caliber weapons of the seacoast artillery group—3 planes. The total: 42.

Other Marines, not part of the NLF, also took part in the Vella Lavella operation. After the 35th RCT moved past Horaniu, establishment of a Marine advance staging point on the island was ordered. Planning for the Bougainville operation was already underway, and the I Marine Amphibious Corps wanted a base closer than Guadalcanal to the Northern Solomons. On 17 September, the new Commanding General, IMAC, Major General Charles D. Barrett, who had taken command of the corps on the 15th, named Major Donald M. Schmuck to head the proposed Corps Forward Staging Area, Vella Lavella. The task organization included elements of the Marine 4th Base Depot, a motor transport company, a special weapons battery, a communication team, part of the Navy's 77th Seabees, as well as two provisional infantry companies from the 3d Marine Division. All told, the forward echelon of Corps Troops included 28 officers and 850 men.

The task force was to land at two points: Juno river and Ruravai beach, on Vella's east coast. Part of the organization was to begin the establishment of a base camp while the combat elements provided local security. Hastily organized, the forward echelon made one practice landing at Guadalcanal before proceeding to Vella Lavella. On 25 September, troops went ashore by landing craft at Juno river while LSTs beached some three miles north at Ruravai beach.

Unloading at both points proceeded without incident until about 1115, when 15 Japanese bombers and about 20 fighters swept over. After one brief sideswipe at the destroyer screen offshore, the enemy planes turned toward Ruravai. Some 40mm and .50 caliber antiaircraft weapons had been hastily set up on the beach, and these opened with a steady fire that was accurate and effective. Three bombers were downed and a fourth damaged. Two of the doomed bombers, however, managed to complete their bombing runs before crashing in the jungle. The other planes continued to bomb and strafe. One 40mm crew and gun was destroyed by a

direct hit and a second crew knocked out of action. Volunteers quickly manned the second gun and continued the fire.

As the bombing attack ended, Allied fighter cover appeared to clear the sky in a series of running dogfights. But the landing area at Ruravai was a shambles. Exploding ammunition continued to wreak havoc. Casualties and damage to supplies were high. One LST had been sunk outright, others had been damaged. A total of 32 men on the beach had been killed and another 58 wounded.

The Japanese did not let up. Each day brought a number of pressing air attacks. Despite frequent interruptions, the construction of roads, LST beaching areas, and base installations continued. The work was further handicapped by wandering bands of enemy stragglers, which necessitated active combat patrols as well as increased guards at all construction projects. Progress, however, was fairly rapid.

On 1 October, as the second echelon of corps troops (including the 2d Parachute Battalion), arrived, the Japanese struck another heavy blow. Four air attacks during the day resulted in further damage and more casualties. One LST was sunk and another damaged. The Japanese lost only one plane. Convinced at last of the futility of trying to land men and supplies over a beach inadequately protected against air attacks, IMAC then directed all further echelons and supplies to be unloaded at Barakoma under the protection of the guns of the 4th Marine Defense Battalion. The supplies were then trucked to Ruravai, where wide dispersal and increased aircraft defense measures ensured fewer losses.

After surviving a number of such severe air strikes during the next week (while Barakoma was studiously avoided by the Japanese), the Corps Staging Area was replaced on 8 October by the newly arrived Vella Lavella Advance Base Command. Some troops were returned to their parent organizations; others remained at the base under the new command. Ruravai was seldom used for its intended purpose, since most ships preferred the loading facilities at Barakoma. Later, however, the sawmills and hospital of the base command proved valuable during the Bougainville campaign by providing timbers for bridging and ready medical facilities for seriously wounded men. Its construction had proved costly, however. In the two weeks at Vella Lavella, the Forward Echelon had lost 17 men killed and 132 wounded during the many air attacks.

JAPANESE WITHDRAWAL[9]

As the campaign in the Central Solomons drew closer to its inevitable end, the Japanese efforts during August and September became those of near-desperation. The Allied attack on Vella Lavella, which effectively shunted the enemy forces at Kolombangara to the sidelines of the war, had the added effect of nearly isolating Japanese garrisons from the main sources of supplies and reinforcements in the Northern Solomons. Aggressive action by Allied destroyer squadrons tightened the blockade. Camouflaged enemy barges, trying to keep the supply lanes open by sneaking along the coves and breaks of island coastlines were hounded and ha-

[9] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: CinCPac Repts, Sep–Oct43, *op. cit.; ComInCh Rept of SoPac Action; ComSoPac Oct43 WarD; New Georgia Campaign; Seventeenth Army Ops—I; SE Area Nav-Ops—II;* ONI, *Combat Narratives X;* Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons;* USSBS, *Campaigns.*

NEW ZEALAND TROOPS *of the 14th Brigade land on Vella Lavella to relieve American soldiers battling the Japanese.* (*SC 184437*)

MUNDA AIRFIELD *after its capture and reconstruction, as seen from the control tower atop Kokengola Hill.* (*SC 233548*)

rassed by the vigilant MTBs and the black-hulled Catalina flying boats ("Black Cats") which prowled the waters of Vella and Kula Gulfs. Nearly stymied in their barge supply attempts, the Japanese finally resorted to supplying garrisons by floatplanes and submarines.

These inadequate measures and a careful second look at the strategic situation forced the enemy to make the only decision possible: general evacuation of all forces from the Central Solomons. The operation began with the removal of troops from the seaplane base at Reketa on Santa Isabel Island in early September. An Allied patrol, landed from an MTB on 3 September, verified the absence of enemy troops. Quantities of rations and ammunition found on shore indicated that the withdrawal had been hurried.

After scattered outposts on Gizo and Ganongga Islands returned to Kolombangara on the 19th and 23d of September, the only remaining enemy troops were the small force defending Arundel, a sizeable body of troops on Kolombangara, and the stragglers back-tracking along the coast of Vella Lavella—about 12,000 troops in all, by Japanese estimates.

Weighing two factors—the direction of the Allied effort and the capability of the *13th Regiment* on Arundel to conduct a delaying action—the Japanese scheduled the withdrawal for late September during a moonless quarter. The northern coast of Kolombangara was designated as the evacuation point. Landing craft from the Buin area would ferry troops across The Slot to Choiseul for further transfer to Bougainville. Sick and wounded would be evacuated by fast destroyers.

The Japanese schedule began none too early. By 27 September the fighter airfield on Vella Lavella was operational although not yet completed, and enemy troops on Kolombangara were caught in a vise between ComAirSols planes at Munda and Barakoma. In addition, Allied 155mm guns and howitzers emplaced on New Georgia's northern coast were pounding a steady tattoo on Kolombangara's defenses.

The effect of waning moonlight — plus the increased barge activity—was not lost on the Allies. By late September it became evident that all Japanese activity was directed toward withdrawal. Immediately, all available Third Fleet destroyer squadrons rushed with protecting cruisers into interception duty in Vella and Kula Gulfs.

The planned withdrawal began, but was disrupted many times by the sudden appearance of Allied planes and ships. On the night of 28 September, the Japanese managed to load 11 destroyers with 2,115 sick and wounded for a quick sprint to safety at Bougainville. Despite the Allied interference and considerable loss of small craft and men, the Japanese relayed another 5,400 men by landing barges to Choiseul during the next few dark nights and an additional 4,000 men were picked up by six destroyers. In the squally weather and murky darkness of the period, the Allied destroyers were hard-pressed to keep track of all enemy activity. In a number of instances, the destroyers had to choose between steaming toward targets which radar contacts indicated as small craft or heading towards reported enemy destroyer forces. Sometimes contact could not be made with either target. Allied ships, however, reported a total of 15 barges sunk on the nights of 29 and 30 September.

During the night of 1–2 October, all available Allied destroyers steamed through The Slot seeking the main Japanese evacuation attempt. Few contacts were made in the pitch darkness. About 20 of the 35 barges encountered were reported sunk. The following night the Allied ships again attempted contact with the Japanese but could not close to firing range. Aware that the enemy destroyers were acting as obvious decoys to lure the attackers away from the barge routes, the Allied ships abandoned the chase and returned to The Slot to sink another 20 barges.

Further enemy evacuation attempts were negligible, and the Allies reasoned that the withdrawal had been completed. A patrol landed on Kolombangara on 4 October and confirmed the belief that the Japanese had, indeed, successfully completed evacuation of all troops. Jumbled piles of supplies and ammunition attested to the fact that the enemy had been content to escape with just their lives. The withdrawal, the Japanese reported later, was about 80 percent successful, the only losses being 29 small craft and 66 men.

The final evacuation attempt was made on 6 October from Vella Lavella. A sizeable enemy surface force was reported leaving Rabaul in two echelons, and three U.S. destroyers moved to intercept the enemy. Another Allied force also hurried to the scene. Contact was made in high seas and a driving rain. In a fierce battle which lasted less than 12 minutes, the United States lost one destroyer to enemy torpedoes and two other destroyers were badly damaged. The Japanese lost only one of nine destroyers, and during the battle the transports managed to evacuate the troops stranded almost within the grasp of New Zealand forces.

The removal of troops from Vella Lavella ended the Japanese occupation of the New Georgia Group. The loss of the islands themselves was not vital, but the expenditure of time and effort and the resultant loss of lives, planes, and ships was a reverse from which the Japanese never recovered. There could only be a guess as to the number of casualties to the enemy in the various bombings, sea actions, and land battles. Postwar estimates placed the number at around 2,733 enemy dead,[10] but this does not account for the many more who died in air attacks, barge sinkings, and ship sinkings. In any event, the units evacuated after the costly defense of the New Georgia Group were riddled shells of their former selves, and few ever appeared again as complete units in the Japanese order of battle.

More than three months of combat had been costly to the New Georgia Occupation Force, too. Casualties to the many units of the NGOF totaled 972 men killed and 3,873 wounded. In addition, 122 died of battle wounds later, and another 23 were declared missing in action. Marine Corps units, other than the 1st Marine Raider Regiment, lost 55 killed and 207 wounded.[11]

CONCLUSIONS

New Georgia lacked the drama of the early months of Guadalcanal and the awesome scope of later battles in the Central

[10] *NGOF Account*, p. 29. The figure reported here includes the 250 enemy dead at Vella Lavella.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 29; Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons*, p. 174. These figures do not include non-battle casualties.

Pacific. Instead, it was characterized by a considerable amount of fumbling, inconclusive combat; and the final triumph was marred by the fact that a number of command changes were required to insure the victory. There were few tactical or strategic successes and the personal hardships of a rigorous jungle campaign were only underscored by the planning failures. And too, the original optimistic timetable of Operation TOENAILS later became an embarrassing subject. For these reasons, a postwar resumé of the battle for the Central Solomons pales in comparison with accounts of later and greater Allied conquests.

The primary benefit of the occupation of the New Georgia Group was the advancement of Allied air power another 200 miles closer to Rabaul. The fields at Munda, Segi Point, and Barakoma provided ComAirSols planes with three additional bases from which to stage raids on the Japanese strongholds in the Northern Solomons and to intercept quickly any retaliatory raids aimed by the enemy at the main Allied dispositions on Guadalcanal and in the Russells. Behind this protective buffer, relatively free from enemy interference, the Allies were able to mass additional troops and materiel for future operations. This extended cover also gave Allied shipping near immunity from attack in southern waters. Although most fleet activities continued to be staged from Guadalcanal, the many small harbors and inlets in the New Georgia Group provided valuable anchorages and refueling points for smaller surface craft.

The capture of the Central Solomons also afforded the Allies the undisputed initiative to set the location and time for the next attack. The simple maneuver of bypassing Kolombangara's defenses won for the Allied forces the advantage of selecting the next vulnerable point in the enemy's supply, communication, and reinforcement lines. The Japanese, guarding an empire overextended through earlier easy conquests, could now only wait and guess where the next blow would fall. The New Georgia campaign presented the Japanese in his true light—an enemy of formidable fighting tenacity, but not one of overwhelming superiority. His skill at conducting night evacuation operations, demonstrated at Guadalcanal and confirmed at New Georgia, could not be denied, however. Both withdrawals had been made practically under the guns of the Allied fleet.

On the Allied side, the campaign furthered the complete integration of effort by all arms of service—air, sea, and ground. Seizure of the Central Solomons was a victory by combined forces—and none could say who played the dominant role. Each force depended upon the next, and all knew moments of tragedy and witnessed acts of heroism. The New Georgia battles marked a long step forward in the technique of employment of combined arms.

There were valuable lessons learned in the campaign, too—lessons which were put to use during the many months to follow. As a result of the New Georgia operation, future campaigns were based on a more realistic estimate of the amount of men and time required to wrest a heavily defended objective from a tenacious enemy. Another lesson well learned was that a command staff cannot divide itself to cover both the planning and administrative support for a campaign as well as the active

direction of a division in combat. After New Georgia, a top-level staff was superimposed over the combat echelons to plan and direct operations.

On a lower level, the tactics, armament, and equipment of individual units were found basically sound. As a result of campaign critiques, a number of worthwhile equipment improvements were fostered, particularly in communications where the biggest lack was a light and easily transported radio set. From the successful operation of Marine Corps light tanks over jungle terrain came a number of recommendations which improved tactics, communication, and fire coordination of the bigger and more potent machines, which were included in the task organization for future jungle operations. The battle against the enemy's bunker-type defenses on New Georgia also pointed up the desirability of tank-mounted flame throwers. Experimental portable models used in the fight for Munda had proved invaluable in reducing enemy pillboxes. Increased dependency upon this newly developed weapon was one direct result of its limited use in the Central Solomons fighting.

Throughout the entire campaign, the improvement in amphibious landing techniques and practices was rapid and discernible. Despite seeming confusion, large numbers of troops and mountains of supplies were quickly deposited on island shores, and rapid buildup of men and material continued despite enemy interference. One contributing factor was the increased availability of the ships needed for such island-to-island operation—LCIs, LSTs, LSDs, and the workhorse LCMs. By the end of the Central Solomons campaign, two years of war production was beginning to make itself felt. Equipment and ships were arriving in bigger numbers. The efficiency of these ships and craft was, in part, a reflection on the soundness of Marine Corps amphibious doctrines—vindication for the early and continued insistence by the Marine Corps on their development and improvement.[12]

[12] For the story of the Marine Corps part in the development of landing craft, see Chapter 3, Part I in Volume I of this series.

PART III

Northern Solomons Operations

Continuing the Pressure

STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS[1]

There was little time for extended rest for Allied sea, air, and ground forces after the final Central Solomons action in October. As early as the previous March, a decision had been made that the Northern Solomons would be the target next after New Georgia; and by the time Munda field was operational under Allied control, plans for the seizure of a beachhead in the Shortlands - Choiseul - Bougainville area were in the final stages. In effect, ComSoPac operations of September and October were the last act to the successful completion of the Central Solomons campaign as well as the overture to the forthcoming Bougainville attack.

The importance of Rabaul had not diminished during the long period involved in taking New Georgia, but the events of the last six months had put the Japanese stronghold on New Britain in a new light. In 1942 there had been no doubt that Rabaul would have to be physically eliminated to insure an inviolate hold on the Southwest-South Pacific area. By mid-1943, there was a growing realization that the enemy air and naval base might not have to be erased by force, that neutralization would serve the Allied cause as well. Concurrent with this shift in thinking was a proposal that the main Allied effort be directed through the scattered islands of the Central Pacific instead of through the larger land masses of New Guinea and the Philippines.

Both concepts had many high-ranking proponents. The divergent views resulted in some open disagreement among the many strong-willed commanders and staff officers responsible for the Allies' operational strategy, but the eventual solution was born of the imagination and experience of all, and there was no further dispute once the course of action had been charted. The actual decision to strangle Rabaul by air instead of capturing it was made by the Combined Chiefs of Staff upon recommendation of the JCS. The CCS conference at Quebec in August also directed that the advance through the

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: CinCPac–CinCPOA WarDs, Aug through Nov43 (COA, NHD); *ComSoPac Jun–Nov43 WarDs; ThirdFlt Narr Rept;* IIIPhibFor AR, Seizure and Occupation of Northern Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, 1–13Nov43, dtd 3Dec43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC) hereafter *IIIPhibFor AR;* IMAC AR, Phase I, Sec A, Rept on Bougainville Operation, dtd 21Mar44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC) hereafter *IMAC AR–I;* Maj John N. Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons,* (Washington: HistSec, DivInfo, HQMC, 1948) hereafter Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War;* Halsey and Bryan, *Halsey's Story;* King and Whitehill, *King's Naval Record;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Hist Div, HQMC, "The Bougainville Operation," MS. *ca.* Feb45 (HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *HistDiv Acct.*

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Southwest-South Pacific by General MacArthur and Admiral Halsey was to continue while Admiral Nimitz aimed a new offensive along the Central Pacific axis. The idea of two campaigns was an effective compromise. Although some realignment of forces was necessary, an extensive shuffle of troops or shipping from either theater would not be required; and a coordinated attack along two fronts would have the advantage of keeping Japanese defenses off balance and committed over a wide area.

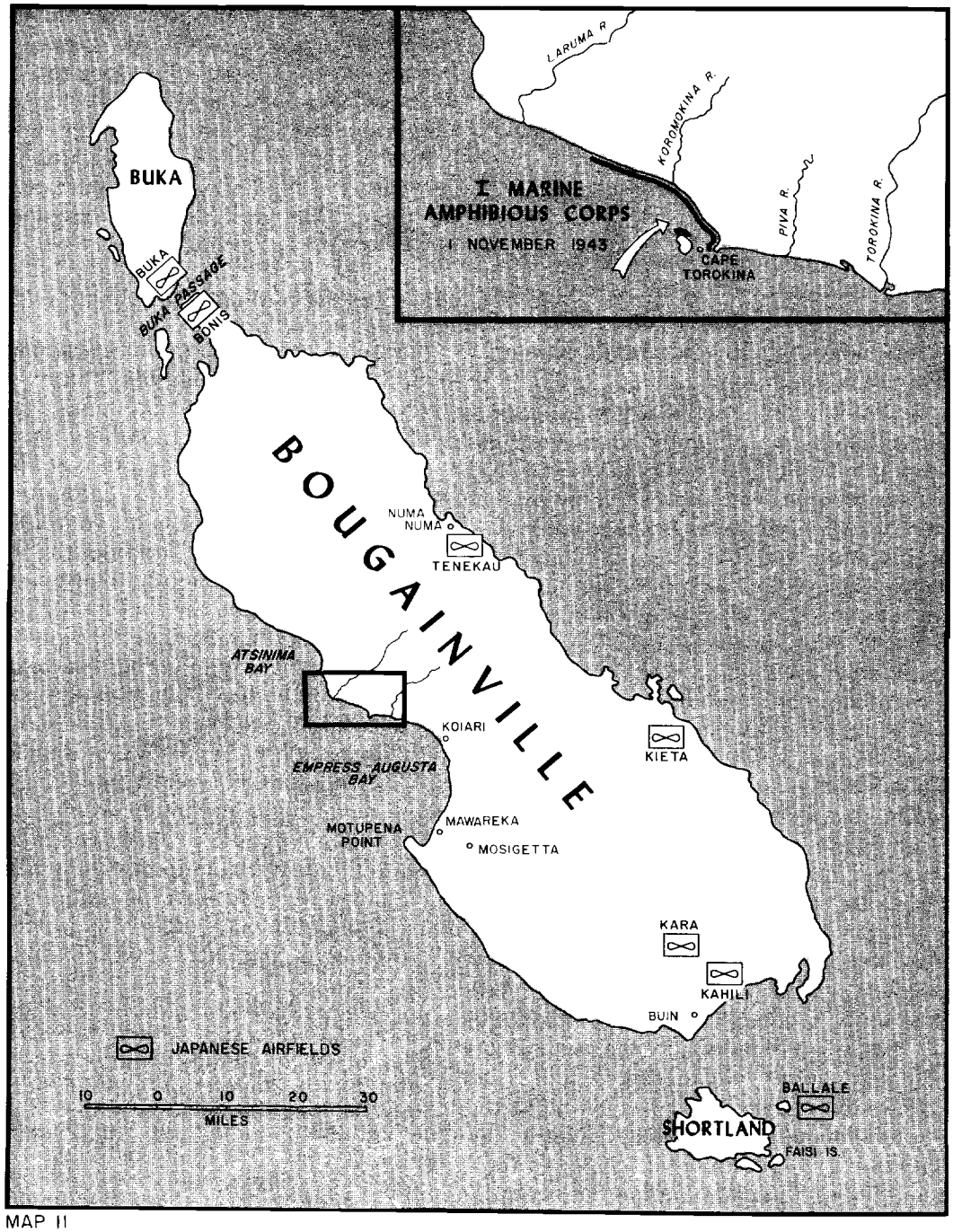
Throughout this evaluation period, General MacArthur held fast to the original ELKTON concept. On the 4th of September, the VIIPhibFor (Admiral Barbey's command) landed SoWestPac troops on the Huon Peninsula of New Guinea to set the stage for eventual passage of MacArthur's forces through the Vitiaz-Dampier Straits. Success of the venture, though, depended upon insurance in the form of air bases within fighter plane distance of Rabaul. Thus, MacArthur's continued surge toward the capture of Salamaua, Lae, and Finschhafen virtually dictated establishment of Allied air facilities in the Northern Solomons by November or December of 1943. Plans for a landing in the Bougainville vicinity, temporarily shelved while other strategic concepts were being examined, were once again restored to the status of a full-scale operation by MacArthur's insistence.

The exact location for such an undertaking had been the cause for considerable discussion and reconnaissance by Halsey's staff. Several islands had been proposed as targets but closer examination eliminated them. The island of Choiseul was little regarded as a major landing site because of two factors: it was not within fighter escort range of New Britain; and MacArthur was of the opinion that an assault on Choiseul did not directly threaten Rabaul. Buka, the small island appendage to northern Bougainville, was too far from Allied air bases for a landing there to be protected adequately. Initial plans to seize the southern end of Bougainville were canceled because the airfields at Kahili and Kara were too strongly protected to attack with the forces then available to Halsey. With the drawn-out campaign on Munda still fresh in his mind, ComSoPac was reluctant to mix with the Japanese in a prolonged struggle that would take too many lives and too much time without paying immediate dividends.

After some deliberation, Halsey proposed that the SoPac forces seize the Shortland Islands (Ballale and Faisi) as airfield sites and then interdict Kahili and Kara with artillery fire as the Rendova forces did at Munda. This move would put Allied air support within fighter range of Rabaul. MacArthur, willing to settle for any action which would help him realize his expressed ambition to return to the Philippines, approved this concept. But later reconnaissance revealed that the Shortlands had no beaches big enough or good enough over which an amphibious assault could be staged, and that airfield sites were limited.

Halsey's top-echelon planners, abandoning the Shortlands idea,[2] on 6 September advanced another plan to seize the Treas-

[2] The major factors governing the abandonment of the Shortlands as primary targets were their distance from Rabaul, "a little far . . . for some of our short-legged planes," and the strong feeling among the planners that "we had to spend too much to get too little." LtGen Field Harris ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, dtd 27Oct60.


LARUMA R.
KOROMOKINA R.
PIVA R.
TOROKINA R.
I MARINE AMPHIBIOUS CORPS
1 NOVEMBER 1943
CAPE TOROKINA
BUKA
BUKA
BUKA PASSAGE
BONIS
BOUGAINVILLE
NUMA NUMA
TENEKAU
ATSINIMA BAY
KOIARI
KIETA
EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY
MOTUPENA POINT
MAWAREKA
MOSIGETTA
KARA
KAHILI
BUIN
JAPANESE AIRFIELDS
10 0 10 20 30
MILES
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FAISI IS.

MAP II

ury Islands and Choiseul as radar and PT bases and jumping-off points for further operations against Bougainville. MacArthur, however, had concluded that the original intentions of ELKTON called for a landing directly on Bougainville and that the interests of the JCS-approved plan could best be executed by an early operation (within the next few months) against Bougainville. MacArthur indicated that any target Halsey selected would be acceptable, but that a decision must be reached soon.

Kieta, on the northeastern coast of Bougainville, was a protected anchorage with an airfield close by; but an assault on Kieta involved long approaches by sea—and the Allied shipping shortage was critical. Kieta was too close to Choiseul, moreover, and that island would have to be attacked as a preliminary measure to protect the landing on Bougainville. Empress Augusta Bay, on the west coast, at first glance had little to recommend it as a landing site. The beaches along the bay were exposed to wind and waves and held no sheltered anchorage for the amphibious shipping required for such an operation. The terrain inland was known to be swampy, heavily timbered, and with few routes of communication. On the other hand, the enemy had apparently dismissed this area as a probable landing spot and the bay was only lightly defended. As late as 17 September, the Allies stood at a figurative crossroads, undecided about which fork in the road to take.

Five days later, on 22 September, Halsey announced a decision that canceled all previous plans and alerted his forces for one of two alternate courses of action: seize and hold the Treasury Islands and northern Empress Augusta Bay area on Bougainville as airfield sites; or, as a second course, seize and hold the Treasury Islands and the Choiseul Bay area as advance radar points, torpedo boat anchorages, and a staging base for landing craft before moving on to construct an airfield on the east coast of Bougainville later in the year. The final decision depended upon last-minute reconnaissance efforts.

SPOTLIGHT ON BOUGAINVILLE[3]

For the Japanese, the conviction that Bougainville was the ultimate Allied objective in the Northern Solomons was hardly a random guess. Lying in a position athwart the northern entrance to The Slot, Bougainville's big bulk dominated the rest of the Solomons chain. By virtue of this ideal geographic location, the island served the Japanese as an advanced supply and refueling base for most of the sea and air operations against the Allies at Guadalcanal and in the Central Solomons. Here, too, were staged the infantry replacements destined for combat or garrison duty on other South Pacific islands. No less than six major airfields and a number of naval operating bases were established by the Japanese on Buka, Bougainville, and the Shortlands to help guard the outer defenses of the airfields and Simpson Harbor at Rabaul. Easily supported by air bases on New Britain, New Ireland,

[3] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ThirdFlt NarrRept*; *IIIPhibFor AR; IMAC AR–I; HistDiv Acct;* 3d MarDiv Terrain InfoRept, n.d. (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); MilHistSec, G–2, FEC Japanese Monograph No. 100, SE Area NavOps, Part III (OCMH), hereafter *SE Area NavOps—III*; Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*; Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*; Feldt, *The Coastwatchers.*

and Truk—points outside the range of most Allied land-based planes—Bougainville was also under the umbrella of naval support from Rabaul and Truk. In short, the Allies needed Bougainville for further operations against Rabaul; the Japanese needed Bougainville to defend Rabaul. Viewed from either camp, the island was a priority possession.

Bougainville was never a part of the British Solomon Islands protectorate. German expansion had claimed the island in 1899, some 130 years after its belated discovery by the French explorer whose name it bears. Mandated to Australia after World War I, the island still was influenced by German missionaries, for the Bougainville natives in 1943 were recognized as hostile to the Allies and considerably more friendly to the Japanese.[4] Some 40,000 natives were on the island, gathered mainly in small villages of less than 200. Energetic and industrious, they provided an adequate labor force for the large plantations which, before the Japanese occupation, were owned by European companies.[5]

The island is the largest of the Solomons group. Nearly 30 miles in width, Bougainville is divided down the center by mountain ranges which extend nearly the entire 125-mile length of the island. The northern Emperor range is capped by the distinctive 10,171-foot peak, Mt. Balbi. The second range, Crown Prince, is less rugged and settles gradually into a broad, widening plain at the southern end of the island. This area has the best anchorages and the biggest plantations. The two coastlines, east and west, are markedly different. The eastern side of the mountain ranges slopes to a fairly open plain with good beach areas. The western side, however, is deeply etched by rushing mountain streams which carry silt into a swampy, alluvial plain bordering the coastline. The characteristic result is a series of deep valleys ending in swamps and sand bars cut by meandering waterways and sluggish rivers of varying depths. This soggy fringe area, covered with tall marsh grass and bamboo-like growth, is trapped between mountains and the sea by a grey-black beach strip which seldom exceeds 15 yards in width.

The island interior is enveloped by a dense rain forest and choking jungle growth which combine with the rugged mountain ranges to discourage overland exploration. A number of good trails traverse the more populated areas in the south and east, but only a few native tracks venture across the inhospitable interior. One path cuts across the mountains from Numa Numa to Empress Augusta Bay where it connects with the East-West trail. This path joins the western villages of Mawareka and Mosigetta to Buin in the south. Fairly wide and cleared, the East-West trail skirts the coastal swamps and can be traveled most of the year.

Although the Japanese had occupied the island since March 1942, only those facilities necessary to maintain the war in the Solomons had been constructed initially. In time, four airfields were in operation, two at each end of the island, and additional troops were stationed on Bougainville. Scant attention, however, was given to the island region between the major airfields. For more than a year, Japanese activity was restricted largely to the Buin area in the south and the Buka-Bonis pas-

[4] *IMAC AR–I*, C–2 Est of Sit, p. 26.

[5] Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*, Appendix V, contains an excellent description of the island of Bougainville and its people, terrain, and geographic features.

sage in the north.[6] There was little overland travel. Barges moving along the coastline served most of the transportation needs. As a result, few roads were improved and in the later defense of the island, this proved an important oversight.

Australian coastwatchers and a few friendly natives maintained observation posts on the southern part of the island until the summer months of 1943. Then aggressive Japanese patrols, assisted by unfriendly native guides, forced the Allied scouts to abandon their radio equipment and withdraw to the interior.[7] As a result, military information about the island and its defenders was cut off abruptly just when it became most needed.

Intelligence estimates on the number of Japanese soldiers and sailors in the area varied widely. Interceptions of radio messages provided most of the information on troop dispositions, and this intelligence was augmented and checked by enemy documents captured in the Central Solomons and by prisoner of war interrogations. Allied guesses placed the total number of defenders in the vicinity at 98,000—2,000 at Choiseul, 35,000 or more at Bougainville and the Shortlands, 5,000 at New Ireland, and the remaining 56,000 at Rabaul. The estimates on the strength of the Bougainville forces, based on order of battle information from prisoners, ranged between 35,000 and 44,000. The biggest concentration of defenders was in the southern part of the island, where an estimated 17,000 soldiers of the *Seventeenth Army* were headquartered. Another 5,000 troops were believed to be in the Buka-Bonis area, with a similar number at Kieta. The only known enemy concentration on the west coast was at Mosigetta, where about 1,000 Japanese—believed to be laborers—were engaged in cultivating the extensive rice fields of that coast. Less than 300 troops were estimated to be in the Cape Torokina vicinity of Empress Augusta Bay. The Shortlands defense force was estimated at 3,000 to 6,000, most of these naval personnel from *Eighth Fleet* headquarters and SNLF units.

Postwar records of the Japanese indicate that the Allied estimates were close. The Buin area actually had about 15,000 troops of the *Seventeenth Army* and 6,800 of the *Eighth Fleet* headquarters and base force personnel, primarily for defense of Kahili and Kara airfields. About 5,000 men were deployed in the Shortlands. The airfield on Ballale was defended entirely by naval personnel with seacoast artillery.

The troop dispositions were in line with the enemy conception of the plans of the Allies. After Guadalcanal was evacuated, and the Japanese became aware of the responsibility of defending what they had so easily grabbed, the Shortland Bay area was decided upon as the strategic key in the defense of the Northern Solomons. Accordingly, the southern part of Bougainville and the Shortland Islands received first priority in troop allotments. At that early date, the enemy believed that any Allied offensive would be directed against the airfields in the southern portion of the island with a possible subsidiary action in the Buka area. Troop strength elsewhere was proportionate to

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[6] USAFISPA Obj Folder, Bougainville Island, dtd 1Aug43 (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC).

[7] *ComSoPac WarD*, 22Jun43. An interesting sequel to this instance is the 13 December entry: "The native responsible for the capture of Allied personnel in Bougainville in June was seized and shot." *ComSoPac Dec43 WarD.*

the Japanese estimate of the Allies' ability to hit each area. Bougainville's defense was based on the premise that a landing anywhere on the island could be met by a transfer of ground troops and a counterlanding by an amphibious group.

Responsible for the defense of Bougainville and the adjacent islands was an old adversary, Lieutenant General Haruyoshi Hyakutake,[8] who had commanded the Japanese forces on Guadalcanal. The general had apparently lost little prestige with the *Imperial Staff* through the defeat, for he was still in command of the *Seventeenth Army*. His forces, however, had not shared his fortune. The *2d Division* was almost wiped out at Guadalcanal, and the *38th Division* had lost heavily at Guadalcanal and New Georgia. His sole remaining division, the *6th*, commanded by Lieutenant General Masatane Kanda, was still in fighting shape. Two regiments, the *23d* and *45th*, were near top-strength, but the third regiment of the division, the *13th Infantry*, had been badly mauled in the Central Solomons. To this division, Hyakutake could add detachments of SNLF units, plus the scattered remnants of other infantry regiments which were trickling into Bougainville after the withdrawal from the Central Solomons.

The Allied estimate of the Japanese ships in the immediate vicinity (Buka, Bougainville) was 2 cruisers, 8 to 10 destroyers, 21 personnel transports, and 12 submarines, plus a variety of smaller craft. The Imperial Navy also had a healthy reserve of warships at Truk and Rabaul. Air support in the Northern Solomons was believed to be about 160 fighters, 120 dive bombers, 120 medium bombers, and 39 float planes.[9]

There were definite signs in September that the Japanese expected an assault on Bougainville. Despite increasing air attrition, plane strength at Buka, Kara, Kahili, and Ballale remained fairly steady as the Japanese replaced their losses. Airfields were improved and expanded despite steady pounding by Allied bombers, and supply routes to the island were maintained in spite of losses incurred through harassment by Allied patrol bombers and torpedo boats. In late October, as the Allies completed their plans for attack, even the long-neglected west coast of Bougainville was given some attention by the Japanese. Intelligence photos for the first time revealed evidence of military activity near Empress Augusta Bay. Some minor construction with a few scattered defensive installations were discovered behind Cape Torokina, but since the improvements were limited and no additional troops appeared to have been moved into the area, the Allies remained convinced that the Japanese had not altered their basic defensive plans and that they had not awakened to the dangers inherent in an undefended coastline.

HALSEY'S DECISION[10]

Before a final decision was made on the direction of the SoPac attack, reconnais-

[8] Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*, p. 235n. Early intelligence reports translated Hyakutake's given name variously as Siekichi or Harukichi.

[9] ThirdFlt OPlan 14–43, Annex A, dtd 15Oct43 (COA, NHD).

[10] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Sep43 WarD; ThirdFlt NarrRept; IIIPhibFor AR; IMAC AR-I; HistDiv Acct;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Halsey and Bryan, *Halsey's Story.*

sance efforts to obtain every possible scrap of information and intelligence about the various projected landing sites continued. As at Guadalcanal and New Georgia, prior knowledge of the Bougainville area was limited to sketchy reports from former residents, planters, medical officers, schooner masters, and missionaries. Although these reports were valuable in regard to general conditions and physical improvements in certain areas, few facts of military significance were obtained. As before, personal reconnaissance by trained observers was required to accumulate the necessary detailed geographic and hydrographic information upon which to base a decision. The first intelligence efforts covered the entire Northern Solomons—Santa Isabel, Choiseul, the Treasurys, Shortlands, and Bougainville. Later, as some islands were eliminated and the choice of targets narrowed to either the east or west coast of Bougainville, reconnaissance activities were concentrated on the Kieta and Empress Augusta Bay areas.

Initial combat intelligence was gathered from air reconnaissance and submarine patrols. Aerial photography was limited because of unfavorable weather, enemy air interference, and lack of fighter plane escorts. Submarines moved in close to the island to shoot pictures through raised periscopes, but this practice was hazardous since the outdated hydrographic charts then available failed to show the exact location of dangerous coral outcroppings and reefs known to exist. Besides, the pictures did not reveal much except a good profile shot of Bougainville's rugged peaks. In time, patrols from submarines, torpedo boats, and seaplanes slipped ashore to scout various areas, and the information gained from physical reconnaissance and personal observation was added to ComSoPac's growing file.

Two patrols, dispatched to Bougainville in September after Halsey announced his two-part alert, helped the SoPac commander decide on the final choice of objectives. One Marine-Navy team, with an Australian officer and four natives as guides, remained four days in the Kieta vicinity, prowling the northeast coast of the island during the night and spending the daylight hours underwater in the submarine USS *Gato*. Considerable Japanese troop activity was observed; and despite several close scrapes from patrolling enemy barges, the group measured beach distances, took depth soundings, and scouted the area inland. On 28 September, the patrol boarded the submarine for the last time and returned to Guadalcanal. The patrol's report was generally unfavorable,[11] indicating that the harbor had many reefs and coral outcroppings, and that the area inland was not suitable for airfields since the Japanese had apparently given up on Kieta.

Another patrol similarly organized landed from the submarine USS *Guardfish* near the Laruma River in north Empress Augusta Bay. Here the terrain was found to be fairly solid with thick bush and a dense rain forest inland. Reluctant to arouse the Japanese to any Allied intentions, the patrol studied Cape Torokina through binoculars and took photographs through telescopic lens. The long-range examination revealed a narrow beach strip some 10,000 yards long with the expected coastal swamps inland. Tidal range in the bay was moderate, about 3½ feet. A coco-

[11] IIIPhibFor Rept of Reconnaissance of the Northeast Bougainville Coast, 23–27Sep43, n.d. (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC).

nut grove on Cape Torokina looked like a favorable spot for an airfield, the patrol decided, since the area appeared dry enough and long enough to support a fighter plane strip. Unable to obtain a soil sample of the area, the patrol did the next best thing and brought back soil from a similar area. The scouts then turned back to the Laruma river and headed into the bush in a wide circle that ended four days later in a rendezvous with the *Guardfish* in Atsinima Bay, some distance to the north. The only enemy sighted were a lone sentry on post near the Laruma river, and a number of Japanese reconnaissance planes flying patrol duty over Empress Augusta Bay beaches.[12]

The endeavor had one big dividend. While waiting for the patrol, the submarine commander checked his position and discovered that the navigation chart then in use was about seven miles in error in its location of Cape Torokina. Undetected, this one factor might well have jeopardized any future operations. Too, the soil sample returned by the patrol was declared favorable for construction of an airfield.

The prospect of landing in a lightly defended area close to an acceptable airfield site appealed to Halsey and his SoPac planners. To confirm the patrol's recommendation, a number of low-level aerial reconnaissance flights were made by IMAC staff members. Their quick glimpses of the Cape Torokina area convinced them that the operation could be a success. On 1 October, Halsey notified MacArthur that Cape Torokina was the main objective and that D-Day would be 1 November. The SoWesPac commander expressed his complete agreement with this decision.[13]

After 12 days of planning, Halsey's ComSoPac headquarters issued the orders which outlined the missions of the sea, air, and ground forces under the admiral's command. Specifically, ComSoPac directed the III Amphibious Force to seize and hold (on D-minus five days) the Treasury Islands as a staging area and advanced naval base, prior to establishing a beachhead on D-Day in the northern Empress Augusta Bay area for construction of airfields and another advanced naval base. The ultimate aim was strangulation of enemy operations in south Bougainville and preparations for further offensives against Rabaul.

Code names selected by ComSoPac for the planning phases were DIPPER, denoting the entire Northern Solomons operation, and CHERRYBLOSSOM, the Empress Augusta Bay area. The Treasury Islands phase of the operation was labeled GOODTIME. Later the code name DIPPER was applied to the Bougainville operation and the island, while the Treasury Islands landing retained the GOODTIME designation.

Selection of Cape Torokina as a landing site despite its disadvantages was tactically and logistically sound. The location fitted well into the plans for neutralization of Rabaul by air, and a beachhead on the western side of Bougainville made logistic support much easier. Moreover, the attack was aimed at a weak point in the Japanese defenses, thus avoiding a direct assault on main enemy defenses in the southern and eastern coasts of the island. Success of the venture depended upon the

[12] IMAC Reconnaissance Rept of Empress Augusta Bay area, 23–26 Sept43, dtd 1Oct43 (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC).

[13] *ComSoPac Oct43 WarD.*

ability of the Allies to beat back any determined sea and air offensive by the Japanese during the critical stages of landing and establishing a beachhead. ComSoPac planners admitted that a strong enemy reaction was highly probable, but this threat was accepted as a calculated risk. The projected operation was "no better demonstration of the firmly held, but at times sorely tried, belief in the Allied superiority over the enemy in the South Pacific." [14]

Less obvious in the choice of Empress Augusta Bay was the fact that the Cape Torokina plain, bordered by the natural obstacles of the Laruna River to the northwest, the mountains inland, and the Torokina river to the southeast, fell into an ideal defensive area about six miles deep and eight miles long which could be defended by the Allied forces then available. The location, too, was believed so isolated from known Japanese dispositions by the nature of the island's terrain that at least three months would be required before a strong force moving overland could seriously threaten the beachhead. In short, large bodies of reinforcing enemy troops could come to the area only from the sea, and the Third Fleet felt confident that it could handle that threat. The Allies had no desire to capture the entire island—the size of Bougainville and the rough terrain precluded such ambitions — but two infantry divisions could hold the Cape Torokina area against any enemy forces in the immediate area or likely reinforcements.

These facts did little to increase enthusiasm for such bold plans. Sentiment was mixed — some optimism, some hesitation, some reluctance — but with D-Day less than a month away, all hands bent to the task of preparing for the assault on the Treasurys and Bougainville.

[14] *IMAC AR–I*, p. 2.

AMPHIBIOUS PLANNING [15]

The planning team that directed the preparations for the Bougainville operation was essentially the same command lineup that outlined the New Georgia attack—with one important change. As before, Admiral Halsey retained personal control of the proceedings, dividing his attention between completion of the Central Solomons campaign and the development of a new operation. From his headquarters in Noumea, Halsey coordinated the planning activities of Admiral Fitch on Espiritu Santo and Admiral Wilkinson and General Harmon on Guadalcanal. A new member of the planning staff was Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, who had replaced General Vogel as commanding general of the I Marine Amphibious Corps, the counterpart to the Army's ground force command under Harmon. As such, Vandegrift held administrative responsibility over practically all Marine Corps personnel in the South Pacific, the exceptions being land-based air units under General Mitchell's command (Marine Air, South Pacific) and ships' detachments. The IMAC staff had not participated in the New Georgia planning since the bulk of the troops were to be furnished

[15] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Sep–Oct43 WarDs; IIIPhibFor AR;* CTF 31 WarDs, Sep–Oct43, n.d. (COA, NHD), hereafter *CTF 31 WarD* with month; *IMAC AR–I; ThirdFlt NarrRept; HistDiv Acct;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul.*

by Griswold's XIV Corps, but Halsey's first planning directive designated the Northern Solomons as an IMAC assignment. As a result, the Marine command became tactical as well as administrative.

Vandegrift, who had won a Medal of Honor for his leadership of the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal, was the first of three IMAC commanders to participate in the Bougainville operation. After completing preliminary plans, Vandegrift was relieved by Major General Charles D. Barrett on 15 September and was en route to the United States to become the 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps when his return was abruptly sidetracked.[16] General Barrett had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage in an accidental fall, and his untimely death left IMAC planning in midair. The operational order for IMAC's part in the seizure of the Treasurys and Bougainville had been drafted before Barrett's death, and Vandegrift resumed command on 18 October in time to sign the completed order[17]—noting, meanwhile, that the entire concept of the operation had changed within the space of one month.[18] Vandegrift completed the planning and witnessed the start of the operation before relinquishing command of IMAC to Major General Roy S. Geiger on 9 November, well after the success of the beachhead was assured.

Even as the Northern Solomons planning shifted through a number of changes before the final draft emerged, so did the task organization assigned to the IMAC landing force. Of the three Marine divisions in the Pacific in 1943, only the 3d was available for the Bougainville operation. The 1st Marine Division was scheduled by MacArthur to spearhead the Cape Gloucester beachhead on New Britain, and the 2d Marine Division had been shifted to the Central Pacific for the Gilbert Islands assault. To augment the 3d Marine Division and IMAC troops, the Army's 25th Division and the 1st Marine Raider Regiment were tentatively assigned to the Bougainville venture; but, as the Central Solomons campaign wore on, both organizations were committed to action far beyond original plans, with the result that neither was available for the Northern Solomons.

A number of provisional units were formed from scattered battalions, and these—with the later addition of the 37th Infantry Division—were assigned to IMAC. Vandegrift's command eventually included his own headquarters and corps troops, the 3d Marine Division, the Army's 37th Division, the 8th Brigade Group of the 3d New Zealand Division, the 3d Defense Battalion, the 2d Marine Raider Regiment (Provisional), the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, the Army's 190th Coast Artillery Regiment (Antiaircraft), and varied naval small craft, construction, and communication units. The Marine parachute regiment, then on Vella Lavella, was designated the corps' reserve force. In area reserve were several coast

[16] Vandegrift was informed in January that his nomination to succeed General Holcomb as Commandant had been approved by Admiral King and the Secretary of the Navy. The general, accompanied by Colonel Gerald B. Thomas, had reached Pearl Harbor when his retention in the South Pacific was requested by Halsey to King through Nimitz. Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 5Aug59 (WWII OpHistFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *Vandegrift Interview*.

[17] BGen James Snedeker ltr to CMC, dtd 14May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC).

[18] *Vandegrift Interview*.

artillery battalions on Guadalcanal and the Army's Americal Division, then in the Fiji Islands. This latter division, however, could be committed only on Halsey's approval.

After the target had been defined in late September, Halsey established his operational chain of command with his amphibious force commander, Admiral Wilkinson, in charge of the entire Bougainville-Treasurys expedition. Wilkinson maintained control of Task Force 31 (III Amphibious Force) with the ground force and transport groups as subordinate commands. As directed by Halsey, Wilkinson would continue to command all forces afloat and ashore until the landing force commander was ashore and had indicated that he was able to take command of the ground forces.[19] The IMAC commander, at first Barrett and then Vandegrift, was responsible for the scheme of maneuver ashore at both Cape Torokina and the Treasurys, and was to exercise command over all units ashore, whether Allied forces, Marine Corps, Army, Navy, or ground echelons of air units. As at New Georgia, the actual employment of aerial support was to be under the operational control of air officers. This air echelon, Commander Aircraft Northern Solomons (ComAirNorSols) was a subordinate command of ComAirSols and was under the direction of Marine Brigadier General Field Harris. His tasks included the responsibility for active air defense of the Bougainville region (Torokina and the Treasurys) as well as operational control of all supporting aircraft entering this region. Harris' responsibilities also included establishment of an air warning system for both Torokina and the Treasurys and organization of air support control procedures for both areas.

For the Treasury Islands phase of the operation, Wilkinson added another echelon to his command, dividing his task force into a Northern Force for the Empress Augusta Bay landings and a Southern Force (Task Force 31.1) for the diversionary landings. Wilkinson retained command of the Northern Force (actually, a name designating the main units of Task Force 31) and placed Admiral Fort in command of the Southern Force. The Treasurys landing force, comprising mostly troops from the 8th Brigade Group of the 3d New Zealand Division, was commanded by Brigadier R. A. Row, under the general direction of the IMAC commander.[20]

By mid-October, all subordinate echelons of Task Force 31 and IMAC had issued operational orders, and the diverse sea and air elements under Third Fleet command had been assigned general missions in support of Wilkinson's task force in the Bougainville-Treasurys venture. Land-based air units of ComAirSols

[19] This concept of command evolved during the Guadalcanal campaign after disagreement between Vandegrift and the commander of the Amphibious Force, South Pacific, Rear Admiral Turner. Many naval officers considered the forces ashore as an extension of the forces afloat, administratively and militarily subordinate to the amphibious commander at all times. Vandegrift successfully contended that the landing force commander was more experienced and better qualified in ground operations and should have undivided responsibility once the troops were ashore. LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal—History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, v. 1, (Washington: HistBr, G–3, HQMC, 1958), pp. 240–241.

[20] The planning and conduct of the Treasurys operation is related in the following chapter.

(Task Force 33) were ordered to continue the general missions of reconnaissance and destruction of enemy ships and aircraft with the added duties of providing air cover and support for the land and sea forces involved in the Northern Solomons assault. Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman's carriers (Task Force 38) were directed to support the expedition by air strikes at Buka and Bonis airfields which were beyond the effective range of fighter planes from the now-completed airfields in the New Georgia area.

Cruisers and destroyers of Rear Admiral Merrill's Task Force 39 were to furnish protection for the amphibious force as well as bombard enemy installations in the Buka-Bonis and Shortlands area before the operation. Task Force 72, the submarines under the command of Captain James Fife, Jr., was to carry out offensive reconnaissance missions north of the Bougainville area.

Final planning for the actual assaults at Cape Torokina and the Treasurys was facilitated by the move of IMAC headquarters from Noumea to Guadalcanal, where the amphibious forces were in training. Vandegrift's command post was established in a coconut grove near Tetere, just a short distance from the headquarters of the IIIPhibFor and the 3d Marine Division bivouac area. The close proximity of the three major heaquarters responsible for coordinating the efforts of the forces involved eased considerably the problems that arose during the last weeks of preparation. And problems arose—many of them. In effect, the Northern Solomons operations had become two operations—each one with resultant problems of transportation, reinforcement, and resupply.

Tactical limitations in launching the Bougainville operation became apparent early.[21] In fact, the entire venture bore the title of "Shoestring No. 2," a reference to the general paucity of means which characterized the Guadalcanal operation in 1942.[22] Early in August, Halsey had reviewed the shipping situation in the South Pacific and estimated that he would need six additional troopships to complete preparations for the next operation, declaring that at least 14 APAs and 6 AKAs would be required from D minus 15 to D plus 5 for the assault on Bougainville.[23] Other commitments, particularly the Central Pacific campaign, had claimed all but eight APAs and four AKAs from the SoPac area; and this limited amount of amphibious shipping was the specter which haunted the Bougainville preparations. The acute shortage seriously restricted the number of troops and supplies that could be transported in the initial assault and prohibited a rapid buildup at the objective. Further, any loss of ships could not be replaced immediately; and, since these 12 ships were a bare minimum for transporting an assault division with the necessary artillery, air service personnel, engineers, and heavy equipment to construct and maintain an airfield, the sinking of any of these ships

[21] When Vandegrift began initial planning, he emphasized that his submitted tentative plans for operations in the Northern Solomons envisioned conduct under optimum conditions, and added that it was "readily foreseeable that the means required may exceed the resources available in this area, particularly in respect to transports and landing craft." CG, IMAC ltr to ComSoPac, dtd 4Aug43 (Bougainville AreaOps-File, HistBr, HQMC).

[22] Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*, p. 288.

[23] *ComSoPac Aug43 WarD.*

during the beachhead phase would seriously threaten the entire operation. The definite possibility of quick and effective air retaliation by the enemy prompted a decision by Wilkinson that the slow-moving LSTs under his command would not be risked during the early phases of the operation.

The glaring contrast between the conduct of the Guadalcanal landing and the New Georgia operation was emphasized in the concept of the Bougainville assault. Vandegrift had the experience and tactical foresight required for such an operation. In Wilkinson he found a partner with a good grasp of amphibious support of operations ashore. Together the two commanders were a good team, and the plans they evolved were practical applications of the available means to the situation. Guadalcanal had been an assault followed by the establishment of a protective perimeter thrown about a captured airfield. The Japanese had dashed themselves against this perimeter, suffering ruinous casualties in the process. New Georgia, however, had been the reverse—a landing, then a protracted overland attack that had been a tiring, bloody smash against a Japanese perimeter. Given these examples, Vandegrift and Wilkinson were determined that the tactical errors of New Georgia would not be repeated. At Bougainville, the Marines would land first, establish and expand a beachhead, and—when the fighting widened into extended land operations—the Army would take over. Airfield construction would commence upon landing, with completion of air strips expected in time to help defend against any determined assault by the Japanese.

In order to take advantage of the extensive stretch of beach north of Cape Torokina, a simultaneous landing of all troops and supplies over multiple beaches was scheduled. This would allow the vitally important ships to drop anchor, unload, and depart without undue delay in the objective area. To further reduce unloading time, all cargo ships would be restricted to short loads, and assault troops would be diverted to hasten the unloading activities. Twelve beaches were to be employed in the assault, eleven extending northwest from Cape Torokina toward the Laruma River and the twelfth located on the northern (inner) shoreline of Puruata Island, the larger of two islets lying off Cape Torokina.

Three assault units of four landing teams each were to land abreast over these 12 beaches. One task unit was to land in the right sector of the beach area with a second task unit landing in the left sector. The third task unit was to be divided, two landing teams landing in each sector. Each infantry unit was to overrun any enemy defenses and seize a broad but shallow beachhead. Reconnaissance was to be started immediately to the front and flanks, while unloading was completed. Beach and antiaircraft defenses were to be prepared immediately to insure protection from a possible enemy counterlanding or the expected enemy air attacks.

Barring unforeseen difficulties, at least 13,900 men would go ashore in the D-Day landings at Cape Torokina. Unloading time for the troops and the 6,200 tons of embarked supplies and equipment was set at no more than six hours. No floating reserve for the Bougainville assault was planned, since the enemy situation ashore did not seem to warrant this risk of em-

barked troops and supplies. Initial plans called for the beachhead to be reinforced and resupplied by five LST echelons five days apart, each echelon bringing in another 3,000 troops and 5,500 tons of cargo. Vandegrift, upon resumption of the IMAC command, objected to this slow buildup and insisted that reinforcement of the beachhead proceed at an accelerated rate. He proposed that the 37th Division follow the 3d Division ashore no later than D plus 7.[24] This change in plans was agreed upon. The IMAC general also assumed responsibility for beachhead logistics, and, in planning the rapid unloading sequence, Vandegrift assigned about one-half of his combat Marines the temporary task of getting supplies ashore. During the initial stages, these Marines would work in the holds of the ships and on the beach as a shore party before returning to their units for combat operations.

Such preparations were not idle gestures. Once ashore, the IMAC troops faced the prospect of having an extremely tenuous supply chain cut behind them by enemy counteractions. To forestall any emergency later, Wilkinson decided to use all available ships in supply operations before the landing. Accordingly, an attempt was made to bring a 30-day level of all classes of supply forward to Vella Lavella, considerably closer to the objective area than the staging-storage-bivouac areas on Guadalcanal or in the Russells. Thus, a steady flow of supplies to the beachhead could be moved by the means available—LSTs, LCTs, APDs, or even DDs. The area picked was Ruravai on the east coast of Vella Lavella, then still under attack by 25th Division and New Zealand troops. The landing at Ruravai, however, was bombed with effectiveness by the Japanese, and the inability to divert a sufficient number of LSTs from the New Georgia supply chain ultimately resulted in a stockpile considerably smaller than that proposed—about 10-days' level, in fact. Cape Torokina, IMAC later discovered, was outside the range of small craft from Vella Lavella, a fact which further reduced the value of the IMAC supply station at Ruravai. The end result was that, despite seemingly adequate preparations, the supply problem remained a major obstacle throughout the operational planning.

Equally vital to the operation's success was the speed with which airfields could be constructed. Although the earlier reconnaissance patrols had located a possible airfield site, the odds were still high that this area might prove too swampy for quick completion of a strip. At least three bomber fields and two fighter strips were deemed essential to threaten Rabaul from Bougainville, and the problem of locating suitable areas as well as having a sufficient number of naval construction battalions assigned to the task were monumental worries. The airfield annex to the IMAC operation order called for two strips to be established as soon as possible[25] with the remaining fields to get underway as the beachhead widened. To assist Vandegrift, an experienced engineer staff was organized within IMAC, this group comprising Marine and Navy officers who had directed airfield construction under combat conditions at Guadalcanal and New

[24] *Vandegrift Interview.*

[25] IMAC OpO No. 1, Anx B, IMAC Airfield Plan, dtd 15Oct43 (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *IMAC OpO No. 1.*

Georgia[26]—a situation likely to be repeated on Bougainville. Since the Cape Torokina area was still relatively unscouted, and the existence of coral a debatable question, plans were made to use pierced planking for all fields. This added a fresh burden to the limited shipping, but provided insurance that runways could be fashioned for at least local air support.[27] The proposed fighter runway, located in the plantation area at Cape Torokina, was to be about 4,500 feet long and about 600 feet wide. A bomber strip inland about 2,000 to 7,500 yards would require an extensive amount of clearing. Even though swamps were prevalent, drainage was believed possible.[28] The remaining fields would have to wait for the widening of the beachhead.

Another facet of the landing—naval gunfire support—also received close attention during the last weeks of preparation. Coordination between the amphibious force and the landing force had improved markedly since the first days of Guadalcanal, but many imperfections unfortunately still existed in the fire support of ground forces by ships' guns. The use of naval gunfire by Allied ships at Guadalcanal had little effect on the progress of the initial landings, and bombardments to cover a landing force in the Central Solomons had been impromptu affairs; *i.e.*, returning the fire of the Munda batteries during the Rendova landing, and the shelling of the Enogai garrison during the Marine raider operations at Rice Anchorage.

New enthusiasm, however, had been generated for naval shore bombardments after Kolombangara's capture. The island's fortified defenses were still intact after the Japanese withdrawal, and IIIPhibFor was granted permission to test new gunfire procedures on these bunkers and pillboxes. One of Wilkinson's destroyer squadrons did the shooting, with all available IMAC and 3d Marine Division gunfire liaison officers and spotters aboard to witness the demonstration.[29] The destroyers pounded the beach defenses in a simulated pre-H-Hour strike before one destroyer moved inshore to act as a spotting ship for on-call missions. At the conclusion of the firing, ships' officers and the observers went ashore. The preparation fires, they found, had blasted the beach areas, and the adjusted firing missions had knocked out other bunkers and fortifications.[30] As a result of this convincing display, IMAC officers were eager to give naval gunfire support a prominent part in the assault plans for Bougainville.

To retain the element of surprise, no pre-D-Day shelling of Cape Torokina was scheduled. This further increased the necessity for effective gunfire which would knock out beach defenses before the Marines went ashore and provide as well for quick fire support to reduce any undiscovered Japanese defenses which might hold up the assault waves long enough for the expected enemy counteraction to threaten the landing force. The IMAC gunfire officers initially made plans for a support group of about 4 heavy or light

[26] Col Francis M. McAlister ltr to CMC, dtd 29May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comments, HistBr, HQMC).

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *IMAC OpO No. 1.*

[29] Col Frederick P. Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support in the Solomon Islands Campaign," MS, 1954 (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC), pp. 51–52, hereafter Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support."

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

cruisers and at least 10 destroyers;[31] but in light of the multiple commitments of the Third Fleet, this was a prohibitive request. Eventually, four destroyers, none of them practised in shore bombardment, were scheduled for pre-H-Hour and post-H-Hour gunfire support. In all truthfulness, IMAC liaison officers were unhappy with the amount of assistance offered by the IIIPhibFor, but accepted the proferred support with the realization that Wilkinson's force had other missions, too.

The final gunfire plan[32] positioned three destroyers (*Sigourney*, *Anthony*, *Wadsworth*) on the southeast flank of the landing area, with the fourth ship (*Terry*) stationed on the opposite or extreme northwest flank. These ships were to open fire at 10,000 yards before closing to 3,000 yards for close support and on-call missions. Target designation was to be taken from a photo mosaic of the Cape Torokina coastline, photographed from about 1,000 yards off-shore by a low-flying plane. After one final rehearsal in the New Hebrides area where the four ships tried to approximate area, range, bearings, and maneuvers as close as possible to those expected on D-Day,[33] the destroyer squadron joined the assault echelons for the move to the objective.

FINAL PREPARATIONS[34]

Major General Allen H. Turnage's 3d Marine Division was a well-trained, albeit inexperienced, outfit, a fusion of a number of combat teams and supporting troops. Three infantry regiments—the 3d, 9th, and 21st Marines—together with the 12th Marines (artillery) and the 19th Marines (engineers and Seabees) formed the nucleus for the division which was first assembled as a unit in May 1943. To these major commands was added a number of service and support groups—tanks, special weapons, amphibian tractors, motor transport, signal, and medical battalions. With a background of extensive jungle warfare training in Samoa and Guadalcanal, the 3d Marine Division was fully expected to be capable of meeting the rigors of the Bougainville operation.

The missions assigned the 3d Marine Division were an extension of IMAC tasks: capture or destroy enemy forces in the area; establish a beachhead in the Cape Torokina area about 2,250 yards inland and about 7,350 yards wide to include the two small islands offshore; commence selection of airfield sites and construction of air strips; establish long-range radar points and an advance naval base to include operating facilities for torpedo boats; expand the beachhead on corps order.

After Turnage had been alerted to the major role of the division in the forthcoming landings,[35] the task organization as-

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[32] CTF OpO No. A15-43, dtd 18Oct43, Anx A (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC); Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support," pp. 61-62.

[33] ComDesDiv 90 AR of 1Nov43, dtd 14Jan44 (COA, NHD).

[34] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IIIPhibFor AR; IMAC AR-1;* 3d MarDiv AR, 1-11 Nov43, dtd 18Dec43, hereafter *3d MarDiv AR; HistDiv Acct;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Aurthur and Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist.*

[35] CG, IMAC ltr of Instrn to CG, 3d MarDiv, dtd 27Sep43.

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signed to the division grew rapidly with the addition of a number of corps troops and provisional battalions, some of them still in the process of forming. The major attachments were the 2d and 3d Raider Battalions, now joined in a provisional regiment, and the 3d Defense Battalion. As expected, the combat experience of these corps and division forces varied. Elements of the 2d Raider Battalion had raided Makin Island in 1942 before going to Guadalcanal, and the 3d Defense Battalion was battle-tested at Tulagi and Guadalcanal. But the rest of the IMAC force—with the exception of the 37th Division—were without prior experience. The Army division, however, had been blooded in the Munda campaign.

Early in October, the diverse elements of IMAC and the 3d Marine Division were assembled at Guadalcanal where the task of welding them into landing teams began. The three task units were based on the reinforced 3d and 9th Marines and the 3d Defense Battalion. Task Unit A–1, four landing teams comprising the 3d Marines and the 2d Raider Battalion, was assigned six beaches in the vicinity of Cape Torokina. Task Unit A–2 (9th Marines) was scheduled to land over five beaches on the left (northwest) flank, with the Marine 3d Raider Battalion, attached to the 9th Marines, to go ashore on Puruata Island. Task Unit A–3, the antiaircraft batteries of the 3d Defense Battalion and supporting troops, was to land behind the assault troops in each sector. Each task unit included artillery, air liaison and signal personnel, engineers, and naval base construction troops. As directed, every landing team was self-sustaining and self-supporting until the division as a whole could be consolidated behind the contemplated force beachhead line.[36]

The 21st Marines plus the remaining artillery units and supporting troops were formed into task units which would be brought to the objective area after D plus 3 days. By 7 November, all elements of the 3d Marine Division would be ashore with the last increments of the IMAC headquarters troops slated for arrival by 15 November. The first unit of the 37th Infantry Division—the 148th Combat Team—was to be unloaded starting 7 November with the remaining combat teams—the 129th and the 145th—scheduled to be on Bougainville by 22 November. In all, an additional 13,000 troops and another 26,672 tons of cargo were to be brought to the Torokina beachhead to reinforce and resupply the assault elements.[37] Originally these echelons were to be transported by LSTs and APDs, but later Allied sea and air victories permitted the continued use of the larger APAs and AKAs in reinforcing the Bougainville beachhead.

With only limited shipping space available to the combat troops, the assault echelons carried only enough supplies—three units of fire, B-rations, and fuel—to continue operations ashore for 10 days. The rest of the allotted cargo space contained additional ammunition, rations, fuel, engineering tools, and equipment which could be unloaded quickly if the situation permitted. The heavier equipment and facilities materiel would be

[36] CofS, 3d MarDiv ltr to CO, 3d Mar, dtd 16Oct43.

[37] *IMAC OpO No. 1;* IMAC, Movement of Task Organization, dtd 29Oct43 (Bouvainville Area-OpsFile, HistBr, HQMC); NorFor LoadingOs Nos. 501–43 through 509–43, dtd 12Oct–15Nov43 in *IIIPhibFor Oct-Nov43 WarDs.*

brought ashore in later echelons. The IMAC troops making the initial landings would carry a haversack only; knapsacks and blanket rolls were to be carried ashore with organizational gear. Officers of IMAC and the 3d Marine Division ordered all seabags, cots, and mattresses to be stored at Guadalcanal; and these were never embarked.

The three assault task units and equipment were embarked at Guadalcanal. Task Unit A–1 went on board four transports on 13 October for rehearsals at Efate, and then stood by at Espiritu Santo to await the assembly date. Task Unit A–2, after embarking 18 October on the remaining four transports, also rehearsed the landing operation for four days at Efate before heading back to the Guadalcanal area for the rendezvous. The third task unit continued training and rehearsals at Guadalcanal until 26 October, at which time the troops and equipment were taken on board the four AKAs.[38] The rehearsals indicated that, with a 2,500-yard run to the beach and each ship restricted to about 500 tons, uninterrupted unloading could be accomplished in about 4½ hours.[39] With allowance for time losses by air alerts while underway and during the assault phase, the amphibious force commander was sure that troops and supplies could be ashore before the end of D-Day. On 30 October, the various elements of the Northern Landing Force—transports, cargo ships, mine sweepers, and destroyers—began steaming toward the rendezvous point off Guadalcanal for the final run toward Bougainville.

[38] CG, 3d MarDiv ltrs of Instrn, dtd 7Oct43 and 14Oct43 (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC).

[39] ComTransGru, IIIPhibFor, Rept of LandingOps, Empress Augusta Bay area, Bougainville Island, 1–2Nov43, dtd 22Dec43 (Bougainville AreaOpsFile, HistBr, HQMC).

ISOLATING THE TARGET [40]

As Wilkinson's transports and screening elements formed into the main convoy to open the second phase of Operation DIPPER, the final naval bombardment and air strikes aimed at the complete neutralization of Bougainville airfields began. For nearly a month the island's defenders had been on the receiving end of frequent bombing and strafing attacks as a preliminary to the actual landings. The final strikes were calculated to insure negligible air interference by the Japanese during the amphibious assault the next day.

Although the Allied air power was recognized as greater than that which could be mustered by the Japanese in the area, the fact that the Allies were moving closer to the main enemy strength was an equalizing factor. Late September estimates placed the Japanese air strength in the Northern Solomons at about 154 planes, or less than ⅓ of the estimated 476 in the Rabaul-Bougainville area. Against this number, the Allied air command—ComAirSols—could ante 728 planes of all

[40] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MarCorpsBd Study and Evaluation of AirOps Affecting the USMC during the War With Japan, dtd 31Dec45 (HistBr, HQMC); *ComSoPac Oct43 WarD; ThirdFlt NarrRept;* ComAirSols StrikeComd WarD, 26Jul–19Nov43, dtd 17Jan44 (COA, NHD), hereafter *StrikeComd WarD;* ComAirSols IntelSec Repts for Oct43, n.d. (COA, NHD); *IIIPhibFor AR; IMAC AR–I; HistDiv Acct; SE Area NavOps—III;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Sherrod, *MarAirHist.*

types. This composite group included 14 Marine Corps squadrons with 181 planes, 19 Navy squadrons with 274 planes, 16 Army squadrons with 216 planes, and 3 New Zealand squadrons with 57 planes. By mid-October, at least 314 fighters and 317 bombers were being directed against the enemy bases. The recent acquisition of airfields on New Georgia and Vella Lavella was a decided asset to ComAirSols operations; for, although most of the bombers were still based on Guadalcanal and the Russells, nearly all of the fighter strength had been moved forward within striking distance of Bougainville. This included 31 fighters and 148 bombers at Munda, 103 fighters at nearby Ondonga, 48 at Segi, and 60 at Barakoma.

The air activity over Bougainville had steadily increased as D-Day moved closer. During the month of October, ComAirSols planes ranged northward on 21 of the 31 days in raids that ranged from tree-level strafing runs by torpedo and scout bombers and fighter planes to high-level bombing attacks by B–24s and B–25s. As the month neared its end, intermittent attacks became almost daily occurrences to the beleaguered Japanese defenders. Kahili and Kara were hit most often, 23 times and 17 times respectively, but Buka, Ballale, Kieta, and the Treasurys also were raked and cratered by Allied planes. Choiseul, too, was rocked occasionally by ComAirSols craft with Choiseul Bay and the Kakasa submarine base the favorite targets.

By 18 October, jubilant aviators had reported that Ballale's airfield was "pulverized."[41] Photographs verified their claims by showing 98 bomb craters on the runway, 23 of them in the center of the strip. By the 22d, Kahili was likewise inoperable. A week later, Ballale was hit again, and the enemy's repair work rendered ineffective. Postwar enemy records also attest to the attention given the enemy airfields by ComAirSols. The Japanese admitted that, just prior to the invasion, the airfields on Bougainville were useless.

Rabaul, too, was feeling the sting of Allied bombings. General Kenney's Allied Air Forces, committed by General MacArthur to lend all assistance to the neutralization of Rabaul by air, roared out of New Guinea bases on 12 October to slug Simpson Harbor and the Rabaul airfields with a 349-plane raid. This blast was encored by an equally large attempt six days later, but this time bad weather closed in over New Britain and only 54 bombers completed their mission. Daylight attacks by fighter-bomber groups were repeated on the 20th, 24th, and 25th of October. Kenney's fliers insisted that the bombings had crippled Rabaul, and optimistic reports of damage inflicted and enemy aircraft destroyed were relayed to the invasion forces. Later assessments, however, discounted these evaluations. Far from being a smoking ruin, the Japanese stronghold with its five airfields was still very much operational and still a factor to be reckoned with in the Bougainville seizure.

As a matter of record, however, the SoWesPac bombers did considerable damage to enemy installations and considerably reduced the Japanese ability to strike at the Bougainville assault forces. Further, this damage was accomplished on restricted targets in the face of hot receptions by enemy fighter craft and accurate antiaircraft defenses. Unfortunately, foul weather near D-Day prevented the

[41] *StrikeComd WarD*, 18Oct43.

Allied Air Forces from continuing their attacks which would have further diverted the Japanese attention from the Bougainville landings. As it turned out, the SoWesPac fliers were able to strike another solid blow against Rabaul only after the IMAC troops were already ashore at Cape Torokina.

As part of ComSoPac's program to stun the Bougainville defenses during the initial stages of the operation, the supporting task forces of Admirals Merrill and Sherman took up the cudgel for a whack at the Japanese airfields prior to D-Day. Merrill, with four light cruisers and eight destroyers, steamed close inshore to the Buka Passage shortly after midnight, 31 October–1 November, to rake Buka and Bonis airfields with a 30-minute bombardment. The gunfire was given added accuracy by the spotting reports from two ComAirSols planes overhead. The task force then retired, harassed but unscathed by enemy planes. Two hours and 60 miles later, the Buka flames were still visible to the task force.

Merrill was barely out of the neighborhood before Sherman arrived in the area with the carriers *Saratoga* and *Princeton*, escorted by 2 light cruisers and 10 destroyers. Undetected by several enemy flights, the carrier planes took off and dropped an additional 20 tons of bombs on the two airfields before the carrier task force retired unopposed and unchallenged. Admiral Merrill, meanwhile, was completing the second part of his mission. The already-riddled airstrip at Ballale was shelled by his task force, as was Faisi and several of the smaller islands. Still unopposed, Merrill's force headed for Vella Lavella to refuel and rearm, satisfied that the supporting bombardments had successfully launched the assault on Bougainville.

Diversionary Assaults

TREASURY ISLAND LANDINGS [42]

If the initial plans for the direct assault on the Buin area or the Shortlands had been carried out, the two small islands of the Treasury Group would have been bypassed and left in the backwash of the campaign. Instead, with the change in plans to strike directly at Empress Augusta Bay, the islands of Mono and Stirling became important as long-range radar sites and torpedo boat anchorages. Moreover, in an attempt to deceive the enemy as to the direction of the attack on Bougainville and convince him that the ultimate Allied aim might be the Buin area or the Shortlands, the seizure of the Treasurys was given added emphasis by being set as a preliminary to the Torokina landings. To help this deception succeed, reconnaissance patrols to the Shortlands and diversionary operations on the island of Choiseul—plus low-flying photo missions over the Shortlands—were scheduled by IMAC to increase the enemy's conviction that the follow-up objective was the Shortlands.

This could have been a natural assumption by the enemy. The Treasurys are about 60 miles northwest of Vella Lavella and only 18 miles south of the Shortlands. While the size of the Treasurys limited consideration as a major target, Mono and Stirling were close enough to Shortland Island to cause the Japanese some concern that they might be used as handy stepping stones by SoPac forces. But then again, the Treasurys are only 75 miles from Cape Torokina—a fact which the Allies hoped might be lost on Bougainville's defenders.

The Treasury Islands are typical of other small islands jutting out of the sea in the Solomons chain. Mono is a thickly forested prominence of volcanic origin, with abrupt peaks and hill masses more than 1,000 feet high in the southern part. These heights slope gradually in an ever-widening fan to the west, north, and east coasts. The shores are firm, with few swamps, and rain waters drain rapidly through deep gorges. The island is small, about four miles north to south and less than seven miles lengthwise.

Stirling Island to the south is smaller, more misshapen. Fairly level, this island is about four miles long and varies from 300 yards to nearly a mile in width. There

[42] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Oct–Nov43 WarDs; ThirdFlt NarrRept; IMAC AR–I;* IMAC C–2 Repts, 27Oct–13Dec43 (Bougainville Area OpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *IMAC C–2 Repts;* IMAC C–2 Jnl, 27Oct–27Nov43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *IMAC C–2 Jnl;* IMAC D–2 MiscRepts (Treasury Is), 27Oct43, dtd 10Nov43 (TreasuryIs AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 8(NZ) BrigGru Rept on Ops, TreasuryIs (Op GOODTIME), dtd 30Nov43 (TreasuryIs AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 8(NZ) BrigGru OpO No. 1, Op GOODTIME, dtd 21Oct43 (TreasuryIs AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); ONI, *Combat Narrative XII*: Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support;" Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier.*

are several small, brackish lakes inland, but the island is easily traversed and, once cleared of its covering forest, would be an excellent site for an airfield. Between these two islands is a mile or more of deep, sheltered water—one of the many anchorages in the Solomon Islands to bear the name Blanche Harbor. The combination of these features—airfield site, radar points, good anchorage—was the factor which resulted in the seizure of the Treasurys as part of the Bougainville operation.

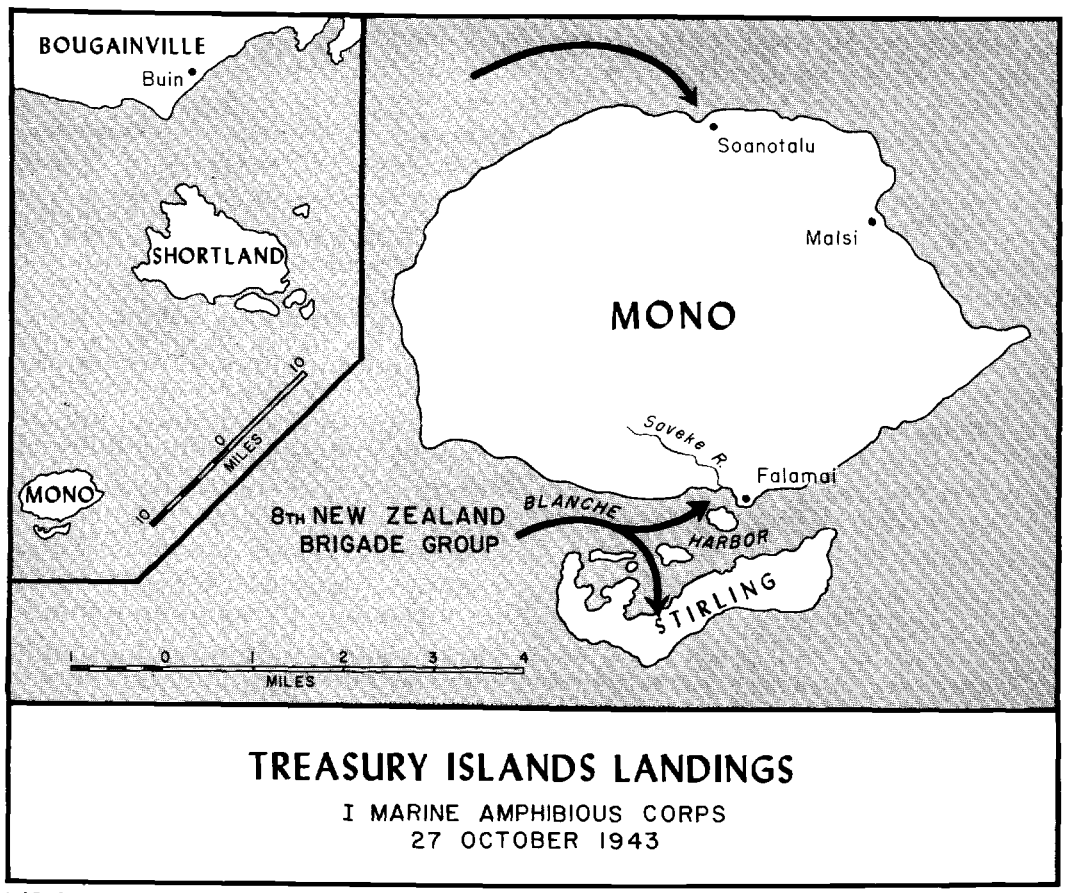
Early information about the islands was obtained by an IMAC patrol which spent six days in the Treasurys in August, scouting the area, observing the movement of the Japanese defenders, and interrogating the natives. In this latter instance, the loyal and friendly people of the Treasurys were a remarkable contrast to the suspicious and hostile Bougainville inhabitants. Additional details were received from rescued aviators who found Mono Island a safe hiding place after their planes had been forced down by damage incurred in raids over Buin and the Shortlands. This first-hand intelligence was augmented by aerial photographs. The reports and photos indicated that the best landing beaches were inside Blanche Harbor, on opposite shores of Mono and Stirling. The only beaches suitable for LSTs, however, were on Mono between the Saveke River and a small promontory, Falamai Point.

As limited as this information was, the amount of intelligence on the enemy dispositions on the two islands was even more meager. The Japanese strength was estimated at 135 men, lightly armed. These were bivouacked near Falamai but maintained a radio station and observation posts in various areas. Natives reported that much of the time the Japanese moved about Mono armed only with swords or hand guns. Stirling Island was apparently undefended.

The 8th New Zealand Brigade Group, attached to I Marine Amphibious Corps for the seizure and occupation of these islands, arrived at Guadalcanal from New Caledonia in mid-September. Although the New Zealanders would form the bulk of the assault troops, the GOODTIME operation was IMAC-directed and IMAC-supported. The landing force comprised about 7,700 officers and men, of whom about 1,900 were from I Marine Amphibious Corps support troops—antiaircraft artillery, construction battalions, signal, and boat pool personnel. Marines attached to the brigade task organization included a detachment from the IMAC Signal Battalion and an air-ground liaison team from General Harris' ComAirNorSols headquarters.

On 28 September, Brigadier Row, the landing force commander, was informed of the general nature of the GOODTIME operation, and planning in conjunction with Admiral Fort began immediately, although there was only enough information available to the commanders of the task group and the landing force to formulate a plan in broad outline. The task was far from easy, for the Southern Force was confronted with the same logistical and transportation problems that faced the Empress Augusta Bay operation.

Fort and Row decided that the main assault would be made in the area of Falamai, where beaches were suitable for LSTs. Stirling Island would be taken concurrently for artillery positions. No other landings were planned; but after Row was informed that the long-range radar would have to be positioned on the northern side of Mono to be of benefit to



MAP 12

the Bougainville operation, another landing at Soanotalu on the north coast was written into the plans.

Final shipping allocation to Fort's Southern Force included 31 ships of six different types—8 APDs, 8 LCIs, 2 LSTs, and 3 LCTs for landing troops and supplies, 8 LCMs and 2 APCs for heavy equipment and cargo. The limited troop and cargo capacity of this collection of ships and landing craft restricted the Southern Force's ability to put more than a minimum of troops and supplies ashore initially, but this problem was solved by reducing the strength of the brigade's battalions and limiting the number of artillery weapons, motor transport, and engineering equipment in the first echelon. The brigade's assault units included 3,795 troops with 1,785 tons of supplies and equipment. Succeeding echelons were scheduled to sail forward at intervals of five days.

The final plans, issued by Row's headquarters on 21 October, directed the 29th and 36th Battalions to land nearly abreast near Falami Point, with the 34th Battalion landing on Stirling Island. Simultaneously, a reinforced infantry company accompanied by radar personnel and Sea-

bees would go ashore at Soanotalu in the north. The two battalions on Mono would then drive across the island to link up with the Soanotalu landing force while naval base construction got underway at Stirling.

The initial landings in Blanche Harbor were to be covered by a naval gunfire support group of two destroyers, the *Pringle* and *Philip*. Liaison officers of IMAC planned the gunfire support, as the New Zealand officers had no experience in this phase of operations. While the brigade group expected to have no trouble in seizing the islands, the naval support was scheduled to cover any unforeseen difficulties. The gunfire plan called for the two destroyers to fire preparation salvos from the entrance to Blanche Harbor before moving in toward the beaches with the landing waves to take targets under direct fire. The IIIPhibFor, however, took a dim view of risking destroyers in such restricted waters. The desired close-in support mission was then assigned to the newly devised LCI(G)—gunboats armed with three 40mm, two 20mm, and five .50 caliber machine guns—which were making their first appearance in combat. Two of these deadly landing craft were to accompany the assault waves to the beaches.

After one final practice landing on Florida Island, the brigade group began loading supplies and embarking troops for the run to the target area. Admiral Fort's Southern Force was divided into five transport groups under separate commanders, and these groups departed independently when loaded. The slower LSTs and LCMs left first, on the 23d and 24th of October, and were followed the next day by the LCIs. The APDs sailed on 26 October

The Southern Force departed with a message which delighted the New Zealanders as typical of the remarks to which Americans at war seemed addicted: "Shoot calmly, shoot fast, and shoot straight." [2]

At 0540 on the 27th, the seven APDs of the first transport group lay to just outside the entrance to Blanche Harbor and began putting troops over the side into landing craft. Heavy rain and overcast weather obscured the beaches, but the pre-assault bombardment by the *Pringle* and *Philip* began on schedule. The USS *Eaton* moved to the harbor's mouth and took up station as fighter-director ship as the destroyers registered on Mono Island. The firing was accomplished without assistance of an air spotter, who later reported radio failure at the critical moment. This probably accounts for the disappointing results of the preparatory bombardments, which proved to be of little value except to boost the morale of the assault troops. The *Pringle's* fire was later declared to be too far back of the beach area to be helpful, and the bombardment by the *Philip* left a great deal to be desired in accuracy, timing, and quantity.

A fighter cover of 32 planes arrived promptly on station over the Treasurys at 0600, and, under this protective screen, the assault waves formed into two columns for the dash through Blanche Harbor to the beaches. Unexpectedly, enemy machine gun fire from Falamai and Stirling greeted the assault boats as they ploughed through the channel. At 0623, just three minutes before the landing craft nosed into the beaches on opposite sides of the harbor, the pre-assault cannonading ceased; and the two LCI gunboats—one on each

[2] Quoted in Gillespie, *New Zealand History*, p. 148.

flank of the assault wave—took over the task of close support for the landing forces. At least one 40mm twin-mount gun, several machine guns, and several enemy bunkers were knocked out by the accurate fire of these two ships. Promptly at 0626, the announced H-Hour, New Zealand troops went ashore on Mono and Stirling.

At Falamai, the 29th and 36th Battalions moved inland quickly against light rifle and machine gun fire, mostly from the high ground near the Saveke River. Casualties in the first wave were light—one New Zealand officer and five sailors wounded—and the second wave had no casualties.

The New Zealanders began to widen the perimeter as more troops were unloaded. At 0735, enemy mortar and medium artillery fire registered on the beach area, causing a number of casualties and disrupting unloading operations. Both LSTs were hit, with one ship reporting 2 dead and 18 wounded among the sailors and soldiers aboard. The other ship reported 12 wounded. Source of the enemy fire could not be determined. The *Eaton*, with Admiral Fort on board, ignored a previous decision not to enter Blanche Harbor and resolutely steamed between the two islands. This venture ended, however, when enemy planes were reported on the way, and the *Eaton* reversed course to head for more maneuvering room outside the harbor. Assured that the air raid was a false alarm, the destroyer returned to Blanche Harbor and added its salvos to those of the LCI gunboats. This fire, directed at likely targets, abruptly ended the Japanese exchange.

By 1800, the two battalions had established a perimeter on Mono Island and were dug in, trying to find some comfort in a dismal rain which had begun again after a clear afternoon. Evacuation of casualties began with the departure of the LSTs. With the exception of one LST, which still had 34 tons of supplies aboard when it retracted, all ships and landing craft had been unloaded and were on their way back to Guadalcanal by the end of D-Day. The casualties were 21 New Zealanders killed and 70 wounded, 9 Americans killed and another 15 wounded.

The landings at Stirling and Soanotalu were uneventful and without opposition. There were no casualties at either beachhead. At Stirling, the 34th Battalion immediately began active patrolling as soon as the command was established ashore. The Soanotalu landings proceeded in a similarly unhindered manner. A perimeter was established quickly, and bulldozers immediately went to work constructing a position for the radar equipment which was to arrive the next day.

The fighter cover throughout the day had shielded the troops ashore from enemy air attacks. The escorting destroyers, however, were hit by an enemy force of 25 medium and dive bombers at about 1530, and the USS *Cony* took two hits. Eight crewmen were killed and 10 wounded. The fire from the destroyer screen and the fighter cover downed 12 of the enemy planes. That night the bombers returned to pound the Mono Island side of Blanche Harbor and, in two raids, killed two New Zealanders and wounded nine.

Action along the Falamai perimeter the night of 27 October was concentrated mainly on the left flank near the Saveke River, the former site of the Japanese headquarters, and several attacks were beaten back. The following day, patrols moved forward of the perimeter seeking

the enemy, and one reinforced company set out cross-country to occupy the village of Malsi on the northeast coast. There was little contact. Japanese ground activity on the night of the 28th was light, and enemy air activity was limited to one low-level strafing attack and several quick bombing raids—all without damage to the brigade group.

By 31 October, the entire situation was stable. The perimeter at Falamai was secure, Malsi had been occupied without opposition, and radar equipment at Soanotalu had been installed and was in operation. With the arrival of the second echelon on 1 November, the New Zealanders began an extensive sweep of the island to search out all remaining enemy troops on the island. The going was rough in the high, rugged mountain areas, but, by 5 November, enemy stragglers in groups of 10 to 12 had been tracked down and killed. The New Zealanders lost one killed and four wounded in these mop-up operations.

Undisturbed for some time, the perimeter at Soanotalu was later subjected to a number of sharp attacks, each one growing in intensity. The Soanotalu force was struck first on 29 October by small groups of Japanese who were trying to reach the beach after traveling across the island from Falamai. These attacks continued throughout the afternoon until a final charge by about 20 Japanese was hurled back. Construction of the radar station continued throughout the fighting. Enemy contact on the next two days was light, and the first radar station was completed and a second one begun.

On the night of 1 November, a strong force of about 80 to 90 Japanese suddenly struck the perimeter in an organized attack, apparently determined to break through the New Zealand defense to seize a landing craft and escape the island. The fight, punctuated by grenade bursts and mortar fire, raged for nearly five hours in the darkness. One small group of enemy penetrated the defenses as far as the beach before being destroyed by a command group. About 40 Japanese were killed in the attack. The Soanotalu defenders lost one killed and nine wounded. The following night, 2 November, another attempt by a smaller Japanese force was made and this attack was also beaten back. This was the last organized assault on the Soanotalu force, and the remainder of the Japanese on the island were searched out and killed by the New Zealand patrols striking overland.

By 12 November, the New Zealanders had occupied the island. Japanese dead counted in the various actions totaled 205; the New Zealanders took 8 prisoners. It is doubtful that any Japanese escaped the island by native canoe or swimming. In addition, all enemy weapons, equipment, and rations on the island were captured. The Allied casualties in this preliminary to the Bougainville operation were 40 New Zealanders killed and 145 wounded. Twelve Americans were killed and 29 wounded.

During the period of fighting on Mono Island, activity on Stirling was directed toward the establishment of supply dumps, the building of roads, and the construction of advance naval base and boat pool facilities. Although several minor enemy air raids damaged installations in the early phases of the operation, the landing at Empress Augusta Bay diverted the attention of the enemy to that area and ended all Japanese attempts to destroy the force in the Treasurys.

RAID ON CHOISEUL ISLAND[3]

If the Japanese had opportunity to speculate on the significance of the Treasurys invasion, the problem may have been complicated a few hours later by a landing of an Allied force on the northwest coast of Choiseul Island, just 45 miles from the southeastern coast of Bougainville. The landing was another ruse to draw Japanese attention from the Treasurys, point away from the Allies' general line of attack, and divert the enemy's interest—if not effort—toward the defense of another area. More specifically, the Choiseul diversion was calculated to convince the Japanese that the southern end of Bougainville was in imminent danger of attack from another direction. The salient facts which the Allies hoped to conceal were that the real objective was Empress Augusta Bay, and that the Choiseul landing force consisted only of a reinforced battalion of Marine parachute troops.

Actually, the raid on Choiseul was a small-scale enactment of landing plans which had been discarded earlier. Choiseul was considered as a possible objective for the main Northern Solomons attack; but when the decision was made that the Allied attack would strike directly amidships on the western coast of Bougainville, the Choiseul idea was dropped. Then, when the suggestion was advanced by Major James C. Murray, IMAC Staff Secretary, that, because of the size and location of Choiseul, a feint toward that island might further deceive the Japanese as to the Allies' intentions, the diversionary raid was added to the Northern Solomons operation.

Choiseul is one of the islands forming the eastern barrier to The Slot; and as one of the Solomon Islands, it shares the high rainfall total, the uniform high heat and humidity common to other islands of the chain. About 80 miles long and 20 miles wide at the widest point, Choiseul is joined by reefs at the southern end of two small islands (Rob Roy and Wagina) which seems to extend Choiseul's length another 20 miles. The big island is not as rugged as Bougainville and the mountain peaks are not as high, but Choiseul is fully as overgrown and choked with rank, impenetrable jungle and rain forest. The mountain ranges in the center of the island extend long spurs and ridges toward the coasts, thus effectively dividing the island into a series of large compartments. The beaches, where existent, vary from wide, sandy areas to narrow, rocky shores with heavy foliage growing almost to the water's edge. Other compartments end in high, broken cliffs, pounded by the sea.

The island was populated by nearly 5,000 natives, most of whom (before the war) were under the teachings of missionaries of various faiths. With the exception of a small minority, these natives remained militantly loyal to the Australian government and its representatives. As a result,

[3] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Oct–Nov43 WarD;* SoPacFor CIC, Study of Choiseul Island, dtd 19Sep43 (Choiseul AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); *IIIPhibFor AR; IMAC AR–I,* Anx Q, BLISSFUL; *IMAC C–2 Jnl;* IMAC OpO No. 2, dtd 22Oct43 (Choiseul AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); CO, 2d ParaBn, PrelimRept, Op BLISSFUL, dtd 5Nov43 (Choiseul AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 2d ParaBn UnitJnl, 27Oct–4Nov43 (Choiseul AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 2d ParaBn OpO No. 1, dtd 23Oct43 (Choiseul AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); MajGen Victor A. Krulak ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 17Oct60, hereafter *Krulak ltr;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War.*

coastwatching activities on Choiseul were given valuable assistance and protection.

Combat intelligance about the island was obtained by patrols which scouted various areas. One group, landed from a PT boat on the southwest coast of Choiseul, moved northward along The Slot side of the island toward the Japanese base at Kakasa before turning inland. After crossing the island to the coastwatcher station at Kanaga, the patrol was evacuated by a Navy patrol bomber on 12 September after six days on the island.

Two other patrols, comprising Marines, naval officers, and New Zealanders, scouted the northern end of the island and Choiseul Bay for eight days (22–30 September) before being withdrawn. Their reports indicated that the main enemy strength was at Kakasa where nearly 1,000 Japanese were stationed and Choiseul Bay where another 300 troops maintained a barge anchorage. Several fair airfield sites were observed near Choiseul Harbor, and a number of good beaches suitable for landing purposes were marked. Japanese activity, the patrols noted, was generally restricted to Kakasa and Choiseul Bay.[4]

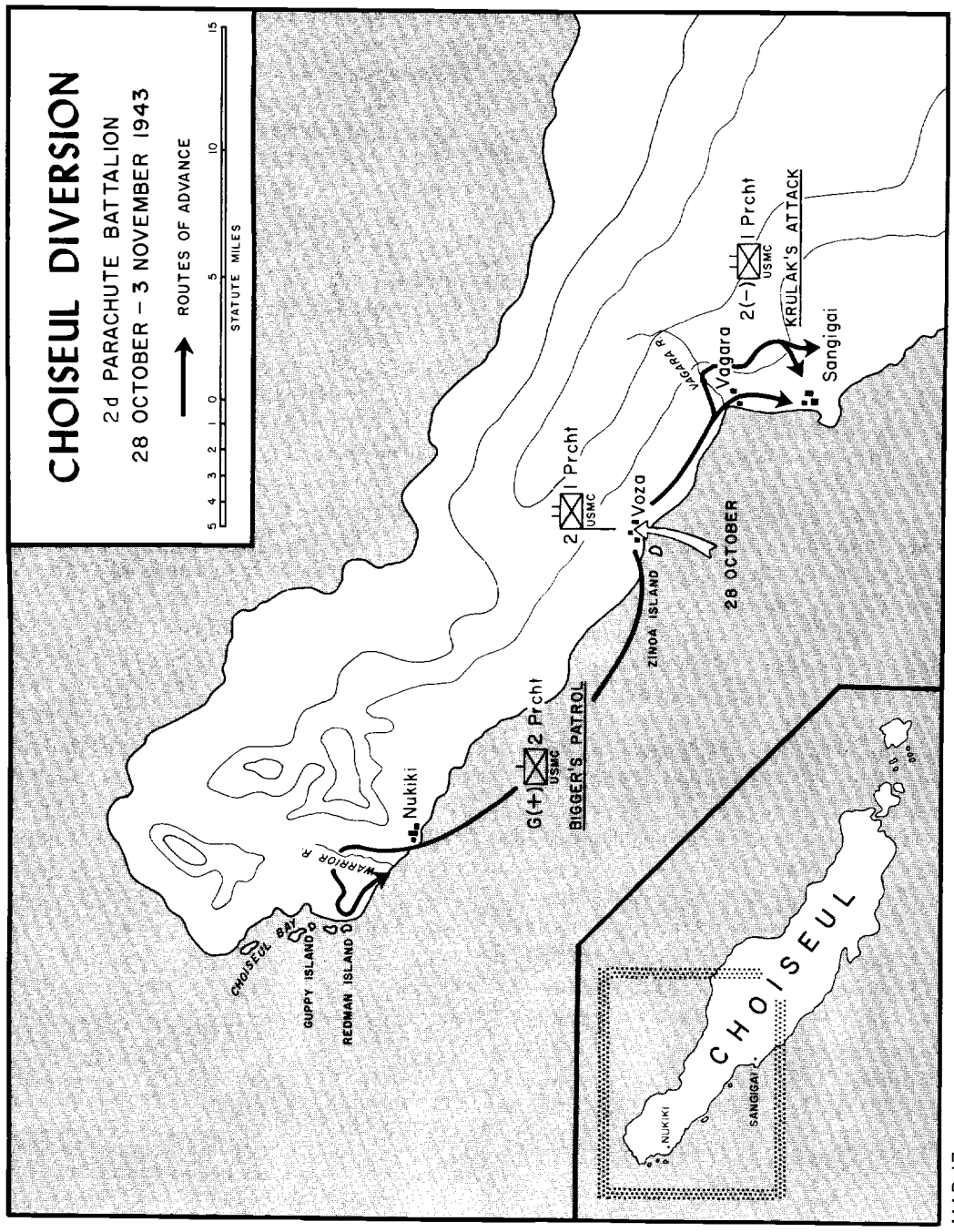
During the enemy evacuation of the Central Solomons, Choiseul bridged the gap between the New Georgia Group and Bougainville. The retreating Japanese, deposited by barges on the southern end of Choiseul, moved overland along the coast to Choiseul Bay where the second half of the barge relay to Bougainville was completed. This traffic was checked and reported upon by two active coastwatchers, Charles J. Waddell and Sub-Lieutenant C. W. Seton, Royal Australian Navy, who maintained radio contact with Guadalcanal.

Seton, on 13 October, reported the southern end of Choiseul free of Japanese, but added that at least 3,000 to 4,000 enemy had passed Bambatana Mission about 35 miles south of Choiseul Bay. On 19 October, the coastwatcher reported that the enemy camps in the vicinity of Choiseul Bay and Sangigai (about 10 miles north of Bambatana Mission) held about 3,000 Japanese who were apparently waiting for barge transportation to Bougainville. Seton indicated that the Japanese were disorganized, living in dispersed huts, and were short of rations. They had looted native gardens and searched the jungle for food. Further, the Japanese were edgy. All trails had been blocked, security had been tightened, and sentries fired into the jungle at random sounds.[5]

After this information was received at IMAC headquarters, Vandegrift and Wilkinson decided that a diversionary raid on Choiseul would be staged. On 20 October, Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams, commanding the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, and the commanding officer of his 2d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Victor H. Krulak, were summoned from Vella Lavella to Guadalcanal. At IMAC headquarters, Williams and Krulak conferred with Vandegrift and his staff. The orders to Krulak were simple: Get ashore on Choiseul and make as big a demonstration as possible to convince the

[4] IMAC Patrol Rept. on Choiseul Bay, 22–30Sep43, dtd 4Oct43; 3d MarDiv Rept of Patrol to Kakasa, 6–13Sep43, dtd 16Sep43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC).

[5] The Japanese uneasiness had an excellent basis. Sub-Lieutenant Seton "had organized 25 natives into a quasi-military force, armed them (Japanese weapons) and, on 2 October, ambushed an [enemy] group in a landing craft, killing seven." *Krulak ltr.*


CHOISEUL DIVERSION
2d PARACHUTE BATTALION
28 OCTOBER – 3 NOVEMBER 1943
ROUTES OF ADVANCE
STATUTE MILES
5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15
CHOISEUL BAY
GUPPY ISLAND
REDMAN ISLAND
WARRIOR R.
Nukiki
G(+) 2 Prcht USMC
BIGGER'S PATROL
2 I Prcht USMC
ZINOA ISLAND
Voza
28 OCTOBER
Vagara
2(–) I Prcht USMC
KRULAK'S ATTACK
Sangigai
CHOISEUL
NUKIKI
SANGIGAI

MAP 13

Japanese that a major landing was in progress. In addition, reconnaissance would be conducted to determine possible sites for a torpedo boat patrol base.

The IMAC operation order, giving the code name BLISSFUL to the Choiseul diversion, was issued on 22 October. Based on information and recommendations from Seton, the Marines' landing was set for the beaches in the vicinity of Voza village, about midway between Choiseul Bay and Bambatana Mission. There the beaches were good, friendly natives would help the invading forces, and there reportedly were no enemy troops. Moreover, it was firmly astride the main route of evacuation of the Japanese stragglers from Kolombangara and points south. After receiving the order, Krulak went to the airstrip on Guadalcanal, and, while waiting for a plane to take him back to his command, wrote out the operation order for his battalion's landing.

This was to be the first combat operation of the 2d Battalion as well as its first amphibious venture. Although equipped and trained for special assignments behind enemy lines, these Marines—known as Paramarines to their comrades—never chuted into action because suitable objectives were usually beyond the range of airborne troops and the necessary transport planes were in chronically short supply. The 1st Parachute Battalion, however, had taken Gavutu and Tanambogo Islands before going to Guadalcanal to take part in the defense of the airfield there in 1942. This battalion had then formed the nucleus for the present 1st Parachute Regiment, now consisting of three battalions in IMAC reserve at Vella Lavella. Each battalion, of three rifle companies each, was armed with a preponderance of light automatic and semi-automatic weapons. The nine-man squads in Lieutenant Colonel Krulak's rifle platoons carried three Johnson light machine guns[6] and six Johnson semi-automatic rifles; each company had, in addition, six 60mm mortars.

Krulak's return to his command set off a flurry of near-frenzied activity, since the battalion had a minimum of time for preparation. For the next four days, officers and men worked almost around the clock to assemble equipment, make final plans, and brief themselves on the task ahead. On the 24th, Coastwatcher Seton and two of his native guides arrived at Vella Lavella to meet Krulak's officers and men and give them last-minute information. After being briefed by Seton, Krulak requested and was given authority by IMAC to operate in any direction on Choiseul, if consistent with his mission.

Equipment and supplies for the operation were pre-sorted into four stacks; and late on the afternoon of the 27th of October the parachute battalion and its gear was embarked on board eight LCMs borrowed from the Vella Lavella boat pool. Krulak's three companies were reinforced by a communications platoon, a regimental weapons company with mortars and light machine guns, and a detachment from an experimental rocket platoon (bazookas and rockets) from IMAC. Total battalion strength was 30 officers and 626 men. In addition, one naval officer accompanied the battalion for reconnaissance purposes related to the possible establishment of a torpedo boat base.

At dusk, when four APDs which had just completed the Treasury landings ar-

[6] "The Johnson light machine gun was more an auto-rifle than a machine gun; more a machine gun than the BAR." *Ibid.*

rived off Vella Lavella, the troops and equipment were transferred from the LCMs to the *McKean*, *Crosby*, *Kilty*, and *Ward* in a quick operation that was completed in less than 45 minutes. The destroyer division, with the USS *Conway* acting as escort, sailed from Vella Lavella at 1921. The *Conway*'s radar would locate the landing point in the dark.

Moving in column through the night, the convoy was sighted shortly after 2300 by an enemy snooper plane which dropped one bomb, scoring a near miss on the last APD in line. Shortly before midnight, at a point some 2,000 yards off the northwest coast of Choiseul, the convoy stopped, and a reconnaissance party in a rubber boat headed toward shore to scout the landing area. A signal light was to be shown if no enemy defenders were encountered. While waiting for the signal, Krulak ordered Companies F and G into the landing boats.

After waiting until 0019 (28 October), Company F headed toward the beach with Company G close behind. The operation order had directed Company G to make the initial assault, but the APDs had drifted apart and the *Kilty* with Company F embarked was closer to shore. Since no light on shore was yet discernible, the Marines expected opposition. The landing, however, was uneventful, and the patrol was waiting on shore. Observers on ship reported later that the light was visible at 0023, just four minutes after the parachute companies began the run for the beach. After setting the troops ashore, the landing craft immediately returned to the transports to bring in a load of supplies.[7]

A lone enemy plane detected the *Conway* standing patrol duty seaward, and dropped two bombs near the ship. The *Conway*, reluctant to draw attention to the landing, did not return the fire, and the enemy plane droned away. An Allied escort plane, assigned to protect the convoy against such attacks, drew considerable criticism, however, for not remaining low enough to spot such bombing runs.

Two hours after arrival in the area, the convoy reversed course and steamed back to Vella Lavella, leaving behind four landing craft (LCP(R)) with their crews for the battalion's use. These craft were dispersed under the cover of overhanging mangroves near the offshore island of Zinoa, and the Marines turned to moving supplies off the beach. Seton, who landed on Choiseul with the battalion, disappeared into the bush and returned almost immediately with a group of native bearers. With their help, the Marines moved into the jungle. The transfer was none too soon; enemy reconnaissance planes appeared at dawn to bomb the area but without success.

Early on the morning of the 28th, a base of operations was established on a high jungle plateau about a mile to the northwest of Voza and outposts were set up on the beach north and south of the village. Security was established and wire communications installed. The plateau, behind natural barriers of rivers and high cliffs, was an ideal defensive spot and a necessary base camp for the heavy radio gear with which IMAC had equipped the parachute battalion.

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[7] DesDiv 44 AR for night of 27–28Oct, Initial Landing of Marine Paratroopers on Choiseul Island, dtd Nov43; USS *Conway* AR, 27–28Oct43, dtd 25Nov43 (Choiseul AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC).

During the day of 28 October, while the Marines established their camp, another enemy flight appeared and raked the beachhead with a strafing and bombing attack. The effect was wasted. The Marines had dispersed; their equipment had been moved; and good camouflage discipline had been observed. Too, the natives had obliterated every sign of a landing at Voza and established a dummy beachhead several miles to the north for the special benefit of Japanese planes seeking a target.

Informed by Seton's guides that the Marine battalion was bivouacked between a barge staging-replenishment base at Sangigai about eight miles to the south and an enemy outpost at the Warrior River about 17 miles to the north, Krulak on the morning of the 29th sent out reconnaissance patrols to the north and south. These groups were to locate trails, scout any enemy dispositions, and become familiar with the area.

Krulak personally led one patrol toward Sangigai, going overland toward the Vagara River which was about halfway between the Marine camp and the enemy base. While part of the patrol headed inland toward the high ground to the rear of Sangigai, to sketch the approaches to the village, the Marine comander led the rest of the patrol to the river. There the hidden Marines silently watched a group of about 10 Japanese unloading a barge; and since this appeared to be an excellent opportunity to announce the aggressive intentions of the Krulak force, the Americans opened fire. Seven of the Japanese were killed, and the barge sunk. Krulak's section then returned to the base, followed shortly by the other half of the patrol. After the attack order was issued, a squad was sent back over the trail to the Vagara to hold a landing point for Krulak's boats and to block the Japanese who might be following the Marines' track. The patrol ran into a platoon of the enemy about three-quarters of a mile from the original Marine landing point and drove the Japanese off.[8]

At 0400 the following morning, 30 October, Krulak led Companies E and F, plus the rocket detachment, toward Voza for an attack on Sangigai. The barge base had been marked as a target since 22 October. To help him in his assault, and give the impression of a larger attacking force, Krulak requested a preparatory air strike on reported Japanese positions northwest of the base. Estimated enemy strength was about 150 defenders, although Seton warned that Sangigai could have been reinforced easily from the southwest since the Marines' landing.

Krulak's attack plans were changed at Voza, however, since one of the four boats had been damaged a few minutes earlier in an attack by Allied planes. The strafing ended when the fighter pilots discovered their error and apologized to the boat crews with a final pass and a clearly visible "thumbs-up" signal. The requested air strike at Sangigai hit at 0610 with better results. While 26 fighters flew escort, 12 TBFs dropped a total of more than two tons of bombs on enemy dispositions.

Unable to use the boats for passage to the Vagara, Krulak ordered his troops to begin a route march overland from Voza. Seton and his native guides led the way, followed by Company F (Captain Spencer H. Pratt) with a section of machine guns

[8] This encounter left Krulak "in no doubt that we needed to go at them quickly, because they were obviously aggressive." *Krulak ltr.*

and the rocket detachment. Company E (Captain Robert E. Manchester) and attached units followed. At about 1100, Japanese outposts on the Vagara opened fire on the Marine column. Brisk return fire from the parachutists forced the enemy pickets to withdraw towards Sangigai.

Following the envelopment plan he had formulated on the 29th, Krulak sent Company E along the coastline to launch an attack on Sangigai from that direction while the remainder of the force, under his command, moved inland to attack from the high ground to the rear and east of Sangigai. The assault was set for 1400, but as that hour drew near, the group in the interior found that it was still a considerable distance from the village. The mountainous terrain, tangled closely by jungle creepers and cut by rushing streams, slowed Krulak's force, and, by H-Hour, the column was still not in position to make its attack effort. When the sound of firing came from the direction of Sangigai village, the second force was still moving towards its designated jump-off point. Seton's natives, however, indicated that the enemy were just ahead.

Company E, moving along the beach, reached its attack position without trouble. Although the assault was delayed a few minutes, the company opened with an effective rocket spread and mortar fire. As the Marines moved forward, the Japanese defenders hastily withdrew, abandoning the base and the village to flee to the high ground inland. The Marine company entered the village without opposition.[9]

The enemy's withdrawal to prepared positions inland fitted perfectly into Krulak's scheme of maneuver. The Japanese moved from the village straight into the fire of Company F, and a pitched battle that lasted for nearly an hour ensued. An enveloping movement by the Marines behind the effective fire of light machine guns forced the Japanese into several uncoordinated *banzai* charges which resulted in further enemy casualties. As the Marines moved once more to turn the enemy's right flank, the Japanese disengaged and about 40 survivors escaped into the jungle. A final count showed 72 enemy bodies in the area. Krulak's force lost four killed. Twelve others, including Krulak and Pratt, were wounded.

Company E, possessors of Sangigai, had been busy in the interim. Manchester's company, using demolitions, destroyed the village, the Japanese base and all enemy supplies, scuttled a new barge, and captured a number of documents, including a chart of enemy mine fields off southern Bougainville. The Marines then withdrew to the Vagara to board the four landing craft (the disabled boat had been repaired) for the return to Voza. Krulak's force, after burying its dead, retraced its path to the Vagara and spent the night in a tight defensive perimeter.[10] Early the

[9] The Marines with Krulak saw the first enemy position "within a few minutes of E Company's opening fire. In this sense, the timing was extremely lucky. Had the enveloping column been 30 minutes slower, the Japs would have gotten away from E Co into the bush. As it was, the sentence in the operation order 'Prevent enemy withdrawal into the mountains' (War Diary—1600 29 Dec) worked out well." *Ibid.*

[10] The original plan was for the boats to make two trips on the 30th, but by the time Company E got back to base it was getting dark. The battalion executive officer cancelled the return trip in view of the dangers of running the boats along the reef shelf at night. Krulak's radio had broken down and so he had no way of learning of this decision, although he guessed that this was the case. Still, it was an anxious night.

next morning, 31 October, the landing craft returned to carry the parachutists to Voza and the base camp.

With the battalion reassembled once more, the Marines prepared ambushes to forestall any Japanese retaliatory attacks, and aggressive patrols were pushed out along the coast to determine if the Japanese were threatening and to keep the enemy off balance and uncertain about Marine strength. A Navy PBY landed near Voza the following day to evacuate the wounded Marines and the captured documents; and, on the same day, in answer to an urgent request by Krulak, 1,000 pounds of rice for the natives and 250 hand grenades and 500 pounds of TNT were air dropped near Voza. Several brisk engagements between opposing patrols were reported on this day, 1 November, but the base camp was not attacked. Seton's natives, however, reported that Sangigai had again been occupied by the Japanese.

After Krulak returned to the base camp on 31 October, his executive officer, Major Warner T. Bigger, led a patrol to Nukiki Village, about 10 miles to the north. No opposition was encountered. On the following day, 1 November, Bigger led 87 Marines from Company G (Captain William H. Day) toward Nukiki again to investigate prior reports of a large enemy installation on the Warrior River. Bigger's instructions were to move from Nukiki across the Warrior River, destroying any enemy or bases encountered, and then move as far north as possible to bring the main Japanese base at Choiseul Bay under 60mm mortar fire. Enemy installations on Guppy Island in Choiseul Bay were an alternate target.

The patrol moved past Nukiki without opposition, although the landing craft carrying the Marines beached continually in the shallow mouth of the Warrior River. Since the sound of the coxswains gunning the boats' motors to clear obstructions was undoubtedly heard by any enemy in the area, Bigger ordered the Marines to disembark. The boats were then sent downriver to be hidden in a cove near Nukiki. Bigger's force, meanwhile, left four men and a radio on the east bank of the river, and all excess gear including demolitions was cached. Mortar ammunition was distributed among all the Marines. The patrol then headed upriver along the east bank, and the Warrior was crossed later at a point considerably inland from the coast.

By midafternoon, the natives leading the patrol confessed to Bigger that they were lost. Although in the midst of a swamp, the Marine commander decided to bivouac in that spot while a smaller patrol retraced the route back to the Warrior River to report to Krulak by radio and to order the boats at Nukiki to return to Voza. In response to Bigger's message, Krulak asked Seton if he had any natives more familiar with the country north of the Warrior River; the only man who had visited the region was sent to guide the lost Marines.

The smaller patrol bivouacked at the radio site on the night of 1–2 November and awoke the next morning to the realization that a Japanese force of about 30 men had slipped between the two Marine groups and that their small camp was virtually surrounded. Stealthily slipping past enemy outposts, the patrol members moved to Nukiki, boarded the boats, and returned to Voza. After hearing the patrol's report, Krulak then radioed IMAC for fighter cover and PT boat support to

withdraw the group from the Choiseul Bay area.

Bigger was unaware of the activity behind him. Intent upon his mission, he decided to continue toward Choiseul Bay. After determining his position, Bigger ordered another small patrol to make its way to the river base camp and radio a request that the boats pick up his force that afternoon, 2 November. This second patrol soon discovered the presence of an enemy force to Bigger's rear, and was forced to fight its way towards Nukiki. This patrol was waiting there when the landing craft returned to Nukiki.

The main force, meanwhile, followed the new guide to the coast and then turned north along the beach toward Choiseul Bay. Opposite Redman Island, a small offshore islet, a four-man Japanese outpost suddenly opened fire. The Marines quickly knocked out this opposition, but one Japanese escaped—undoubtedly to give the alarm.

Because any element of surprise was lost and thinning jungle towards Choiseul Bay provided less protection and cover for an attacking force, Bigger decided to execute his alternate mission of shelling Guppy Island. Jungle vegetation growing down to the edge of the water masked the fire of the 60mm mortars, so Bigger ordered the weapons moved offshore. The shelling of Guppy was then accomplished with the mortars emplaced on the beach with part of the baseplates under water. The enemy supply center and fuel base was hit with 143 rounds of high explosives. Two large fires were observed, one of them obviously a fuel dump. Bigger's force, under return enemy fire, turned around and headed back toward the Warrior River.

The Japanese, attempting to cut off Bigger's retirement, landed troops from barges along the coastline; and the Marine force was under attack four separate times before it successfully reached the Warrior River. There the patrol set up a perimeter on the west bank and waited for the expected boats.

Several men were in the river washing the slime and muck of the jungle march from their clothing when a fusillade of shots from the opposite bank hit the Marine force. The patrol at first thought it was being fired upon by its own base camp, but when display of a small American flag drew increased fire, the Marines dove for cover. Heavy return fire from the Marine side of the river forced the enemy to withdraw. Seizing this opportunity, Bigger directed three Marines to swim across the Warrior to contact the expected boats and warn the rescuers of the ambush. Before the trio could reach the opposite shore, though, the Japanese returned to the fight, and only one survivor managed to return to the Marine perimeter.

Even as the fierce exchange continued, the Marines sighted the four boats making for the Warrior River from the sea. An approaching storm, kicking up a heavy surf, added to the difficulty of rescue. Under cover of the Marines' fire, the landing craft finally beached on the west shore, and the Bigger patrol clambered aboard.

One boat, its motor swamped by surf, drifted toward the enemy shore but was stopped by a coral head. The rescue was completed, though, by the timely arrival of two PT boats—which came on the scene with all guns blazing.[11] While the

[11] One of these boats was commanded by Lieutenant John F. Kennedy, USNR, later the 35th President of the United States. *Krulak ltr.*

patrol boats raked the jungle opposite with 20mm and .50 caliber fire, the Marines transferred from the stalled craft to the rescue ships and all craft then withdrew. A timely rain squall helped shield the retirement. Aircraft from Munda and PT boats provided cover for the return to Voza.

The time for withdrawal of the battalion from Choiseul was near, however, despite the fact that Krulak's force had planned to stay 8–10 days on the island. On 1 November, another strong patrol, one of a series sent out from the Voza camp to keep the enemy from closing in, returned to the Vagara to drive a strong Japanese force back towards Sangigai. From all indications, the Japanese defenders now had a good idea of the size of the Krulak force, and aggressive enemy patrols were slowly closing in on the Marines. Seton's natives on 3 November reported that 800 to 1,000 Japanese were at Sangigai and that another strong force was at Moli Point north of Voza.

After the recovery of the Bigger patrol from Nukiki, IMAC asked Krulak to make a frank suggestion as to whether the original plan should be completed or whether the Marine battalion should be removed. The Cape Torokina operation was well underway by this time, and IMAC added in its message to Krulak that Vandegrift's headquarters considered that the mission of the parachute battalion had been accomplished. Krulak, on 3 November, radioed that the Japanese aggressiveness was forced by their urgent need of the coastal route for evacuation, and that large forces on either side of the battalion indicated that the Japanese were aware of the size of his force and that a strong attack, probably within 48 hours, was likely. The Marine commander stated that he had food for seven days, adequate ammunition, and a strong position; but that if IMAC considered his mission accomplished, he recommended withdrawal.

Commenting later on his situation at this time, Krulak remarked:

> As a matter of fact, I felt we'd not possibly be withdrawn before the Japs cut the beach route. However, we were so much better off than the Japs that it was not too worrisome (I say now!) The natives were on our side—we could move across the island far faster than the Japs could follow, and I felt if we were not picked up on the Voza side, we could make it on the other side. Seton agreed, and we had already planned such a move. Besides that we felt confident that our position was strong enough to hold in place if necessary.[12]

On the night of 3 November, three LCIs appeared offshore at a designated spot north of Voza to embark the withdrawing Marines. In order to delay an expected enemy attack, the Marines rigged mine fields and booby traps. During the embarkation, the sounds of exploding mines were clearly audible. Much to the parachutists' amusement, the LCI crews nervously tried to hurry embarkation, expecting enemy fire momentarily. Krulak's battalion, however, loaded all supplies and equipment except rations, which were given to the coastwatchers and the natives. Embarkation was completed in less than 15 minutes, and, shortly after dawn on the 4th of October, the Marine parachute battalion was back on Vella Lavella.

Krulak's estimate of the Japanese intentions was correct. Within hours of the Marines' departure, strong Japanese forces closed in on the area where the parachute battalion had been camped. The enemy had been surprised by the landing

[12] *Ibid.*

and undoubtedly had been duped regarding the size of the landing force by the swift activity of the battalion over a 25-mile front. Then, after the operation at Empress Augusta Bay got underway, the Choiseul ruse became apparent to the Japanese, who began prompt and aggressive action to wipe out the Marine force. The continued presence of the Allied group on Choiseul complicated the evacuation program of the Japanese, and, once aware of the size of the Krulak force, the enemy lost no time in moving to erase that complication.

Before the battalion withdrew, though, it had killed at least 143 Japanese in the engagement at Sangigai and the Warrior River, sunk two barges, destroyed more than 180 tons of stores and equipment, and demolished the base at Sangigai. Unknown amounts of supplies and fuel had been blasted and burned at Guppy Island. Mine field coordinates shown on the charts captured at Sangigai were radioed to the task force en route to Cape Torokina, vastly easing the thoughts of naval commanders who had learned of the existence of the mines but not their location. Later, the charts were used to mine channels in southern Bougainville waters that the Japanese believed to be free of danger.

The destruction of enemy troops and equipment on Choiseul was accomplished at the loss of 9 Marines killed, 15 wounded, and 2 missing in action. The latter two Marines were declared killed in action at the end of the war.[13]

The effect of the diversionary attack upon the success of the Cape Torokina operation was slight. The Japanese expected an attack on Choiseul; the raid merely confirmed their confidence in their ability to outguess the Allies. In this respect, the Japanese were guilty of basing their planning on their opponents' intentions, not the capabilities. There is little indication that enemy forces in Bougainville were drawn off balance by the Choiseul episode, and enemy records of that period attach little significance to the Choiseul attack.

This may be explained by the fact that the main landing at Cape Torokina took place close on the heels of Krulak's venture and the ruse toward Choiseul became apparent before the Japanese reacted sufficiently to prepare a counterstroke to it. Certainly, the size and scope of the landing operations at Empress Augusta Bay were evidence enough that Choiseul was only a diversionary effort.

THE JAPANESE [14]

Enemy reaction to the Allied moves was a bit slow. The Japanese knew that an offensive against them was brewing; what they could not decide was where or when. The *Seventeenth Army* was cautioned again to keep a watchful eye on Kieta and

[13] This is the casualty figure given by Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*, p. 114. Few accounts of the Choiseul attack are in accord on Marine casualties. Muster rolls of the battalion indicate 9 KIA, 12 WIA, and 5 MIA. Of those missing, four were later declared dead and one believed a prisoner of war. IMAC C-2 Jnl, 4Nov43, and the report of the diversion attack, Operation BLISSFUL, p. 4, indicate that 9 KIA and 16 WIA is correct. *IIIPhibFor AR*, pp. 3–4, states that 8 KIA, 14 WIA, 1 MIA, and 1 captured is correct. *IMAC AR–I*, p. 11, gives the casualties as 8 KIA, 14 WIA, and 1 MIA. ONI, *Combat Narrative XII*, p. 24, gives the losses as 9 KIA, 15 WIA, and 2 MIA. The figure given by Rentz undoubtedly takes into cognizance a 13Dec43 message from Coastwatcher Seton to the effect that the bodies of two Marines, one of them bound as a prisoner, had been found near the Warrior River. *ComSoPac Dec43 WarD.*

Buka, and General Hyakutake in turn directed the *6th Division* to maintain a firm hold on Choiseul as well as strong positions in the Shortland Islands. Then, the Japanese defenders on Bougainville waited for the next developments.

After the Allied landings in the Treasurys, the Japanese thinking crystallized: Munda was operational; Vella Lavella was not. Therefore, the only targets within range of New Georgia were the Shortlands or Choiseul. And based upon this reasoning, the Allies scarcely would attempt a landing on Bougainville before staging bases on Mono or Choiseul were completed. Reassured by this assumption, the Japanese relaxed, confident that the next Allied move would come during the dark quarters of the moon—probably late in November.

With the Allied move toward Choiseul, the Japanese were more convinced that the Allied pattern was predictable. With a firm foothold on Mono and Choiseul, the Allies would now move to cut Japanese lines and then land on the southern part of Bougainville in an attempt to seize the island's airfields. Basing their estimates on the increased number of Allied air strikes on Buka and the Shortlands, the Bougainville defenders decided that these were the threatened areas. All signs pointed to a big offensive soon—probably, the Japanese agreed—on 8 December, the second anniversary of the declaration of war.

The enemy had no hint that such an unlikely area as Empress Augusta Bay would be attacked. The defense installations were concessions to orders directing that the western coast be defended, and the troops at Mosigetta—the only force capable of immediate reinforcement to the Cape Torokina area—were alerted only to the possibility that they might be diverted on short notice to the southern area to defend against an assault there.

Japanese sea and air strength was likewise out of position to defend against the Bougainville thrust. Admiral Mineichi Koga, commander in chief of the *Combined Fleet* at Truk, had decided earlier to reinforce Vice Admiral Jinichi Kusaka's *Southeast Area Fleet* and the land-based planes of the *Eleventh Air Fleet* at Rabaul so that a new air campaign could be aimed at the Allies in the South Pacific. This operation, *Ro*, to start in mid-October, was to short-circuit Allied intentions by cutting supply lines and crushing any preparations for an offensive. To Kusaka's dwindling array of fighters, bombers, and attack planes, Koga added the planes from the carriers *Zuikaku*, *Shokaku*, and *Zuiho*—82 fighters, 45 dive bombers, 40 torpedo bombers, and 6 reconnaissance planes.

Koga's campaign, though, was delayed. Allied radio traffic indicated that either Wake or the Marshall Islands would be hit next, and to counter this threat in the Central Pacific, Koga sent his fleet and carrier groups toward Eniwetok to set an ambush for the Pacific Fleet. After a week of fruitless steaming back and forth, the Japanese force returned to Truk, and the carrier groups moved on to Rabaul. The Japanese admiral had at first decided to deliver his main attack against New Guinea, but the Treasurys landings

[14] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *SE Area NavOps—III; Seventeenth ArmyOps—II;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier.*

caused him to swerve towards the Solomons. Then, when Allied activities between 27 October and 1 November dwindled, the fleet again turned toward New Guinea to take up the long-delayed *Ro* operation. The elements of the Japanese fleet reached the area north of the Bismarcks on 1 November, just in time to head back towards the Solomons to try to interrupt the landings at Cape Torokina.

Assault of Cape Torokina

". . . *THE TROOPS ARE MAGNIFICENT.*" [1]

The Northern Landing Force arrived off Empress Augusta Bay for the assault of Cape Torokina shortly after a bright dawn on 1 November, D-Day. The approach to the objective area had been uneventful. After rendezvousing near Guadalcanal, the transports steamed around the southern and western coasts of Rendova and Vella Lavella toward the Shortland Islands. ComAirSols fighter planes provided protection overhead and destroyer squadrons screened the flanks. Submarines ranged ahead of the convoy to warn of any interception attempt by the enemy.

When darkness fell on 31 October, the convoy abruptly changed course and, picking up speed, started the final sprint toward Empress Augusta Bay. Mine sweepers probed ahead for mine fields and uncharted shoals, while Navy patrol bombers and night fighters took station over the long line of transports. Eight air alerts were sounded during the night. Each time the night fighters, directed by the destroyers, intercepted and chased the enemy snooper planes away from the convoy. The amphibious force, moving direct as an arrow toward the coast of Bougainville, was never attacked.

Nearing Empress Augusta Bay, the convoy slowed so that the final movement into the objective area could be made in daylight. General quarters was sounded at 0500, and, after the sun came up, the assault troops on the transports could see the dark shoreline and rugged peaks of Bougainville directly ahead. Only a thin cloud mist hung over the island, scant concealment for enemy planes which could have been waiting to ambush the amphibious force. The element of surprise, which had been zealously guarded during all preparations for the offensive, apparently had been retained. The conflicting re-

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Nov43 WarD; ThirdFlt NarrRept; IIIPhibFor AR; IIIPhibFor Nov43 WarD;* ComTransGru, IIIPhibFor, Rept of LandingOps, Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville Island, 1–2Nov43, dtd 22Dec43 (COA, NHD); *IMAC AR–I; IMAC C–2 Repts; IMAC C–2 Jnl;* 3d MarDiv, Combat Rept of the 3d MarDiv in the BougainvilleOps, 1Nov-28Dec43, dtd 21Mar44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv CombatRept; 3d MarDiv AR;* 3d MarDiv D–1 Jnl, 1Oct–14Nov43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 3d MarDiv D–2 SAR, Empress Augusta Bay Ops dtd 1Feb44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv D–2 SAR;* 3d MarDiv D–2 Jnl, 28Oct–28Dec43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv D–2 Jnl;* 3d MarDiv D–3 Jnl, 31Oct–28Dec43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv D–3 Jnl;* 3d MarDiv D–3 PeriodicRepts, 6Jul–27Dec43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv D–3 Repts; HistDiv Acct;* ONI, *Combat Narrative XII;* Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support;" Aurthur and Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul.*

ports by Japanese snooper planes of task forces observed at various points from Buka to the Shortlands and Vella Lavella had the general effect of confusing the Japanese.[2]

At 0545, mine sweepers and the destroyer *Wadsworth* opened fire on the beaches north of Cape Torokina to cover their own mine-sweeping operations. As the *Wadsworth* slowly closed to within 3,000 yards to fire directly into enemy installations, the busy mine sweepers scouted the bay. Thirty minutes later, advised that no mines had been found, the transports moved into the area. Off Cape Torokina, each APA shelled the promontory with ranging 3-inch fire before turning hard to port to take Puruata Island under fire with 20mm guns. At 0645, the eight troop transports were on line about 3,000 yards from the beach and parallel to the shoreline. Behind them, in a similar line, were the four cargo transports with the destroyer squadrons as a protective screen seaward.

On board the transports, observers peered anxiously toward the beaches near the Laruma River. A two-man patrol had been landed on Bougainville on D minus 4 days (27 October) with the mission of radioing information or lighting a signal fire near the Laruma if the Cape Torokina area was defended by less than 300 Japanese. Concern mounted as H-Hour approached without the expected message or signal. The alternatives were that the patrol had been captured or that the cape area was unexpectedly reinforced by the enemy. Because the landing waves had been organized to handle cargo and supplies at the expense of initial combat strength, any change in the enemy situation at this late date was cause for worry. H-Hour, set for 0715, was postponed for 15 minutes on signal from Admiral Wilkinson, but the landing was ordered as planned. (The patrol later reported unharmed, citing radio failure and terrain difficulties for the lack of messages.)

Preparatory fires by the main support group began as soon as visibility permitted identification of targets. From their firing positions south of the transport area, the *Anthony* and *Sigourney*—and later the *Wadsworth* — poured 5-inch shells into Puruata Island and the beaches north of Cape Torokina. The *Terry*, on the left flank of the transport area, fired into known enemy installations on the north shoulder of the cape. The effect was a crossfire, centered on the beaches north of Cape Torokina. This indirect fire on area targets was controlled by spotter aircraft.

Debarkation of troops began after the transports anchored in position and while the pre-assault bombardment crashed along the shoreline. The order to land the landing force was given at 0645, and within minutes assault craft were lowered into the sea, and embarkation nets tossed over the side of the transports. Marines clambered down the nets into the boats, and, as each LCVP was loaded, it joined the circling parade of landing craft in the rendezvous circles, waiting for the signal to form into waves for the final run to the beach. Nearly 7,500 Marines, more than half of the assault force, were boated for the simultaneous landing over the 12 beaches.

At 0710, the gunfire bombardment shifted to prearranged targets, and five minutes later the first boats from the

[2] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 12.

LANDING CRAFT *is lowered over the side of the APA* George Clymer *on D-Day at Bougainville while Marines watch in the foreground.* (*USN 80–G–55810*)

APAs on the south flank of the transport area started for shore. The support ships continued to shoot at beach targets until 0721, when the shelling was lifted to cover targets to the rear of the immediate shoreline. As the fire lifted, 31 torpedo and scout bombers from Munda streaked over the beaches, bombing and strafing the shoreline just ahead of the assault boats. The planes, from VMTB–143, –232, and –233, and VMSB–144, were covered by VMF–215 and –221 and a Navy fighter squadron, VF–17.[3] The air strike lasted until 0726, cut short four minutes by the early arrival of the first landing craft at the beaches.

The 9th Marines (Colonel Edward A. Craig) landed unopposed over the five northernmost beaches—Red 3, Red 2, Yellow 4, Red 1, and Yellow 3. Although no enemy fire greeted the approach of the boats, the landing was unexpectedly hazardous. Rolling surf, higher and rougher than anticipated, tossed the landing craft at the beaches. The LCVPs and the LCMs, caught in the pounding breakers, broached to and were smashed against shoals, the beach, and other landing craft. The narrow shoreline, backed by a steep 12-foot embankment, prevented the landing craft from grounding properly, and this further complicated the landing.

Some boats, unable to get near the shore because of rough surf and wrecked boats, unloaded the Marines in chest-deep water. Other Marines, in LCVPs with collision-damaged ramps, jumped over the sides of the boats and made their way to shore. In spite of these difficulties, the battalion landing teams managed to get ashore quickly, and, by 0750, several white parachute flares fired by the assault troops indicated to observers on board ship that the landing was successful.

Once ashore, combat units of the 9th Marines completed initial reorganization and moved inland to set up a perimeter around the five beaches. Active patrolling was started immediately, and a strong outpost was set up on the west bank of the Laruma River. Other Marines remained on the beach to help unload the tank lighters and personnel boats which continued to arrive despite the obvious inadequacy of the beaches and the difficult surf. At least 32 boats were wrecked in the initial assault and lay smashed and awash along the beach. By mid-morning, hulks of 64 LCVPs and 22 LCMs—many of them beyond repair—littered the five beaches.[4]

The landings on the six southern beaches (Yellow 2, Blue 3, Blue 2, Green 2, Yellow 1, and Blue 1) and the single beach on Puruata Island (Green 1) were in stark contrast to the northern zone. Enemy resistance in this area was evident almost as soon as the boat groups from the right-flank transports came within range. The 2d and 3d Battalions of Colonel George W. McHenry's 3d Marines landed on the three beaches south of the Koromokina River against small-arms fire. Surf was high but not difficult, and no boats were lost. The Marines, disembarking without delay, sprinted across the narrow beach to take cover in the jungle. Reorganization was completed quickly, and the battalions started to dig out the small number of Japanese defenders attempting to hold back the assault from hastily pre-

[3] Sherrod, *MarAirHist*, p. 181.

[4] "Many automatic weapons were mounted on these landing boats. These weapons were salvaged by the Marines and used later to reinforce their normal arms when the final defensive line was established." LtGen Edward A. Craig ltr to CMC, dtd 24Oct60, hereafter *Craig ltr.*

pared positions. In a few minutes, the scattered enemy in the area had been killed, and sniper patrols began moving inland. Contact was established with the 9th Marines on the left, but a wide swamp prevented linkup with the 2d Raider Battalion on the right.

The raiders, led by Major Richard T. Washburn, went ashore in the face of heavy machine gun and rifle fire from two enemy bunkers and a number of supporting trenches about 30 yards inland. Japanese defenders were estimated at about a reinforced platoon. After the first savage resistance, the enemy fire slackened as the raiders blasted the bunkers apart to kill the occupants. Other enemy soldiers retreated into the jungle. Only after the beach area was secured did the raiders discover that the regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph W. McCaffery, had been fatally wounded while coordinating the assault of combat units against the enemy dispositions.[5]

Extensive lagoons and swampland backing the narrow beach limited reconnaissance efforts, and reorganization of the assault platoons and companies was hindered by constant sniper fire. Despite these handicaps, the raiders pushed slowly into the jungle and, by 1100, had wiped out all remaining enemy resistance. Raider Company M, attached to the 2d Raider Battalion for the job of setting up a trail block farther inland to stall any enemy attempt to reinforce the beachhead, moved out along the well-marked Mission Trail and was soon far out ahead of the raider perimeter.

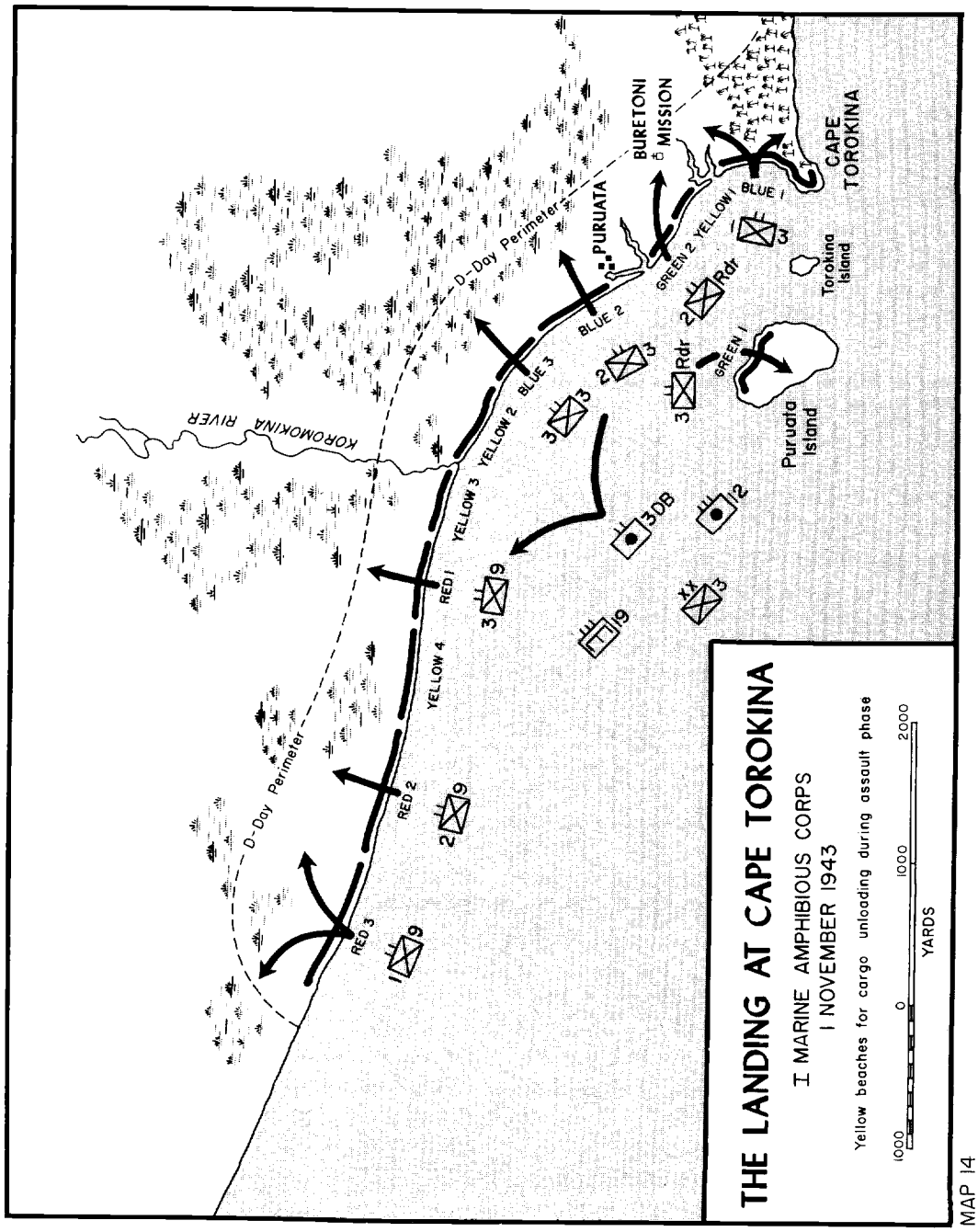
The 1st Battalion of the 3d Marines hit the hot spot of the enemy defenses. As the waves of boat groups rounded the western tip of Puruata Island, they were caught in a vicious criss-cross of machine gun and artillery fire from Cape Torokina and Puruata and Torokina Islands. Heading toward the extreme right of the landing area over beaches which included Cape Torokina, the 1st Battalion ploughed ashore straight through this deadly crossfire. An enemy 75mm artillery piece, which had tried earlier to hit one of the transports, remained under cover during the aerial bombing and opened fire again only after the assault boats reached a point some 500 yards offshore. Its location was such that all boats heading toward the beach had to cross the firing lane of this gun.[6]

One of the first casualties in the assault waves was the LCP carrying the boat group commander. The command boat, blasted by a direct hit, sank immediately. The explosion resulted in dispersion, disorganization, and confusion among the boat group. In a split second, the approach formation was broken by landing craft taking evasive action to avoid the antiboat fire.

The result was a complete mixup of assault waves. A total of six boats were hit within a few minutes; only four of them managed to make the beach. As the first waves of boats grounded on the beaches, the Japanese opened up with machine gun and rifle fire, and mortar bursts began to range along the shoreline. A withering fire poured from a concealed complex of log and sand bunkers connected by a series of rifle pits and trenches.

[5] MajGen Alan Shapley ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 13Oct60, hereafter *Shapley ltr.*

[6] Col George O. Van Orden ltr to CMC, dtd 27May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC) places the location of this gun well within the limits of Blue Beach 1, the landing area of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines.


THE LANDING AT CAPE TOROKINA
I MARINE AMPHIBIOUS CORPS
1 NOVEMBER 1943
Yellow beaches for cargo unloading during assault phase
1000 0 1000 2000
YARDS
D-Day Perimeter
D-Day Perimeter
KOROMOKINA RIVER
PURUATA
BURETONI MISSION
CAPE TOROKINA
Purudta Island
Torokina Island
RED 1
RED 2
RED 3
YELLOW 1
YELLOW 2
YELLOW 3
YELLOW 4
BLUE 1
BLUE 2
BLUE 3
GREEN 1
GREEN 2
Rdr
Rdr
3DB

MAP 14

The enemy emplacements, barely above ground level and hidden beneath the tangled underbrush along the shoreline, were sited to cover the beaches and bay with interlocking bands of fire. The pre-assault bombardment by gunfire ships and planes had not knocked out the enemy fortifications; in most cases it had not even hit them.

The Marines, with all tactical integrity and coordination lost, plunged across the thin strip of beach to take cover in the jungle. An orderly landing against such concentrated fire had been impossible. After the scrambling of the assault waves, units from the battalion landing team had gone ashore where possible and practically every unit was out of position. Contributing to this confusion was the fact that the majority of the boats hit were LCPs carrying boat group commanders. The Japanese, correctly surmising that the more distinctive LCPs were command craft, directed most of their fire on these boats.

The initial reorganization of the elements of the battalion landing team was handicapped further by the wounding and later evacuation of the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Leonard M. Mason. Control of boat teams was difficult under the pounding of 90mm and "knee mortar"[7] bursts mixed with the raking fire of machine guns and rifles. Platoons and squads from all companies were mixed along the beach. The original plans directed Company A to land on Cape Torokina, but after the assault waves were dispersed and tangled by the effective fire of the Japanese 75mm artillery piece, elements of Company C landed on the promontory. Several squads from Company F of the 2d Battalion also landed in this area and were forced to fight their way along the beach to reach their parent unit. Only Company B of the 1st Battalion landed on its assigned beach. Casualties were fairly light, though, despite the intense fire of the enemy. In addition to at least 14 men lost in the landing craft which had been sunk, fewer than a dozen Marines had been killed on the beach.

The 1st Battalion hesitated only a short time; then the extensive schooling of the past asserted itself. Training in small unit tactics against a fortified position now paid big dividends. Rifle groups began to form under ranking men, and the fight along the shoreline became a number of small battles as the Marines fought to widen their beachhead against the enemy fire. As the Marines became oriented to their location and some semblance of tactical integrity was restored, the pace of the assault quickened.

Before the operation, all units had been thoroughly briefed on the mission of each assaulting element, and each squad, platoon, and company was acquainted with the missions of other units in the area. In addition, each Marine was given a sketch map of the Cape Torokina shoreline. Small groups formed under the leadership and initiative of junior officers and staff noncommissioned officers, and these groups, in turn, were consolidated under one command by other officers. Bunker after bunker began to fall to the coordinated and well-executed attacks of these groups. As the Japanese defensive complex slowly cracked, the 1st Battalion command was established under the battalion executive officer, and the hastily re-formed companies took over the mission of the area in which they found themselves.

[7] The common term for the Japanese 50mm grenade discharger.

The efficient reduction of the enemy's defensive position added another testimonial to prior training and planning. Officers of the 3d Marine Division had studied the Japanese system of mutually protecting bunkers on New Georgia and decided that in such a defensive complex the reduction of one bunker would lead to the elimination of another. In effect, one bunker unlocked the entire position. The quickest way to knock out such pillboxes with the fewest casualties to the attacking force was for automatic riflemen to place fire on the embrasures of the bunker while other Marines raced to its blind side to drop grenades down the ventilators or pour automatic rifle fire into the rear entrance.

By midmorning, through such coordinated attacks, most of the Japanese bunkers on Cape Torokina had been knocked out. The position containing the murderous 75mm gun was eliminated by one Marine who, directing the assault of a rifle group, crept up to the bunker and killed the gun crew and bunker occupants before falling dead of his own wounds. After the last emplacement was silenced late that afternoon, Marines counted 153 dead Japanese in the Cape Torokina area.

For a while, the situation on the right flank had been touch and go. One hour after the landing, a variation of the time-honored Marine Corps phrase was flashed from the Cape Torokina beach. "The situation appears to be in hand," was the first message, but a few minutes later a more history-conscious officer flashed an amended signal: "Old Glory flies on Torokina cape. Situation well in hand." The most expressive message, however, to observers on board the transports was the report from a young officer to Colonel McHenry: " . . . the troops are magnificent." [8] The Marine officers who had directed the assault on the fortified positions added sincere endorsements to this expression of admiration.

On Puruata Island, the 3d Raider Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Fred D. Beans) landed with one reinforced company in the assault and the remainder of the battalion as reserve and shore party. Only sporadic fire hit the boats as they neared the island. By 0930, the raiders had established a perimeter about 125 yards inland against hidden snipers and accurate machine gun and mortar fire. The Japanese, obviously outnumbered, gave little indication of yielding, and, by 1330, the reserve platoons of the battalion were committed to the attack. The raiders, with the added support of several self-propelled 75mm guns attached from the 9th Marines, then moved about halfway across the island.

Puruata was not declared secured until midafternoon of the following day. A two-pronged attack, launched by the raiders early on the morning of 2 November, swept over the island against only sporadic rifle fire, and, by 1530, all Japanese resistance on the island had been erased. Only 29 dead enemy were found, although at least 70 were estimated to have been on the island. The remainder had apparently escaped to the mainland. The raiders lost 5 men killed and 32 wounded in the attack.[9]

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[8] 3d MarRegt Jnl, 1Nov43 (Bougainville Area-OpFile, HistBr, HQMC).

[9] This is the number given in *3d MarDiv Combat Rept*, p. 343. The same report, on p. 153, also gives 6 KIA and 18 WIA for this part of the operation. In cases of discrepancies such as this, the report of the unit engaged is given in this account.

MARINES WADING ASHORE *on D-Day at Bougainville, as seen from a beached LCVP.* (*USN 80–G–54348*)

PURUATA ISLAND *in the foreground, Torokina airfield in the background, appear in an aerial photograph taken on 13 December 1943.* (*USMC 68047*)

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The Marines' fight uncovered extensive enemy defenses which were not disclosed in aerial photographs taken before the operation. The entire headland was ringed by 15 bunkers, 9 of them facing to the west and 6 of them overlooking the beaches on the east side of the cape. Behind this protective line and farther inland was another defensive line of eight bunkers which covered the first line of fortifications. Two other bunkers, about 750 yards inland, provided additional cover to the first two lines.

Constructed of ironwood and coconut logs two feet thick, the bunkers were bulwarked by sandbags and set low into the ground. Camouflaged by sand and tangled underbrush, the bunkers were hard to detect and difficult to knock out without flamethrowers or demolitions. Despite this, the 3d Marines suffered few casualties in destroying this defensive installation. Twenty of the bunkers had been eliminated by the coordinated fire and maneuver of individual Marines; the remaining five were blasted apart by self-propelled tank destroyers firing 75mm armor-piercing shells directly into the embrasures.

The enemy 75mm artillery piece sited as a boat gun hit 14 boats during the initial landings before it was put out of action. Only four of the boats sank. Despite the high velocity of the shells and the slow speed of the landing craft, the 50 or more rounds fired by the enemy scored remarkably few hits. This was attributed to two factors: the poor accuracy of the Japanese gunners and the limited traverse of the gun. Marines found, after knocking out the bunker, that the aperture in the pillbox permitted the muzzle of the gun to be moved only three degrees either way from center. This prohibited the gun from bringing enfilade fire to bear on the beaches. Had this been possible, the large number of boats along the shoreline would have been sitting targets which even poor gunners could not miss, and the casualties to the landing force would have been correspondingly greater.

The unexpected resistance on Cape Torokina and Puruata island after the naval gunfire bombardment and bombing was a sharp disappointment to IMAC officers who had requested much more extensive preparatory fires. The gunfire plan, which was intended to knock out or stun enemy defenses that might delay the landing, had accomplished nothing. The *Anthony*, firing on Puruata Island, reported that its target had been well covered; but the raider battalion, which had to dig the defenders out of the emplacements on the island, reported that few enemy installations had been damaged.

The *Wadsworth* and *Sigourney*, firing at ranges opening at 11,000 to 13,000 yards, had difficulty hitting the area and many shots fell short of the intended targets. The *Terry*, closest to the shore but firing at an angle into the northwestern face of Cape Torokina, was poorly positioned for effective work. None of the 25 bunkers facing the landing teams on the right had been knocked out by gunfire, and only a few of the Japanese huts and buildings inland were blasted by the ships' fire. The gunnery performance of the destroyers left much to be desired, III-PhibFor admitted later. Particularly criticized was the fact that some ships fired short for almost five minutes with all salvos hitting the water. After two or three rounds, the range should have been adjusted, but apparently the practice bombardment at Efate had not been sufficient.

The long-range sniping at Cape Torokina with inconclusive results was vindication for the IMAC requests prior to the operation that the destroyers move as close to the shoreline as possible for direct fire.

> The sad thing about the whole show, to the corps and division gunfire planners, was that the means actually were available to give us just what we wanted, but were dissipated elsewhere in what we felt was fruitless cannonading.[10]

Valuable lessons in gunfire support were learned at Bougainville that D-Day. For one thing, the line of flat trajectory fire in some places passed through a fringe of tall palm trees which exploded the shells prematurely and denied direct observation of the target area. Further, the ships had trouble seeing the shoreline through the combination of early morning haze and the smoke and dust of exploding shells and bombs, rising against a mountainous background.

Although the enemy airfields in the Bougainville area were knocked out by Admiral Merrill's final bombardment and the prior action of ComAirSols bombing strikes, the Japanese reaction to the landing came swiftly. At 0718, less than two hours after the transports appeared off Cape Torokina and about eight minutes before the first assault boats hit the beach, a large flight of Japanese planes was detected winging toward Empress Augusta Bay. The transports, most of them trailing embarkation nets, immediately pulled out of the bay toward the sea to take evasive action again.

The first enemy flight of about 30 planes, evidently fighters from the naval carrier groups land-based in New Britain, was intercepted at about 0800 by a New Zealand fighter squadron flying cover over the beachhead. Seven of the Japanese planes were knocked down, but not before a few enemy raiders strafed the beaches and dive-bombed the frantically maneuvering APAs and AKAs. Ten minutes later, another flight of enemy fighters and bombers struck the area in a determined attack, but were turned away by the fierce interference of other ComAirSols planes, including Marine fighters from VMF–215 and VMF–221. Radical evasive tactics by the transports—aided by excellent antiaircraft gunnery by the destroyer screen and savage pursuit by the fighter cover—prevented the loss of any ships, although the *Wadsworth* took some casualties from a near miss. The fighter cover downed eight planes, and the destroyer screen claimed another four raiders.

Two hours after the attack began, the APAs and AKAs returned to resume operations. Valuable time, however, had been lost. Intruding enemy planes continued to harass the transports, but unloading operations kept up until about 1300, when the arrival of another large formation of about 70 enemy planes put the ships into action again.

One APA, the *American Legion*, grounded on a shoal and remained there during the attack despite the persistent efforts of two tugs which attempted to free it. A destroyer resolutely stood guard, pumping antiaircraft fire into attacking planes. The ship was pulled free before the air attack was driven off. As before, the aggressive fighter cover and heavy fire from the destroyer screen prevented damage to the amphibious force, and the ships turned back to the task of unloading. During the attacks, the Allies claimed 26 enemy planes as shot down—four more

[10] Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support," pp. 61–62.

than the Japanese records indicate—with the loss of four planes and one pilot. For the first day, at least, the threat of enemy air retaliation had been turned back.

ESTABLISHING A BEACHHEAD [11]

Ashore, the defensive perimeter now stretched a long, irregular semi-circle over the area from the Laruma River past Cape Torokina, a distance of about four miles. Only the northern beaches were quiet; the area around the cape was still being contested by snipers within this perimeter and by small groups of enemy in the jungle outside the line. Within this area, the logistics situation was beginning to be cause for concern.

Confusion began after wrecked tank lighters and personnel boats were broken on the northern beaches, closing those areas to further traffic. When unloading operations began once more after the first air raid, the northern beaches were ordered abandoned and all cargo destined for the 9th Marines sector was diverted to beaches south of the Koromokina River. This change, the only move possible in view of the difficult surf conditions, led to further complications because the beaches in the 3d Marines' sector were already crowded, and the coxswains on the landing craft had no instructions regarding where the supplies should be dumped.

The landing beaches in the 3d Marines' sector were hardly an improvement. Few had any depth, and from the outset it was apparent that the swampy jungle would stall operations past the beaches. The only means of movement was laterally along the thin beach, and the gear already stacked along the shoreline was causing congestion along this route. The difficult terrain inland made the formation of dumps impractical, so all cargo was placed above the high water mark and some degree of orderliness attempted. Despite this, the 9th Marines lost much organizational property and supplies, most of which was never recovered.

As cargo and supplies mounted on the beaches assigned to the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 3d Marines, the bulk cargo was diverted further to Puruata Island. The landing craft were unloaded within a few hundred yards of the battle between the raiders and the small but determined group of defenders emplaced there. Almost 30 percent of the total cargo carried by the 12 transports was unloaded by 1130 of D-Day, and this figure was extended to almost 50 percent completion by the time that the APAs and AKAs had to depart the area for the second time. The cargo remaining on board was varied; some ships had unloaded all rations but little ammunition. Other transports had unloaded ammunition first and were just starting to move the other supplies.

While the combat troops ashore prepared to defend the newly won beachhead,

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[11] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *CincPac-CincPOA Nov43 WarD; ComSoPac Nov43 WarD; ThirdFlt NarrRept; IIIPhibFor AR; IIIPhibFor Nov43 WarD; IMAC AR–I; 3d MarDiv Combat Rept; 3d MarDiv AR;* 3d MarDiv D–4 Jnl 1–16 Nov43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv D–4 Jnl;* 3d MarDiv ServTrps Rept of Ops, Nov–Dec43, dtd 27Jan44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *3d MarDiv ServTrps Rept;* 3d MarDiv Supply and Evac Rept, DIPPER Operation, dtd 29Jan44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); *HistDiv Acct;* ONI, *Combat Narrative XII;* Aurthur and Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier.*

the transport groups proceeded to unload as rapidly as the air attacks, loss of boats, and elimination of a number of beaches would permit. By 1600 on D-Day, only the four northernmost transports—the ones most affected by the boat mishaps and the unsuitable beaches—still had cargo on board.

The quick unloading of the other five APAs and three AKAs, despite the interruptions, was a reflection of the measures taken by Admiral Wilkinson and General Vandegrift to insure rapid movement of supplies ashore. Embarked troops on each APA and AKA had been required to furnish a complete shore party of about 500 men. During the unloading, 6 officers and 120 men remained on board ship to act as cargo handlers while a further 60 were boat riders to direct the supplies to the proper beaches. Another 200 Marines stayed on each beach to help unload the landing craft. The remaining personnel were used as beach guides, vehicle drivers, cargo handlers, and supervisors.[12] The 3d Service Battalion, augmented by supporting troops—artillerymen, engineers, military police, signal men, tank men, communicators, and Seabees—formed the bulk of these working parties. In some instances, these supporting troops were not released to their units until several days after the beachhead had been established. In all, about 40 percent of the entire landing force was engaged initially in shore party activities.

By late afternoon, each landing team reported its mission accomplished. In the absence of any identifiable terrain features in the interior, the landing teams had been directed to extend the beachhead certain distances, and, by the end of D-Day, each of the battalions was established in a rough perimeter along the first of these designated Inland Defense Lines. The division front lines extended into the jungle about 600 yards near the Laruma River and about 1,000 yards in front of Cape Torokina. Although the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, in the area of the cape plantation, and the 3d Raiders on Puruata Island were still receiving occasional sniper fire, the remainder of the perimeter was quiet and defense was not a special problem.

There was, however, still congestion on the shoreline. In order to bring some order out of the near chaos on the beaches and to reduce the paralyzing effect of the mountains of supply piled helter-skelter, additional Marines from the combat forces were detailed as labor gangs to sort the supplies and haul them to the front-line units. This placed a double-burden on some units who were already near half-strength by the assignment of troops to the shore party work.

An additional problem, late on D-Day, was the correlation and coordination of the defensive positions and missions of the many assorted and unrelated supporting units which had landed during the day. These included echelons of artillery, antiaircraft artillery, and seacoast defense units. The 12th Marines, decentralized with a battery attached to each landing team, was in varying stages of readiness for defense of the beachhead. Battery B, in the 9th Marines area, was in position by early afternoon but was so engaged in cargo hauling that the first requests for a firing mission could not be completed. Other batteries were also in position by the end of D-Day, and several had fired registration shots and were available for intermittent fires during the first night.

[12] IMAC AdminO No. 1, dtd 15Oct43 in *IMAC AR–1*.

The remaining batteries were ready for support missions the following day.

Selection of positions in most areas was difficult. The battery supporting the 2d Raider Battalion was forced to move inland about 100 yards through a lagoon before a position could be located. Two amphibian tractors ferried the guns and most of the ammunition across the water, and the artillerymen transferred the remaining ammunition from the beach to the gun position by rubber boats. This battery registered on Piva Village by air spot, and the next day fired 124 rounds on suspected enemy positions in the vicinity of that village.

Antiaircraft batteries (90mm) and the Special Weapons Group of the 3d Defense Battalion landed right behind the assault units. Advance details of the seacoast defense battery also moved ashore early and immediately began seeking suitable positions to mount the big guns. After the first air raid on the morning of D-Day, the remaining antiaircraft guns of the Marine defense battalion were hurried ashore so that protection of the beachhead could be increased as soon as possible. By nightfall of D-Day, 20 40mm guns, 8 20mm guns, and the .50 and .30 caliber machine guns of the battalion were integrated into the defense of the perimeter and were ready for action.

As nightfall approached, the frontline units sited all weapons along fixed lines to coordinate their fire with adjacent units, and all companies set up an all-around defense. Supporting units on the beach also established small perimeters within this defensive line. There was to be no unnecessary firing and no movement. Marines were to resort to bayonets and knives when needed, and any Japanese infiltrators were to be left unchallenged and then eliminated at daybreak. An open-wire telephone watch was kept by all units, and radios were set to receive messages but no generators were started for transmissions.

The night passed as expected—Marines huddling three to a foxhole with one man awake at all times. A dispiriting drizzle, which began late on D-Day afternoon, continued through the night. Japanese infiltrators were busy, and several brief skirmishes occurred. An attack on a casualty clearing station was repulsed by gunfire from corpsmen and wounded Marines; and one battalion command post, directly behind the front lines, was hit by an enemy patrol. The attackers were turned back by the battalion commander, executive officer, and the battalion surgeon who wielded knives to defend their foxhole.

While the Marines ashore had busied themselves getting ready for the first night of defense of the beachhead, the transport groups proceeded with the unloading details. At 1645, the transports were advised to debark all weapons, boat pool personnel, and cargo handlers and leave the area at 1700. The four transports still with supplies aboard (the *Alchiba*, *American Legion*, *Hunter Liggett*, and the *Crescent City*) were to keep working until the final moment and then leave with the rest of the transports despite any Marine working parties still on board.

Admiral Wilkinson, aware that the situation ashore was well under control, had decided that all ships would retire for the night and return the next day. In event of a night attack, the transports in Empress Augusta Bay would be sitting ducks. The admiral felt that his ships could not maneuver in uncharted waters at night, and that night unloading operations were not feasible. The admiral had another reason, too. An enemy task force of four

cruisers and six destroyers was reported heading toward Rabaul from Truk, and these ships, after one refueling stop, could be expected near Bougainville later that evening or early the next morning. The amphibious force, as directed, moved out to sea for more protection.

At 2300 that night, 1 November, the four transports which were still to be unloaded were ordered to reverse course and head back toward Empress Augusta Bay while the rest of the transports continued toward Guadalcanal. The four transports, screened by destroyers, regulated their speed and direction so as to reach the Cape Torokina area after daybreak. A short time later, alerted to the fact that a large enemy fleet was in the area, the transports headed back toward Guadalcanal again.

Admiral Merrill's Task Force 39, after the successful bombardment of Buka and the Shortlands which opened the Bougainville operation, had moved north of Vella Lavella to cover the retirement of the transport group. At this particular time, Merrill's concern was the condition of his force which had been underway for 29 hours, steaming about 766 miles at near-maximum speed. Although the cruisers were still able to fight, the fuel oil supply in the destroyers was below the level required for anything but small engagements at moderate speeds.

So, while Merrill's cruisers waited, one of the two destroyer divisions in the task force turned and headed for New Georgia to refuel. That afternoon, 1 November, while an oil barge was pumping oil into the destroyers at maximum rate, the report of the Japanese fleet bearing down on Bougainville was received. The destroyers, impatient to get going, hurried through the refueling.

At 1800, all destroyers raced out of Kula Gulf to rejoin Merrill. The 108-mile trip was made at 32 knots, although the engines of two of the destroyers were on the verge of breakdown. By 2330, the ships joined Merrill's cruisers south of the Treasurys, and the entire task force headed toward Bougainville where it interposed itself between the departing transports and the oncoming enemy fleet. Allied patrol planes had kept the attack force under surveillance all day, and, by nightfall, the direction of the Japanese ships was well established. If the Allied thinking was correct, another trap had been baited for the Japanese. The enemy, guessing that the same task force that hit Buka had provided the shore bombardment for the Cape Torokina landing, might be lured into assuming that the fighting ships were now low on fuel and ammunition and had retired with the transports. If that was the enemy assumption, then Merrill was in position for a successful ambush.

Moving slowly to leave scant wake for enemy snooper planes to detect, Merrill's force was off Bougainville by 0100, 2 November, and beginning to maneuver into position to intercept the enemy fleet. At that time, the enemy was about 83 miles distant. Merrill's basic plan was to stop the enemy at all costs, striking the Japanese ships from the east so that the sea engagement would be deflected toward the west, away from Bougainville. This would give his ships more room to maneuver as well as allow any damaged ships to retire to the east on the disengaged side. Further, Merrill respected the Japanese torpedoes and felt that his best chance to divert the enemy force and turn it back—possibly without loss to his own

force—was by long-range, radar-directed gunfire.

The naval battle of Empress Augusta Bay began just 45 miles offshore from the beachhead whose safety depended upon Task Force 39. Merrill's cruisers opened fire at 0250 at ranges of 16,000 to 20,000 yards. The enemy fleet, spread out over a distance of eight miles, appeared to be in three columns with a light cruiser and destroyers in each of the northern and southern groups and two heavy cruisers and two destroyers in the center. Detection was difficult because, with the enemy so spread out, the radar on Merrill's ships could not cover the entire force at one time.

The enemy's northern force was hit first, the van destroyers of Task Force 39 engaging this section while the rest of the American ships turned toward the center and southern groups. As planned, the attack struck from the east. Task Force 39 scored hits immediately, drawing short and inaccurate salvos in return. The Japanese, relying on optical control of gunfire, lighted the skies with starshells and airplane flares; but this also helped Task Force 39, since the enemy's flashless powder made visual detection of the Japanese ships almost impossible without light.

The two forces groped for each other with torpedoes and gunfire. In the dark night, coordination of units was difficult and identification of ships impossible. The maneuvering of Merrill's task units for firing positions, as well as the frantic scattering of the enemy force, spread the battle over a wide area, which further increased problems of control and identification. On at least one occasion, Task Force 39 ships opened fire on each other before discovering their error.

In such confused circumstances, estimation of damage to either force was almost impossible, although some of the American destroyers believed that their torpedoes had found Japanese targets, and other enemy ships were believed to have been hit by gunfire. In the scramble for positions to take new targets under fire, two destroyers of Merrill's force scraped past each other with some damage, and several other close collisions between other destroyers were narrowly averted. One American destroyer, the *Foote*, reported itself disabled by an enemy torpedo and two other destroyers were hit by gunfire but remained in action. The only cruiser damaged was the *Denver*, which took three 8-inch shells and was forced to disengage for a short time before returning to the fight.

By 0332, Task Force 39 was plainly in possession of the field. The enemy force, routed in all directions, had ceased firing and was retiring at high speed. Merrill's cruiser division ceased firing at 0349 on one last target at ranges over 23,000 yards. This ended the main battle, although the TF 39 destroyers continued to scout the area for additional targets and disabled enemy ships. At daybreak, TF 39 was reassembled and a flight of friendly aircraft appeared to provide escort for its retirement. The *Foote* was taken under tow and the return to Guadalcanal started. The Merrill force believed that it had sunk at least one enemy light cruiser and one destroyer and inflicted damage on a number of other ships. This estimate was later found correct.[13] In addition, the

[13] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 14.

Japanese also had several ships damaged in collisions.

Task Force 39 was struck a few hours later by a furious air attack from more than 70 enemy planes, but the Japanese made a mistake in heading for the cruisers instead of the destroyers guarding the disabled *Foote*. The heavy antiaircraft fire and the aggressive protection of the ComAirSols fighter cover forced the enemy planes away. The air cover shot down 10 planes, and the ships reported 7 enemy aircraft downed. Only one American cruiser, the *Montpelier*, was hit by bombs but it was able to continue. While the air battle raged, the amphibious force's transports reversed course once more and returned to Cape Torokina without interference and completed the unloading. The sea and air offensive by the Japanese had been stopped cold by the combined action of ComSoPac's air and sea forces.

THE JAPANESE [14]

To the Japanese defenders, the sudden appearance of a number of transports off Cape Torokina on the morning of 1 November came as something of a shock. All Japanese plans for the island had discounted a landing north of Cape Torokina because of the nature of the beaches and the terrain. If the Allies attacked the western coast of Bougainville, the enemy thought the logical place would be southern Empress Augusta Bay around Cape Mutupena. Japanese defensive installations, of a limited nature, were positioned to repel an Allied landing in this area.

But the small garrison in the vicinity of Cape Torokina, about 270 men from the *2d Company, 23d Regiment*, with a regimental weapons platoon attached, was well trained. From the time that the alarm was sounded shortly after dawn on 1 November, the Japanese soldiers took up their defensive positions around the cape and prepared to make the invading forces pay as dearly as possible for a beachhead.

The invading Marines found the island's defenders dressed in spotless, well-pressed uniforms with rank marks and service ribbons, an indication that the Cape Torokina garrison was a disciplined, trained force with high morale, willing to fight to the death to defend its area. But after the first day, when the Japanese were knocked out of the concentrated defenses on Cape Torokina, the enemy resistance was almost negligible. A wounded Japanese sergeant major, captured by Marines the second day, reported that the understrength garrison had been wiped almost out of existence. The prisoner confirmed that the Japanese had expected an attack on Bougainville for about three days—but not at Cape Torokina.

With the notice of the Allied operations against Bougainville, all available Japanese air power was rushed toward Rabaul, and Admiral Kusaka ordered the interception operations of the *Southeast Area Fleet* (the *Ro* operation) shifted from New Guinea to the Solomons. Because all planes of the *1st Air Squadron* and additional ships were already en route to Rabaul, this action placed the entire mobile surface and air strength of the *Combined Fleet* under the direction of the commander of the *Southeast Area Fleet*.

[14] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR–I; 3d MarDiv CombatRept; IMAC C–2 Jnl; 3d MarDiv AR; SE Area NavOps—III: Seventeenth Army Ops—II;* USSBS, *Campaigns;* USSBS, *Interrogations; HistDiv Acct.*

The protests of some commanders against the use of surface vessels in the area south of New Britain—which was well within the range of the area dominated by the planes of ComAirSols—were brushed aside. *Combined Fleet Headquarters*, convinced that this was the last opportunity to take advantage of the strategic situation in the southeast, was determined to strike a decisive blow at the Allied surface strength in the Solomons and directed Kusaka to continue the operation.

After the battle of Empress Augusta Bay, however, the defeated Japanese retired from the area with the realization that combined sea and air operations were difficult with limited air resources, especially "in a region where friendly and enemy aerial supremacy spheres overlapped broadly." [15]

The *Seventeenth Army*, charged with the actual defense of Bougainville, took the news of the Allied invasion a bit more blandly:

> In formulating its operation plan, the Seventeenth Army planned to employ its main force only on the occasion of an army invasion in the southern or northern region, or the Kieta sector. Therefore, at the outset of the enemy landing in the vicinity of Torokina Point, the Seventeenth Army was lacking in determination to destroy the enemy. The army's intention at that point was only to obstruct the enemy landing. [16]

There were many avenues of obstruction open to the Japanese, despite the fact that the Allied sea and air activity probably discouraged the enemy from many aggressive overtures. Deceived originally as to the intentions of the Allies, the Japanese apparently remained in doubt for some time as to the strategical and tactical importance of the operations at Cape Torokina. The enemy could have counterlanded or prevented extension of the defensive positions and occupation of the projected airfield sites by shelling or air bombardments. But none of these courses of action were initiated immediately or carried out with sufficient determination to jeopardize the beachhead seized by the IMAC forces.

The chief threat to the Cape Torokina perimeter seemed to be from the right flank. Operation orders, taken from the bodies of dead Japanese at Cape Torokina, indicated that forces in the area southeast of the Cape could strike from that direction, and it was to this side that the IMAC forces ashore pointed most of their combat strength.

[15] *SE Area NavOps—II*, p. 18.

[16] *Seventeenth Army Ops—III*, p. 103.