

Holding the Beachhead

*EXPANSION OF THE PERIMETER*¹

The landings on Bougainville had proceeded as planned, except that the 3d Marines encountered unexpectedly stiff resistance initially and the 9th Marines landed over surf and beaches which were later described as being as rough as any encountered in the South Pacific. The success of the operation, though, was obvious, and General Vandegrift, leaving Turnage in tactical control of all IMAC troops ashore, confidently returned to Guadalcanal with Wilkinson.²

At daybreak the second day, the Marines began expansion of the beachhead. Flank patrols along the entire perimeter established a cohesive defensive front, and from this position a number of reconnaissance patrols were pushed forward. There was no enemy activity except occasional sniper fire in the vicinity of Torokina plantation and on Puruata Island, where the raiders were still engaged.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Nov43 WarD*; *ThirdFlt NarrRept*; *IIIPIibFor AR*; *IIIPIibFor Nov43 WarD*; *IMAC AR-I*; *IMAC Rept on Bougainville Operation, Phase II, dtd 21Mar43* (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *IMAC AR-II*; *IMAC C-2 Repts*; *IMAC C-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv CombatRept*; *3d MarDiv AR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 SAR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *HistDiv Acct*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Isely and Crowl, Marines and Amphibious War*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, 3d MarDivHist*.

² *Vandegrift interview*.

Patrols had to thread their way through a maze of swamps that stood just back of the beaches, particularly in the 3d Marines' zone of action. Brackish water, much of it knee to waist deep, flooded inland for hundreds of yards. The bottom of these swamps was a fine, volcanic ash which had a quicksand substance to it. Marines had trouble wading these areas, and bulldozers and half-tracks all but disappeared under the water.³

Only two paths led out of this morass, both of them in the sector of the 3d Marines. These two trails, in some places only inches above the swampland, extended inland about 750 yards before joining firmer ground. One of the pathways, the Mission Trail toward the Piva River and Piva Village, was believed to be the main route of travel by the Japanese forces, and this trail was blocked on D-Day by the quick action of raider Company M. More detailed information on the extent of swamps and the location of higher ground would have been invaluable at this stage of beachhead expansion, but the aerial photographs and hasty terrain maps available furnished few clues

³ Col Francis M. McAlister ltr to CMC, dtd 29Mar48, hereafter *McAlister ltr*. The fact that the 9th Marines was able to dig in deeply and well shortly after it landed "indicated that there was a good deal of firm ground back of the beaches," much more than is generally recognized or remembered by men who got soaked wading the swamps. *Craig ltr*.

as to suitable locations for defensive positions or supply dumps. The result was complete dependence upon reports of the reconnaissance patrols.⁴

Because the routes inland were passable only to tracked vehicles, road building became the priority activity of the operation. Wheeled vehicles and half-tracks could be used only along the beaches, and in places where the shoreline was only a few yards wide, the supplies piled around had a paralyzing effect on traffic. The 53d and 71st Seabees, which landed in various echelons with the assault troops, began construction of a lateral road along the beach while waiting for the beachhead to expand.

Construction of a similar road along the Mission Trail was handicapped by the swamps and the lack of bridging material. Progress was slow. Airfield reconnaissance on Cape Torokina was begun at daybreak despite the sporadic sniper fire, but plans for immediate patrols to seek airfield sites further inland was postponed by the need for roads and the limited beachhead.

Early on the morning of 2 November, a shift in the tactical lineup along the perimeter was ordered in an attempt to pull in the flanks of the beachhead and constitute

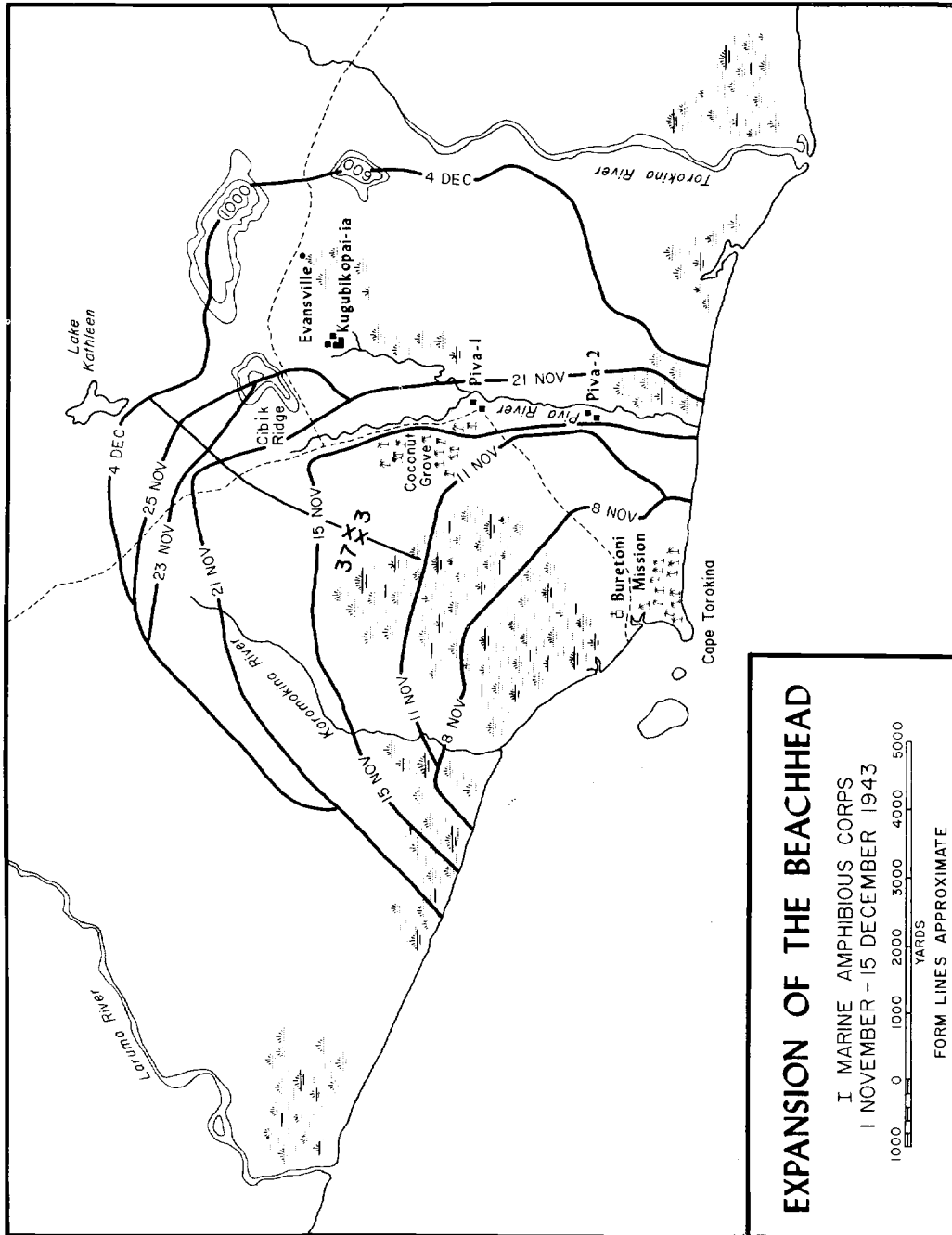
⁴ General Craig recalls: "It was almost impossible to spot our troop dispositions on operations maps at times. The maps were very poor and there were few identifying marks on the terrain until we got to the high ground. At one time I had each company on the line put up weather balloons (small ones) above the treetops in the jungle and then had a plane photograph the area. The small white dots made by the balloons gave a true picture finally of just how my defensive lines ran in a particularly thick part of the jungle. It was the only time during the early part of the campaign that I got a really good idea as to exactly how my lines ran." *Craig ltr.*

a reserve force for IMAC. Prior to the operation, General Turnage had been concerned about the possibility of his lengthy but narrow beachhead being rolled up like a rug by enemy action. Without a reserve and unable to organize a defense in depth to either flank, the division commander had planned to move individual battalions laterally to meet enemy threats as they developed. Now, with the beaches in the 9th Marines' sector unsuitable for continued use, and the 3d Marines needing some relief after the tough battle to take Cape Torokina, redistribution of certain units was directed.⁵

At 0830, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines started drawing in its left flank toward the beach while 1/9, the extreme left flank landing team, began withdrawal to the vicinity of Cape Torokina. Some units moved along the beach; others were lifted by amphibian tractors. By nightfall, 1/9 was under the operational control of the 3d Marines and was in reserve positions behind 1/3 on the right flank. Two artillery batteries of the 12th Marines registered fire on the Laruma River to provide support for 2/9 on the left flank.

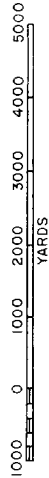
The following day, 3 November, 2/9 made the same withdrawal and moved into positions to the right of the 2d Raider Battalion. During the day, 1/9 relieved 1/3 on the right flank of the perimeter, and at 1800 operational control of Cape Torokina passed to the 9th Marines. At this time, 3/9 with its left flank anchored to the beach north of the Koromokina River, was placed under the control of the 3d Marines; 1/3, withdrawn from action, was designated the reserve unit of the

⁵ LtCol Alpha L. Bowser, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 19May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *Bowser ltr.*



EXPANSION OF THE BEACHHEAD

I MARINE AMPHIBIOUS CORPS
1 NOVEMBER - 15 DECEMBER 1943



FORM LINES APPROXIMATE

9th Marines. In effect, after three days, the two assault regiments had traded positions on the perimeter and had exchanged one battalion.

The last Japanese resistance within the perimeter had been eliminated, also. On 3 November, after several instances of sporadic rifle fire from Torokina Island, the artillery pieces of a battery from the 12th Marines, as well as 40mm and 20mm guns of the 3d Defense Battalion, were turned on Torokina Island for a 15-minute bombardment. A small detachment of the 3d Raiders landed behind this shelling found no live Japanese but 8-10 freshly dug graves. The enemy had apparently been forced to abandon the island.

Extension of the perimeter continued despite the shuffling of front-line units. On the left, 3/9 and the two battalions of the 3d Marines continued to press inland in a course of advance generally north by northeast. Contact was maintained with the 2d Raider Battalion on the right of the 3d Marines, and patrols scouted ahead with the mission of locating the route for a lateral road from the left flank to the right flank. The 2d Raiders, moving along the Mission Trail in front of the 9th Marines, extended the beachhead almost 1,500 yards. In this respect, the addition of a war dog platoon to the front-line units was invaluable. Not only did the alert Doberman Pinschers and German Shepherds smell out hidden Japanese, but their presence with the patrols gave confidence to the Marines.

On 4 November, extensive patrolling beyond the perimeter north to the Laruma River and south to the Torokina River was ordered, but enemy contact was light and only occasional sniper fire was encountered. The 1/9 patrol to the Torokina River killed one sniper near the Piva,

and some enemy activity was reported in front of 2/9; other than that, enemy resistance had vanished.

By the end of the following day, 5 November, the IMAC beachhead extended about 10,000 yards along the beach around Cape Torokina and about 5,000 yards inland. Defending along the perimeter were five battalions (3/9, 3/3, 2/3, 2/9, and 1/9) with 1/3 in reserve. The 2d Raiders, leaving one company blocking Mission Trail, and the 3d Raiders were assembled under control of the 2d Raider Regiment commander, Lieutenant Colonel Alan Shapley, in IMAC reserve on Puruata Island and Cape Torokina.

All other IMAC units which had been engaged in shore party operations also reverted to parent control. By this time, two battalions of the 12th Marines were in position to provide artillery support to the beachhead and the antiaircraft batteries of the 3d Defense Battalion were operating with radar direction. With all units now able to make a muster of personnel, the IMAC casualties for the initial landings and widening of the beachhead were set at 39 killed and 104 wounded. Another 39 Marines were reported missing. The Japanese dead totaled 202.

Nearly 6,200 tons of supplies and equipment had been carried to Empress Augusta Bay by the III PhibFor transports. By the end of D-Day, more than 90 percent of this cargo was stacked along the beaches in varying stages of organization and orderliness. The problem was complicated further by the final unloading of the four transports on D plus 1. Practically every foot of dry area not already occupied by troop bivouacs or gun emplacements was piled high with cargo, and the troops still serving as the shore party were hard-pressed to find addi-

tional storage areas within the narrow perimeter. Ammunition and fuel dumps had to be fitted in temporarily with other supply dumps, and these in turn were situated where terrain permitted. The result was a series of dumps with explosives and fuels dangerously close to each other and to troop areas and beach defense installations.

Main source of trouble was the lack of beach exits. Some use of the two trails had been attempted, but these had broken down quickly under the continual drizzle of rain and the churning of tracked vehicles. The lateral road along the beach was practically impassable at high tide, and at all times trucks were forced to operate in sea water several inches to several feet deep. Seabees and engineers, attempting to corduroy some of the worst stretches, had their efforts washed out.

The bordering swamplands, which restricted the use of wheeled vehicles and half-tracks in most instances, forced the discovery of the amphibian tractor as the most versatile and valuable addition to the landing force. Already these lumbering land-sea vehicles had proven their worth in carrying cargo, ferrying guns, and evacuating wounded men through the marsh lands and the lagoons, and the variations of their capabilities under such extreme circumstances were just beginning to be realized and appreciated. The arrival of the LST echelons later brought more of these welcome machines to the beachhead.

IMAC and 3d Marine Division engineers landed in the first echelons on D-Day, but reconnaissance to seek supply routes into the interior and supply dump locations was handicapped by the limited expansion of the beachhead. Many survey missions bumped into the combat battalions and were discouraged from patrol-

ling in front of the defensive positions by the Marines who preferred to have no one in advance of the lines except Japanese. This problem was solved by the frontline units furnishing combat patrols for engineer survey parties who moved ahead and then worked a survey back to the old positions.

The swamplands were successfully attacked by a series of drainage ditches into the sea. As the ground dried, the volcanic ash was spread back as fill dirt. The airfield work was slowed by the many supply dumps and gun emplacements which had been placed in the vicinity of the plantation, one of the few dry spaces around. Many division dumps and artillery positions had to be moved from the area, including one battery of 90mm guns of the 3d Defense Battalion which occupied a position in the middle of the projected runway.

By the time the first supporting echelon of troops and cargo arrived on 6 November, the Torokina beachhead was still handicapped by the lack of good beach facilities and roads. Airfield construction had slowed the development of roads, and vice versa, and the loose sand and heavy surf action along the Cape Torokina beaches resisted efforts to construct proper docking facilities for the expected arrival of the supporting echelons.⁶ Coconut log ramps, lashed together by cables, were extended about 30 feet from the shoreline, but these required constant rebuilding. Later, sections of bridges were used and these proved adaptable to beach use.

The reinforcements arrived at Torokina early on the morning of 6 November. The

⁶ LtCol Harold B. West ltr to CMC, dtd 28May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC).

3,548 men and 6,080 tons of cargo were embarked at Guadalcanal on the 4th on eight LSTs and eight APDs, which were escorted to Cape Torokina by six destroyers. The APDs unloaded a battalion landing team from the 21st Marines and other division elements quickly and then headed back to Guadalcanal for another echelon. But the unloading of the LSTs was slowed by the crowded conditions of the main beaches and the lack of beach facilities. Most of the cargo was unloaded at Puruata Island where the tank landing ships could beach adequately, and the cargo was then transhipped to the mainland.⁷ This created something of a problem, too, for supplies were poured onto Puruata without a shore party to organize the cargo; and this condition was barely cleared up before another echelon of troops and supplies arrived.

COUNTERLANDING AT KOROMOKINA⁸

After the first desperate defense of Cape Torokina, the enemy had offered no resistance. Then, on 7 November, the Japanese suddenly launched a counterlanding against the left flank of the beachhead. The move caught the 3d Marine Division in the midst of reorganization of the perimeter to meet the expected threat on the right flank.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Nov43 WarD*; *ThirdFlt NarrRept*; *IMAC AR-II*; *IMAC C-2 Repts*; *IMAC C-2 Jul*; *3d MarDiv CombatRepts*; *3d MarDiv AR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 SAR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 Jul*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *HistDiv Acct*; *SE Area NavOps-III*; *Seventeenth Army Ops-II*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, 3d MarDivHist.*

The counterlanding fulfilled an ambition long cherished by the Japanese. At Rendova, an attempted landing against the Allied invasion forces fizzled out during a downpour that prevented the rendezvous of the Japanese assault force; and at New Georgia, the enemy considered—then rejected—an idea to land behind the 43d Division on Zanana Beach. The Cape Torokina operation, however, gave the Japanese a chance to try this favored counterstroke. Such a maneuver was in line with the basic policy of defense of Bougainville by mobile striking forces, and, in fact, a provisional battalion was in readiness at Rabaul for just such a counterlanding attempt.

This raiding unit was actually a miscellany of troops from several regiments of the *17th Division*. Specially trained, the battalion included the *5th Company, 54th Infantry*; the *6th Company, 53d Infantry*; a platoon from the *7th Company, 54th Infantry*; and a machine gun company from the *54th Infantry*, plus some service troops. Japanese records place the strength of the battalion at about 850 men.⁹

The attack force started for Cape Torokina on the night of 1 November, but the reported presence of an Allied surface fleet of battleships and cruisers in the area, and the threat of being discovered by Allied planes, convinced the Japanese that a counterlanding at this time would be difficult. Accordingly, the attempt was postponed, and the troops returned to Rabaul while Admiral Kusaka's *Southeast Area Fleet* concentrated on destroying the Allied interference before another try was made. The landing party finally departed Rabaul on 6 November, the four troop

⁹ *IMAC C-2 Jul*; *SE Area NavOps-III*, p. 20.



CALF-DEEP MUD clings to a column of Marine ammunition carriers as they move toward the front lines on Bougainville. (USMC 68247)



ADMIRAL HALSEY AND GENERAL GEIGER watch Army reinforcements file along the shore at Bougainville. (USMC 65494)

destroyers screened by a cruiser and eight escort destroyers.

Shortly after midnight, the transport group entered the objective area, but the first landing attempt was hurriedly abandoned when Allied ships were discovered blocking the way. The destroyers headed north again, then back-tracked closer to the shoreline for a second try. This time the troop destroyers managed to unload the troops about two miles from the beaches. The landing force demanded protective gunfire from the destroyers, but the Japanese skippers, considering the Allied fleet nearby, paid little heed. The troops, loaded in 21 ramp boats, cutters, and motor boats,¹⁰ were landed at dawn near the Laruma River, just outside the left limits of the IMAC perimeter.

First indication that a Japanese counterlanding was in progress came from one of the ships at anchor which reported sighting what appeared to be a Japanese barge about four miles north of Cape Torokina.¹¹ Before a PT boat could race out to check this report, 3d Marine Division troops on that flank of the beachhead confirmed the fact that enemy barges were landing troops at scattered points along the shoreline and that the Marines were engaging them.

The first landings were made without opposition. A Marine antitank platoon, sited in defensive positions along the beach, did not open fire immediately because of confusion as to the identity of the landing craft. The Marines who witnessed the landings said that the Japanese ramp boats looked exactly similar to American boats, including numbers in

white paint on the bow.¹² In the early dawn mist, such resemblance in silhouette was enough to allay the suspicions of the sentries. Once the alarm was sounded, artillery pieces of the 12th Marines and coast defense guns—including the 90mm antiaircraft batteries—of the 3d Defense Battalion were turned on the enemy barges and landing beaches.¹³

Instead of landing as a cohesive unit, however, the Japanese raiding force found itself scattered over a wide area, a victim of the darkness and the same surf troubles that earlier had plagued the Marines. Troops were distributed on either side of the Laruma and were unable to reassemble quickly. The Japanese were faced with the problem of attacking with the forces on hand or waiting to reorganize into tactical units. Under fire already, deciding that further delay would be useless, the enemy began the counterattack almost at once. Less than 100 enemy soldiers made the first assault.

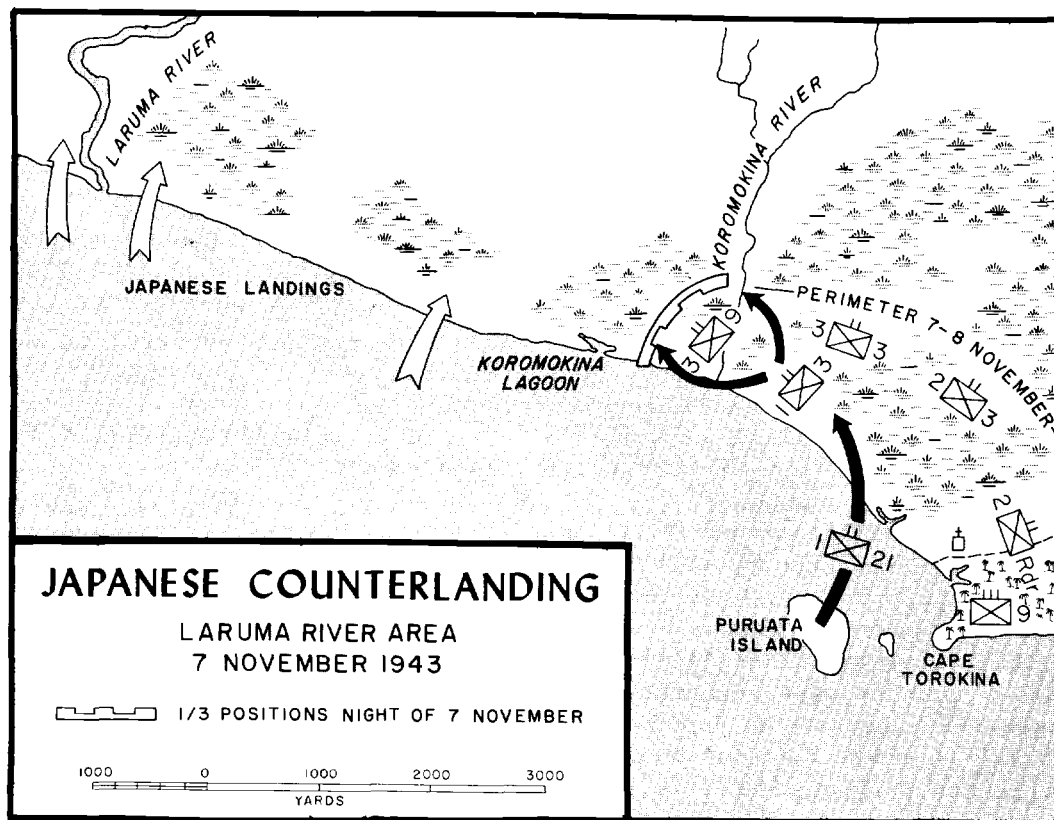
The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Walter Asmuth, Jr.)—occupying the left-flank positions while waiting to be moved to the Cape Torokina area—drew the assignment of stopping the enemy counterthrust. Artillery support fire was placed in front of the perimeter and along the beach. At 0820, Company K, 3/9, with a platoon from regimental weapons company attached, moved forward to blunt the Japanese counterattack. About 150 yards from the main line of resistance (MLR), the advancing Marines hit the front of the enemy force. The Japanese, seeking cover from the artillery fire, had dug in rapidly and, by taking ad-

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ LtCol Jack Tabor ltr to CMC, dtd 7Jun48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC).

¹⁰ 3d MarDiv D-3 Jnl, 7Nov43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*



MAP 16

R.F. STIBIL

vantage of abandoned foxholes and emplacements of the departed 1/9 and 2/9, had established a hasty but effective defensive position.

Heavy fighting broke out immediately, the Japanese firing light machine guns from well-concealed fortifications covered by automatic rifle fire from tree snipers. Against this blaze of fire, the Marine company's attack stalled. The left platoon was pinned down almost at once, and, when the right and center platoons tried to envelop the defensive positions, the dense jungle and enemy fire stopped their advance. The Japanese resistance increased as reinforcements from the remainder of the counterlanding force be-

gan to arrive. At 1315, the 1st Battalion of the 3d Marines in reserve positions in the left sector was ordered into the fight.

While Company K held the Japanese engaged, Company B of 1/3 moved across the MLR on the left flank and passed through Company K to take up the fight. At the same time, Company C of 1/3 moved forward on the right. The 9th Marines' company withdrew to the MLR leaving the battle to 1/3, now commanded by Major John P. Brody. In the five hours that Company K resisted the Japanese counterlanding, it lost 5 killed and 13 wounded, 2 of whom later died.

The two companies of 1/3 found the going no easier. The Japanese were well-

hidden, with a high proportion of machine guns and automatic weapons, and the Marine attack was met shot for shot and grenade for grenade. In some instances, Marines knocked out machine gun emplacements that were almost invisible in the thick jungle at distances greater than five yards. Tanks moved up to help with the assault, and the Marine advance inched along as the 37mm canister shells stripped foliage from the enemy positions. High explosive shells, fired nearly point blank, erased many of the enemy emplacements, and in some cases the HE shells—striking ironwood trees—knocked enemy snipers out of the branches.

Late in the afternoon, the advance was halted and a heavy artillery concentration, in preparation for a full-scale attack by the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, was placed on enemy defenses in front of the Marines. The artillery fire raged through the enemy positions; and to keep the Japanese from seeking cover and safety in the area between the artillery fire and the Marine lines, Companies B and C placed mortar fire almost on top of their own positions.

The attack by 1/21 (Lieutenant Colonel Ernest W. Fry, Jr.) was set for 1700 on the 7th, but the effective artillery-mortar fire and the approaching darkness postponed the attack until the following morning. Fry's battalion, which landed on Puruata the previous day, was moved to the mainland to be available for such reserve work after the Japanese struck. The battalion spent the night behind the 1/3 perimeter, which, by the end of 7 November, was several hundred yards past the original perimeter position of 3/9 that morning.

The enemy's action in landing at scattered points along the shoreline resulted in several Marine units being cut off from

the main forces during the day. One platoon from Company K, 3/9, scouting the upper Laruma River region, ambushed a pursuing Japanese patrol several times before escaping into the interior. This platoon returned to the main lines about 30 hours later with one man wounded and one man missing after inflicting a number of casualties on the enemy landing force. Another outpost patrol from Company M, 3/9, was cut off on the beach between two enemy forces. Unfortunately, the radio of the artillery officer with the patrol did not function, and so support could not be summoned.

The artillery officer found his way back to the main lines where he directed an artillery mission that landed perfectly on the Japanese position to the left. The patrol then moved toward the division main lines, only to find the beach blocked by enemy forces opposing Company K. A message scratched on the beach¹⁴ called an air spotter's attention to the patrol's plight, and, late that afternoon, two tank lighters dashed in to the beach to pick up the patrol. Sixty men were evacuated successfully after killing an estimated 35 Japanese. Only two of the Marines had been wounded.

Two other Marine groups became isolated in the fighting along the perimeter. One platoon from 1/3, scouting the enemy's flank position, slipped through the jungle and passed by the enemy force without being observed. Choosing to head for the beach instead of the interior, the platoon struggled to the coast. There the patrol cleaned its weapons with gasoline from a wrecked barge, and spent the night in the jungle. The next morning, the attention of an Allied plane was attracted

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

and within an hour the platoon was picked up by a tank lighter and returned to the main lines.¹⁵ The other isolated unit, a patrol from Company B, was cut off from the rest of the battalion during the fighting and spent the night of 7-8 November behind the enemy's lines without detection.

On the morning of 8 November, after a 20-minute preparation by five batteries of artillery augmented by machine guns, mortars, and antitank guns, 1/21 passed through the lines of the 1/3 companies and began the attack. Light tanks, protected by the infantrymen, spearheaded the front. Only a few dazed survivors of two concentrated artillery preparations contested the advance, and these were killed or captured. More than 250 dead Japanese, some of them killed the previous day, were found in the area.¹⁶ The battalion from the 21st Marines moved about 1,500 yards through the jungle paralleling the shoreline. No opposition was encountered. That afternoon, 1/21 established a defensive line behind an extensive lagoon¹⁷ and sent out strong patrols on mop-up duties. There was no enemy contact.

The following morning, 9 November, the area between the Marine positions and the Laruma River was bombed and strafed by dive bombers from Munda. The air strike completed the annihilation of the Japanese landing force. Patrols from 1/21 later found the bodies of many Japanese in the area, apparently survivors of the attacks of 7 and 8 November who had

taken refuge in the Laruma River area. There was no further enemy activity on the left flank of the perimeter, and, at noon of that day, control of the sector passed to the 148th Infantry Regiment of the 37th Division, which had arrived the preceding day. The battalion from the 9th Marines moved to the right flank, and 1/3 returned to regimental reserve in the 3d Marines area. Fry's battalion, holding down the left-flank position, remained under operational control of the 148th Regiment until other units of the 37th Division arrived.

The Japanese attempt to destroy the IMAC forces by counterlanding had ended in abject failure. The landing force, woefully small to tackle a bristling defensive position, had only limited chances for success, and these were crushed by the prompt action of Company K, 3/9, and the rapid employment of the available reserve forces, 1/3 and 1/21.

Estimates differ as to the size of the raiding unit which the Japanese sent against a force they believed numbered no more than 5,000 men. Japanese records indicate that 850 men were landed, but IMAC intelligence officers believed that no more than 475 Japanese soldiers were thrown against the defensive perimeter. Most of these were killed in the artillery barrages and the air strike on 7-9 November. The landing site was an unfortunate choice, also. The Japanese had no idea of the exact location of the Allied beachhead and believed it to be farther east around Cape Torokina. The landing was not planned for an area so close to the beachhead. With all tactical integrity lost, forced to attack before they were ready and reorganized, the Japanese were handicapped from the first.

¹⁵ Maj Robert D. Kennedy ltr to CMC, dtd 21May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC).

¹⁶ Two different counts are given for enemy casualties. *3d MarDiv AR*, p. 7, gives 254 enemy dead; *IMAC AR-II*, p. 9, gives 277 enemy dead.

¹⁷ This engagement is called the Battle of Koromokina Lagoon in some accounts.

Another factor in the defeat was the Japanese inability to coordinate this counterattack with a full-scale attack on the opposite side of the perimeter, although this was the original intention of the counterlanding. The enemy's error of carrying situation maps and operation orders into combat was repeated in the Laruma River landing. Within hours of the attack by 1/21 on 8 November, IMAC intelligence officers had the Japanese plan of maneuver against the entire beachhead and were able to recommend action to thwart the enemy strategy.

*PIVA TRAIL BATTLE*¹⁸

The enemy pressure on the right flank of the perimeter began as a series of small probing attacks along the Piva Trail leading into the beachhead fronting Cape Torokina. Japanese activity on this flank, in contrast to the counterlanding effort, was entirely expected. Since D-Day, the 2d Raider Battalion with Company M of the 3d Raider Battalion attached had slowly but steadily pressed inland astride the trail leading from the Buretoni Mission towards the Piva River. This trail, hardly more than a discernible pathway through the jungle, was the main link between the Cape Torokina area and the Numa Numa trail; and if the Japanese mounted a serious counterstroke, it would probably be aimed along this route.

Advance defensive positions were pushed progressively deeper along this

¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR-II*; *IMAC C-2 Repts*; *IMAC C-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv Combat-Rept*; *3d MarDiv AR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 SAR*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *HistDiv Acct*; Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; Aurthur and Cohlma, *3d MarDivHist*.

path by raider companies, and, by 5 November, the Marines had established a strong trail block about 300 yards west of the junction of the Piva-Numa Numa trails. Although the responsibility for the defense of this sector now belonged to the 9th Marines, the 2d Raider Battalion still maintained the trail block. Until the night of 5-6 November, there had been no interference from the enemy except occasional sniper fire. That night, with Company E of the 2d Raiders manning the defensive position, the Japanese struck twice in sharp attacks. Company E managed to repulse both attacks, killing 10 Japanese, but during the fight an undetermined number of enemy soldiers managed to evade the trail block and infiltrate to the rear of the raiders.

The following day was quiet, but anticipating further attempts by the Japanese to steamroller past the road block, the 2d and 3d Raider Battalions, under regimental control of the 2d Raider Regiment, were moved into position to give ready support of the road block. The raiders remained attached to the 9th Marines, and Colonel Craig continued to control operations of both regiments.¹⁹

The first enemy thrust came during the early part of the afternoon of 7 November, shortly after Company H of the 2d Raiders had moved up to the trail block to relieve Company F which had been in position the night before. A force of about one company struck the defensive block first; but Company H, aided by quick and effective 81mm mortar fire from 2/9 in the defensive perimeter to the rear of the trail block, turned the enemy's assault. One platoon from Company E, 2d Raiders, then rushed to the trail block to reinforce Com-

¹⁹ *Craig ltr.*

pany H until another raider unit, Company G, was in position to help defend the trail. The enemy, unable to penetrate the Marine position after several furious attacks, withdrew about 1530, and was observed digging in around Piva Village, some 1,000 yards east. The Japanese force was estimated at about battalion strength.

Several small-scale attacks were started later that afternoon by the Japanese, but each time the two raider companies called for mortar concentrations from 2/9 and the assaults were beaten back. One determined attempt by the Japanese to cut the trail between the road block and the IMAC perimeter was repulsed by Company G. During the night, the enemy rained 90mm mortar fire on the trail block and sent infiltrating groups into the Marine lines, but the two raider companies, sticking to their foxholes, inflicted heavy casualties by withholding return fire until the enemy was at point-blank range. One Marine was killed.

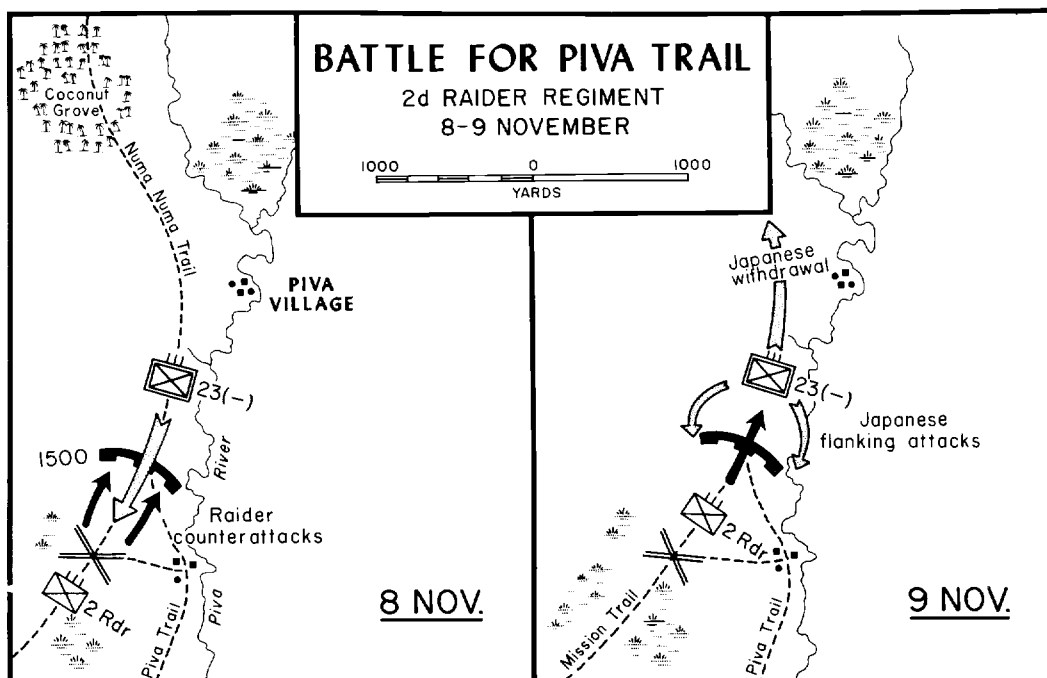
Early the next morning, 8 November, Company M of the 3d Raiders hurried forward to relieve Company H while Company G took over the responsibility for the trail block. Company M took up positions behind the trail block and deployed with two platoons on the left side of the trail and one platoon on the right. Before Company H could leave the area, however, enemy activity in front of Company G increased and returning patrols reported that a large-scale attack could be expected at any time. Reluctant to leave a fight, Company H remained at the trail block. The Japanese assault was not long in coming. Elements of two battalions, later identified as the *1st* and *3d Battalions* of the *23d Infantry* from the Buin area, began pressing forward behind a heavy mortar barrage and machine

gun fire. By 1100, the trail block was enveloped on all sides by a blaze of gunfire as the Marine units sought to push the attackers back. Company G, solidly astride the trail, bore the brunt of the enemy's assault.

Shortly after 1100, Company E moved from a reserve area into the trail block and took up positions on the right of Company G. The platoons of Company E were then extended to the right rear to refuse that flank. At this time, the combined fronts of G and E Companies astride the Piva Trail measured about 400 yards. An hour later, at noon, Company L of the 3d Raiders also advanced from a reserve area and stationed itself on the left flank of Company G. The Marine position now resembled a rough horseshoe, with Companies E, G, and L holding the front and flanks and Companies H and M connecting the trail block to the main IMAC perimeter.

Flanking movements by either the attackers or the defending Marines were impossible because of the swampy ground on either side of the trail, and two attempts by enemy groups to envelop the flanks of the Marine position ended as near-frontal attacks with heavy casualties to the attacking troops. In each instance, the Japanese were exposed to the direct fire of a Marine company in defensive positions. Both attacks were beaten back.

At 1300, with the enemy assault perceptibly stalled, the 2d Raiders attempted a counterattack. Company F, returned to the trail block from a reserve area, together with Company E began a flanking maneuver from the right. After struggling through the swamps for only 50 yards, the two raider companies struck a large force of Japanese, and the fight for possession of the trail began once more.



MAP 17

The enemy soldiers, attempting another counterattack, ran full into the fire of Company G's machine guns and once again took heavy casualties. Half-tracks of the 9th Marines Weapons Company, with two supporting tanks, moved forward to help the Marine attack gain impetus, but the thick jungle and the muddy swamps defeated the attempts of the machines to reinforce the front lines. Unable to help, the machines began evacuating wounded. By 1600, the fight at the trail block was a stalemate. The Marines were unable to move forward, and the enemy force had been effectively stalled. Another Japanese counterattack, noticeably less fierce than the first, was turned back with additional casualties to the enemy.

With darkness approaching, the raider companies were ordered to return to their

prepared lines, and the Marines began to withdraw through the trail block. Company F covered the disengagement and beat back one final enemy attempt before the withdrawal was completed. The raider casualties were 8 killed and 27 wounded. The Marines estimated that at least 125 Japanese had been killed in the day's fighting.

That night, General Turnage directed Colonel Craig to clear the enemy from the area in front of the 9th Marines and the trail block so that the perimeter could be advanced. Craig, planning an attack with an extensive artillery preparation, decided to use Shapley's 2d Raider Regiment again because the raiders were already familiar with the terrain. The attack was to be supported by 2/9 with a section of tanks and half-tracks attached.

At 0620 the following morning, 9 November, the raider units returned to the trail block area which had been held overnight by Company M and a fresh unit, Company I. The two assault companies deployed behind Company I with Company L taking positions on the left of the trail and Company F on the right side of the trail. At 0730, the artillery preparation by 1/12 began to pound into the Japanese positions ahead of the trail block. More than 800 rounds were fired as close as 250 yards from the Marine lines to prepare the way for the attack by the two raider companies.

The Japanese, though, had not waited to be attacked. At first light, the enemy started strong action to overrun the trail block and moved to within 100 yards of the Marine position. There they had established a similar trail block with both flanks resting on an impassable swamp. Other enemy soldiers, who had crept up to within 25 yards of the front lines during the night, remained hidden until the artillery fires ceased and the raider companies began the attack. Then the Japanese opened up with short-range machine gun fire and automatic rifle fire.

The enemy's action delayed part of Company F, with the result that, when Company L began the attack at 0800, only half of Company F moved forward. Coordination between the two attacking units was not regained, and, by 0930, the raider attack had covered only a few yards. The two companies were forced to move along a narrow front between the swamps, and the enemy fire from a large number of machine guns and "knee mortars" stalled the Marine attack.

Neither the tanks nor the half-tracks could negotiate the muddy corridor to reinforce the Marine attack. Unable to flank the enemy position, the raiders could move forward only on the strength of a concentrated frontal attack. The fight along the corridor became a toe-to-toe slugging match, the Marines and Japanese screaming at each other in the midst of continual mortar bursts and gunfire. Slowly at first, then with increasing speed, the Marine firepower overcame that of the Japanese. The raider attack, stalled at first, began to move.

Threatened by a desperate enemy counteraction on the right flank, Colonel Craig—personally directing the attack of the raiders—moved Company K into the gap between Companies L and F and deployed the Weapons Company of the 9th Marines on the right rear of the trail block for additional support. These moves stopped the Japanese counterattack on that flank. Later, another platoon from Company M moved into the front lines to lend its firepower to the raider advance.

Suddenly, at 1230, the Japanese resistance crumbled and the raider companies pressed forward against only scattered snipers and stragglers. By 1500, the junction of the Piva-Numa Numa Trail was reached, and, since no enemy had been seen for more than an hour, the assault units halted. Defensive lines were dug, and patrols began moving through the jungle and along the Numa Numa Trail. There was no contact, and a large enemy bivouac area along the Numa Numa Trail was discovered abandoned. More than 100 dead Japanese were found after the attack. The Marines lost 12 killed and 30 wounded in the operation.

An air strike set for early the next morning, 10 November, was delayed for a short time by the late return of a patrol from Company K, 3d Raiders, which had been on an all-night scouting mission to Piva Village. The patrol reported no contacts. Twelve torpedo bombers from Marine squadrons VMTB-143 and -233 based at Munda then bombed and strafed the area from the Marine position to Piva Village. The front lines were marked by white smoke grenades and a Marine air liaison party guided the pilots in their strike. The first bomb fell within 150 yards of the markers. A 50-yard strip on both sides of the Numa Numa Trail was worked over by the planes, and, at 1015, the infantry began moving toward Piva Village.²⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Cushman's 2/9, followed closely by 1/9 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jaime Sabater, passed through the raider companies and moved along the trail. The advance was unopposed, although scattered enemy equipment, ammunition, and weapons—including a 75mm gun and a 37mm gun as well as rifles and machine guns—were found. Another 30-40 dead Japanese were also found in the area, apparent victims of the extensive air and artillery support of the Marines.

By 1300, the two battalions of the 9th Marines had moved through Piva Village and into defensive positions along the Numa Numa Trail. Aggressive patrols

began fanning out toward the Piva River and along the trail, seeking the enemy. The IMAC beachhead, by the end of the day, was extended another 800 yards inland and contact had been established with the 3d Marines to the left.

The 2d Raider Regiment, which had taken the full force of the enemy's attack on the right flank, returned to bivouac positions within the perimeter as the division reserve force. In the space of three days, the threat to the beachhead from either flank had been wiped out by the immediate offensive reactions of the 3d Marine Division. The attempted mouse-trap play by the Japanese to draw the Marine forces off balance towards the Koromokina flank, to set the stage for a strike from the Piva River area, had been erased by well conducted and aggressive attacks supported by artillery and air. The landing force of nearly 475 Japanese on the left flank had been almost annihilated, and at least 411 Japanese died in the attacks on the right flank.

Another factor in the success of the beachhead was the continued arrival of reinforcements, a testimonial to the foresight of General Vandegrift who had insisted that the buildup of the forces ashore not wait the 30-day interval which had been planned. The 148th Regimental Combat Team of the 37th Division began arriving on 8 November, in time to take over responsibility for the left sector of the perimeter, allowing Marine units in that area to revert to their parent units and bolster the right flank defense. In addition, the arrival of these troops and additional equipment and supplies allowed the perimeter to expand to include a center sector.

²⁰ Because of the swampy nature of the ground over which the advance was made, an amphibian tractor company was attached to the 9th Marines. Colonel Craig used the LVTs to carry two days rations and supplies for the regiment and to transport radio jeeps for the air liaison party and his own and the battalions' headquarters. *Craig ltr.*

*THE COCONUT GROVE*²¹

The second major battle in the vicinity of the Numa Numa Trail began after a two-day lull following the seizure of Piva Village. During that interval, only minor skirmishes occurred, most of them inadvertent brushes between Marine scouting patrols and Japanese stragglers. Although contact with the main force of the enemy had been lost, there was little doubt that the enemy was still present in large numbers north of the Piva River. The 9th Marines, holding the area around Piva Village, concentrated on improving the supply routes into its position. Defensive installations and barriers were also extended and strengthened.

As the beachhead slowly widened behind the 3d and 9th Marines, airfield reconnaissance efforts were extended, and, during the time that the trail block fighting was underway, a group of Navy and Marine engineers with construction battalion personnel were busy making a personal ground reconnaissance of an area which had earlier been selected as a possible airfield site. This location, about midway between the Koromokina and Piva Rivers, was about 5,500 yards inland or about 1,500 yards in advance of the 3d Marine Division positions.

The engineers, accompanied by a strong combat patrol, managed to cut two 5,000-foot survey lanes nearly east to west across the front of the IMAC perimeter. The patrol then returned to report that at least one bomber strip and one fighter strip

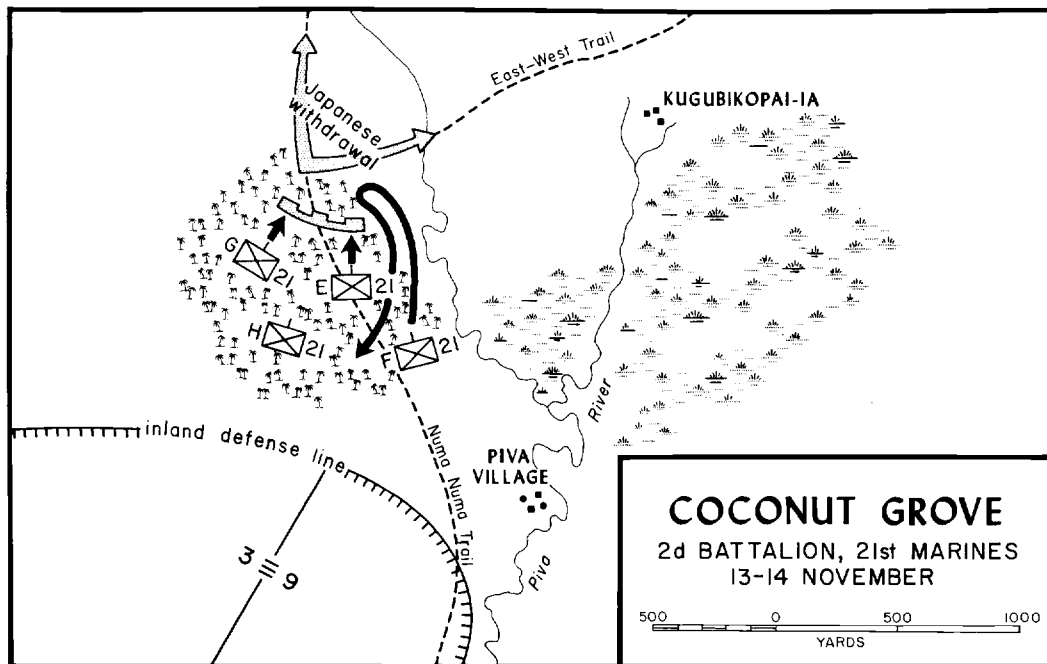
could be constructed in the area scouted. The survey party was unchallenged by the enemy, although a combat patrol the following day clashed with a Japanese patrol near the same area.

Because the numerous swamps and difficult jungle terrain prohibited the possibility of extending the beachhead immediately to cover the proposed airfield site, General Turnage decided that a combat outpost, capable of sustaining itself and defending the selected area until the front lines could be lengthened to include it, should be established at the junction of the Numa Numa and East-West Trails. On 12 November, the division commander directed the 21st Marines (Colonel Evans O. Ames) to send a company-sized patrol up the Numa Numa Trail the following morning. This group was to move to the junction of the two trails and reconnoiter each trail for a distance of 1,000 yards. This would delay any Japanese attempts to occupy the area, and would prevent having to fight an extended battle later for its possession.

At this time, the 21st Marines had two battalions ashore and a third due to land within the next few days. Fry's battalion was still in support of the 37th Division on the left, and 2/21 (Lieutenant Colonel Eustace R. Smoak) was then in bivouac near Cape Torokina. Smoak's battalion, with the regimental command post group, had arrived on 11 November. Alerted for action, 2/21 moved to a new bivouac area about 400 yards behind the 9th Marines and waited for orders.

On the night of 12 November, the division chief of staff (Colonel Robert E. Blake) directed that the size of the patrol be increased to two companies with a suitable command group and artillery observers to establish a strong outpost at the trail

²¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR-II*, *IMAC C-2 Repts*; *IMAC C-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv CombatRept*; *3d MarDiv AR*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *HistDiv Acct*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, 3d MarDivHist*.



MAP 18

junction. Aware of the importance of the mission, Smoak requested and received permission to use his entire battalion in the assignment.

At 0630 the following morning, 13 November, Company E as the advance unit of 2/21 moved to the assembly area behind the 9th Marines but was ordered to hold up at this point. An hour later, with the remainder of the battalion still engaged in drawing ammunition, water, and rations, Company E was directed to begin the advance. The remainder of the battalion would follow as soon as possible. An artillery observer party, attached to the battalion, failed to arrive until after Company E had departed.

The rifle company cleared the 9th Marines perimeter at 0800, and three hours later was ambushed by a sizeable enemy

force located in an overgrown coconut palm grove about 200 yards south of the trail junction which was the objective. Company E deployed to return the fire, but mortar shells and machine gun fire restricted movement and casualties began to mount.

The enemy had won the race for the trail junction.

Although it is possible that the Japanese had been in an organized position in the coconut grove for some time, it is unlikely that the airfield reconnaissance patrol would have been allowed to operate without attack if such were the case. A better possibility is that the Japanese moved into the position coincidental with the decision by Turnage to establish an outpost there.

Smoak's battalion, at that time some 1,200 yards to the rear of Company E, received word of the engagement at 1200. The battalion, pulling in its slower moving flank security patrols, hurried up the trail toward the fight. By 1245, 2/21 was about 200 yards behind Company E and a number of disturbing and conflicting reports were being received. The battalion commander was told that Company E was pinned down by heavy fire and slowly being annihilated. A personal reconnaissance by an officer indicated that the company had taken severe casualties and needed help immediately. While artillery assistance was ordered, Smoak sent Company G forward to help the beleaguered Company E, and Company H was ordered to set up 81mm mortars for additional support.

In the meantime, more conflicting reports were received as to the enemy's location and the plight of Company E. As might be expected, several of the messages bordered on panic. Smoak then moved his own command group nearer to the fire fight, and sent Company F forward so that Company E could disengage and withdraw to protect the battalion's right flank. Company G was directed to maintain its position on the left.

In a matter of moments, the combat situation deteriorated from serious to critical. Company F failed to make contact with Company E, the battalion executive officer became a casualty, and a gaping hole widened in the Marines' front lines. Company E, not as badly hurt as had been first reported, was rushed back into the lines and established contact with Company G. There was no sign of Company F. At 1630, with communication to the regimental command post and the artillery

battalions knocked out, Smoak ordered his companies to disengage and withdraw from the coconut grove. A defensive line was established several hundred yards from the enemy position.

Shortly after the Marines began to dig in along the trail, a runner from Company F returned to the lines to report that Company F—failing to make contact with Company E—had continued into the Japanese position and had penetrated the enemy lines. The company had taken heavy casualties, was disorganized, and seeking to return to the 2/21 lines. Smoak ordered the runner to guide the company around the right flank of the Marine position into the rear of the lines. The missing company returned, as directed, about 1745. At 1830, communication with the regimental CP and the artillery battalions was restored, and artillery support requested. Concentrations from 2/12 were placed on the north, east, and west sides of the battalion's lines; and the 2d Raider Battalion, now attached to the 21st Marines, was rushed forward to protect the communication and supply lines between 2/21 and the regiment. There were no enemy attacks and only sporadic firing during the night.

The following morning, despite sniper fire, all companies established outposts and sent out patrols in preparation for a coordinated attack with tank support. A scheduled air strike was delayed until the last of these patrols were recalled to positions within the Marine lines. At 0905, the 18 Navy torpedo bombers then on station began bombing the coconut grove and the area between the enemy position and the Marine perimeter. A Marine air-ground liaison team directed the strike. Artillery smoke-shells marked the position for the aviators, who reported that 95 per-

cent of the bombs fell within the target area. Bombs were dropped as near as 100 yards from the forward Marine foxholes.

Unfortunately, the ground attack was delayed until 1100 by the need to get water to the troops, so that the effect of the air strike was lost. A break in communications further delayed the attack, and new plans were made for an attack at 1155. A 20-minute artillery preparation followed by a rolling barrage preceded the assault. At 1155, 2/21 began moving forward, Company E on the left and Company G on the right with Companies F and H in reserve. Five tanks from Company B, 3d Tank Battalion, were spaced on line with the two assault companies.

In a short time, the attack had stalled. The Japanese soldiers had reoccupied their positions; and the enemy fire, plus the noise of the tanks and the rolling barrage, resulted in momentary loss of attack control. The tanks, depending upon the Marine infantry for vision, lost direction and at one point were directing fire at Marines on the flank. One tank was knocked out of commission by an enemy mine, and another was stalled by a hit from a large caliber shell. The battalion commander, seeing the confusion, ordered the attack to cease and the companies to halt in place. This act restored control, and after the three remaining tanks were returned to a reserve position, the attack was continued behind a coordinated front. The enemy positions were overrun, and the defenders killed. Mop-up operations were completed by 1530, and a perimeter around the position was established. Only about 40 dead Japanese were found, although the extent of the defensive position indicated that the enemy strength had been greater. The Marines lost 20 killed (in-

cluding 5 officers) and 39 wounded in the two days of fighting.

The 2d Battalion emerged from this battle as a combat-wise unit. A series of events, unimportant on the surface, had resulted in serious consequences. The attack on 13 November with companies committed to action successively without prior reconnaissance or adequate knowledge of the situation was not tactically sound. Company E was beyond close supporting distance when attacked, and the conflicting reports on the number of casualties forced the battalion commander to push his remaining strength forward as quickly as possible. These units were engaged prematurely and without plan. The orderly withdrawal on 13th of November, and the prompt cessation of the attack on 14 November when control was nearly lost, was convincing evidence that 2/21 was rapidly gaining combat stability. The last well-coordinated attack was final proof.

In view of the bitter fighting later, the lack of preparatory artillery fires before Company E began its advance on 12 November has been pointed out as a costly omission. Actually, had the presence of the extensive and well-organized Japanese position been determined by prior reconnaissance, the support of this valued arm would have been used. Marine commanders were well aware that infantry attacking prepared defenses would sustain heavy casualties unless the assaults were preceded by an effective combination of the supporting arms—air, artillery, or mortars.

The seizure of the coconut grove area allowed the entire beachhead to leap forward another 1,000 to 1,500 yards. By 15 November, the IMAC perimeter extended

to the phase line previously established as Inland Defense Line D.

*DEFENSE OF THE CAPE
TOROKINA AREA*²²

In the first two weeks of operations on Bougainville, the Marine-Army perimeter had progressed to the point where nothing less than an all-out effort by major Japanese forces could endanger its continued success. From the long and shallow toe-hold along Empress Augusta Bay on D-Day, the IMAC perimeter gradually crept inland until, on 15 November, it covered an area about 5,000 yards deep with a 7,000-yard base along the beach. Included within this defensive area were the projected sites of a fighter strip at Torokina and fighter and bomber strips near the coconut grove.

The expansion of the beachhead and the arrival of the first echelons of the 37th Division marked a change in the command of the troops ashore. General Turnage had been in command of the 3d Marine Division and all IMAC troops on the beachhead since D-Day;²³ but after the arrival of the Army troops, IMAC once more took up the command of all forces ashore. On 9 November, Vandegrift relinquished command of the Marine amphibious corps to Major General Roy S. Geiger, another Guadalcanal veteran, and returned to the United States. With the arrival of the second echelon of the 37th

Division on 13 November, its commander, Major General Robert S. Beightler, assumed command of the Army sector of the perimeter.

The enemy's attempts to bomb the beachhead after D-Day were sporadic and uncoordinated. The fighter cover of ComAirSols, which included Marine Fighter Squadrons -211, -212, -215, and -221, permitted few interlopers to penetrate the tight screen; and the Japanese—after the losses taken in the strikes of 1 and 2 November—could not mount an air attack of sufficient size and numbers to affect the beachhead defenders. The enemy air interference over Cape Torokina was limited to a few night raids, and these were intercepted by Marine planes from VMF (N)-531.

During the first 15 days of the beachhead, there were 52 enemy alerts, 11 bombings, and 2 strafing attacks. The only significant damage was done in a daylight raid of 8 November during the unloading of a follow-up echelon of troops and supplies. More than 100 Japanese fighters and carrier bombers jumped the 28 badly outnumbered AirSols planes, and, during the air melee over the beachhead, the transport *Fuller* was bombed. Five men were killed and 20 wounded. A total of 26 Japanese planes were claimed by the Allied fighters. Eight AirSols planes, including one from VMF-212, were lost.

In the first days of the beachhead, the responsibility for turning back any coordinated sea and air operations by the Japanese rested with the overworked cruiser-destroyer forces of Admiral Merrill and the planes of ComAirSols. Admiral Halsey, weighing the risk of carriers in enemy waters against the need to cripple further the enemy's strength at Rabaul, on 5 No-

²² Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Nov43 WarD*; *ThirdFlt NarrRept*; *IMAC AR-II*; *3d MarDiv CombatRept*; *HistDiv Acct*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, 3d MarDivHist*; *Isley and Crowl, Marines and Amphibious War*; *Morison, Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*; *Miller, Reduction of Rabaul*.

²³ *Vandegrift interview*.

vember sent Admiral Frederick C. Sherman on a dawn raid against New Britain with the carriers *Saratoga* and *Princeton*. Despite foul weather, the carrier planes—97 in all—found a hole in the clouds and poured through to strike the enemy fleet at anchor in Simpson Harbor. The planes reported damage to four heavy and two light cruisers and two destroyers.

Six days later, three carriers (*Essex*, *Bunker Hill*, and *Independence*) on temporary loan from Nimitz' Central Pacific fleet struck from the east while Sherman's force hit from the south. The 11 November strike found few targets. The enemy fleet was absent from Rabaul; but the carrier planes knocked 50 Japanese interceptors out of the air and worked over the

few ships in the harbor. The two raids ended the Japanese attempts to destroy the Bougainville beachhead by concerted air and sea action.

While the perimeter had been slowly pushed inland, the arrival of additional troops and supplies strengthened the IMAC position. By the time of the arrival of the third echelon on 11 November, beach conditions were more favorable and facilities to allow quick unloading were developed. The third and fourth echelons were unloaded and the ships headed back towards Guadalcanal within the space of a day. During the period 1–13 November, the following troops, equipment, and supplies were delivered to the beachhead:²⁴

Date	Echelon	Ships	Troops	Cargo tons
1 Nov	1	8 APA, 4 AKA	14,321	6,177
6 Nov	2	8 APD, 8 LST	3,548	5,080
8 Nov	2A	4 APA, 2 AKA	5,715	3,160
11 Nov	3	8 APD, 8 LST	3,599	5,785
13 Nov	4	4 APA, 2 AKA	6,678	2,935
Total			33,861	23,137

²⁴ III *PhibFor AR*, pp. 11–12.

Advance to Piva Forks

THE JAPANESE VIEWPOINT¹

Throughout the first weeks of operations on Bougainville, there was no indication that the Japanese were aware of the true intentions of the I Marine Amphibious Corps and its activities at Cape Torokina. Had the enemy guessed that the Allied purpose was limited only to the construction and defense of several airfields and a naval base in preparation for further operations, the Japanese might have objected more strenuously to the presence of uninvited co-tenants. But the *Seventeenth Army*, hesitating to commit the forces available at Buin before being more certain of Allied plans, held back.

The lack of immediate and continued aggressive action against the IMAC beachhead was a sore point between the Japanese sea command in the Southeast Area and the *Seventeenth Army*, which still chose to take a lighter, more optimistic view of the situation than the Navy. Admiral Kusaka's *Southeast Area Fleet* contended that if the Allies constructed an airfield at Torokina, further Japanese operations on Bougainville would be impractical and sea movements impossible. General Hyakutake, though, argued that

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ThirdFlt NarrRept*; *IIPhibFor Nov43 Ward*; *IMAC AR-II*; *IMAC C-2 Rcpts*; *IMAC C-2 Jnl*; *HistDiv Acct*; *SE Area NavOps-III*; *Seventeenth Army Ops-II*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Morison, Breaking the Bismarks Barrier*.

the Allies would occupy a base of operations and then at the first opportunity attempt to occupy the Buin sector with the main force while striking the Buka sector with other elements. In such a case, the *Seventeenth Army* explained, it was better to intercept such movements from prepared positions in the Buin and Buka sectors than to abandon these established positions to counterattack at Torokina.²

This may have been wishful thinking. Hyakutake was well aware of his own situation—there were no good roads leading into the Allied position over which the *Seventeenth Army* could mount a counter-offensive, and barges were in short supply. Two attempts to wipe out the beachhead had resulted in crushing defeats, and the Navy's ill-timed *Ro* offensive had likewise ended with heavy losses. Reluctantly, the Japanese finally admitted what Allied planners had gambled on some time before—that a decisive counter-stroke against the beachhead could not be undertaken for some time.

Despite this estimate, the Allies kept a wary eye on the enemy dispositions in the Bougainville area. Aerial reconnaissance to the north disclosed that the Japanese were constructing extensive defenses in the Buka area to keep their one remaining airfield in operation. The Allies reasoned that if the enemy was committed to a defense of Buka, then he was not likely to

² *SE Area NavOps-III*, pp. 30-31.

draw troops from there for an offensive in the Empress Augusta Bay area. This removed one threat to the beachhead.

The main danger to the Allied position, however, was from the south where the bulk of the *6th Division* and, therefore, most of the *Seventeenth Army* was located. The Japanese, moving by barge from Buin to Mawareka could strike overland from that point. The meager trail net from Mosigetta and Mawareka was the logical route of approach to Cape Torokina, and reliable intelligence reports indicated that these paths could be traveled by pack animals as well as by troops. This gave the Japanese the added capability of packing artillery into the area to support an attack. The overhanging jungle foliage would screen any movements of troops and make the task of detection more difficult.

A coastwatcher patrol kept the trails to Mosigetta and Mawareka under close surveillance. Daily air searches and photographs were made of the beaches in southern Empress Augusta Bay to detect evidence of enemy landings during the night. In addition, captured enemy letters, diaries, notebooks, and plans were processed and interpreted by intelligence officers for further information. These documents and interrogations of a few prisoners gave a comprehensive order of battle for the immediate area and some approximation of forces. The Japanese apparently had no immediate plans for a counterstroke. The constant and alert protection of the combat air patrol over Bougainville and the expanded and increased activity of Allied ships in southern Bougainville waters undoubtedly played a major role in discouraging the enemy from exercising this capability.

SUPPLY PROBLEMS³

A number of changes in the disposition of IMAC units within the perimeter had been made during the widening of the beachhead to the 15 November line. After General Geiger took command of the Marine amphibious corps, all units temporarily attached to the 3d Marine Division for the landing reverted to IMAC control once more, and defensive installations within the beachhead were improved and strengthened.

The Marine 3d Defense Battalion, supported by long-range radar installations, continued to provide antiaircraft and seacoast artillery protection for the beachhead and offshore islands. All field artillery units—both Marine Corps and Army—were placed under central command as an IMAC artillery group to be available as massed fires for interdiction, neutralization, counterbattery, beach defense, or attack support. Brigadier General Leo M. Kreber of the 37th Division was designated commander of the artillery group. A corps reserve was established by withdrawing most of Lieutenant Colonel Shapley's 2d Raider Regiment from the front lines. This reserve was then held in readiness for counterattacks in any sector of the perimeter or for quick reinforcement of the front line defenses.

Following the battle of the Coconut Grove, contact with the main forces of the enemy was lost once more and the period was one of relative inactivity by

³ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR-II*; *3d MarDiv Combat Rept*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *3d MarDiv D-4 Repts*; *3d MarDiv ServTrps Rept*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, 3d MarDiv Hist.*

the Japanese. Perimeter units of the 3d Marine Division and the 37th Division continued active combat patrolling, but there were few enemy contacts. The Japanese had apparently withdrawn. The activity by the IMAC forces was mainly to fix the location of enemy troops and to obtain information on the terrain ahead in preparation for the continuing expansion of the beachhead. After 15 November, these offensive moves were made to improve the defensive positions of the perimeter, and the attack objectives were usually just lines drawn on a map a certain distance from an established position. These moves to new phase lines were more in the nature of an active defense.

The 37th Infantry Division, during this period, found the expansion of the perimeter in its sector much less difficult than the Marines did in their sector. There was little enemy activity in front of the 148th and 129th Infantry Regiments after the Koromokina engagement, and the Army units received only glancing blows from scattered Japanese groups. Once the beachhead was carried past the outer limits of the swampy plains toward higher ground, the infantry regiments were on fairly firm terrain and could move without too much trouble. This sector of the beachhead also took on added strength as more Army support units continued to arrive with later echelons of shipping. After the movement to Inland Defense Line D, General Geiger allowed General Beightler to expand the 37th Division sector of the beachhead, coordinating with the Marine efforts only at the central limiting point on the boundary line between divisions. The lack of aggressive enemy action in front of the two Army regiments permitted the perimeter in this sector to advance more rapidly. This situation, in regard

to enemy opposition, continued throughout the campaign until March 1944.

The Marine half of the perimeter at this time, in contrast to the area held by the 37th Division, was still marked by lagoons and swamplands. In most places, the front lines could be reached only by wading through water and slimy mud which was usually knee deep, was often waist deep, and sometimes was up to the arm pits. The defensive perimeter in the Marine sector actually consisted of a number of isolated positions, small islands of men located in what was known locally as "dry swamp"—meaning that it was only shoe-top deep.⁴ The frequent downpours discouraged attempts to dig foxholes or gun emplacements. Machine guns were lashed to trees, and Marines huddled in the water. In this sultry heat and jungle slime, travel along the line was extremely difficult, and resupply of the frontline units was a constant problem.⁵

Improvement of the supply lines to the perimeter positions was the greatest concern of IMAC at this time. The seemingly bottomless swamps through which supply roads had to be constructed were a dilemma whose early solution appeared at times to be beyond the capabilities of the available road-building equipment and material. The move to Line D took in the site of the projected bomber and fighter strips near Piva, and although the

⁴ *Bowser ltr.*

⁵ In general, the former commander of the 9th Marines feels that the terrain situation was less of a problem than it is usually found described in contemporary accounts. He recalls, "I never found it too difficult to get around to my various units on foot each day." He considers the area around Hill 1000 to have furnished the hardest travelling and remembers that many Marines got lost in the deep ravines and heavy trackless underbrush that abounded there. *Craig ltr.*



FIELD TELEPHONE LINES, the primary means of communication in the jungle, are laid by armed Marine wiremen on Bougainville. (USMC 67228B)

bomber field was already surveyed, construction was held up by the lack of access roads to the area. The diversion of equipment and resources to the construction of roads and supply trails instead of airfields handicapped the work which had begun on the fighter strip at Torokina and delayed the start of the Piva bomber strip, but the problem of supply was too pressing to be ignored.

By 16 November, the lateral road across the front of the perimeter was completed after two weeks of feverish activity. During the time of the Piva Trail and Coconut Grove engagements, the 3d Battalion of the 3d Marines had pushed the construction of this supply road as fast as the limits of men and machines would permit. The speed was dictated by the need to keep pace with the assault battalions which were seeking the main enemy positions before the Japanese could consolidate forces and prepare an established defense in depth. Engineers moved along with the 3d Battalion as the Marines moved inland. On more than one occasion, bulldozer operators had to quit the machines and take cover while Marine patrols skirmished with enemy groups in a dispute over the right of way.

The end product was a rough but passable one-lane roadway which followed the path of least resistance, skirting along the edge of the swampy area. The road began near the Koromokina beaches, then wound inland for several thousand yards before cutting to the southeast toward the coconut grove and the Piva River. Small streams were bridged with hand-hewn timbers, and muddy areas were corduroyed with the trunks of fallen trees. In many instances, trucks were used to help batter down brush and small trees, with resultant damage to vitally needed motor

transport. Dispersal areas were limited, and there was much needed work to be done on access, turn-around, and loop roads. But this rutted and muddy roadway joined the two sectors of the beachhead to the dumps along the shoreline and greatly aided the supply and evacuation problems of the frontline battalions.

As the lateral road was cut in front of 2/3, this battalion advanced about 1,000 yards inland to protect the roadway and to cover the widening gap created between the two divisions by the continual progress of 3/3 toward the Piva River. The road construction force and 3/3 broke out of the jungle at the junction of the Numa Numa and Piva trails on 16 November, having connected the lateral road with the amphibian tractor trails from the Cape Torokina area. Although rains sometimes washed out the crude trailway and mired trucks often stalled an entire supply operation, the roadway was assurance that the IMAC forces could now make another offensive-defensive advance, confident that the essential supplies would reach the front lines.

The critical supply situation had been corrected by an abrupt revision of the original plans. The rapidly changing tactical circumstances and the redistribution of combat elements along the beachhead left the beaches cluttered with all classes of supplies and equipment. After some semblance of order had been restored, it was apparent that the landing teams could not handle and transport their own supplies as had been planned. The battalions, striking swiftly at the Japanese, moved inland with what they could carry. Within a short time, most of the units were miles from their original shore party dumps. These were practically abandoned and became a source of supply on a first-come,

first-served basis to all units of the I Marine Amphibious Corps. Rations and ammunition were picked up by most units at the first available source.

The first corrective action by the Marine division's G-4 and the division quartermaster was to direct that all shore party dumps revert to division control. A new plan was outlined under which the division quartermaster assumed responsibility for control and issue of all supplies in the dumps and on Puruata Island.⁶ A division dump or distribution point was established adjacent to the plantation area on Cape Torokina. All supplies littering the beach were recovered and returned to this area. Succeeding echelons of supplies and equipment arriving at the beachhead were also placed in this dump for issue by the division quartermaster.

Before the completion of the lateral road and control of supplies by the division quartermaster, the battalions holding the perimeter were supplied on a haphazard schedule by the versatile amphibian tractors. When the new program was effected, supplies were virtually leapfrogged forward in a relay system that involved handling of the same stocks as many as four times. This system, however, provided for an equitable distribution of ammunition and rations to all units. From the division dump at the beach, supplies were carried to regimental dumps, which in turn issued to the battalions. Trucks carried the supplies as far forward

⁶When the 37th Division took over its own sector of the IMAC perimeter, corps took charge of the dumps on Puruata and handled supply distribution to both frontline divisions. In getting needed supplies up to forward elements, the Army unit used essentially the same system of delivery as that described for the 3d Marine Division. *Beightler Utr.*

as possible, then amphibian tractors took over. As the battalions advanced, forward supply points were set up. An attempt was made to build up an emergency supply level at each of these forward points. The front lines, however, moved ahead so steadily that usually an untracked jungle stretched between the troops and their supply dumps. The LVTs, when possible, skipped these forward points to continue as close to the front lines as they could manage.

A total of 29 of these LVTs had been landed with the assault waves on D-Day and more arrived in later echelons. Their contribution to the success of the beachhead, however, was in far greater proportion than their number. Without the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion (Major Sylvester L. Stephen), the operation as planned could not have been carried beyond the initial beachhead stages; and it was the work of the LVT companies and the skill of the amtrac operators that made possible the rapid advance of the IMAC forces during the first two weeks. The tractors broke trails through the swamps and marshes, ploughing along with vital loads of rations, water, ammunition, weapons, medical supplies, engineer equipment, and construction materials. Even towing the big Athey trailers, the LVTs were able to move over muddy trails which defeated all wheeled vehicles; and, in fact, the broad treads of the trailers sometimes rolled out and restored rutted sections of roadways so that jeeps could follow.

As might be expected, the maintenance of these machines under such conditions of operation became a problem. Many amtracs were in use continually with virtually no repairs or new parts. As a result, numerous tractors were sidelined be-

cause of excessive wear on channels and tracks caused by the constant operation through jungle mud. The largest number of machines available at one time was 64, but the number of tractors still in service declined rapidly after the first two weeks. Ironically, by the time that a major battle between the Marine forces and the Japanese appeared likely (24 November), the number of amtracs available for use was 29—the same number that was available on D-Day.

COMBAT LESSONS⁷

Throughout this period, the individual Marine (and his Army counterpart in the 37th Division) learned how to battle both the Japanese and the jungle. For two weeks the Marines had struggled through swamps of varying depth, matching training and skill against a tenacious and fanatic enemy. This fight for survival against enemy and hardship in the midst of a sodden, almost impenetrable jungle had molded a battlewise and resourceful soldier, one who faced the threat of death with the same fortitude with which he regarded the endless swamps and forest and the continual rain. Danger was constant, and there were few comforts even in reserve bivouac positions.

The combat Marine lived out of his marching pack with only a few necessities—socks, underwear, and shaving gear—and a veritable drug store of jungle aids such as atabrine tablets, sulphur powders, aspirin, salt tablets, iodine (for water purification as well as jungle cuts and scratches), vitamin pills, and insect

repellent. Dry clothes were a luxury seldom experienced and then only when gratuitous issues of dungarees, underwear, and shoes were made. Knapsacks and blanket rolls seldom caught up with the advancing Marines, and most bivouacs were made in muddy foxholes without the aid of covering except the poncho—which served a variety of uses.

Troops received few hot meals, since food could not be carried from kitchens through the swamps and jungle to the perimeter positions. Besides, there were no facilities for heating hot water for washing mess kits if hot food could have been brought forward. Troops generally ate dry rations, augmented by canned fruit and fruit juices, and waited for cooked food until they were in reserve positions. When the combat situation and the bivouac areas in the swamps permitted, Marines sometimes combined talents and rations and prepared community stews of C-rations, bouillon powder, and tomato juice which was heated in a helmet hung over a fire. Only the canned meat or cheese, the candy bar, and the cigarettes were taken from the K-rations; the hard-tack biscuits found little favor and were usually thrown away. After the beachhead became more fully established, bread was supplied by regimental bakery units and delivered to the front lines. The bread was baked daily in the form of handy rolls, instead of large loaves, which helped solve the problem of distribution to Marines in scattered positions.

Heat tabs met with varied reaction until the Marines found that at least two tabs were required to boil a canteen cup of water. Experience also taught that C-rations could be cooked twice as fast over one heat tab if the ration was divided in half. The first half-can could be heated,

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *3d MarDiv Combat Rept*; Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; Aurthur and Cohlma, *3d MarDiv Hist*.

then eaten while the second half-can was heating.

During the Marine advance, there was little water brought forward, and most of the drinking water was obtained from swamp holes and streams. This was purified individually by iodine or other chemicals supplied by the Navy Corpsman with each platoon. Despite this crude sanitation and continued exposure to jungle maladies, there were few cases of dysentery. The 3d Marine Division, as a whole, maintained a healthy state of combat efficiency and high morale throughout the entire campaign.

The Marines, after defeating the Japanese in three engagements, were becoming increasingly skilled jungle fighters, taking cover quickly and quietly when attacked and using supporting weapons with full effectiveness. Targets were marked by tracer bullets, and the Marines learned that machine guns could be used to spray the branches of trees ahead during an advance. This practice knocked out many enemy snipers who had climbed trees to scout the Marine attack. Although visibility was usually restricted by the close jungle foliage, the Marines learned to take advantage of this dense underbrush to adjust supporting fires almost on top of their own positions. This close adjustment discouraged the Japanese from moving toward the Marine lines to seek cover during a mortar or artillery barrage.

In the jungle, 60mm mortars could be registered within 25 yards of the Marine positions, 81mm mortars and 75mm pack howitzers within 50 yards, and 105mm howitzers within 150 yards. The latter shell was particularly effective in jungle work, as were the canister shells used in direct fire by the 37mm antitank guns.

Both stripped foliage from hidden enemy positions, exposing the emplacements to a coordinated attack. Although the 60mm and 81mm mortars were virtually ineffective against emplacements with overhead cover, both shells were valuable in stopping attacks by troops in the open and in keeping the Japanese pinned to an area being hit by artillery.

Artillery was usually adjusted by sound ranging. The artillery forward observer, estimating his position on the map by inspection, requested one round at an obvious greater range and then adjusted the fire by sound into the target. The location of the target was then determined by replot, and the observer was able then to locate his position as well as the front lines.

Mortar fire was restricted in many cases by the overhanging jungle. Because most fighting was conducted at extremely close range, the mortar rounds in support were fired almost vertically with no increments. When there was any doubt about foliage masking the trajectory, a shell without the arming pin removed was fired. If the unarmed shell cleared, live rounds followed immediately.

Movement through the jungle toward Japanese positions was usually made in a formation which the 3d Marine Division called "contact imminent." This formation, which insured a steady, controlled advance, had many variations, but the main idea was a column of units with flank guards covering the widest front possible under conditions at the time. Trails were avoided. A security patrol led the formation; and as the column moved, telephone wire was unrolled at the head of the formation and reeled in at the rear. At the instant of

stopping, or contact with the enemy, company commanders and supporting weapons groups clipped hand telephones onto the line and were in immediate contact with the column commander. Direction and speed of the advance was controlled by the officer at the head of the main body of troops. A command using this formation could expect to make about 500 yards an hour through most swamps. Such a column was able to fend off small attacks without delaying forward movement, yet was flexible enough to permit rapid deployment for combat to flanks, front, or rear. This formation was usually employed in most advances extending the defensive sectors of the perimeter.

Holding the Marine front lines at this time were the 3d Marines on the left and the 9th Marines on the right. Although Colonel McHenry's 3d Marines had responsibility for the left subsector, only one battalion, the 3d, was occupying perimeter positions. The 1st Battalion was in reserve behind 3/3, and the remaining battalion, 2/3, was attached temporarily to the 129th Infantry in the Army sector. During this time, however, two battalions of the 21st Marines were attached to Colonel McHenry's command for patrol operations. Elements of 2/21 took part in numerous scouting actions along the East-West trail past Piva Village to develop the enemy situation in that area; 1/21 moved into reserve bivouac positions behind the 3d Marines.

On the 17th of November, the convoy bearing 3/21 (Lieutenant Colonel Archie V. Gerard) was attacked by Japanese aircraft off Empress Augusta Bay, and the APD *McLean* was hit and sunk. At least 38 Marines from 3/21 were lost at sea. Two days later, as 3/21 prepared to join the remainder of the regiment near the

front lines, the battalion's bivouac position near the beach was bombed by the Japanese and another five Marines were killed and six wounded. Gerard's battalion joined the 3d Marines for operations the same day. Without having been in action against the enemy, 3/21 had already lost as many men as most frontline battalions.

The 9th Marines, at this time, occupied positions generally along the west bank of the Piva River. Amtracs were the only vehicles which could negotiate the swamp trails from the beaches, and the supply situation in this sector was critical. Most of the 9th Marines' units were forced to take working parties off the front lines to hand-carry supplies forward and to break supply trails into the regiment's position. Evacuation of wounded was also by hand-carry. The period after the movement to Phase Line D was spent improving the defensive position, seeking enemy activity, and gathering trail information. A number of patrols moved across the Piva River looking for enemy action, but there were few contacts in the several days following the final Coconut Grove action.

*THE BATTLE OF PIVA FORKS*⁸

Combat activity in the Marine sector picked up again on the 17th and 18th of November after all units had devoted several days to organization of the defensive perimeter and extension and improvement

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR-II*; *IMAC C-2 Repts*; *IMAC C-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv Combat-Rept*; *3d MarDiv D-2 SAR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *3d MarDiv D-4 Repts*; *Snedcker ltr*; *Bowser ltr*; *McAlister ltr*; BGen John S. Letcher ltr to CMC, dtd 1Jun48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr. HQMC), hereafter *Letcher ltr*; LtCol Jack Tabor ltr to CMC, dtd 7Jun48 (Bou-

of supply lines. The 37th Division sector remained relatively inactive, with few reports of enemy sighted. Marine units started aggressive patrolling in search of routes of advance and terrain information as far out ahead as the next phase line to be occupied by the 21st of November (Inland Defense Line E). There were minor skirmishes with enemy outposts as the Marines scouted the jungle, but the flareups were brief and there were few casualties to either side. In the 9th Marines subsector, both 1/9 and 2/9 reported that enemy activity had increased, and the 3d Marines reported that all units along the line had been in contact with small parties of Japanese. A patrol from 3/3 successfully ambushed a Japanese group, killing eight enemy soldiers and one officer who had in his possession a sketch of Japanese dispositions to the immediate front. The drawing, and other captured documents, indicated that the enemy was preparing extensive defenses along both the Numa Numa and the East-West trail.

Another patrol from 3/3, moving down the Numa Numa trail on 18 November, discovered an enemy road block about 1,000 yards to the front. A patrol from 1/21, probing along the East-West trail, encountered a similar enemy position about halfway between the two branches of the Piva River. This was further evi-

gainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *Tabor ltr*; Capt Richard C. Peck ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 3Jun48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *Peck ltr*; *HistDiv Acct*; Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; Aurthur and Cohlma, *3d MarDivHist*; Maj Harry W. Edwards, "Cibik Ridge—Prelude to Victory," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 35, no. 3 (Mar51); Maj Donald M. Schmuck, "The Battle of Piva Forks," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 28, no. 6 (Jun44).

dence of Japanese intentions for a determined defense of this area, and plans were made for an immediate attack. The 3d Raider Battalion was attached to the 3d Marines to release 3/3 (Lieutenant Colonel Ralph M. King) for the reduction of the Numa Numa trail position the following day.

King's battalion, accompanied by light tanks, cut through the jungle to the left in front of the 129th Infantry subsector. After an artillery preparation, the battalion struck the enemy position in a flanking attack that completely routed the Japanese. A total of 16 dead enemy were found, although more than 100 foxholes indicated that at least a reinforced company had occupied the position. King's battalion immediately took possession of the trail block and established a perimeter defense at the junction of the Numa Numa trail and the Piva River. Meanwhile, 1/3 and 1/21 had advanced without difficulty, opposed only by a few bypassed survivors from King's attack. The 3d Raiders then moved forward to be available for support, and 2/3—released from operational control by the 129th Infantry—also started east behind the Numa Numa trail toward an assembly area. The march was made under fire; the Japanese sporadically shelled the advancing battalion with 90mm mortars.

The following morning, 20 November, the same Japanese company that had been forced to withdraw the previous day came bouncing back, full of fight. The enemy attempted to outflank the Marine positions along the trail, but King's battalion drove the enemy back again. The Japanese then undertook to harass the Marines by sniper fire and mortar concentrations, and the resistance grew more determined when King's force started a counterattack.

Two of the light Marine tanks were disabled in the close fighting along the trail before the Marine battalion could advance. The general course of attack by 3/3 was east along the Numa Numa trail toward the two forks of the Piva River.

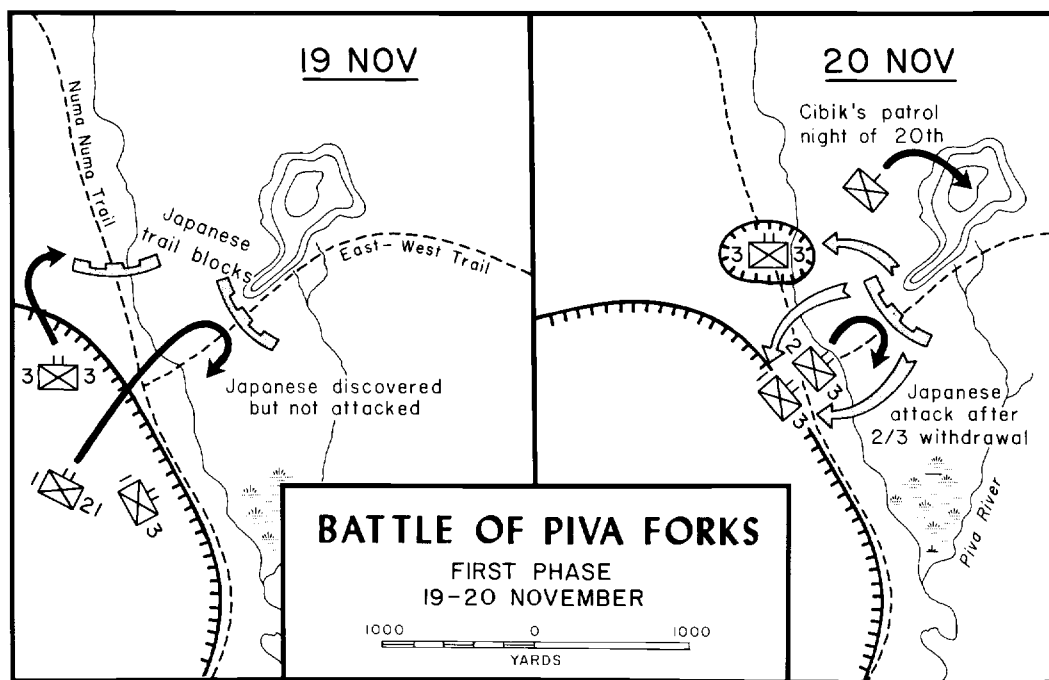
A number of changes in the front line dispositions were ordered as 3/3 advanced. The 3d Raider Battalion moved out of reserve positions to cover the slowly widening gap between the 129th Infantry and the 3d Marines. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Hector de Zayas' 2/3 on the right of 3/3 passed through the front lines of 2/21 to advance across the west fork of the Piva River. The objective of 2/3 was the enemy position reported earlier between the two forks of the Piva River. The Piva crossing was made over a hasty bridge of mahogany timbers thrown across the stream by engineers. The enemy outpost was then discovered abandoned but clumsily booby-trapped. The only opposition to the attack by 2/3 was scattered snipers and several machine gun nests. By late afternoon of the 20th, de Zayas' battalion was firmly astride the East-West trail between the two forks of the Piva River. Elements of the 21st Marines, now in reserve positions behind the two battalions of the 3d Marines, moved forward to take up blocking positions behind Colonel McHenry's regiment.

As the Marine forces prepared to continue the attack, the opportune discovery of a small forward ridge was a stroke of good fortune that ultimately assured the success of the Marine advance past the Piva River. This small terrain feature, which was later named Cibik Ridge in honor of the platoon leader whose patrol held the ridge against repeated Japanese assaults, was reported late on the afternoon of the 20th. The area fronting the

3d Marine positions had been scouted earlier, but this jungle-shrouded elevation had escaped detection. Although the height of this ridge was only 400 feet or so, the retention of this position had important aspects, since it was the first high ground discovered near the Marine front lines and eventually provided the first ground observation posts for artillery during the Bougainville campaign. There is no doubt that the enemy's desperate attempts to regain this ground were due to the fact that the ridge permitted observation of the entire Empress Augusta Bay area and dominated the East-West trail and the Piva Forks area.

All this, however, was unknown when First Lieutenant Steve J. Cibik was directed to occupy this newly discovered ridge. His platoon, quickly augmented by communicators and a section of heavy machine guns, began the struggle up the steep ridge late in the afternoon of the 20th. Telephone wire was reeled out as the platoon climbed. Just before sunset, the Marines reached the crest for the first look at the terrain in 20 days of fighting. Daylight was waning and the Marines did not waste time in sightseeing. The remaining light was used to establish a hasty defense, with machine guns sited along the likely avenues of approach. Then the Marines spent a wary night listening for sounds of enemy.

The next morning Cibik's men discovered that the crest of the ridge was actually a Japanese outpost position, used during the day as an observation post and abandoned at night. This was confirmed when Japanese soldiers straggled up the opposite slope of the ridge shortly after daybreak. The enemy, surprised by the unexpected blaze of fire from their own outpost, turned and fled down the hill.



MAP 19

After that opening move, however, the enemy attacks were organized and in considerable strength. Cibik's platoon, hastily reinforced by more machine guns and mortars, held the crest despite fanatical attempts by the Japanese to reoccupy the position. The Marines, grimly hanging to their perch above the enemy positions, hurled back three attacks during the day.

The expansion of the beachhead to Inland Defense Line E jumped off at 0730 on the morning of 21 November. The general plan called for a gradual widening of the perimeter to allow the 21st Marines to wedge a defensive sector between the 3d and 9th Marines. This action would then put all three Marine infantry regiments on the front lines. Colonel Ames' 21st Marines passed through the junction of the 3d and 9th Marines and crossed the

Piva River without difficulty. By early afternoon, the two assault battalions (1/21 and 3/21) had reached the designated line, and the attack was held up to await further orders. The approach march had been made without enemy interference, except on the extreme left flank where a reinforced platoon, acting as the contact between the 21st Marines and the 3d Marines, was hit by a strong Japanese patrol. The Marine platoon managed to repulse this attack with heavy losses to the enemy. Important documents, outlining the Japanese defenses ahead, were obtained from the body of a dead Japanese officer.

By 1425, the 21st Marines had established a new defensive sector, and contact between 3/21 and the 9th Marines had been established. There was, however, no contact between 1/21 and 3/21 along the front

lines. The remaining battalion, 2/21, was then released from operational control by the 3d Marines, and this unit moved into reserve positions behind 3/21 and 1/21 to block the gap between the battalions.

The enemy resistance in the 3d Marines' sector, however, was unexpectedly strong. All three battalions were engaged with the Japanese during the course of the advance. The left battalion, 3/3, crossed the Piva River without trouble and advanced toward a slight rise. As the 3/3 scouts came over the top of this ridge, the Japanese opened fire from reverse slope positions. The scouts were pinned down by this sudden outburst, but after the rest of the battalion moved forward a strong charge over the ridge cleared the area of all Japanese. Before the battalion could consolidate the position, though, enemy 90mm mortars registered on the slope, and the Marines were forced to seek shelter in the 200 or more foxholes which dotted the area. These enemy emplacements and the steep slope prevented many casualties. The 3d Battalion decided to halt in this position and a defensive perimeter was set up for the night.

The 2d Battalion, making a reconnaissance in force in front of the 1/3 positions, bumped into a strong enemy position astride the East-West trail near the east fork of the Piva. About 18 to 20 pillboxes were counted, each of them spitting rifle and machine gun fire. De Zayas' battalion managed to crack the first line of bunkers after some fighting at close range, but could make no further headway. Company E, attempting to flank the enemy positions to relieve the intense fire directed at Company G, was knocked back by the Japanese defenders. Aware now that the enemy was organized in considerable depth, the battalion commander ordered

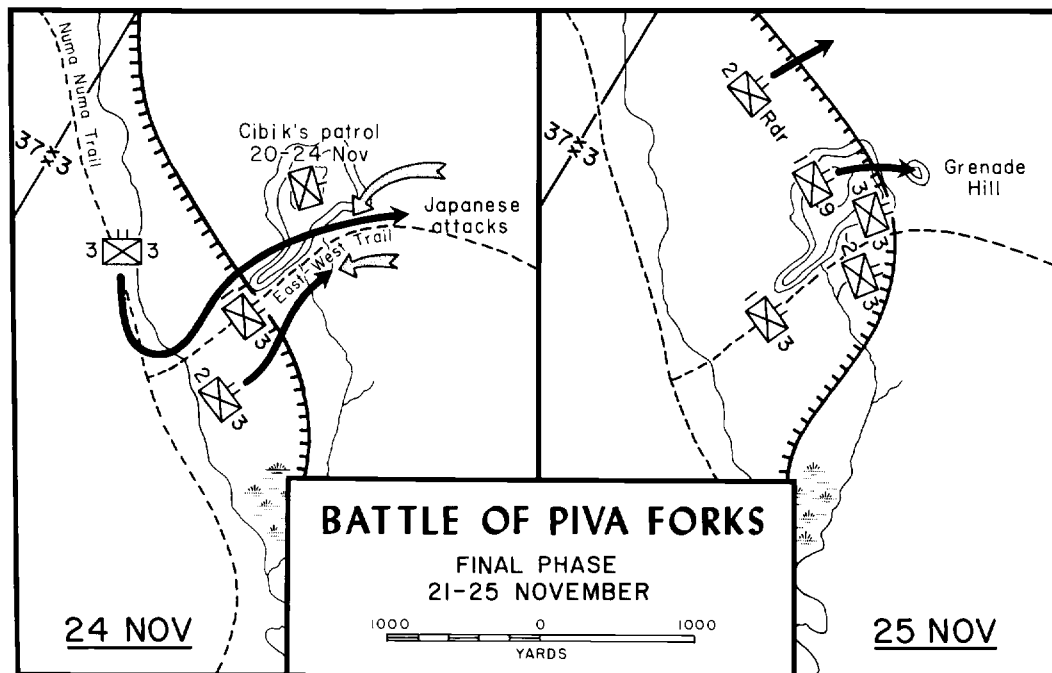
a withdrawal to allow artillery to soften up the enemy positions.

The retrograde movement was difficult since there were many wounded Marines and the terrain was rugged, but the withdrawal was managed despite the determined efforts by the Japanese to prevent such a disengagement. After de Zayas' battalion had reentered the lines of 1/3, the Japanese attempted a double envelopment of the position held by the 1st Battalion (now commanded by Major Charles J. Bailey, Jr.). This was a mistake. The enemy followed the obvious routes of approach down the East-West Trail, and his effort perished in front of the machine guns sited along this route by 1/3. Bailey's battalion then extended to the left toward Cibik Ridge.

The 9th Marines, meanwhile, had crossed the Piva River in the right sector and were now occupying a new line of defense about 1,000 yards east of the river. The new positions extended from the beach to the 21st Marines in the center sector. The 129th Infantry, completing the general advance of the Marine-Army perimeter to Inland Defense Line E, also moved forward another 1,000 yards. The 37th Division unit was also unopposed.

Action along the entire beachhead dwindled on the 22d of November. The 21st Marines bridged the gap between the two front line battalions by shifting 3/21 about 400 yards to the right to make contact with 1/21. A considerable gap still existed between the 21st Marines and the 3d Marines. This break in the defensive lines was caused by the fact that the frontage of the Marine positions was greater than anticipated because of map inaccuracies.

The expansion of the perimeter was halted on these lines while a concerted at-



MAP 20

tack was planned to push the Japanese out of the strongly entrenched positions ahead. The enemy fortifications, which faced nearly south because of the twists of the trail, would be assaulted from the west to east in a flanking attack. To insure a coordinated advance, the attack was set for 24 November, with the East-West trail as the boundary between the assaulting regiments.

It was now apparent that the main Japanese dispositions had been reached, and intensive preparations for the full-scale assault on the enemy forces were rushed. All available tanks and supporting weapons were moved forward into positions behind the 3d Marines as fast as the inadequate trail net would permit. Engineers and Seabees worked to extend the road as close to the Piva River forks as possible, erecting hasty bridges across the Piva

River despite intense sniper fire and harassment by enemy mortars. Supply sections moved huge quantities of ammunition, rations, and medical supplies forward in a relay system that began with trucks and amtracs and ended with Marines hand-carrying the supplies to the front lines. A medical station was established near the terminus of the road to facilitate evacuation of the wounded. All signs indicated that the 3d Marines, scheduled to advance on the 24th, would be meeting a strong enemy force.

By the evening of the 22d, several changes had been made in the sector of the 3d Marines. The 2d Raider Battalion, now attached to the 3d Marines, was ordered to relieve King's battalion on the small hill which had been taken the day before, and 3/3 then moved to a reserve

bivouac area behind 1/3 and nearly abreast of 2/3. The dispositions of the 3d Marines at this time resembled a triangle with the apex pointed along the East-West trail toward the Japanese positions. The 1st Battalion was in front, with 3/3 on the left of the trail and 2/3 on the right. Cibik's force, holding a position in front of the perimeter, was reinforced with a company of raiders and a platoon from the 3d Marines Weapons Company. By this time, the observation post was defended by more than 200 Marines and bristled with supporting weapons. The Japanese, to reclaim this position, would have to pay a terrible price.

On 23 November, artillery observers moved to the crest of Cibik Ridge to adjust fires in preparation for the attack the next day. The Marines holding the front lines marked their positions with colored smoke grenades, and both artillery and mortars were then registered in the area ahead. The sighting rounds caused some confusion when several explosions occurred within the Marine positions. It was then realized that the Japanese were firing in return and using the same smoke signals for registration on the Marine lines.

Shells from long-range enemy guns were also falling on Torokina strip and an echelon of LSTs unloading near the cape. The observers on Cibik Ridge shifted registration fires toward several likely artillery positions and the enemy fire ceased. The news that the enemy had artillery support for the defense of his positions was disturbing, though. Scouts had estimated that the enemy force, located in the area around the village of Kogubikopai-ai, numbered about 1,200 to 1,500. The addition of artillery support would make the

job of reducing this strong position even more difficult.

The attack order for 24 November directed the two battalions, 2/3 and 3/3, to advance abreast along the East-West trail and attack for about 800 yards beyond the east fork of the Piva River. Seven battalions of artillery—four Marine and three Army—would provide support for the attack after an opening concentration of 20 minutes fire on an area about 800 yards square. During the day of 23 November, while the artillery group registered on all probable enemy positions, Bailey's 1/3 moved every available weapon, including captured Japanese guns, into the front lines. By nightfall, 1/3 had emplaced 44 machine guns across the trail and had registered the concentrations of a dozen 81mm mortars and 9 60mm mortars along the zone of action of the attacking battalions.

Early the next morning, the two battalions began moving out of bivouac and up the trail toward the front lines held by 1/3. It was Thanksgiving Day back in the States; but on Bougainville this was just another day of possible death, another day of attack against a hidden, determined enemy. Few Marines gave the holiday any thought—the preparations for this advance during the last two days had built up too much tension for anything but the job ahead. Behind the Marines, in the early dawn mist, trucks and amtracs churned along muddy trails, bringing forward last loads of rations, ammunition, and medical supplies. Tanks, assigned to a secondary role in this attack, clanked toward the front lines to move into support positions.

At 0835, just 25 minutes before the attack hour, the seven battalions of the artillery group opened fire on the Japanese

positions in front of the 3d Marines. From the opening salvo, the roar of the cannon fire and the sharp blasts of the explosions in the jungle ahead merged into a near-deafening thunder. In the next 20 minutes or so, more than 5,600 shells from 75mm and 105mm howitzers hammered into the Japanese positions. The enemy area was jarred and shattered by more than 60 tons of explosives in that short time. At the same time, smoke shells hitting along the hills east of the Torokina River cut down enemy observation into the Marine positions.

As H-Hour approached, Bailey's battalion, from the base of fire position astride the East-West trail, opened up with close-in mortar concentrations and sustained machine gun fire which shredded the jungle ahead, preventing the Japanese from seeking protection next to the Marine lines. But just before the attack was to jump off, Japanese artillery began a counterbarrage which blasted the Marine lines, pounding the 1/3 positions and the assembly areas of the assault battalions. The extremely accurate fire threatened to force a halt to the attack plans. At this point, the value of Cibik Ridge was brought into full prominence. The forward observer team on the ridge discovered the location of a Japanese firing battery and requested counterbattery fire. There were several anxious moments when communications abruptly failed, but the line break was found and repaired in time.

The enemy guns were located on the forward slope of a small coconut grove area some several thousand yards from the Piva River. As the two Marine officers watched, the return fire from the 155mm howitzer battery of the 37th Division began to explode near this grove. Fire was

adjusted quickly by direct observation, and in a matter of moments the enemy battery had been knocked out of action.⁹

Even as the last Japanese artillery shells were exploding along the Marine lines, the two assault battalions began forming into attack formation behind the line of departure. At 0900, as the continuous hammering of machine guns, mortars, and artillery slowly dwindled to a stop, the two battalions moved through the 1/3's lines and advanced.

After the continuous roar of firing and explosions for more than 20 minutes, a strange stillness took over. The only sounds were those of Marines moving through the jungle. The neutralization of the enemy positions within the beaten zone of the artillery preparation had been complete. The first few hundred yards of the enemy positions were carried without difficulty in the incredible stillness, the Marines picking their way cautiously through the shattered and cratered jungle. Blast-ed and torn bodies of dead Japanese gave mute evidence of the impact of massed artillery fires. Enemy snipers, lashed into positions in tree tops, draped from shattered branches.

This lull in the battle noise was only temporary. Gradually, as the stunned survivors of the concentrated bombard-

⁹ Although this account of the silencing of the enemy battery agrees with contemporary records, the former executive officer of the 12th Marines questioned its accuracy, recalling: "The [line] break was not found or repaired for more than one hour and the Japanese battery firing from a position in full view of the observer on the nose of Cibik Hill was able to withdraw behind the crest of what was later to be known as Hill 1000 before counterbattery fire could be brought to bear on the position." BGen John S. Letcher ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 60ct60.

ment began to fight back, the enemy resistance swelled from a few scattered rifle shots into a furious, fanatical defense. Japanese troops from reserve bivouac areas outside the beaten zone were rushed into position and opened fire on the advancing Marines. Enemy artillery bursts blasted along the line, traversing the front of the advancing Marines. Extremely accurate 90mm mortar fire rocked the attacking companies.

Enemy fire was particularly heavy in the zone of 2/3 on the right of the East-West trail, and de Zaya's battalion, after moving about 250 yards, reported 70 casualties. A small stream near the trail meandered back and forth across the zone of advance, and the attacking Marines were forced to cross the stream eight times during the morning's movement. At least three enemy pillboxes were located in triangular formation in each bend of the stream, and each of these emplacements had to be isolated and destroyed. A number of engineers equipped with flame throwers moved along with the assault companies, and these weapons were used effectively on most bunkers. The Japanese, fully aware of the death-dealing capabilities of the flame throwers, directed most of their fire toward these weapons. Many engineers were killed trying to get close enough to enemy emplacements to direct the flame into the embrasures.

The attack by King's battalion (3/3) on the left of the East-West trail encountered less resistance, and the battalion was able to continue its advance without pause. Many dazed and shocked survivors of the bombardment were killed by the attacking Marines before the Japanese could recover from the effects of the artillery fire. But by the time the battalion had moved nearly

500 yards from the line of departure, the enemy forces had managed to reorganize and launch a desperate counterattack which King's men met in full stride. Without stopping, 3/3 drove straight through the enemy flanking attempt in a violent hand-to-hand and tree-to-tree struggle that completely destroyed the Japanese force.

By 1200, after three full hours of furious fighting, the two battalions had reached the initial objectives, and the attack was held up for a brief time for reorganization and to reestablish contact between units. Following a short rest, the Marines started forward again toward the final objective some 350-400 yards farther on. Meanwhile, artillery again pounded ahead of the Marine forces and mortars were moved forward. The final attack was supported by 81mm mortars; but as the advance began again, enemy counter-mortar fire rained on the Marines. The attack was continued under this exchange of supporting and defensive fires.

King's battalion was hit hard once more, but managed to keep going. Enemy machine gun and rifle fire from positions on high ground bordering a swampy area raked through the attacking Marines, forcing them to seek cover in the knee-deep mud and slime. Company L, on the extreme left, was hit hardest. Reinforced quickly with a platoon from the reserve unit, Company K, the company managed to fight its way through heavy enemy fire to the foot of a small knoll. Company I, with the battalion command group attached, came up to help. Together, the two companies staged a final rush and captured the rising ground. After clearing this small elevation of all enemy, the bat-

talion organized a perimeter defense and waited for 2/3 to come up alongside.

The 2d Battalion, moving toward the final objective, was slowed by strong enemy reinforcements as it neared its goal. Quickly requesting 60mm and 81mm mortar concentrations, the 2d Battalion overcame the enemy opposition and lunged forward. The final stand by the Japanese on the objective was desperate and determined, but as the Marines struggled ahead, the resistance dwindled and died. The 2d Battalion then mopped up and went into a perimeter defense to wait out the night. Behind the two front battalions, however, the battle continued well into the night as isolated enemy riflemen and machine gunners that had been overrun attempted to ambush and kill ammunition carriers and stretcher bearers.

During the day, the corps artillery group, providing support for the Marine attack, fired a total of 52 general support missions in addition to the opening bombardment. Nine other close-in missions were fired as the 37th Division also moved its perimeter forward. In all, during the attack on 24 November, the artillery group fired 4,131 rounds of 75mm, 2,534 rounds of 105mm, and 688 rounds of 155mm ammunition.

The casualties during this attack also reflected the intensity of the combat. After the conclusion of the advance by the Marines, at least 1,071 dead bodies of Japanese were counted. The Marine casualties were 115 dead and wounded.

For some Marines, the day was Thanksgiving Day after all. A large shipment of turkeys was received at the beachhead, and, unable to store the birds, the division cooks roasted the entire shipment and packed the turkeys for distribution to

front line units.¹⁰ Not every isolated defensive position was reached, but most of the Marines had a piece of turkey to remind them of the day.

*GRENADE HILL*¹¹

The following morning, 25 November, the 3d Marines remained on the newly-taken ground, while a number of changes were made in the lineup along the perimeter. Two days earlier, General Turnage had directed that the 3d Marines and the 9th Marines exchange sectors as soon as possible. This move would allow Colonel McHenry's 3d Marines, by now badly depleted by battle casualties, sickness, and exhaustion, to take over a relatively quiet sector while the 9th Marines returned to action.

The changes had been started on the 24th while the 3d Marines were engaged in the battle for Piva Forks. The 1st Battalion of the 9th Marines, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Carey A. Randall, was in regimental reserve positions behind 2/9 and 3/9 on the right flank when alerted by a warning order that the battalion would move on 30-minute's notice.

¹⁰ In the 9th Marines' sector, company cooks did the honors for the holiday birds using 50-gallon drums in which the turkeys were boiled together with rice. "The turkeys together with any other Thanksgiving extras were then delivered boiled to units in position on the lines." *Craig ltr.*

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR-II*; *3d MarDiv Combat Rept*; *3d MarDiv D-2 SAR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *Letcher ltr*; *Snedeker ltr*; LtCol Harold C. Boehm ltr to CMC, dtd 9Aug48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC); *Peck ltr*; *HistDiv Acct*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; Aurther and Cohlma, *3d MarDivHist*.

Late in the afternoon, Randall's battalion was ordered to move north along the Piva River to report to Colonel McHenry's regiment for operational control. Shortly before dark, Randall reported to McHenry and was directed to an assembly area. The battalion was to be prepared for relief of the front lines as soon after daybreak as possible. The 2d Battalion of the raider regiment, with two companies of the 3d Raiders attached, was also ordered to move up behind the 3d Marines for commitment to action.

On the morning of the 25th, as the 2d Raiders and 1/9 moved toward the front lines to extend the perimeter, a number of other changes were directed. De Zayas' 2/3, south of the East-West trail, extended its right flank to the southeast to make contact with the 21st Marines. King's battalion, 3/3, organized defensive positions on the left of the East-West trail to make contact with Cibik Ridge where a reinforced company was holding. As the front lines were straightened, 1/3 was withdrawn from action and 3/9 moved into reserve positions behind the 3d Marines. To substitute for the loss of 1/9 and 3/9 to the left sector, a newly arrived battalion of the 37th Division was attached to the 9th Marines. This unit, the 1st Battalion of the 145th Infantry, was placed in reserve positions in the extreme right sector near Piva Village.

Meanwhile, as these changes were made, the 2d Raiders and 1/9 moved east along the East-West trail to begin the day's attack. Randall's 1/9 was to move up Cibik Ridge and then attack almost directly east on a front of 400 yards to extend the left flank of 3/3. The 2d Raiders were to attack on the left flank of 1/9 on a front of about 800 yards. The objective,

an area of high ground north of the East-West trail, was about 800 yards distant.

Randall's battalion, guided by a patrol from Cibik Ridge, proceeded single file to the crest. There the Marines could see the attack objective ahead. At 1000, after another crushing 10-minute artillery preparation, the attack was started straight down the opposite side of Cibik Ridge. The assault companies lined up with A on the left and C on the right. Company B was to follow on order. Attached machine guns supported each company, and a heavy mortar barrage from Cibik Ridge pounded ahead as the Marines attacked. At the foot of the ridge, both attacking companies were held up by extremely heavy machine gun fire from concealed positions on a small knoll just ahead. The fight for this knob of ground continued the rest of the day.

The 2d Raiders, meanwhile, had advanced against sporadic resistance. The attack was held up several times by enemy groups; but, as the raiders prepared to assault the defenses, the enemy suddenly gave ground to retire to new positions. By afternoon, Major Washburn's battalion had occupied the hill mass dominating the East-West trail and established a strong perimeter defense on the objective to wait for the battalion from the 9th Marines to come up on line.

Randall's battalion, however, had its hands full. Both attack companies had committed their reserve platoons to the assault of the small knoll facing them without making headway. The enemy was well dug-in with a complete, all-around defense. Marines estimated that the small hill was held by at least 70 Japanese with 4 heavy (13mm) machine guns and about 12 Nambu (6.5mm) machine guns. In addition, the Japanese apparently had plenty

of grenades, since a continual rain of explosives was hurled from the enemy positions. The Marines, unable to advance against this formidable strongpoint, dubbed the knoll "Grenade Hill."

Many attempts to envelop this position were repulsed. At some points, the Marine attackers were only five yards from the enemy emplacements, engaged in a hot exchange of small-arms fire and grenades, but unable to carry the last few yards. The fight was conducted at such close quarters that the mortars on Cibik Ridge could not be registered on the enemy position. Many of the dugouts along the side of the hill were destroyed by the Marine attacks, but the crown of the hill was never carried. One platoon from Company A, circling the knoll to the left, managed to fight up a small trail into the position. Fierce enemy fire forced the Marines back before the crest of the ridge was reached. Fourteen Japanese were killed by the Marine platoon in this attempt to take the hill.

By midafternoon, Company B was ordered from Cibik Ridge to plug the gap between the 1/9 attack and the positions of 3/3 on the right. Company B moved down the slope of Cibik Ridge toward the East-West trail south of Grenade Hill and continued east on the trail for several hundred yards in an attempt to locate the left flank of the 3d Marines. Shortly before dusk, the company abruptly ran into a Japanese force. After an intense but short fire fight, the Marine company decided that the Japanese position on higher ground was too strong to overrun and broke off contact. The company then withdrew to a defensible position closer to Cibik Ridge. The Japanese made a similar decision and also withdrew. Company B, out of touch with 1/9 and unable

to locate the left flank of 3/3 before dark, organized a defense position across the trail and settled down to wait for morning.

Meanwhile, the fight for Grenade Hill had dwindled and stopped. The two companies of 1/9, unable to capture the hill, dug in around the base of the knob to wait for another day. The 2d Raiders, on the objective, remained in front of the lines in a tight defensive ring.

The next morning, 26 November, scouts from 1/9 reported that the Japanese had quietly withdrawn from Grenade Hill during the night and the small knoll was abandoned. The two assault companies rushed for the hill at once, taking over the enemy positions along the crown of the knoll. The small knob of ground, about 60 feet across at the base and hardly more than 20 feet high, was dotted with a number of well-constructed and concealed rifle pits and bunkers. Each bunker was large enough for at least three enemy soldiers. Only 32 dead Japanese were found on the hill. At 1015, the attack was pushed forward again and contact was made with Company B. This company, during the morning, had linked up with the left flank of the 3d Marines, thereby establishing contact along the line. Company B then joined with 1/9 to complete the move to the final objective. By nightfall, the ridgeline blocking the East-West trail was in Marine hands.

During the attacks of 25-26 November, the Marines lost 5 killed and 42 wounded. At least 32 Japanese had been killed in the assaults on Grenade Hill, and there had undoubtedly been additional casualties in the attacks in other areas. The number of enemy killed during the period 18-26 November in the 3d Division sector was at least 1,196, although the total number of

casualties must have been considerably higher than that figure.¹²

The fight for expansion of the beachhead in this area was recorded as the Battle of Piva Forks, and marked the temporary end of serious enemy opposition to the occupation and development of the Cape Torokina area. The only high ground from which the enemy could threaten or harass the beachhead was now held by IMAC forces, and possession of the commanding terrain facing the Piva River gave the Marine regiments an advantage in defending that sector.

After the objective of 26 November had been secured, the remainder of the directed reliefs were completed. The 3d Battalion of the 9th Marines relieved 3/3 in the front lines, and this battalion then became the reserve unit behind 1/9 and 3/9. Control of 1/3 was then shifted to the 9th Marines, and at 1600 on the afternoon of the 26th, the 3d Marines and 9th Marines exchanged commands in the left and right subsectors. The 21st Marines, maintaining positions in the center subsector, moved forward about 500 yards after the attack on Grenade Hill. The IMAC dispositions at the conclusion of the fighting on 26 November had the 148th and 129th Infantry Regiments on line in the 37th Division sector, and the 9th Marines, the 21st Marines, and the 3d Marines on line, left to right, in the Marine sector.

For the 3d Marines, this last move to the right sector completed a full cycle of the beachhead which was begun on D-Day. Following the landing, the regiment moved toward the Koromokina River, then traveled inland through the jungle and swamps to the Piva Forks area. Finally, after 27 days of jungle fighting, the regi-

ment was back near Cape Torokina within the limits of patrols of the first two days ashore.

In the right sector, the exhausted infantry battalions of the 3d Marines were given a respite by the formation of a composite battalion from among the Regimental Weapons Company, the Scout Company, several headquarters companies, and supporting service troops. This makeshift battalion took over a position along the Marine lines on the 28th of November and maintained the defense until early in December so that Colonel McHenry's 3d Marines could reorganize and rest. The Army battalion, 1/145, assigned to this sector was also placed in frontline defenses under the operational control of the 3d Marines and aggressively patrolled past the Torokina River seeking the enemy.

The Japanese, however, evidently intended to do no more than keep this area under observation. Other than a few brushes with enemy outposts, the 3d Marines were out of contact with the Japanese for the remainder of the campaign. The problem, as before, was mainly one of maintaining and supplying the Marine fighting units in the midst of swamplands.

On the 28th of November, General Geiger ordered that the IMAC perimeter in the center and left subsectors be moved forward to Inland Defense Line F, and, after this line was occupied, artillery was displaced forward to defend the area seized and to support the last push to the final beachhead line.¹³

The area fronting the Marine perimeter at this time varied from mountainous terrain to deep swamps and dense jungle.

¹² *IMAC AR-II*, p. 14.

¹³ The 148th Infantry and most of the 129th had already reached the final beachhead line by 25 November. *Beightler ltr.*



NUMA NUMA TRAIL: POSITION *in the swamp below Grenade Hill held by Marines of Company E, 2/21. (USMC 69394)*



MARINE WOUNDED *are carried down a steaming jungle trail from Hill 1000 during the fighting in early December. (USMC 71380)*

The 9th Marines, on the right flank of the 37th Division, reported rugged terrain in this subsector with many ridges and deep gorges cut by water falls and streams. The 21st and 3d Marines, however, still faced the task of holding areas in the midst of swamps. These, the Marines reported, were not impassable, but it was certain that large forces of enemy could not advance through these swamps without detection by one of the many patrols which roved back and forth between units during the day. At night, small groups moved into the swamps as listening posts.

Every possible battle position, however, was wired and mined. Gaps in the front-line defense were covered by automatic weapons. The Japanese, however, never attempted an infiltration during this time, and only scattered groups of enemy were encountered. These were evidently only

scouts who were trying to keep the Marines' progress under surveillance.

The Marines continued to gain combat experience. Two rules of jungle warfare were found invaluable during this period. The first rule was to avoid using the same trail twice in a row—because the second time the trail would be ambushed. The second rule was to avoid heckling a Japanese outpost twice unless prepared to fight a full-scale battle on the second go-around. Inevitably, in these brushes with the Japanese, the second fight was more vicious and determined than the first. While the enemy did not actively seek out the Marine units for battle, the small outpost engagements convinced the Marines that the enemy was still in the area in force and prepared to fight any further expansion of the beachhead.

End of a Mission

*THE KOIARI RAID*¹

Throughout the expansion of the beachhead past the Piva River forks, the possibility of a major counterattack by the Japanese along the right flank was a constant threat. To short-circuit possible enemy plans to carry out a full-scale reinforcement effort along this route, a raid on Japanese lines in the southern part of Empress Augusta Bay was proposed. This would disrupt enemy communications, destroy installations and supplies, and obtain information about any troop movements towards the beachhead. The foray was aimed at reported Japanese installations near Koiari, about 10 miles down the coast from Cape Torokina.

The unit selected for this operation was the 1st Parachute Battalion (Major Richard Fagan), which had arrived on Bougainville from Vella Lavella on the 23d of November. Fagan's battalion was to operate much in the manner of Krulak's group on Choiseul. The parachute battalion was to harass enemy units as far inland as the East-West trail but was to avoid a decisive engagement with major Japanese forces. A boat would rendez-

vous each night with the raiding unit if communications failed. The orders for withdrawal would be given by IMAC headquarters.²

The raid was originally scheduled for the morning of 28 November so that escorting destroyers of a shipping echelon could provide naval gunfire support if needed. A trial landing on the selected beach, about 3,000 yards north of Koiari, was made after dark on the 27th by one boat, whose crew then returned to report that there was no evidence of enemy in the area. Because of delay in the actual embarkation of the parachute battalion, however, the entire operation was postponed until the 29th.

Destroyer support would no longer be available, but this lack was not disturbing. One 155mm howitzer battery from the 37th Division was in position near Cape Torokina to support the parachute battalion with long-range fire, and air support could be expected during the day. Two LCI gunboats, which had proved successful during the Treasurys operation, were also available. General Geiger, taking account of the fire support at hand, decided that one day's postponement would not jeopardize the operation and another reconnaissance boat was sent to the selected beach late on the evening of 28 November. The second report was similar to the first: no enemy sighted. In view of later devel-

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *IMAC AR-II*; *3d Mar Div Combat Rept*; *3d Mar Div D-3 Jnl*; *3d Mar Div D-3 Repts*; 1st MarParaBu Unit Rept, Koiari Raid, dtd 30Nov43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); *Snedeker ltr*; Henderson, "Naval Gunfire Support;" Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*.

² IMAC OpO No. 5, dtd 27Nov43 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC).

opments, it is doubtful that either of the reconnaissance boats landed at the designated beach.

Fagan's battalion, with Company M of the 3d Raider Battalion and a forward observer team from the 12th Marines attached, embarked on board LCMs and LCVPs at Cape Torokina early on the morning of 29 November. One hour later, at 0400, the boats moved in toward the Koiari beach and the Marines were landed virtually in the middle of a Japanese supply dump. The surprise was mutual. A Japanese officer, armed only with a sword, and apparently expecting Japanese boats, greeted the first Marines ashore. His demise and the realization of his mistake were almost simultaneous. The Marines, now committed to establishing a beachhead in the midst of an enemy camp, dug in as quickly as possible to develop the situation.

Before the Japanese recovered from the sudden shock of American forces landing in the middle of the supply dump, the parachute battalion had pushed out a perimeter which extended roughly about 350 yards along the beach and about 180 yards inland. The force was split—the raider company and the headquarters company of the parachute battalion had landed about 1000 yards below the main force and outside the dump area. The Japanese reaction, when it came, was a furious hail of 90mm mortar shells and grenades from "knee mortars." The entire beachhead was raked by continual machine gun and rifle fire. Periodically the Japanese mounted a determined rush against one flank or the other. The Marines, taking cover in hastily dug slit-trenches in the sand, returned the fire as best they could. Casualties mounted alarmingly.

The battalion commander, meanwhile, radioed IMAC headquarters of the parachutists' plight and requested that the unit be withdrawn since accomplishment of the mission was obviously impossible and the slow annihilation of the battalion extremely likely. General Geiger immediately took steps to set up a rescue attempt, but unfortunately the return radio transmission was never received by Fagan. By midmorning, Fagan's radio failed and although it would transmit, it could not receive incoming messages. Contact with IMAC was later made over the artillery net to the forward observer team. At 0930, the beachhead was strengthened by the arrival of the two companies which had been separated. These Marines had fought their way along the shoreline to reach the main party, losing 13 men during the march.

As time passed, Fagan became more convinced that his battalion was in a tighter spot than IMAC headquarters realized. The battalion commander estimated that the Japanese force numbered about 1,200 men, with better positions than the Marines for continued fighting. When the first rescue attempt by the landing craft was beaten back by an intense artillery concentration along the shoreline, the situation looked even more grim. When a second rescue attempt was also repulsed by the Japanese artillery, the Marines resigned themselves to a long fight.

Late in the afternoon, when enemy trucks were heard approaching the perimeter from the south, the parachutists guessed that an all-out attack that night or early the next morning would attempt to wipe out the Marine beachhead. Taking stock of the situation—their backs to the sea, nearly out of ammunition, without

close support weapons—the Marine parachutists reluctantly but realistically concluded that the enemy's chances for success were quite good.

During the day, 155mm guns of the 3d Defense Battalion at Cape Torokina registered along the forward edge of the parachutists' perimeter, keeping the enemy from making a sustained effort from that direction. IMAC, in the meantime, sent an emergency message to the task force escorting transports back to Guadalcanal, and three of the screening destroyers immediately reversed course and steamed at flank speed for Bougainville. The three support ships—the *Fullam*, *Landsdowne*, and *Lardner* and one of the LCI gunboats arrived shortly before 1800. The *Fullam*, first to arrive, opened fire immediately under the direction of two gunfire officers from IMAC who had raced for the beleaguered beachhead in a PT boat.

There was little daylight left for shooting on point targets by the time the destroyers arrived. Unable to see the beach, they stationed themselves by radar navigation and opened up with unobserved fires which the gunfire officers adjusted by sound. The ships fired directly to the flanks of the Marine beachhead, while the 155mm guns at Cape Torokina fired parallel to the beach. The effect was a three-sided box which threw a protective wall of fire around the Marine position. Behind this shield, the rescue boats made a dash for the beach. The Marine battalion, which had been alerted for the evacuation through the artillery radio net, was waiting patiently despite the fact that its last three radio messages had indicated that it was out of ammunition.

For some reason—probably because the Japanese were busy seeking cover from

naval gunfire—there was no return enemy fire. As the rescue boats beached, the Marines slowly retired toward the shore. There was no stampede, no panic. The withdrawal was orderly and deliberate. After waiting to insure that all Marines were off the perimeter, the battalion commander gave the signal to clear the beach and at 2040 the last boat pulled away without drawing a single enemy shot. The artillery battery and the gunfire support ships then worked over the entire beach, hoping to destroy the Japanese force by random fires.

The attempt to raid the Japanese system of communications and supply along the Bougainville coast ended in a dismal failure. Although the Marines had landed in an area where great destruction could have been accomplished, they were never able to do more than hug the shoreline and attempt to defend their meager toehold with dwindling ammunition until rescued. In the pitch darkness at the time of evacuation, much of the Marine equipment was lost. Although the withdrawal was orderly, some crew-served weapons, rifles, and packs were left behind. Enemy supplies destroyed would have to be credited to the bombardment by Allied artillery and destroyers after the evacuation. The Marines estimated that the Japanese had lost about 291 men, about one-half of whom were probably killed and the others wounded. The Marine parachute battalion, which landed a total of 24 officers and 505 enlisted men plus 4 officers and 81 enlisted men from the 3d Raiders, listed casualties as 15 killed or died of wounds, 99 wounded, and 7 missing.³

³ 1st MarParaBn UnitRept; IMAC AR-II, p. 15, gives 15 killed and 71 wounded for this operation.

*HELLZAPOPPIN RIDGE
AND HILL 600A*⁴

After the move to Inland Defense Line F, corps headquarters kept its eyes on a hill mass some 2,000 yards to the front which dominated the area between the Piva and Torokina Rivers. These hills, if held by the Japanese, would give them observation of the entire Cape Torokina area and a favorable position from which to launch an attack against the IMAC beachhead. Geiger's headquarters felt these hills were a continual threat to the perimeter.

On the other hand, Marine occupation of the hills would provide a strong natural defensive position blocking the East-West trail at its Torokina River crossing and would greatly strengthen the final Inland Defense Line. That line, which included the hill mass, was to have been occupied by 30 November, but the supply problems through the swamps and the enemy action had caused an unavoidable delay. Despite the added logistical difficulties which occupation of this hill mass would involve, corps headquarters directed the 21st Marines to maintain a combat outpost on one

of the hills until the perimeter could be extended to include this area.

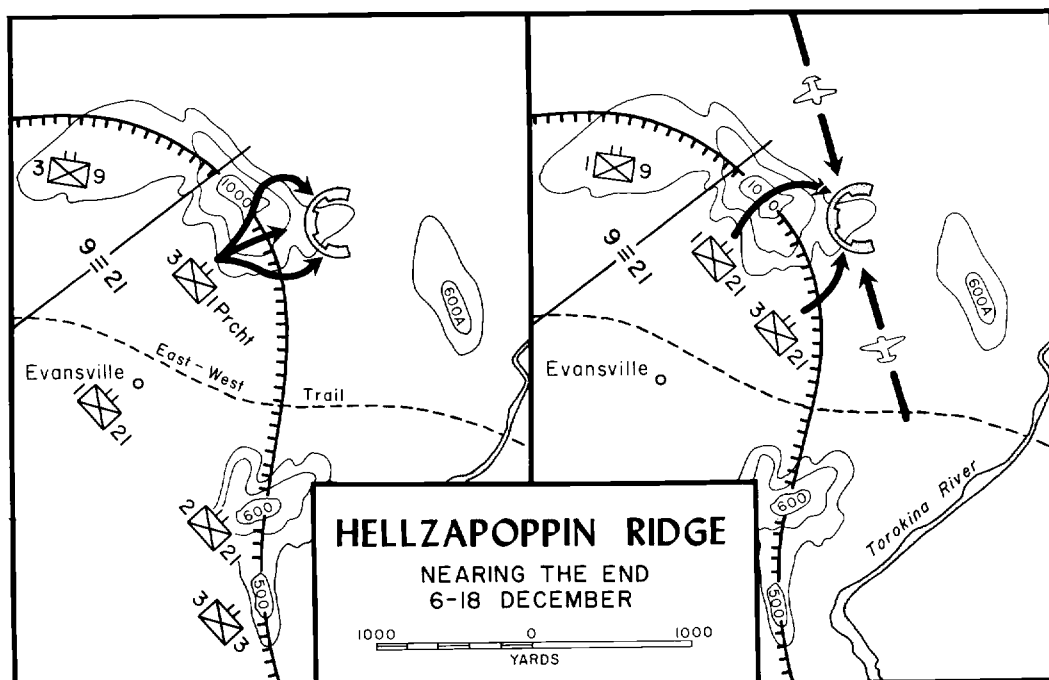
On 27 November, a patrol of 1 officer and 21 men from Colonel Ames' regiment moved to Hill 600 where observation could be maintained over the other two hills and the Torokina River. Hill 600, just south of the East-West trail, was bordered on the left by a higher, longer ridge about 1,000 feet high. A smaller hill, about 500 feet high, was farther south.

As a preliminary to eventual occupation of the hills by IMAC forces, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams, was moved from reserve positions on Vella Lavella on 3 December. Two days later, this unit—actually just the regimental headquarters, the weapons company, and the 3d Parachute Battalion—moved toward the largest of the three hills, Hill 1000. The parachute regiment made a forced march with a half-unit of fire and only three days' rations. This shortage of food was later partially solved by an air-drop on the regiment's position. Williams' regiment pushed forward along the East-West trail almost to the Torokina River before turning to the north to start the climb of the ridgeline toward Hill 1000.

By the end of 5 December, the 1st Parachute Regiment with units of the 3d, 9th, and 21st Marines in support, had established a general outpost line stretching from Hill 1000 to the junction of the East-West trail at the Torokina River. A Provisional Parachute Battalion, under Major George R. Stallings, was formed by Williams from regimental headquarters and Company I to occupy the left sector of his defenses.⁵ Williams' command,

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: IMAC Rept. on Bougainville Operation, Phase III, 1-15Dec43, dtd 21Mar-44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *IMAC AR-III*; *IMAC C-2 Repts*; *IMAC C-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv CombatRept*; *3d MarDiv D-2 SAR*; *3d MarDiv D-2 Jnl*; *3d MarDiv D-3 Repts*; *3d MarDiv D-4 Repts*; 1st MarPara-Regt UnitRept, 6-13Dec43, n.d. (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC), hereafter *ParaRegt Rept*; LtCol Robert T. Vance ltr to CMC, dtd 27May48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC); *Snedeker ltr*; *McAllister ltr*; *Bowser ltr*; *Letcher ltr*; *Rentz, Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; *Aurthur and Cohlma, 3d MarDivHist*.

⁵ Col Robert T. Vance ltr to CMC, dtd 6Oct60, hereafter *Vance ltr*.



MAP 21

with about 900 men, was strung over a thinly held line about 3,000 yards in length. Meanwhile, the 21st Marines outpost on Hill 600 was reinforced. A full rifle company with a machine gun platoon and the IMAC experimental rocket platoon attached was moved forward to bolster the Marine defense on the two hills blocking the East-West trail.

The move to this hill mass overlooking the Torokina River was made at about the time that the Japanese evidenced a strong interest in these positions. During the period 27 November to 4 December, the enemy activity was confined to minor contacts along the perimeter with the Japanese using mostly long-range artillery fire to make their continued presence known. On 29 November, the Cape Torokina airfield site was hit by a number of 15cm howitzer shells from extreme range. On 3

December, the Japanese attempted to shell the beachhead once more. This time the artillery was emplaced on a forward slope, and a fierce counterbattery fire from three battalions of 75mm howitzers, one battalion of 105mm howitzers, and one battery of 155mm guns quickly smashed the Japanese position. The artillery spotting problem was further aided on 4 December by the delivery of two light planes. These slow-moving aircraft increased the effectiveness of artillery fire by allowing observers to spot targets of opportunity and request and adjust fires. The scout bombers which had been used as spotting planes flew too fast and had too many blind spots to be good observation planes.

The first enemy contact of any consequence since Grenade Hill came in the sector of the 9th Marines on 5 December. Colonel Craig's regiment had been ordered

to expand the perimeter to make contact with the parachute regiment on Hill 1000, and, as a small patrol from 2/9 moved out, it was ambushed by about 10 Japanese. The Marines lost two killed and two wounded in the first exchange. The Japanese then withdrew. The following day a 40-man patrol from the 9th Marines aggressively scouted ahead of the regiment but did not encounter any enemy forces. This day, the entire beachhead took another jump forward as advance units of the three regiments pushed inland. On the right flank, 3/3 advanced from positions which had been occupied since 21 November and put a patrol on Hill 500 south of the strong 21st Marines outpost on Hill 600. This position was then strengthened by the extension of an amphibian tractor trail from the swamps to Hill 600, assuring an adequate supply route. The 9th Marines, on the far left, moved up to make contact with the Marines holding Hill 1000.

A general line of defensive positions now stretched from the area north of Hill 1000 along this ridge to the East-West trail and then to the two smaller hills, 600 and 500, south of the trail. With the extension of the supply lines, a growing supply dump called Evansville was established to the rear of Hill 600 near the East-West trail to insure supply of the final defensive line. The advance to Inland Defense Line H came on a day when the entire island was rocked by a violent earthquake. Earthworks and trenches were crumbled and gigantic trees swayed as the ground trembled and rolled. Persons standing were thrown to the ground by the force of the quake. Other earth tremors were recorded later, but none achieved the force of the quake of 6 December.

Movement to the final defense line came as minor patrol clashes were reported along the entire perimeter. On 7 December, the Provisional Parachute Battalion discovered abandoned positions on a 650-foot ridge which extended east from Hill 1000 toward the Torokina River, much in the manner that Grenade Hill was an offshoot of Cibik Ridge.⁶ Patrols returned to report that a number of well dug-in and concealed emplacements had been found on the ridge, and Williams made plans to occupy this area with part of his force the next morning. A patrol from the Provisional Parachute Battalion started down the spur on the 8th of December but was driven back by unexpected enemy fire. The Japanese, repeating a favorite maneuver, had returned to occupy the positions during the night.

The patrol reorganized and made a second attempt to seize the enemy position. No headway was made during a sharp exchange of fire. After eight Marines had been wounded, the patrol returned to the front lines. On the morning of 9 December, three patrols of the 3d Parachute Battalion converged on the spur; each encountered light resistance and reported that the enemy broke contact and withdrew. Major Vance ordered Company K to move forward and secure the area. The advancing Marines soon discovered that, "far from withdrawing, the Japs were still there and in considerable strength."⁷

Company K managed to penetrate the Japanese positions, but continued heavy casualties forced a withdrawal before the entire ridge could be captured. During this attack, the enemy fire showed few signs of slackening. Vance then ordered

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Company L to outflank the Japanese lines, requesting the Provisional Battalion to support with Company I on the left flank. "Neither of these two units could make headway against the almost sheer sides of the ridge and the heavy fire of the enemy."⁸ Several patrols from Company I were ambushed by Japanese in strong emplacements, and, during the confused close-range battle, one light machinegun squad became separated from the rest of the patrol. This squad did not return with the rest of the company, and an immediate search by a strong patrol failed to locate the missing men. Three of the Marines later returned to Hill 1000, but the rest of the squad were carried as casualties.

Despite a number of sharp attacks by the parachute regiment, the enemy position remained as strong as before. The Marines, eyeing the Japanese bastion, called for reinforcements to plug the weak spots caused by the casualties in the over-extended lines, and two rifle companies from adjacent units were rushed to Hill 1000. Company C, 1/21, at Evansville, was attached to Vance's unit and moved into the 3d Parachute Battalion's positions bringing much needed ammunition and supplies. At the same time, Company B, 1/9 advanced to cover the gap on the left between 3/9 and the lines on Hill 1000.

That afternoon, the parachute regiment was hit suddenly by a strong Japanese counterattack aimed at the center of the Marine positions on Hill 1000. An estimated reinforced company made the charge, but an artillery concentration centered on the saddle between Hill 1000 and the enemy-held spur broke the back of the Japanese rush. The quick support by 105mm and 75mm howitzers scattered the

Japanese soldiers and ended the attack. The Marines, though, had 12 men killed and 26 wounded in the brief struggle.

Evacuation of wounded from this battle area was particularly difficult. Only two trails led to the top of the hill—one a hazardous crawl up a steep slope, and the other a wider jeep trail leading toward the Torokina River. Torrential rains made both virtually impassable. At least 12 men were required to manhandle each stretcher case to an aid station set up about half-way down the rear slope. There, blood plasma and emergency care were given the wounded before they were carried to an amtrac trail at the foot of the hill. The wounded men were then moved across the swamps to roads where jeep ambulances were waiting.⁹

On the morning of 10 December, all units completed the advance to the final defense line along the general line of Hill 1000 to Hill 500, and the 1st Battalion of the 21st Marines moved forward under enemy mortar fire to take over responsibility for the defense of Hill 1000. There was no enemy action in the sectors of the 9th and 3d Marines on either flank. At 0900, Lieutenant Colonel Williams met the commanders of 1/9 and 1/21 at his command post on Hill 1000, and the details of the relief of the 1st Parachute Regiment by 1/21 and of contact with 1/9 were worked out. There was still action by the enemy, though. A small Marine patrol scouting ahead of the lines to pick up the bodies of dead Marines was fired upon by an enemy force. The Marines drew back and called for an artillery concentration on the area before continuing the patrol. This time

⁹ Sgt Charles E. McKenna, "Saving Lives on Bougainville," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 28, no. 3 (Mar44).

⁸ *Ibid.*

there was only sporadic sniper fire. That afternoon the scattered elements of the parachute regiment moved off Hill 1000, leaving the unfinished business of the enemy stronghold and the difficulties of supply and evacuation to 1/21 and 1/9. The parachute troops, obviously ill-equipped and understrength for such sustained combat, moved into reserve positions behind the IMAC perimeter.

The strong Japanese position on the spur extending east from the heights of Hill 1000 resisted all efforts by the Marines for the next six days. The bitter fighting on this small ridge, which did not even show on the terrain maps provided by IMAC, earned for this stronghold the name of "Hellzapoppin Ridge." Although Marines sometimes called the enemy position "Fry's Nose" for the commander of 1/21, Lieutenant Colonel Fry, or "Snuffy's Nose," for Colonel Ames, the 21st Marines' commander, the name of Hellzapoppin Ridge is more indicative of the fierce combat that marked the attempts to capture this spur.

This position, abandoned at the time, was first discovered on 7 December when an enemy operations map was picked up and interpreted. This document indicated that the ridge positions were those of a reinforced company from the Japanese *23d Infantry*. Enemy strength was estimated at about 235 men, but, beyond this, the Marines had no further information on the area which the enemy so stoutly defended. The ridge was about 300 yards long with steep slopes leading to a narrow crest some 40 yards wide. Combat patrols sought to uncover more information about this natural fortress, but the enemy resisted every attempt. All companies of 1/21 launched attacks against this position, but the enemy's

fierce fire drove them back. The Japanese appeared to be well dug in, with overhead cover, in a carefully prepared all-around defense.

Unable to define the limits of the Japanese position, the Marines were unable to bring any supporting weapons except 60mm and 81mm mortars to bear on the emplacements. The 60mm mortars proved too light to open holes for the Marine attacks, and the heavier mortars also appeared to have little effect on the enemy positions. During the first stages of the repeated attacks on Hellzapoppin Ridge, and until the final assault on 18 December, artillery fire was also ineffective. Because the ridge was on the reverse slope of Hill 1000, the artillery batteries had trouble adjusting the angle of fire to hit the spur. The huge trees lining the ridge caused tree bursts, with no effect on the enemy bunkers. The enemy fortress, effectively defiladed by most of Hill 1000, was relatively immune to shelling.

At this time the Marine artillery firing positions were near the bomber airstrip in the vicinity of the Coconut Grove. The direction of fire was almost due east. This location, however, resulted in many "overs" on the enemy position or tree bursts in the jungle along the ridge of Hill 1000 where the front lines of 1/21 were located. Some casualties to Marine personnel were taken during attempts to bring the fire to bear on the enemy fortifications.

On the 13th of December, after repeated attempts to knock the Japanese off Hellzapoppin Ridge by artillery fire had failed, a request for direct air support was made to ComAirNorSols by General Geiger. The IMAC commander requested that the three scout bombers and three torpedo bombers which had just landed at the

newly completed airstrip at Torokina be used that afternoon. The six Marine planes, loaded with 100-pound bombs, made a run on the enemy position just at dusk after the target had been marked by smoke shells from 81mm mortars. Four planes managed to hit the target area; but the fifth plane dropped its bombs well behind the Marine front line about 600 yards north of the enemy ridge. The explosions killed two Marines and wounded five. The sixth plane returned to Torokina without completing the mission. The Marines, somewhat dubiously, requested another strike for the next day.

For this mission, 17 torpedo bombers from VMTB-232 landed at Torokina airfield for a pre-strike briefing. The locations of the Marine lines and the target area were described for the pilots before the planes took off again. This time the Marine lines were marked with colored smoke grenades and the target area with white smoke. The results were considerably better. The planes made the strike in column formation parallel to the front lines. About 90 percent of the bombs landed in the target area.

Another strike the following day, 15 December, was conducted in the same manner. Pilots of 18 TBFs (VMTB-134) landed at Torokina for an extensive briefing by the strike operations officer and a ground troop commander who then led the strike in an SBD. Smoke shells again marked the front lines and the target area, and the torpedo bombers hit the ridge with another successful bombing run. On the 18th of December, two final strikes completed the softening process on the enemy-held positions. Six planes from VMTB-134, each with a dozen 100-pound bombs, landed at Torokina once more for briefing before heading for the

target. Each mission was led by the Air-Sols operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel William K. Pottinger, with the 21st Marines Executive Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur H. Butler, as observer. The first strike was completed with all bombs reported landing in the target area. Later, five more TBFs made a second strike, this time dropping 36 bombs. The second strike was also guided to the target by the lead plane. At the end of this mission, the five planes continued to make strafing runs on the target and executed dummy bombing runs to hold the enemy defenders in place while the 21st Marines attacked and seized the ridge.

Prior to the two air attacks on the 18th, the I Marine Amphibious Corps and the 21st Marines made extensive preparations for the final assault on Hellzapoppin Ridge. A battery of 155mm howitzers from the 37th Division was moved by landing craft (LCMs) to new firing positions near the mouth of the Torokina River. From this position the battery could fire north along the river valley and put shells on the south side and crest of the ridge without endangering the Marine lines. The 155mm howitzers, which were moved into these temporary firing positions early on the morning of the 18th, opened fire at about 1000. Smoke shells were used for registration shots before the final concentrations were fired. The battery fired about 190 rounds in the next hour, hitting the ridge repeatedly although there was some initial difficulty in adjusting the fire to get hits along the crest of the knife-like ridge. The artillery shells cleared much of the brush and smaller jungle growth off the ridge, exposing the target to the two air strikes which followed the artillery fire.

Shortly after the final air attack,¹⁰ units of 1/21 and 3/21 (committed to action from the regimental reserve) moved off Hill 1000 and over Hellzapoppin Ridge in a coordinated double envelopment. The air attacks and the direct artillery fire had done the job. The blasted and shredded area revealed many dead Japanese. The stunned survivors who made a token resistance were quickly eliminated. After more than six days of repeated attacks on this defensive stronghold, Hellzapoppin Ridge was captured, and the enemy force cleared from the many concealed and emplaced bunkers. The victory cost the 21st Marines 12 killed and 23 wounded. More than 50 Japanese bodies were found in the area. The remainder of the enemy defenders had apparently fled the area.

The next three days were devoted to the extension of the perimeter to include this natural fortress and to improvement of the final defensive line. There was no enemy contact until the morning of 21 December when a reconnaissance patrol reported that about 14–18 enemy soldiers had been discovered on a hill near the Torokina River. A combat patrol from the 21st Marines immediately moved out to drive the Japanese from this hill, 600–A. The Marines lost one killed and one wounded in a short action that ended in a repulse for the attackers. Directed to put an outpost on Hill 600–A, a platoon from 3/21 (Lieutenant Colonel Archie V. Gerard) started for the hill early on the 22d of December, but once more the Japanese had occupied a position in strength during the night. As the Marines reached the crown of Hill 600–A, a blast of small-arms fire from entrenched enemy forced

them back down the hill. Company I of Gerard's battalion then started forward to reinforce the platoon.

A double envelopment was attempted by Company I, but Japanese defenses on the reverse slope of Hill 600–A stopped that maneuver and pinned the attackers into an area between the enemy lines and the Marine base of fire. Company I, under heavy rifle and machine gun fire, wriggled out of this predicament and withdrew to request artillery support.

Another attack the next day, 23 December, by Company K of Gerard's battalion ended up much in the same manner. The company, reinforced by a heavy machine gun platoon, attempted to break the Japanese hold on Hill 600–A by a direct attack, but the advance platoon took so much fire that the attack could not move forward. Company K withdrew and artillery support was requested. A 30-minute concentration pounded the forward slopes of the hill with the usual tree-bursts reducing the effectiveness of the fire. Then Company K started forward again. The attack was repulsed. A third attempt, after another mortar and artillery preparation, also failed. Company K then withdrew to the front lines.

The next morning, in preparation for another attack, scouts moved forward toward the enemy position. Inexplicably, after putting up a stiff fight for two days, the enemy had retreated during the night. Only one Japanese body was found in the 25 covered emplacements on the hill. Artillery fire had damaged only a few of the bunkers. The Marines, in attacking for two days, lost four killed and eight wounded.

The next several days were quiet, the Marines resting and preparing for a gen-

¹⁰ BGen John S. Letcher ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 6Oct60.

eral relief along the perimeter by the units of the Army's Americal Division. There was no further action of any consequence before the Marines departed Bougainville. After the capture of Hill 600-A, the Japanese resistance consisted mostly of periodic shelling of the area around Evansville with 75mm howitzers and 90mm mortars. This firing, however, was sporadic and ineffectual. The Japanese quickly retreated past the Torokina River when combat patrols went out to eliminate the enemy fire.

Three final air attacks, two on the 25th and one on the 26th of December, apparently discouraged the Japanese from staging another attack on the perimeter. The object of the attacks was to clear out an area north of Hill 600-A where Japanese activity was reported by patrols. Eighteen torpedo bombers armed with 500-pound and 100-pound bombs blasted the target, and after the attacks patrols found the area abandoned. Trenches and installations indicated that about 800 Japanese had been in the area. A number of patrols across the Torokina River, however, failed to make contact with the enemy.

The relief of the Marine division from Bougainville had been expected since 15 December after the consolidation of the final defense line along Hill 1000 and Hill 600. As additional Army troops continued to arrive at the beachhead, Admiral Halsey directed the Army's XIV Corps to assume control of the Bougainville operation, and, on 15 December, General Geiger turned over control of the beachhead to the commanding general of the XIV Corps, Major General Oscar W. Griswold. The relief of the 3d Marine Division by the Americal Division began on the morning of 27 December when all units of the 9th Marines were relieved on frontline

positions by the 164th Infantry and moved into bivouac areas in preparation for the return to Guadalcanal. The last units of the 3d Marines manning perimeter positions were relieved by the 132d Infantry on the afternoon of the 28th. With two regiments on line, command of the right sector of the beachhead was assumed by Major General John R. Hodge of the Americal Division. The 21st Marines was relieved by the 182d Infantry on the 1st and 2d of January 1944. By 16 January, the entire 3d Marine Division had returned to Guadalcanal.

The raider and parachute regiments remained on Bougainville for two weeks after the 3d Division departed as part of a composite command led by Lieutenant Colonel Shapley with Lieutenant Colonel Williams as executive officer. The provisional force manned the right flank of the perimeter along the Torokina and spent its time improving defenses and patrolling deep into enemy territory.¹¹ By the end of January, the raiders and parachutists had turned over their positions to the Army and joined the general exodus of IMAC troops from the island. The 3d Defense Battalion, which stayed on until 21 June, was the sole remnant of the Marine units that had taken part in the initial assault on Bougainville.

The damage to the Japanese forces in the nearly two months of Marine attacks was not overwhelming. The enemy committed his units piecemeal, and, although most of these were completely wiped out, the total loss was not staggering. The Marines estimated that 2,458 enemy soldiers lost their lives in the defense of the Cape Torokina area, the Koromokina counter-

¹¹ *Shapley ltr*; BGen Robert H. Williams ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 4Nov60.

landing, and the counterattacks in the Marine Corps sector. Prisoners numbered 25. Japanese materiel captured was also negligible and consisted of a few field pieces and infantry weapons.

The postwar compilation of Marine Corps casualties in the Bougainville operation totaled 423 killed and 1,418 wounded. The breakdown by major units was: Corps troops—6 killed and 31 wounded; 1st Parachute Regiment (less 2d Battalion)—45 killed and 121 wounded; 2d Raider Regiment (provisional)—64 killed and 204 wounded; 3d Defense Battalion—13 killed and 40 wounded; and 3d Marine Division—295 killed and 1,022 wounded.¹²

COMPLETION OF THE AIRFIELDS¹³

For a period of about 10 days after the landings on Bougainville, the Allies had almost complete air superiority in the Solomons. The Japanese bases in the Bougainville area had been worked over so well and so many times by Allied air strikes and naval bombardments that the enemy experienced extreme difficulty putting them into operation again. As a result, the Japanese were forced to contest the Cape Torokina landings from bases at Rabaul and fields on New Ireland. By the time that the beachhead had expanded to include the Piva fields, the Jap-

anese capability to threaten the beachhead from air bases in the Northern Solomons had been partially restored, and only repeated strikes against the fields at Buka, Kahili, and Ballale kept the Japanese air threat below the dangerous point. On 20 November, ComAirNorSols estimated that at least 15 known enemy airfields within 250 miles of Empress Augusta Bay were either under construction or were repaired and operational once more. Completion of airstrips within the Cape Torokina perimeter was then rushed to meet this growing enemy threat.

During the early stages of the beachhead, the construction of the airfields had been weighed against the immediate need for a road net to insure an adequate system of supply to the front lines. The road net had been given priority, and most of the efforts of the 19th Marines had been directed to this project. After the perimeter road was completed in time to support the fight for the Piva Forks, attention was again turned toward airfield construction. The road network was still far from finished, however. When the various artillery units and support outfits occupying the projected airfield sites were asked to move out of the way of construction work, the answer was usually a succinct, "Over which roads?"¹⁴

The Japanese, ironically, gave the construction gangs a big assist. The enemy emplaced several 15cm howitzers in the high ground east of the Torokina River, and the construction work in the vicinity of the Coconut Grove appealed to his curiosity. As a result, whenever there was no combat air patrol over the beachhead, the Japanese were quite apt to drop shells into the airfield area. The Seabees and the

¹² Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*, App. II, p. 140. See Appendix H, Marine Casualties, for the final official totals.

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ThirdFlt NarrRept*; *IMAC AR-III*; *3d MarDiv Combat Rept*; Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*; Morrison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*; Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*.

¹⁴ *McAlister ltr.*



PIVA AIRFIELDS, the key bomber and fighter strips in the aerial offensive against Rabaul, as they appeared on 15 February 1944. (USN 80-G-250368)



FIELD ARTILLERY missions are fired against Japanese attacking the Torokina perimeter by 155mm seacoast defense guns of the Marine 3d Defense Battalion. (SC 190032)