The Dragons Peninsula Campaign

RICE ANCHORAGE [1]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

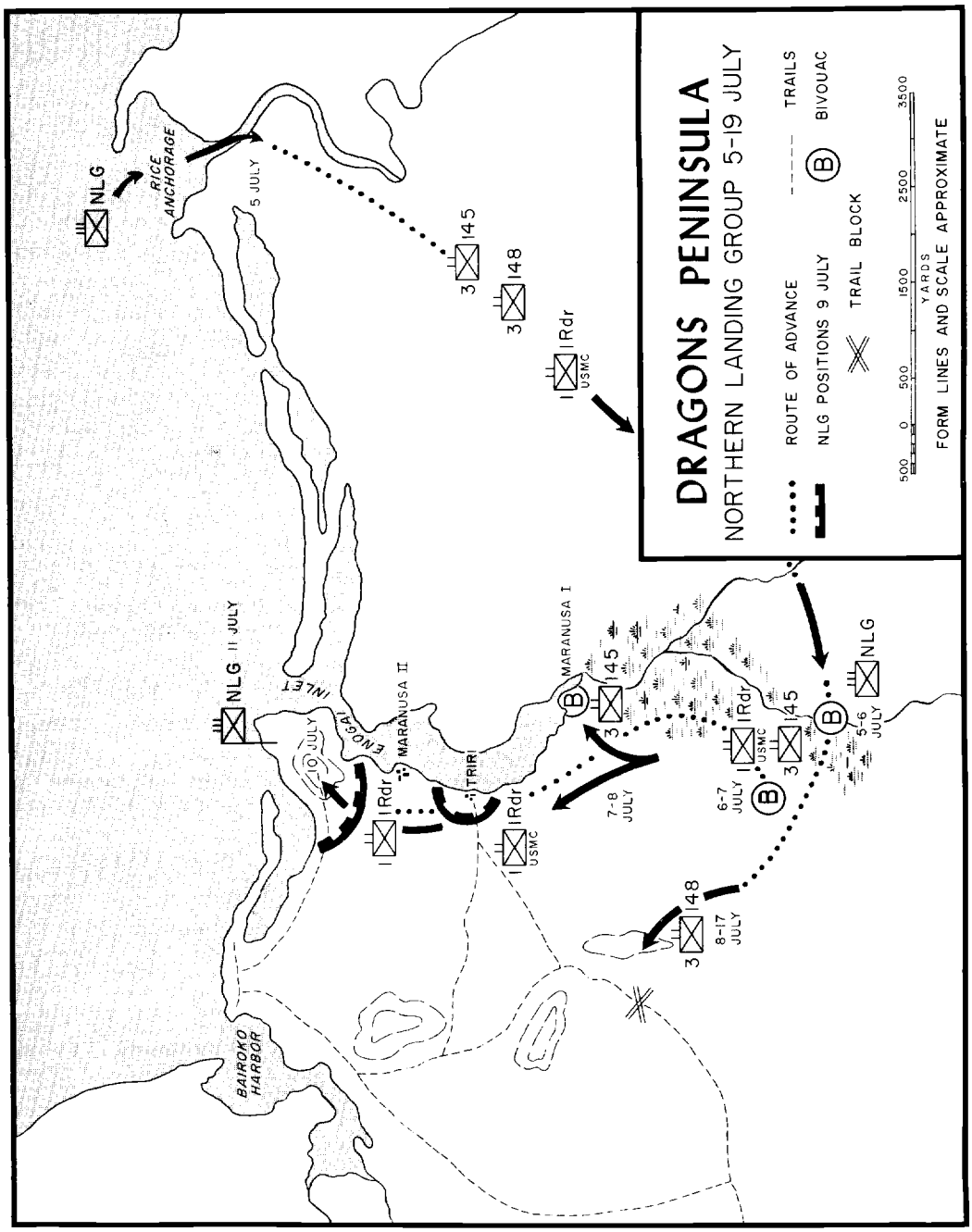
The actual landing of the Liversedge group started about 0130 in the midst of a torrential downpour and sporadic shellfire. For a short time the success of the amphibious venture seemed in serious doubt. Rice Anchorage could not be located in the darkness and rain. The transport group slowed and waited—uncomfortably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

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

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

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

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


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

MAP 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CAPTURE OF ENOGAI[4]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRAIL BLOCK ACTION [5]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENOGAI: 12–19 JULY[7]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[9] *Stevenson ltr.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

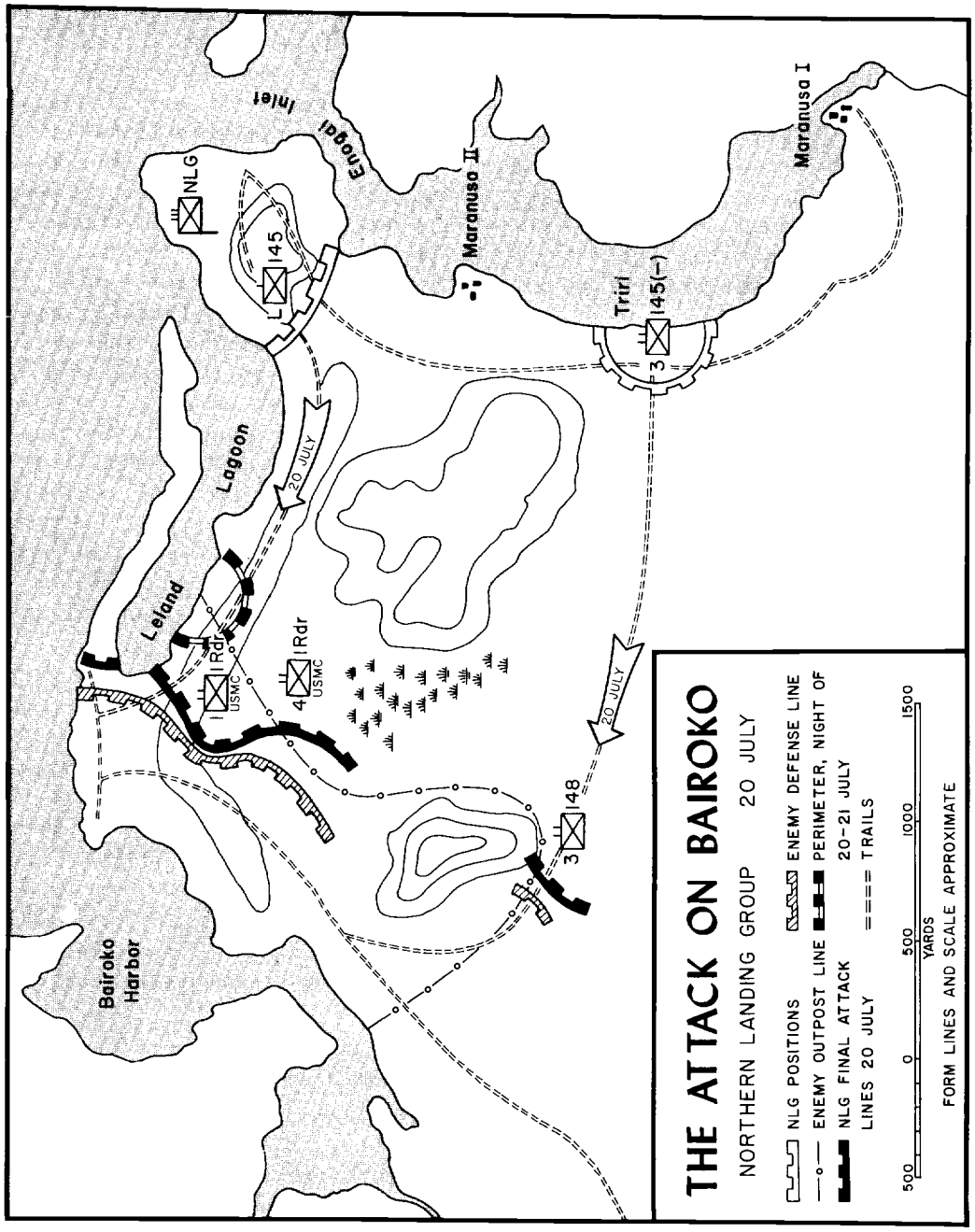
The first shots came shortly after 1015. A Japanese outpost opened fire on the NLG column, and Wheeler and Kemp quickly deployed their companies into attack formation. The outpost was overrun. Without pause, the raiders continued forward, feeling their way through the tangled jungle. At 1040, Griffith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

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

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

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

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


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

MAP 9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[15] *Griffith ltr.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[16] *Stevenson ltr.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

END OF A CAMPAIGN [18]

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

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

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

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

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

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

[19] *1st RdrRegt Jnl.*

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

[21] *1st RdrRegt Jnl*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

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

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

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

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

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

End of a Campaign

BAANGA AND ARUNDEL[1]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

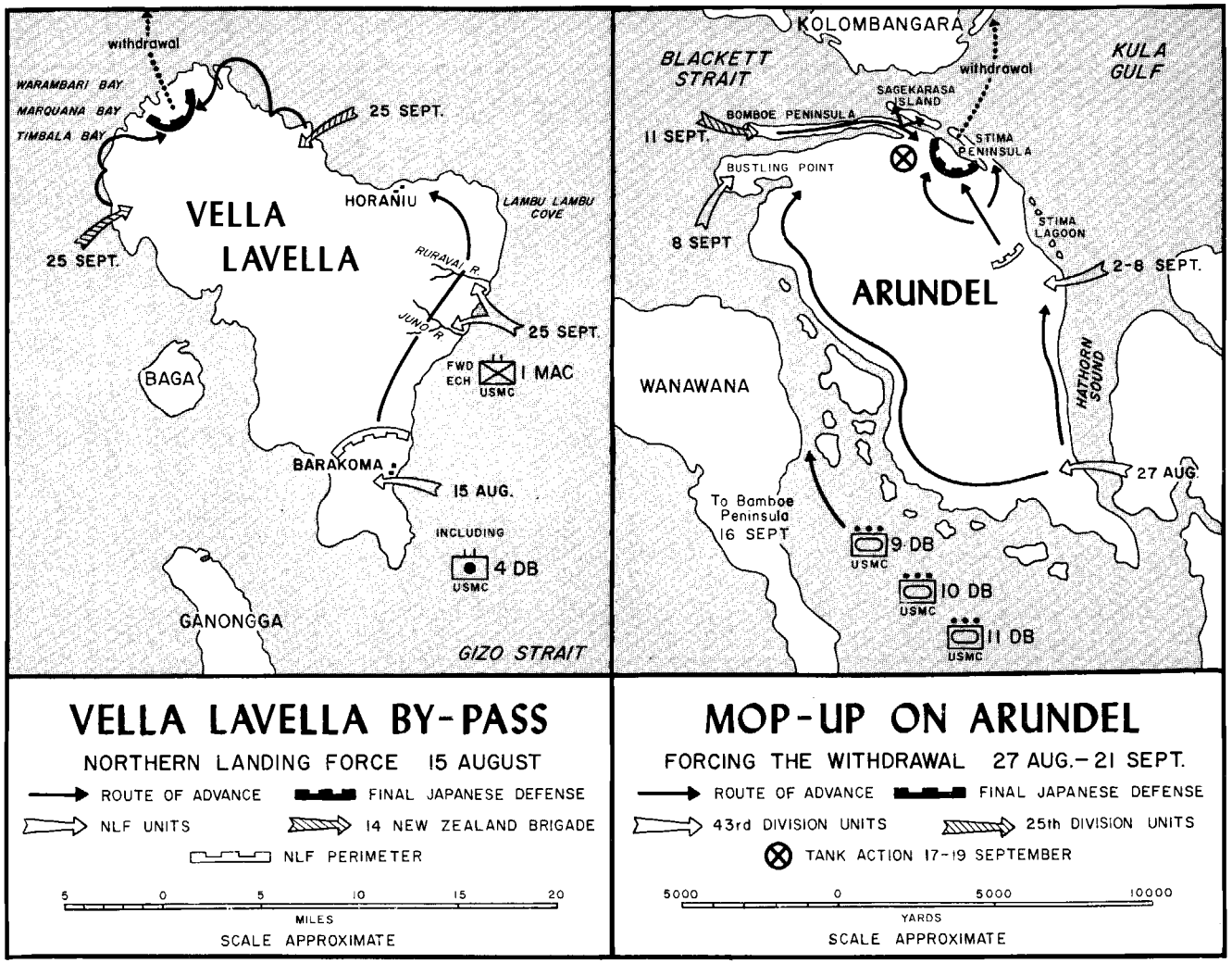
As the front lines inched abreast of Sagekarasa Island, which parallels Bomboe Peninsula, a second battalion swam and waded across a lagoon to establish another front on that island. Unable to erase the beachhead in a series of screaming counterattacks that night, the Japanese then hurriedly evacuated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

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

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

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

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


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

MAP 10

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

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

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

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

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

VELLA LAVELLA[4]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MARINES AT VELLA LAVELLA[8]

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

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

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

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

which landed on 21 August was never committed to action.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JAPANESE WITHDRAWAL[9]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PART III

Northern Solomons Operations

Continuing the Pressure

STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS[1]

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

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

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

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

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

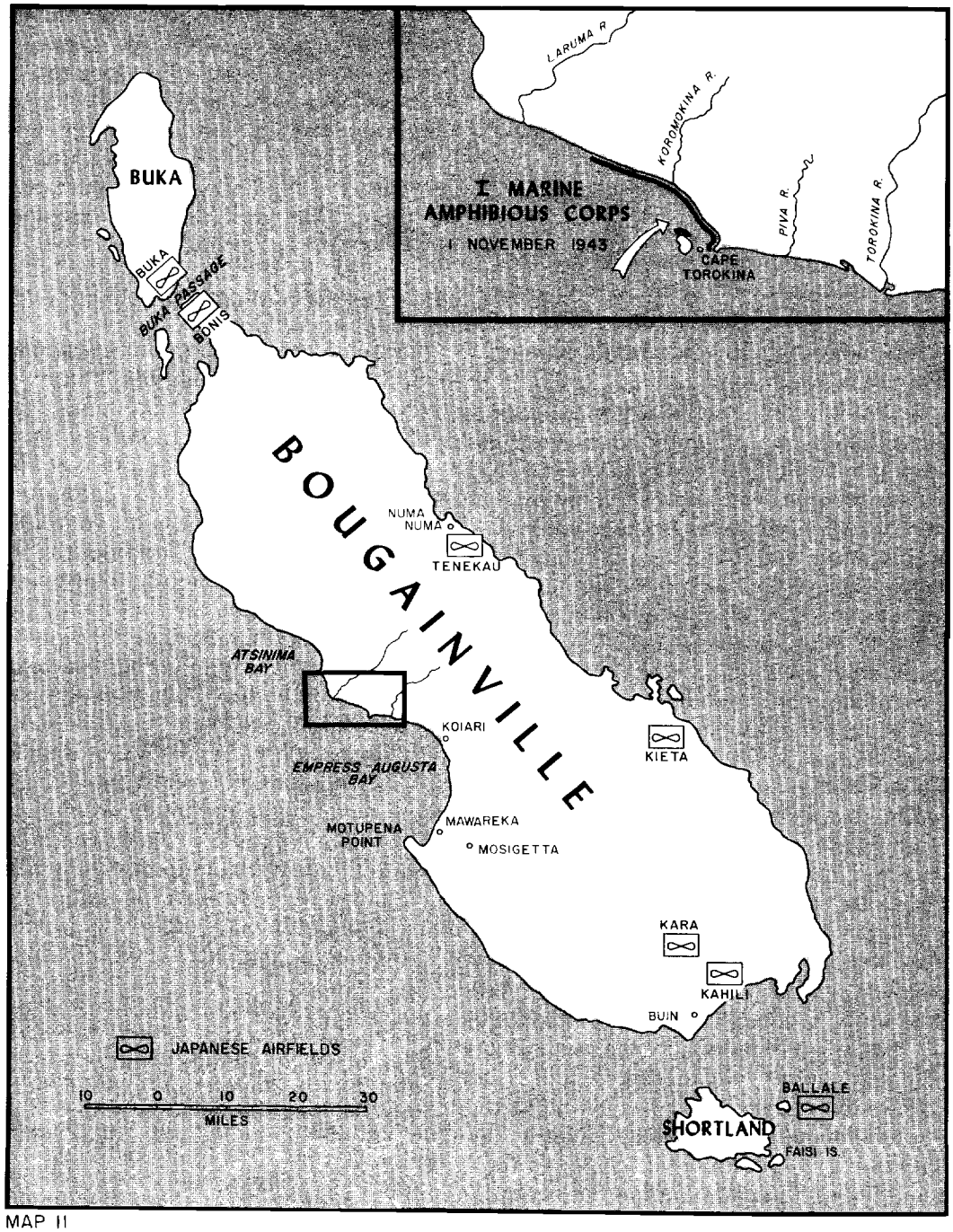
Throughout this evaluation period, General MacArthur held fast to the original ELKTON concept. On the 4th of September, the VIIPhibFor (Admiral Barbey's command) landed SoWestPac troops on the Huon Peninsula of New Guinea to set the stage for eventual passage of MacArthur's forces through the Vitiaz-Dampier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

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

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

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

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


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

MAP 11

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

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

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

SPOTLIGHT ON BOUGAINVILLE[3]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HALSEY'S DECISION[10]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[13] *ComSoPac Oct43 WarD.*

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

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

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

[14] *IMAC AR–I*, p. 2.

AMPHIBIOUS PLANNING [15]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[18] *Vandegrift Interview*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[23] *ComSoPac Aug43 WarD.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[24] *Vandegrift Interview.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *IMAC OpO No. 1.*

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

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

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

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

FINAL PREPARATIONS[34]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ISOLATING THE TARGET [40]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[41] *StrikeComd WarD*, 18Oct43.

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

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

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

Diversionary Assaults

TREASURY ISLAND LANDINGS [42]

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

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

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

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

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

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

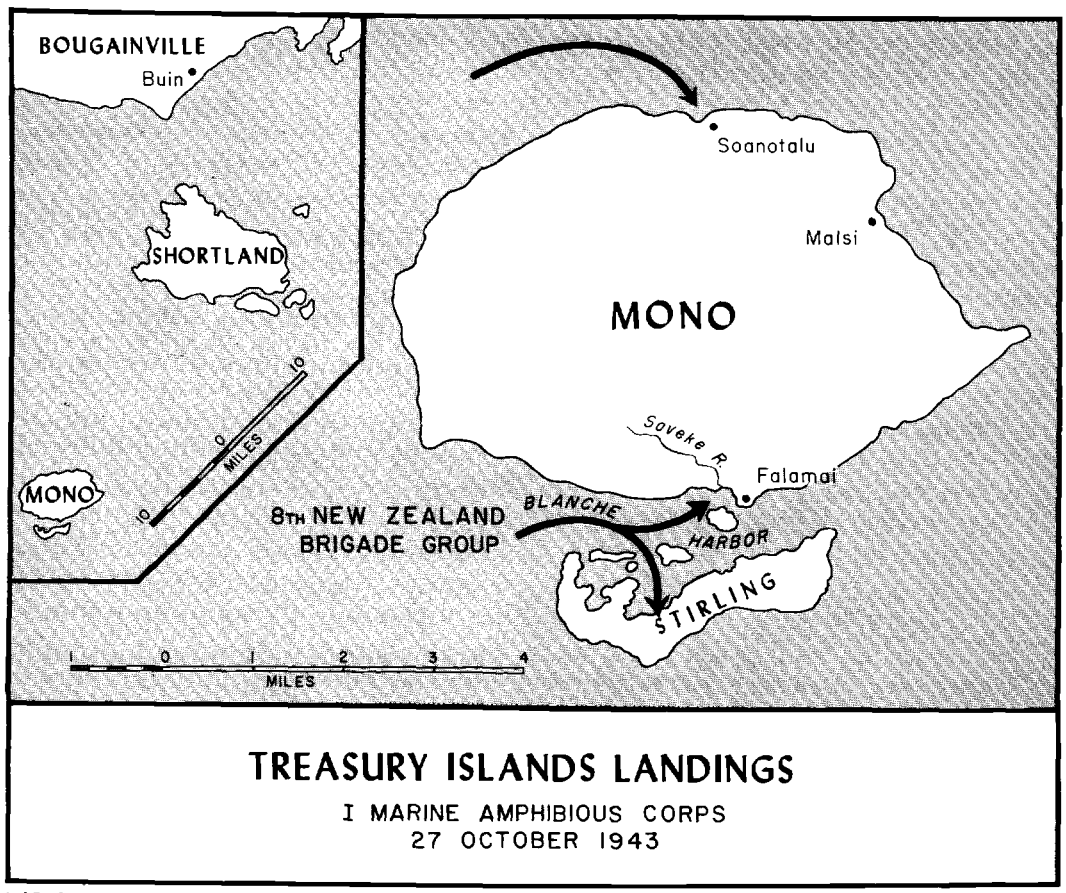
Early information about the islands was obtained by an IMAC patrol which spent six days in the Treasurys in August, scouting the area, observing the movement of the Japanese defenders, and interrogating the natives. In this latter instance, the loyal and friendly people of the Treasurys were a remarkable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

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

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

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

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



MAP 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAID ON CHOISEUL ISLAND[3]

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

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

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

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

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

coastwatching activities on Choiseul were given valuable assistance and protection.

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

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

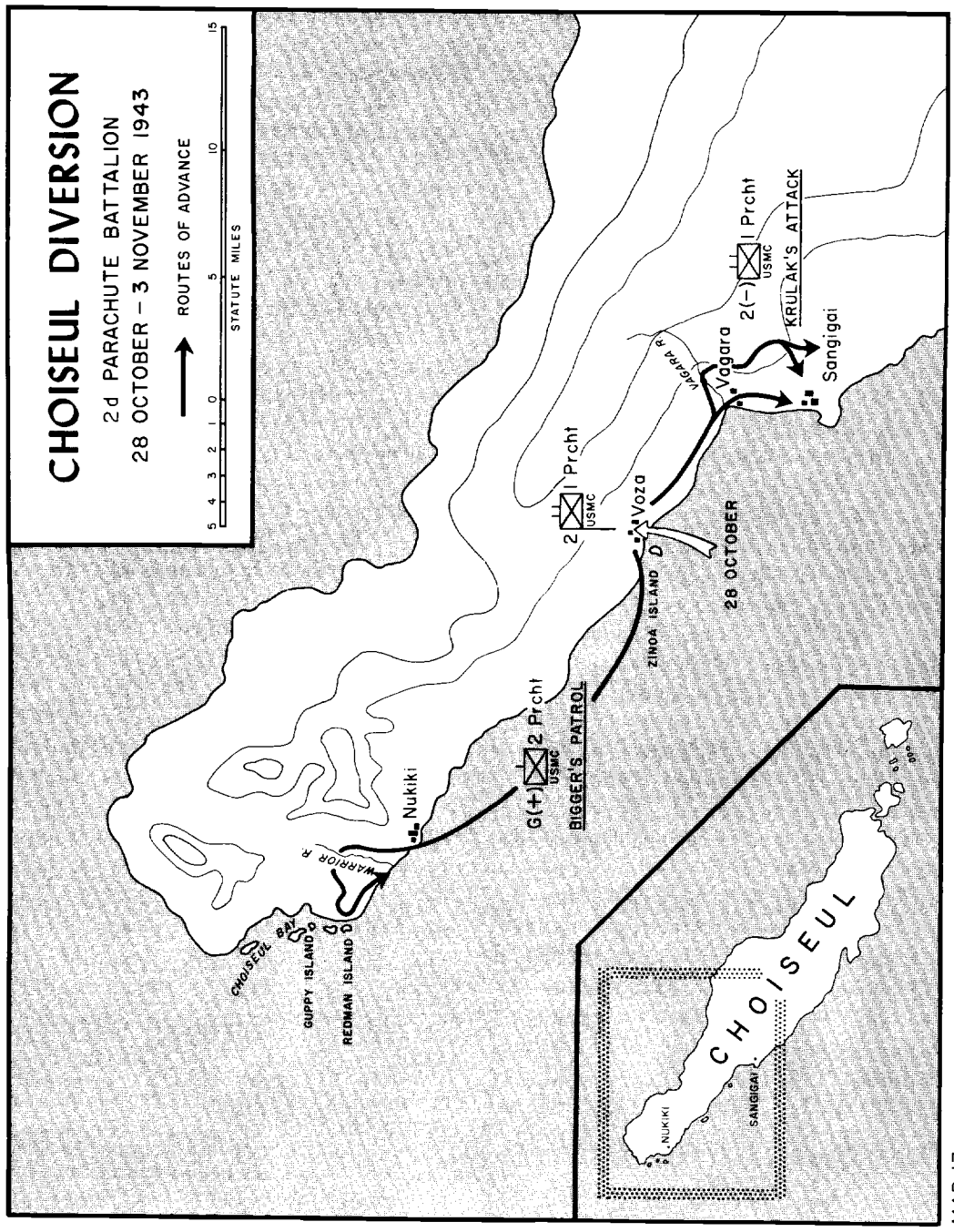
During the enemy evacuation of the Central Solomons, Choiseul bridged the gap between the New Georgia Group and Bougainville. The retreating Japanese, deposited by barges on the southern end of Choiseul, moved overland along the coast to Choiseul Bay where the second half of the barge relay to Bougainville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

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

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

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

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


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

MAP 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

withdraw the group from the Choiseul Bay area.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[12] *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

THE JAPANESE [14]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Assault of Cape Torokina

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[2] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 12.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

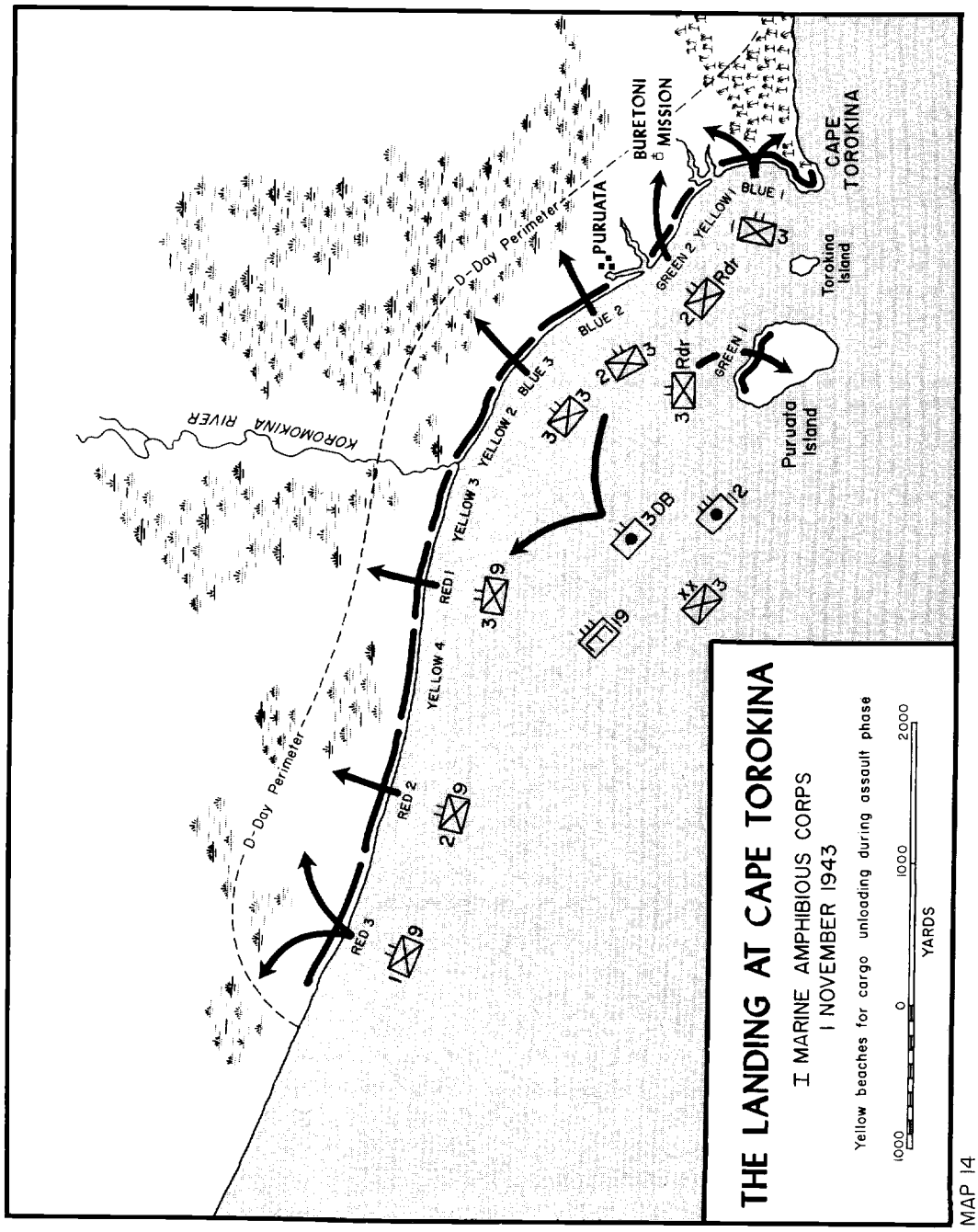
The 1st Battalion of the 3d Marines hit the hot spot of the enemy defenses. As the waves of boat groups rounded the western tip of Puruata Island, they were caught in a vicious criss-cross of machine gun and artillery fire from Cape Torokina and Puruata and Torokina Islands. Heading toward the extreme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

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

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

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

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


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

MAP 14

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ESTABLISHING A BEACHHEAD [11]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[13] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 14.

Japanese also had several ships damaged in collisions.

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

THE JAPANESE [14]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[15] *SE Area NavOps—II*, p. 18.

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

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.

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

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Nov43 WarD; ThirdFlt NarrRept; IIIPhibFor AR; IIIPhibFor 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; 3dMarDiv 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 Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist.*

[2] *Vandegrift interview.*

[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.

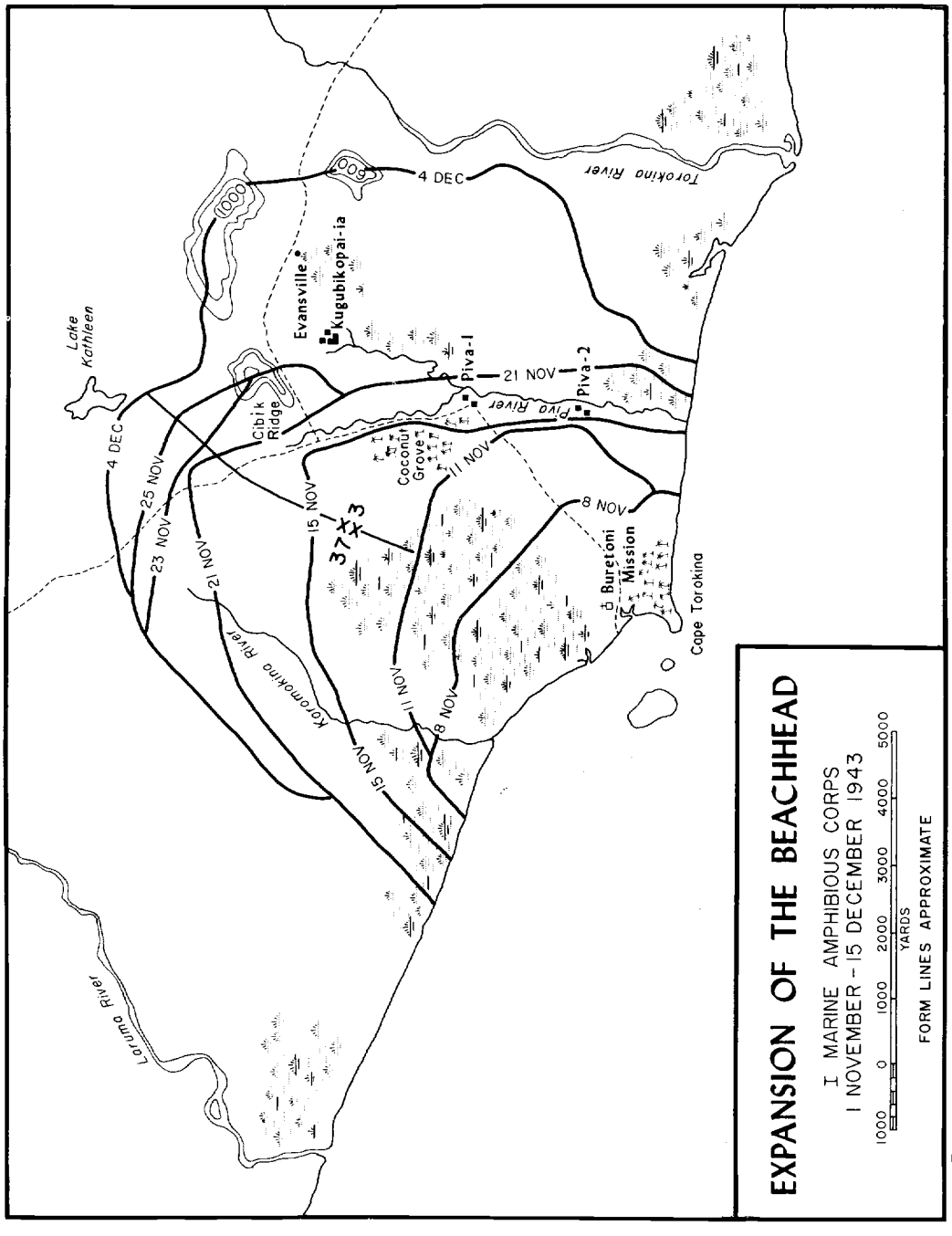
Early on the morning of 2 November, a shift in the tactical lineup along the perimeter was ordered in an attempt to pull in the flanks of the beachhead and constitute a reserve force for IMAC. Prior to the operation, General Turnage had been concerned about the possibility of his lengthy but narrow beachhead 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, redisposition 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

[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.*

[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
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000
YARDS
FORM LINES APPROXIMATE
Lake Kathleen
Evansville
Kugubikopai-ia
Cibik Ridge
Piva-1
Piva-2
Piva River
Coconut Grove
Buretoni Mission
Cape Torokina
Torokina River
Koromokina River
Laruma River
4 DEC
25 NOV
23 NOV
21 NOV
15 NOV
11 NOV
8 NOV
37XX3
1000
600

MAP 15

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 IIIPhibFor 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 patrolling 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 transshipped 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 KOROMOKINA[8]

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.

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

[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 Rcpts; IMAC C–2 Jnl; 3d MarDiv CombatRepts; 3d MarDiv AR; 3d MarDiv D–2 SAR; 3d MarDiv D–2 Jnl; 3d MarDiv D–3 Repts; HistDiv Acct; SE Area NavOps—III; Seventeenth Army Ops—II;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Aurthur and Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist.*

[9] *IMAC C–2 Jnl; 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*)

691–360 O—63——16

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.

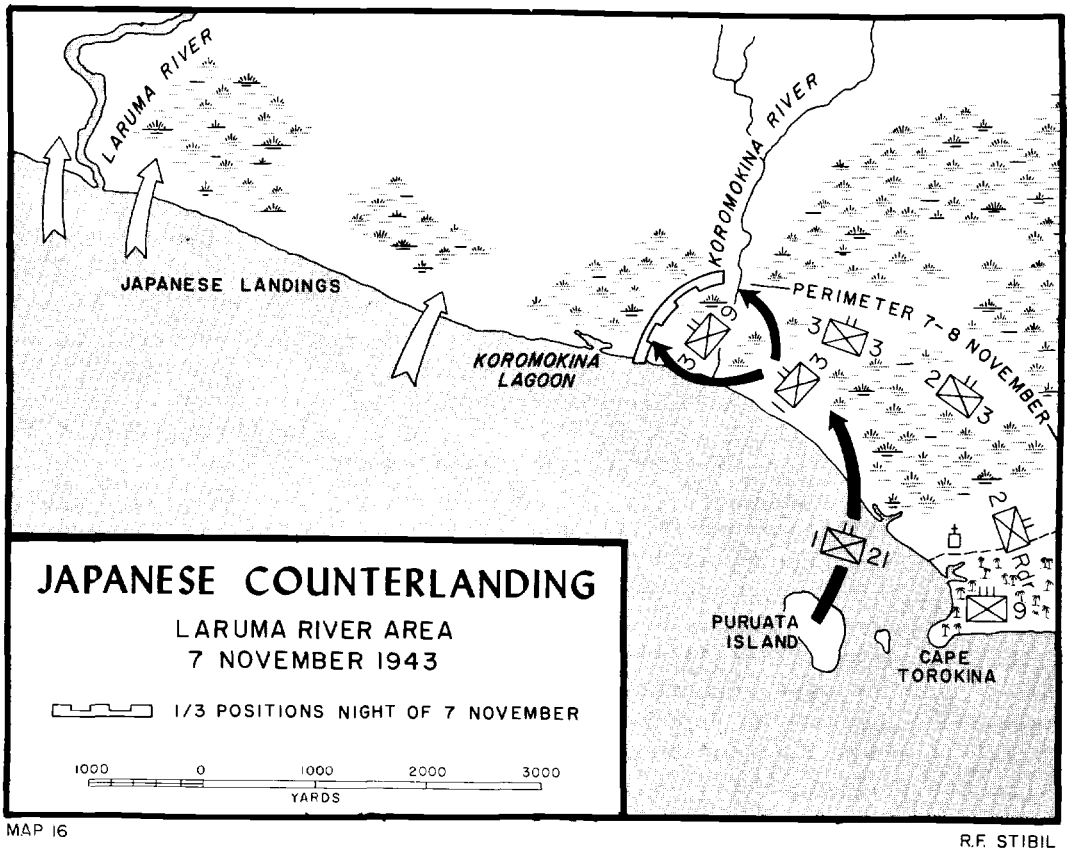
The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Walter Asmuth, Jr.)—occupying the left-flank positions while waiting to be moved to the Cape Torokina area—drew the assignment of stopping the enemy counterthrust. Artillery support fire was placed in front of the perimeter and along the beach. At 0820, 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-

[10] *3d MarDiv D–3 Jnl*, 7Nov43.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

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



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 began 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 beach [14] 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 lagoon [17] 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.

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[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 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-

[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 Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist.*

[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.

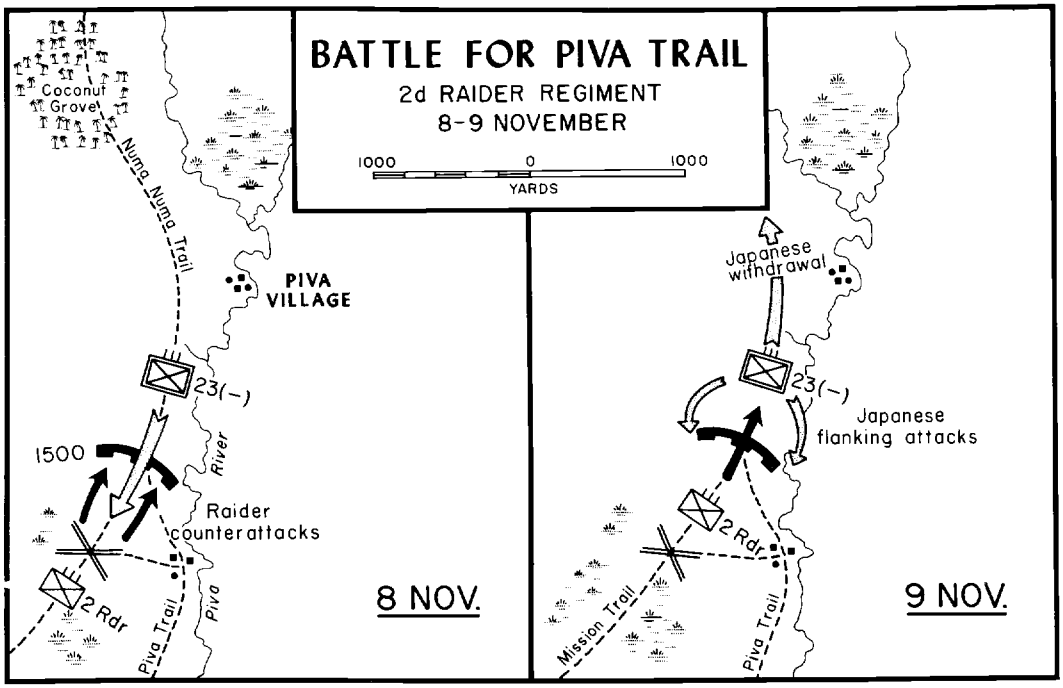
Several small-scale attacks were started later that afternoon by the Japanese, but each time the two raider companies called for mortar concentrations from 2/9 and the assaults were beaten back. One determined attempt by the Japanese to cut the trail between the road block and the IMAC perimeter was 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.

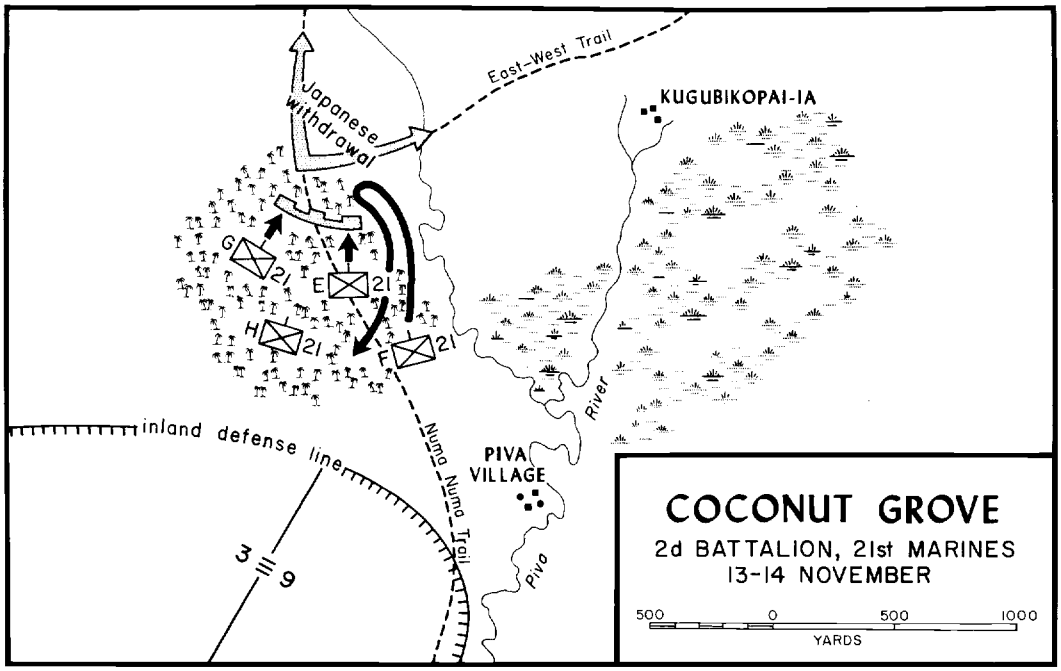
The engineers, accompanied by a strong combat patrol, managed to cut two 5,000-foot survey lanes nearly east to west across the front of the IMAC perimeter. The patrol then returned to report that at least one bomber strip and one fighter strip could be constructed in the area scouted. The survey party 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 Cohlmia, *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 (including 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 toehold 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-

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[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 Cohlmia, *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 VIEWPOINT [1]

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 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 counteroffensive, 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 counterstroke 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

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ThirdFlt NarrRept; IIIPhibFor 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.*

[2] *SE Area NavOps—III*, pp. 30–31.

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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 Mowareka 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 PROBLEMS[3]

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 CombatRept; 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 Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist.*

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 redisposition 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 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-

[6] When 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 Ltr.*

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 LESSONS [7]

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, sulpha 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 hardtack 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 CombatRept;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Aurthur and Cohlmia, *3d MarDivHist.*

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; Snedeker 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 evidence 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.

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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 Cohlmia, *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).

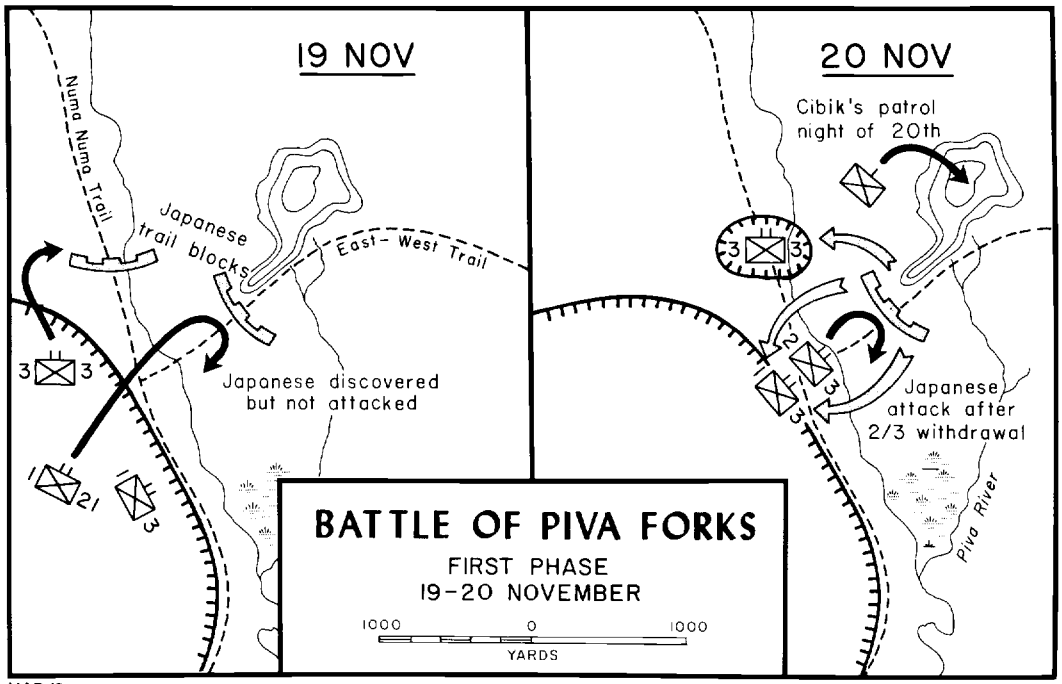
Two of the light Marine tanks were disabled in the close fighting along the trail before the Marine battalion could advance. The general course of attack by 3/3 was east along the Numa Numa trail toward the two forks of the Piva River.

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.

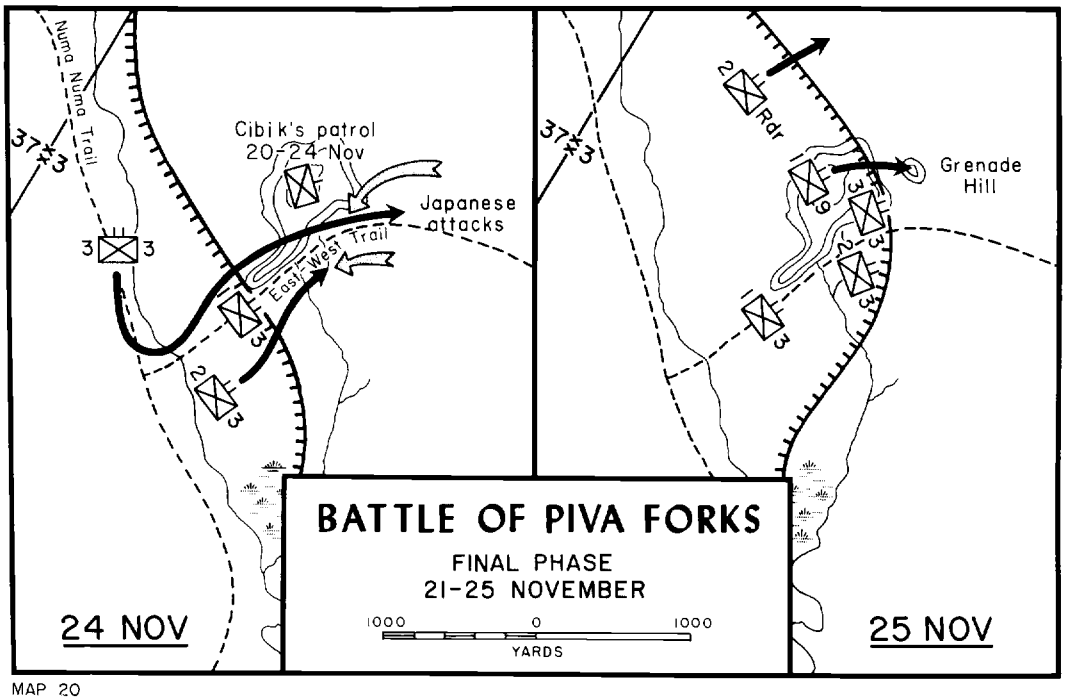
The 2d Battalion, making a reconnaissance in force in front of the 1/3 positions, bumped into a strong enemy position astride the East-West trail near the east fork of the Piva. About 18 to 20 pillboxes were counted, each of them spitting rifle and machine gun fire. De Zayas' battalion managed to crack 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. Blasted 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 countermortar 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-

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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.

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[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 CombatRept; 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;* Aurthur and Cohlmia, *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 regiment 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 rendezvous 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 MarDiv CombatRept; 3d Mar Div D–3 Jnl; 3d MarDiv D–3 Repts;* 1st MarParaBn 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.

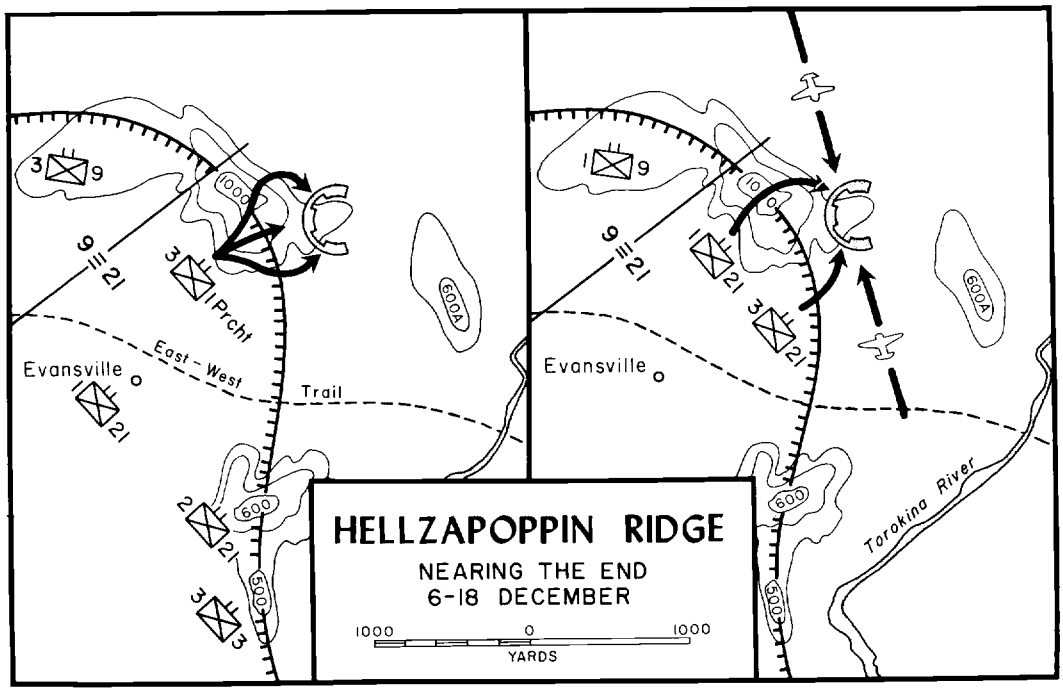
On 27 November, a patrol of 1 officer and 21 men from Colonel Ames' regiment moved to Hill 600 where observation could be maintained over the other two hills and the Torokina River. Hill 600, just south of the East-West trail, was bordered on the left by a higher, longer ridge about 1,000 feet high. 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 21Mar44 (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 MarParaRegt 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; McAlister ltr; Bowser ltr; Letcher ltr;* Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Aurthur and Cohlmia, *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 Japanse 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 overextended 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

[8] *Ibid.*

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

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 60ct60.

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 AIRFIELDS [13]

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 Japanese 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;* Morison, *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*)

Marine engineers moved to the end of the field which was not being hit and continued to work. The other tenants, though, anxious to avoid repeated artillery shelling, vacated the area.

By the time that Inland Defense Line F had been occupied on 28 November, clearing of the projected bomber and fighter strips was well underway. The work was speeded by the arrival on the 26th of November of the 36th Naval Construction Battalion which brought all its equipment and went to work almost full time on the Piva fields. Meanwhile, the Torokina strip had been unexpectedly put into operation. About noon on the 24th, Seabees and engineers working on the airstrip were amazed to see a Marine scout-bomber preparing to land on the rough runway. Quickly clearing the strip of all heavy engineering equipment, the construction workers stood by while the Marine pilot brought his plane into a bumpy but successful landing. The emergency landing of the plane, damaged in a raid over Buka, initiated operations on the new strip.

Admiral Halsey, whose cheerful messages delighted the South Pacific Forces all through the long climb up the Solomons ladder, provided a fitting note of congratulations on the completion of the fighter strip:

> In smashing through swamp, jungle, and Japs to build that air strip, your men have proven there is neither bull nor dozing at Torokina. . . . A well done to them all. Halsey.[15]

The advance naval base and boat pool, which had been underway since the first landings, was also rushed toward completion during the month of November. This gave the III Amphibious Force torpedo boats a wider range, and these ubiquitous craft then prowled along the Bougainville coast as far north as Buka and as far south as the Shortlands in protective patrols.

The Torokina strip was finally declared operational on 10 December, just one month after the initial construction was started. At dawn on the 10th, Marine Fighter Squadron 216, with 17 fighter planes, 6 scout bombers, and 1 cargo plane, landed as the first echelon. The following day, 11 December, three Marine torpedo bombers landed and these were joined six days later by four aircraft from an Army Air Forces squadron. The first direct air support mission was flown on 13 December with Hellzapoppin Ridge as the target, while combat air patrols began flying from the former plantation site on 10 December, the day that the planes arrived. Later in the month, additional flights including night fighter patrols, began operations from the Torokina strip.

After the completion of the first field, work was rushed on the Piva bomber field, and early in December another full-strength naval construction battalion, the 77th, arrived to help with the job. As the network of roads throughout the perimeter was completed, the 71st and 53d Seabees also went to work on the airfields. The Piva bomber field received its first planes on 19 December, and was completely operational on 30 December. The Piva fighter field, delayed by lack of matting, was operational on 9 January, after the main units of the 3d Marine Division were withdrawn from the island.

With the opening of three Allied airfields on Bougainville, the Japanese capability to threaten the Allied position on

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[15] ComSoPac msg to CG, IMAC, in *3d MarDiv Jnl*, 13Dec43.

Cape Torokina from the air was virtually eliminated. The tactical importance of these airstrips was demonstrated in the quick support given the ground troops in the attack on Hellzapoppin Ridge, but the advantage was strategic as well as tactical. The Torokina airfields brought Allied air power to within 220 miles of Rabaul and allowed fighter aircraft to escort bombers on air strikes against Japanese bases on New Britain and New Ireland. The completion of the three fields on Bougainville, and a fourth field at Stirling Island in the Treasurys, marked the successful achievement of the primary aim of the Bougainville operation.

The constant pressure which the expanding air strength of the Allies exerted upon the Japanese installations was reflected in the attempts which the enemy made to delay the Torokina airstrips. During the first 26 days of operation at Torokina, the beachhead had 90 enemy alerts. The vigilance of the ComAirNorSols fighter cover and the accuracy of the Marine 3d Defense Battalion's antiaircraft fire was indicated by the fact that bombs were dropped during only 22 of these alerts. Casualties from enemy air action up to 26 November were 24 killed and 96 wounded. Damage was restricted mainly to the boat pool and supply stocks on Puruata Island.

During the time that the 3d Marine Division remained on the island, the Japanese managed to bomb the perimeter only five more times, and the interval between alerts grew increasingly lengthy. For the entire period 1 November to 28 December, there were 136 enemy air alerts with bombs dropped during only 27 of these alerts. The total casualties in enemy air raids were 28 killed, 136 wounded, and 10 missing.

JAPANESE COUNTERATTACKS, MARCH 1944[16]

Several weeks after the 3d Marine Division departed Bougainville, the XIV Corps became aware of gradually increasing enemy activity around the area of the Torokina River and the right sector of the beachhead now being held by the Americal Division. Immediate offensive efforts were directed toward the Torokina sector, and aggressive patrols by the Americal Division erased the threat to the perimeter by driving the Japanese out of prepared positions along the coast near the Torokina River. The bunkers and pillboxes encountered were destroyed. The perimeter, however, was not extended to cover this area.

The following month, Japanese patrol action was more aggressive, and throughout February the entire perimeter was subjected to a number of sharp probing attacks by small groups of enemy soldiers. The two frontline divisions, keenly aware that the perimeter might soon be tested by another determined Japanese attack, prepared extensive defenses to meet it. Fortifications in depth were constructed, and the entire front was mined and wired where possible.

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[16] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ThirdFlt NarrRept;* XIV Corps, History of TA Operation Mar44, dtd 21Apr44 (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 37th InfDiv G–2 Periodic Repts, n.d. (Bougainville AreaOpFile, HistBr, HQMC); 37th InfDiv OpRept—Bougainville, 6Nov43–30Apr44, n.d. (WW II RecsDiv, FRC Alex); *3d MarDefBn SAR;* LtCol Edward H. Forney ltr to CMC, dtd 7Jun48; LtCol John G. Bouker ltr to CMC, dtd 24Jun48; Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul.*

The Japanese, after being forced to withdraw from the heights around the Torokina River late in December, began planning the counterstroke about the middle of January. Determined to end the Allied possession of the Cape Torokina area, the enemy readied the entire *6th Division*, plus a number of special battalions from the *Seventeenth Army*. This force began training for the operation while support troops started building roads toward the Cape Torokina area from Mawareka. This offensive was to be a joint Army-Navy effort, but when Truk Island in the Central Pacific was hit by a large Allied carrier force on 16 February 1944, the remainder of the naval air strength at Rabaul was dispatched to Truk. The *Seventeenth Army* then carried on the operation alone.

As expected by Allied intelligence officers, the trail net from Mosigetta-Mawareka was the main route of travel, and a rough road was completed during the early part of the year. This route had its share of troubles, though. Sections of the road were washed out by rains, and swollen rivers carried away the hasty bridges thrown across them by the Japanese engineers. Additionally, the Japanese activity along this road was a prime target for repeated aerial attacks from patrolling Allied planes. Japanese barge movements along the coast were so harassed by Allied torpedo boats, LCI gunboats, and patrol planes that only a few of the barges remained afloat by March. In the end, the enemy force was required to move overland through the jungle, tugging and pulling artillery and supplies behind.

The Japanese offensive, known as the *Ta* operation, included elements from five infantry regiments—the *13th*, *23d*, *45th*, *53d*, and the *81st*—and two artillery regiments. The attack force numbered about 11,700 troops out of a total force of some 15,400. The general plan of the *Ta* operation was a simultaneous attack on the Allied perimeter from the northwest, north, and east, while the artillery units pounded the objective from positions east of the Torokina River. The attack opened on 8 March with a simultaneous shelling of the Torokina and Piva airstrips and a sudden thrust at the 37th Division lines near Lake Kathleen in the center of the perimeter.

The Army division held its positions against light probing attacks and waited for the all-out assault. The following day three battalions from the *13th* and *23d Infantry* slashed at 37th Division positions in an effort to penetrate the Army lines and obtain high ground where they could emplace artillery weapons to threaten the airfields. The 145th Infantry bore the brunt of these attacks, and by the 12th of March had made three counterattacks to dislodge the enemy forces and restore the lines. During these bitter struggles, the entire enemy force was virtually annihilated; 37th Infantry Division troops counted 1,173 dead Japanese in the area after the attacks.

While this fight raged, another strong Japanese force suddenly assaulted the Americal Division in the area of the upper Torokina River. The action here was considerably less violent but more protracted than in the 37th Division area, and the Japanese forces were not driven back until the 29th of March. The enemy in this area suffered 541 casualties.

In sharp contrast to the weeks of November and December, the main enemy

thrusts during the March counterattack continued in the perimeter sector held by the 37th Division. After the staggering repulse near the center of the perimeter, the Japanese forces moved toward the Laruma area, where four more determined attacks were launched against the Army positions. A coordinated attack in two places on the northwest side of the perimeter on the 13th and 14th was repulsed by the 129th Infantry, and more than 300 Japanese were killed. On the 17th of March, the Japanese struck another blow at the 37th Division positions and were met by a tank-infantry counterattack that killed another 195 enemy.

The sixth and final attack against the XIV Corps perimeter was launched on the 24th of March. Japanese fanaticism carried the attack as far as one of the battalion command posts of the 129th Infantry before the penetration was sealed off. Another 200 Japanese perished in this last attack. The following day, XIV Corps artillery shelled the retreating Japanese, and the last bid by the enemy to retake the Cape Torokina area was over. Admiral Halsey, describing the "Ta" operation later, reported:

> The attack came against positions that had been carefully prepared in depth, with well-prepared fields of fire and manned by well-disciplined, healthy, and ready-to-go troops of the 37th and Americal Division. Some damage was done by enemy artillery but the damage did not prevent aerial operations. The Japanese infantry attacks were savage, suicidal, and somewhat stupid. They were mowed down without mercy and the attack was actually broken up by the killing of a sufficient number of Japanese to render them ineffective. At this writing, over 10,000 Japanese have been buried by our forces on Bougainville. The remainder can probably manage to keep alive but their potential effectiveness and heavy weapons have been destroyed.[17]

The XIV Corps estimated that more than 6,843 Japanese had died in the futile charges against the strong Allied positions from 8 to 25 March. These casualty figures compare favorably with Japanese records which indicate that the *Ta* attack force lost 2,389 killed and 3,060 wounded. In addition, various supporting units under direct control of the *Seventeenth Army* suffered casualties of about 3,000 killed and 4,000 wounded.[18]

At the time of the attack against the XIV Corps perimeter, the Antiaircraft and Special Weapons Groups of the Marine 3d Defense Battalion were operating under the tactical control of Antiaircraft Command, Torokina, an XIV Corps grouping of all air defense weapons. For some time, enemy activity over the beachhead had been restricted because of the almost complete dominance of Allied aircraft. As a result, the Marine weapons were seldom fired. When the Japanese attack was launched, the 90mm batteries were employed as field artillery.

The Marine batteries were usually registered by an Army fire direction center on various targets beyond the range of light artillery units and adjusted by aerial observers. Most of the firing missions were targets of opportunity and night harassing registrations on enemy bivouac and supply areas. The Marine weapons fired a total of 4,951 rounds of ammunition in 61 artillery missions.[19]

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[17] *ThirdFlt NarrRept*, p. 12.

[18] *Seventeenth Army Ops—II*, p. 111.

[19] CO, 3d DefBn SAR Covering Employment of Guns in Direct Ground Fire Missions, 14Mar–15Apr44, dtd 15Apr44 (Bougainville AreaOps-File, HistBr, HQMC).

On the 13th of March, two 90mm guns from the Marine unit were moved toward the northwest side of the perimeter with the mission of direct fire on a number of enemy field pieces and other installations located on a ridge of hills extending in front of the 129th Infantry. Emplacement of the guns in suitable positions for such restricted fire was difficult, but both guns were eventually employed against limited targets of opportunity. The guns were later used to greater advantage to support the soldiers in local counterattacks against the Japanese forces.

The 155mm seacoast defense guns of the Marine battalion were also used as field artillery in defense of the perimeter. The Marine battery was called upon for 129 firing missions in general support of the Army defenses and was usually employed against long-range area targets. The big guns fired 6,860 rounds, or 515 tons of explosives, against enemy positions.

In addition, two of the 40mm guns from the Special Weapons Group were moved into the front lines in the Americal Division sector for close support. There were few suitable targets for the guns in the slow action in this area, and only two or three bunkers were hit by direct fire. One weapon, however, fired over 1,000 rounds in countermortar fire and to strip obstructing foliage from enemy positions. Targets being scarce, the guns were sometimes used as sniping weapons against individual Japanese.[20]

The defense battalion was the last Marine Corps ground unit withdrawn from Bougainville. It departed Cape Torokina on 21 June, nearly eight months after the initial landings of the battalion on 1 November with the assault waves. The withdrawal came one week after Admiral Halsey's South Pacific Command was turned over to Vice Admiral John H. Newton and all the Solomon Islands were annexed as part of General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command. The South Pacific campaign against the Japanese was virtually ended. Ultimately, the Cape Torokina area was occupied by Australian forces which, by the end of the war, were closing slowly on Numa Numa and the last remnants of the Bougainville defenders.

CONCLUSIONS

In an analysis of the operations against the Japanese in the Northern Solomons, three points of strategic importance are apparent. The first of these is that despite the risk inherent in attacking deep into enemy-held territory, the Allied forces successfully executed such a venture. Diversionary and subsidiary actions were so timed and executed that the Japanese were deceived as to the intentions and objective of the final attack. The South Pacific forces also gambled and won on the premise that the ever-increasing superiority of Allied air and sea power would counterbalance the vulnerability of extended supply lines attendant upon an operation so close to Rabaul.

Another point is that, although the operations in Bougainville and the Treasurys were planned, directed, and executed by South Pacific Forces, the campaign was partially a maneuver to provide flank security for the advance of the Southwest Pacific Forces along the northern coast of New Guinea. The need to strike at a point which would insure this flank security was the factor which resulted in the selection

[20] 3d DefBn Memo No. 6–44, dtd 1Apr44 (Bougainville Area OpsFile, HistBr, HQMC).

of Cape Torokina as the I Marine Amphibious Corps objective.

The third point is that the Bougainville campaign was wholly successful, with a minimum of lives lost and materiel expended. Seizure of a shallow but broad beachhead by Marine units and the expansion of this perimeter with the subsequent and continued arrival of Army reinforcements was an economical employment of both amphibious troops and infantry.

The operations in the Northern Solomons knocked the Japanese off-balance. The only enemy activity was a day-to-day reaction to Allied moves. After 15 December, Allied air superiority south of Rabaul was unchallenged, and the Japanese cancelled further naval operations in the latitude of the Bougainville operation. There were other considerations, however. The enemy was pressed by additional Allied moves in the Central Pacific, the loss of the Gilbert Islands, and the continued advance of General MacArthur's forces in the Southwest Pacific. The success at Bougainville, however, led to the eventual collapse of the enemy's defensive positions in the Bismarcks.

> The Bougainville campaign was intended to accomplish the destruction of enemy air strength in the Bismarcks; not only was this accomplished but the by-products of the campaign were so extensive that the subsequent operations at Green Island and Emirau were accomplished virtually without enemy opposition, and the entire enemy offensive potential in the Bismarcks area was destroyed. In the matter of ultimate achievement and importance in the Pacific War, the Bougainville operation was successful beyond our greatest hopes.[21]

By tactical considerations, the planning of the Northern Solomons campaign was daring, yet sound. The diversionary landing on Choiseul and the operations in the Treasurys were conceived to mislead the Japanese, and these maneuvers served as the screen behind which the I Marine Amphibious Corps moved toward the actual point of attack. The surprise achieved by the landings at Empress Augusta Bay is evidence of astute, farsighted thinking behind these operations.

The tactical stroke which decided the success of the Bougainville operation was the selection of the Cape Torokina beaches as the landing site. To pick a landing area lashed by turbulent surf, with tangled jungle and dismal swamps immediately inland, was a tactical decision which the Japanese did not believe the Allied forces would make. Amphibious patrols had failed to scout the exact beaches chosen and general knowledge of the area was unfavorable. Despite these disadvantages, the shoreline at Cape Torokina was picked because the Japanese had decided not to defend such an unlikely area in strength.

When the I Marine Amphibious Corps was relieved by XIV Corps on 15 December, General Geiger's Marine forces could leave the island confident that the beachhead was firmly anchored along the prescribed lines and that the mission was complete. Advance naval base facilities were installed and functioning; one fighter strip was in operation and another underway, and a bomber field was nearly complete. Equally as important, a road net capable of carrying all anticipated traffic was constructed or nearly finished throughout the beachhead. This last achievement, as much as the rapid completion of airfields, insured the continued existence of the Cape Torokina perimeter against Japanese attacks.

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[21] *ThirdFlt NarrRept*, p. 12.

That the operations ashore were successful though faced by three formidable obstacles—Japanese forces, deep swamps, and dense jungle—is a tribute to the cooperation of the Marine Corps, Army, and Navy units assigned to the I Marine Amphibious Corps.

For the 3d Marine Division, which formed the bulk of the IMAC forces initially, the months of hard fighting established skills and practices which lasted throughout the Pacific campaign. The Marines of General Turnage's division first experienced the difficulties of maintaining supply and evacuation while under enemy fire at Cape Torokina. If there had been any misgivings about committing an untested division to such a task, these were dispelled by the manner in which the Marines conducted the operation. After the campaign, General Turnage wrote: "From its very inception it was a bold and hazardous operation. Its success was due to the planning of all echelons and the indomitable will, courage, and devotion to duty of all members of all organizations participating." [22]

By the time of the Piva Forks battle, the 3d Division Marine was a combat-wise and skilled jungle fighter capable of swift movement through swamps and effective employment of his weapons. By the end of the campaign, the Marine was a veteran soldier, capable of offering a critical appraisal of his own weapons and tactics as well as those of his opponent.

This increased fighting skill was reflected by mounting coordination between all combat units, with lessening casualties. In this respect, the 3d Medical Battalion achieved a remarkable record of rescue operations which, despite the complexities of evacuation, resulted in less than one percent of the battle casualties dying of wounds. Aid stations were located as close to the front lines as possible. Wounded Marines were given emergency treatment minutes after being hit. The casualties were removed by amtracs to hospitals in the rear, or, in the case of seriously wounded Marines, to more extensive facilities at Vella Lavella. The hospitals on the beach were subjected to air raids and shelling, but the treatment of wounded continued despite these handicaps.

Disease incidence was low, except for malaria which had already been contracted elsewhere. The construction work on the airfields and roads resulted in the draining of many adjacent swamps which aided the malaria control. There were no cases of malaria which could be traced to local infection, and dysentery and diarrhea were practically nonexistent—a rare testimonial to the sanitary regulations observed from the start of the operation. Before the campaign, many preventive measures were taken. Lectures and demonstrations which stressed the value of clothing, repellents, bug spray, and head and mosquito nets were part of the pre-operation training. Their effect and the discipline of the Marines is reflected in the fact that few men were evacuated because of illness.

The Marines learned that, with few exceptions, jungle tactics were a common sense application of standard tactical principles and methods to this type of terrain. Control of troops was difficult but could be accomplished by the "contact imminent" formation described earlier. During most of the fighting, command posts were situated as close to the front lines as

[22] *3d MarDiv CombatRept, p.* 12.

possible—sometimes as near as 75 yards. Although this close proximity sometimes forced the command post to defend itself against enemy attacks, Marine officers felt that such a location provided more security. Additionally, this close contact allowed rapid relay of information with resultant quick action. The command post was usually in two echelons—the battle or forward CP with the commanding officer and the operations and intelligence officers, and the rear command post manned by the executive officer and the supply and communications officers.

Defense in the jungle usually took the form of a thinly-stretched perimeter with a reserve in the center. Organization of the positions was seldom complete. Sometimes a double-apron fence of barbed wire blocked some avenue of approach, but usually a few strands of booby-trapped wire sufficed. The Marines took a lesson from the Japanese and cleared fields of fire by removing only a few obstructing branches from trees and underbrush.

As the fighting moved through the jungles, the Marines found that the automatic rifle (BAR) was the most effective weapon for close combat. Light and capable of being fired instantly, the BAR was considered superior to the light machine gun for most occasions. The machine gun, however, had its adherents because of its mobility and low silhouette. These rapid-fire weapons and the highly regarded M–1 rifle were used most of the time in jungle attacks. The .30 caliber carbine most Marines dismissed as too light in hitting power, too rust-prone, and too similar in sound to a Japanese weapon. The heavy machine gun was too heavy and too high for jungle work except for sustained firing in a defensive position.

Supporting weapons such as the 37mm antitank gun and the 75mm pack howitzer were effective in the dense foliage, but these guns were difficult to manhandle into position and could not keep up with the advance in a rapidly changing tactical situation. The 81mm mortars, augmented by the lighter 60mm tubes, provided most of the close support fires. These weapons achieved good results on troops in the open, but were too light for emplaced bunkers. The Marines were supported on two occasions by an Army unit with chemical mortars (4.2 inch), and these were found to be extremely effective against pillboxes and covered positions.

Several attempts were made to use flame throwers in stubborn areas, and these weapons had a demoralizing effect on the Japanese. Many bunkers were evacuated by the enemy before the weapons could be fired against the position. The flame throwers quickly snuffed out the lives of the Japanese remaining in their emplacements. Ignition of the fuel was difficult in the jungle, but Marines solved this by tossing incendiary grenades against a bunker and then spraying the position with fuel. The 2.36-inch antitank bazooka was used on enemy emplacements on Hellzapoppin Ridge, but the crews were unable to get close enough for effective work. The experimental rockets, which were used in the latter stages of the campaign, were highly inaccurate against small area targets and revealed the positions of the Marines.

The Japanese proved to be as formidable an enemy as the Marines expected. The Japanese defenses were well-placed and skillfully concealed and camouflaged. Expenditure of ammunition was small and fire from the bunkers was deadly. Foxholes were cleverly camouflaged and only

narrow, inconspicuous lanes of fire were cleared. Fire was limited to short range. Most Marines were killed within 10 yards of enemy positions. In such actions, the rate of the wounded to the dead was high, and the majority of bullet wounds were in the lower extremities. This reflected the Japanese tendency to keep firing lanes low to the ground.

Grenades were used extensively, both by hand and from launchers. The concussion of these enemy grenades was great but fragmentation was poor. The Japanese weapon most feared by the Marines was the 90mm mortar which the enemy employed with great skill. The enemy shell contained an explosive with a high velocity of reaction which resulted in a concussion of tremendous force. The sound of this blast was almost as terrifying as the actual burst. One Marine regiment, assessing the effect of this weapon against the Marines, estimated that at least one-fifth of all battle casualties were inflicted either by the blast concussion or fragments from this enemy shell.

The Japanese, however, displayed what the Marines believed was amazing ineptness in the tactical use of artillery. The gunnery was excellent, and fire from the light and heavy artillery pieces was accurately placed on road junctions, observations points, front lines, and supply dumps. But the placement of firing batteries was so poor that, almost without exception, the Japanese positions were detected and destroyed within hours after firing was started. The enemy fired concentrations of short duration, but, despite this, the muzzle blasts of the weapons were detected and the positions shelled by counterbattery fire.

The enemy may have lacked shells because of the difficulty of supply through the jungle, but "there is no reasonable explanation for the Japanese repeatedly placing their guns on the forward slopes of hills under our observation and then firing them even at twilight or night when the muzzle flashes of the guns fixed their positions as surely as if they had turned a spotlight on them." [23]

As for the artillery support offered by the 12th Marines (and later the 37th Division units), the 3d Marine Division stinted no praise in reporting that the accurate artillery fire was the dominant factor in driving the Japanese forces out of the Torokina area. At least half of the enemy casualties were the direct result of artillery shelling. The preattack bombardment fired before the Battle of Piva Forks was devastating evidence of the force of sustained shelling. The Marines, aware that the all-around defensive system of the Japanese discouraged flank attacks, depended upon the fires of the supporting artillery to pave the way for the infantry to close with the enemy. This infantry-artillery cooperation was one of the highlights of the Bougainville campaign. A total of 72,643 rounds were fired by Marine artillery units in support of the attacks by the IMAC forces.

The greatest advance in supporting arms techniques was in aviation. Prior to the operation, the Marines had a tendency to regard close air support as a risk. The infantrymen wanted and needed direct support from the air, but their faith as well as their persons had been shaken on occasion by air support being too close. Ground troops felt insecure with only smoke to mark their front lines and targets, and airmen were hesitant to bomb after it became known that the Japanese

[23] *Ibid*, p. 145.

shot white smoke into the Marine lines to deceive the airmen into bombing their own people. Since it was known from the New Georgia campaign that the enemy troops tended to close in against the front lines to wait out a bombing attack, preparations for close air support at Bougainville started with the idea of developing techniques which would result in maximum accuracy at minimum distance from Marine lines.

Prior to the operation, three air liaison parties were organized and trained. In addition, each battalion and regiment sent a representative to the training school so that each infantry command post would have a man available to direct the close support missions. The pre-strike briefings by both the strike operations officer and a ground officer familiar with the terrain was another innovation. How well this system succeeded is demonstrated by the fact that in 10 missions requested by forces on Bougainville, the only casualties to ground troops were from bombs inexplicably dropped 600 yards from a well-marked target. The other nine strikes were highly successful and in two instances were made within 75 yards of the front lines without harm to the infantry.

Before the Cape Torokina operation, air support was employed mostly against targets beyond the reach of artillery. The Bougainville fighting showed that air could be employed as close to friendly troops and as accurately as artillery, and that it was an additional weapon which could be used to surprise and overwhelm the enemy. Much credit for developing this technique should go to Lieutenant Colonel John T. L. D. Gabbert, the 3d Division Air Officer, and the ground and flying officers who worked with him.

The work of the amphibian tractor companies is another highlight of the operation. Throughout the campaign, these machines proved invaluable. Had it not been for the amtracs, the supply problem would have been insurmountable. The 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion transported an estimated 22,992 tons of rations, ammunition, weapons, organizational gear, medical supplies, packs, gasoline, and vehicles, as well as reinforcements and casualties. A total of 124 amtracs were landed, but the demand was so great and jungle treks so difficult that only a few were in operating order at any one time. These, however, did yeoman work, and the list of the duties and jobs performed by these versatile machines varied from rescuing downed aviators from the sea to conducting scouting trips along the front lines. The appreciation and affection felt by the Marines for these lumbering lifesavers is best expressed by this comment:

> Not once but all through the campaign the amphibian tractor bridged the vital gap between life and death, available rations and gnawing hunger, victory and defeat. They roamed their triumphant way over the beachhead. They ruined roads, tore down communication lines, revealed our combat positions to the enemy—but everywhere they were welcome.[24]

Not to be overlooked in an analysis of the campaign is the contribution to the success of the Cape Torokina operation by the 19th Marines. The Marine pioneers and engineers, with a Seabee unit attached, landed with the assault waves on D-Day and for some time functioned as shore party personnel before being released to

[24] John Monks, Jr., and John Falter, *A Ribbon and a Star, The Third Marines at Bougainville* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945), p. 65.

perform the construction missions assigned. Only one trail to the interior existed at the time of landing; in slightly more than two weeks a rough but passable road connected all units along the perimeter. This provided a vitally necessary supply and reinforcement route for further advances.

One of the reasons the Marines gained and held the perimeter was this ability to construct quickly the necessary roads, airfields, and supply facilities. Engineering units and Seabees of the I Marine Amphibious Corps built and maintained 25 miles of high-speed roads as well as a network of lesser roads within the space of two months. This work was in addition to that on two fighter strips and a bomber field. The Japanese had not developed the Cape Torokina area and therefore could not defend it when the Marines landed. After the IMAC beachhead was established, the Japanese employed a few crude pieces of engineering equipment in an attempt to construct roads from the Buin area toward Empress Augusta Bay. The project was larger than the equipment available. The attacking force for the *Ta* operation had to struggle more than 50 miles through jungle, swamps, and rivers tugging artillery, ammunition, and rations over rough jungle trails. XIV Corps was able to meet this threat over IMAC-constructed roads, which permitted reinforcements to rush to the perimeter at high speed.[25]

The solution of the logistics muddle, which started on D-Day and continued for several weeks, was another accomplishment which marked the Bougainville campaign. With the exception of the unexpected accumulation of supplies and equipment which nearly smothered the beaches early in the operation, logistical planning proved to be as sound as conditions permitted. An advance base at Vella Lavella for a source of quick supply to augment the short loads carried ashore on D-Day proved to be unnecessary in the light of later events. The III Amphibious Force lost a minimum of ships during the Bougainville operation, a stroke of good fortune that accrued as a result of air domination by the Allies. This permitted direct and continued supply from Guadalcanal. More than 45,000 troops and 60,000 tons of cargo were unloaded in the period 1 November–15 December, with no operational losses. With the exception of the first two echelons, all supplies were unloaded and the ships had departed before nightfall.

The lack of an organized shore party for the sole purpose of directing and controlling the flow of supplies over the beachhead was partially solved by the assignment of combat troops for this duty. Luckily, the enemy situation during the early stages at Cape Torokina was such that nearly 40 percent of the landing force could be diverted to solving the problem of beach logistics. This led to many complaints by assault units, which—despite only nominal opposition by the Japanese during the landing stages—protested the loss of combat strength at such a time.

It is to General Vandegrift's credit that quick unloading was assured by the assignment of infantrymen to the task of cargo handling. This, however, was a temporary measure to meet an existing problem and would have been unfeasible in future operations where opposition was more determined. His action, though, was an indication of the growing awareness that

[25] Col Ion M. Bethel ltr to CMC, dtd 16Jul48 (Bougainville Monograph Comment File, HistBr, HQMC).

beach logistics was a vital command responsibility. It is interesting to note that after the Bougainville operation a number of units recommended that the shore party be augmented by additional troops or personnel not essential to operations elsewhere. Later in the war, combat leaders realized that nothing was more essential than an uninterrupted flow of supplies to the assault units, and that the complicated task of beach logistics must be handled by a trained shore party organization and not an assigned labor force of inexperienced personnel.

The Bougainville operation was no strategic campaign in the sense of the employment of thousands of men and a myriad of equipment requiring months of tactical and logistical maneuver. As compared with the huge forces employed in later operations, it was a series of skirmishes between forces rarely larger than a battalion. Yet, with all due sense of proportion, the principal engagements have the right to be called battles, from the fierceness and bravery with which they were contested and the important benefits resulting from their favorable outcome.[26]

The campaign for the Northern Solomons ended as the Bougainville operation drew to a close. The end of the Solomons chain had been reached, and new operations were already being planned for the combined forces of the Southwest and South Pacific commands. The general missions of the campaign had been accomplished. Rabaul was neutralized from airfields on Bougainville, and the victory won by Marines and soldiers at Cape Torokina allowed other Allied forces to continue the attack against the Japanese at other points.

The final accolade to the Bougainville forces is contained in the message General Vandegrift sent his successor, General Geiger, when the Marine forces returned to Guadalcanal:

> I want to congratulate you on the splendid work that you and your staff and the Corps did on Bougainville. The spectacular attack on Tarawa has kind of put Bougainville off the front page; but those of us who know the constant strain, danger, and hardship of continuous jungle warfare realize what was accomplished by your outfit during the two months you were there.[27]

[26] *HistDiv Acct*, p. 1.

[27] LtGen Alexander A. Vandergrift ltr to MajGen Roy S. Geiger, dtd 29Jan44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HistBr, HQMC).

PART IV

The New Britain Campaign

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New Britain Prelude

GHQ AND ALAMO PLANS[1]

By late November, the parallel drives of South and Southwest Pacific forces envisaged in ELKTON plans had reached the stage where General MacArthur was ready to move into New Britain, with the main target the enemy airfields at Cape Gloucester on the island's western tip. The timing of the attack depended largely upon the availability of assault and resupply shipping, and the completion of Allied airfields on Bougainville and in the Markham-Ramu River valley at the foot of the Huon Peninsula. Complete control of the Vitiaz Strait, the prize sought in the pending operation, would give the Allies a clear shot at the Japanese bases on the New Guinea coast and a secure approach route to the Philippines.

The airstrips building within the IMAC perimeter on Bougainville provided the means for a heightened bomber offensive against Rabaul—raids which could count on strong fighter protection. With the completion of Torokina Field expected in early December, and the first of the Piva Field bomber runways ready by the month's end, SoPac planes could throw up an air barrier against enemy counterattacks on landings on western New Britain. In like manner, the new Markham-Ramu valley fields increased the potential of American and Australian air to choke off raids by the Japanese *Fourth Air Army* based at Madang and Wewak and points west on the New Guinea coast.

While men of the Australian 9th Division drove the Japanese garrison of Finschhafen back along the shore of the Huon Peninsula toward Sio, other Australians of the 7th Division fought north through the Markham-Ramu uplands, keeping the pressure on the retreating enemy defenders. Behind the assault troops, engineers worked feverishly to complete airfields at Lae and Finschhafen, and at Nadzab and Gusap in the valley. Completion schedules were slowed by the seemingly endless rain of the New Guinea region, and the most forward strip, that at Finschhafen, could not be readied for its complement of fighters before 17 December. An all-weather road building from Lae to Nadzab, key to the heavy duty supply of the valley air bases, was not slated to be fully

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: GHQ, SWPA G–3 Jnl and File, Sep43–May44, hereafter *GHQ G–3 Jnl;* ALAMO Force G–3 Jnl and File 23Jul43–10Feb 44, in 20 parts, hereafter *ALAMO G–3 Jnl* with part number; ALAMO Force Rept of the DEXTERITY Operation, 15Dec43–10Feb44, n.d., hereafter *DEXTERITY Rept* (all in WW II Recs Div, FRC Alex); USSBS, MilAnalysisDiv, *Employment of Forces under the Southwest Pacific Command* (Washington, Feb47); Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul.* Where location citations for documentary sources for this part are missing, the material is in the New Britain Area Operations File, New Britain Monograph and Comment File, or Unit Historical Report File of the Historical Branch, G–3, HQMC.

operational until the 15th. Prior to that date, all troops and equipment were airlifted into the valley by transports of the Allied Air Forces.

Until the new forward bases were ready to support attacks on the next SWPA objectives, all the shipping available to Admiral Barbey's VII Amphibious Force was tied up moving troops and supplies forward from depots at Townsville, Port Moresby, and Milne Bay. The landing craft and ships essential to a move across Vitiaz Strait against Cape Gloucester could not be released for rehearsal and loading until 21 November at the earliest.

These factors, coupled with the desire of planners to execute the movement to the target during the dark of the moon, combined to set D-Day back several times. The target date first projected for Cape Gloucester was 15 November; the date finally agreed upon was 26 December. In both cases, provision for a preliminary landing on the south coast of New Britain was also made, the advance in scheduling here being made from 9 November to 15 December. Altogether, the planning for the operation was characterized by change, not only in landing dates, but also in the targets selected and the forces involved.

General MacArthur chose to organize his troops for the operations on New Guinea and against Rabaul into two task forces. The headquarters of one, New Guinea Force, under Australian General Sir Thomas A. Blamey, conducted the Papuan campaign and directed the offensive operations on the Huon Peninsula. The first operation of the other, New Britain Force, led by Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, USA, was the seizure of Woodlark and Kiriwina. Krueger's command, known as ALAMO Force after July, was next charged with the execution of DEXTERITY (the seizure of Western New Britain).

Technically, Blamey, serving as Commander, Allied Land Forces, had operational control of the national contingents assigned to his command. This assignment included the U.S. Sixth Army, led by Krueger, the Australian Military Forces, also led by Blamey, and the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army. Actually, most of the troops in Sixth Army were assigned to ALAMO Force, which MacArthur kept directly under his General Headquarters (GHQ). The effect of this organizational setup was to make New Guinea Force an Australian command to which American troops were infrequently assigned and to fix ALAMO Force as an American command with very few Australian units.

In contrast to the situation on land, no separate national task forces were created at sea or in the air. At a comparable level with Blamey, directly under MacArthur were two American officers, Vice Admiral Arthur S. Carpender, who led Allied Naval Forces, and Lieutenant General George C. Kenney, who headed Allied Air Forces. Each man was also a national contingent commander in his own force; Carpender had the Seventh Fleet and Kenney the Fifth Air Force. The Dutch and Australian air and naval forces reported to the Allied commanders for orders.

At this time, amphibious operations in the Southwest Pacific, unlike those in Halsey's area where naval command doctrine prevailed, were not conducted under unified command lower than the GHQ level. Control was effected by cooperation and coordination of landing and sup-

port forces. Neither amphibious force nor landing force commander had sole charge during the crucial period of the landing itself; the one had responsibility for movement to the target, the other for operations ashore. This deficiency in the control pattern, which was recognized as a critical "weakness" by MacArthur's G–3, Major General Stephen J. Chamberlin, was not remedied until after DEXTERITY was officially declared successful and secured.[2]

Despite its complexity, the command setup in the Southwest Pacific had one indisputable virtue—it worked. And it worked with a dispatch that matched the efforts of Halsey's South Pacific headquarters. Both GHQ and ALAMO Force displayed a tendency to spell out tactical schemes to operating forces, but this was a practice more annoying to the commanders concerned than harmful. Since frequent staff conferences between cooperating forces and the several echelons of command was the rule in planning phases, the scheme of maneuver ordered was inevitably one acceptable to the men who had to make it work. In like manner, differences regarding the strength of assault and support forces were resolved before operations began. When, at various points in the evolution of DEXTERITY plans, the differences of opinion were strong, the resolution was predominantly in favor of the assault forces.[3]

[2] S.J.C. memo for CinC, dtd 12Feb44. Subj: OpsInstns for Manus-Kavieng Ops, in *GHQ G–3 Jnl*, 13Feb44.

[3] "In all these operations General MacArthur gave General Krueger responsibility for coordinating ground, air, and naval planning. This gave the ground force commander a preeminent position." Dr. John Miller, Jr., OCMH, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 9May62.

The GHQ procedure in planning an operation was to sketch an outline plan, including forces required and objectives, and then to circulate it to the Allied commands concerned for study, comment, and correction. In the case of DEXTERITY, the principal work on this first plan was done by Lieutenant Colonel Donald W. Fuller, one of the three Marines who were assigned to MacArthur's headquarters as liaison officers shortly after the 1st Division left Guadalcanal. With the others, Lieutenant Colonels Robert O. Bowen and Frederick L. Wieseman, Fuller soon became a working member of the GHQ staff. He summarized the planning sequence at this stage by recalling:

> The routine was then to let all services study the outline plan for a prescribed period and then hold a conference in GHQ. The commanders concerned [including General MacArthur], the General Staff, and Technical Services GHQ then discussed the plan and, if any objections were made, they were resolved at that time. After everyone appeared happy, the plan was filed. It was never issued formally but merely handed out for comment. The next step was the issuance of orders which were called "operations instructions." This was actually the only directive issued to conduct an operation . . . never while I was there was any command ever directed to conduct an operation in accordance with General MacArthur's outline plan.[4]

On 6 May, ALAMO Force had received a warning order from GHQ which set a future task for it of occupying western New Britain by combined airborne and amphibious operations. Engrossed as it then was in preparations for the Woodlark-Kiriwina landings, General Krueger's headquarters had little time for ad-

[4] Col Donald W. Fuller ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 28Jan52.

vance planning, but, as the weeks wore on toward summer, attention focused on the target date in November. Although the assault troops were not yet formally named, there was no doubt that they would be drawn from the 1st Marine Division, and the division sent some of its staff officers to Brisbane in June to help formulate the original plans. These Marines served with Sixth Army's staff in the Australian city, the location of MacArthur's headquarters as well as those of the principal Allied commands. In the forward area, at Port Moresby in the case of GHQ, and Milne Bay for Krueger's task force, were advance headquarters closer to the scene of combat. Members of the Sixth Army staff were detailed to additional duty as the ALAMO Force staff, and the traffic between Brisbane and New Guinea was heavy. After the initial GHQ outline plan was circulated on 19 July, ALAMO planners were not long in coming up with an alternate scheme of their own.

Conference discussions tended to veer toward the ALAMO proposals which differed mainly in urging that more forward staging areas be used that would place troops nearer the targets selected and thus conserve shipping. A second outline plan circulated on 21 August was closer to the ALAMO concept and named the units which would furnish the assault elements: 1st Marine Division; 32d Infantry Division; 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment. By mid-September, preparations for the operation were far enough along so that detailed planning could be undertaken. MacArthur's operations instructions to cover DEXTERITY were published on the 22d; six days later, an ALAMO Force draft plan was sent to GHQ for approval.

After a summer of discussion, refinement, and change, General Krueger's plan called for seizure of a foothold on New Britain's south shore at Lindenhafen Plantation on 14 November and subsequent operations to neutralize the nearby Japanese base at Gasmata. Once the Gasmata effort was well underway, the main DEXTERITY landings would take place at Cape Gloucester with the immediate objective the enemy airfields there. The eventual goal of the operation was the seizure of control of Western New Britain to a general line including Talasea on the north coast's Willaumez Peninsula and Gasmata in the south.

The assault force chosen for the Gasmata operation (LAZARETTO) was the 126th Infantry,[5] reinforced as an RCT with other 32d Division units and Sixth Army troops. To carry out operations against Cape Gloucester (BACKHANDER), General Krueger designated the 1st Marine Division, reinforced by the 503d Parachute Infantry. In ALAMO Force reserve for all DEXTERITY operations was the remainder of the 32d Division. While the 32d was a unit of the Sixth Army assigned to ALAMO, both the Marine and parachute units were assigned from GHQ Reserve, which came immediately under MacArthur's control.

The basic scheme of maneuver proposed for BACKHANDER called for a landing by the 7th Marines (less one of its battal-

[5] The assault force initially selected was the 5th Marines, reinforced as an RCT, with additional supporting units from the Sixth Army, all under the command of Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., ADC of the 1st Marine Division. General Shepherd and his staff completed preliminary plans for the operation on board ship en route from Melbourne to Milne Bay, but found on arrival that the 126th Infantry had been designated the assault element instead. Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 20Aug62, hereafter *Shepherd ltr.*

ions), organized as Combat Team C, on north shore beaches between the cape and Borgen Bay. Simultaneously, the remaining battalion of the 7th, suitably reinforced, would land near Tauali just south of the cape to block the trail leading to the airfields. Shortly after the Marines landed, the 503d was to jump into a drop zone near the airfields and join the assault on enemy defenses. The 1st Marines, organized as Combat Team B, would be in immediate reserve for the operation with Combat Team A (the 5th Marines) on call subject to ALAMO Force approval. The intent of the operation plan was to use as few combat troops as possible and still accomplish handily the mission assigned.

On 14 October, GHQ returned the ALAMO plan approved and directed that Combat Team B be staged well forward along the New Guinea coast, at Oro Bay or Finschhafen rather than Milne Bay, if it developed that Allied Air Forces could provide adequate daylight cover over loading operations. Similarly, authorization was given to increase the strength of the assault forces if late intelligence of the enemy garrison developed the need. In order to conserve operating time and get more value out of the shipping available, maximum use was ordered made of Oro Bay as a supply point for BACKHANDER.

After considering the ALAMO Force plan, Admiral Carpender agreed to use two of his overworked transports together with all the LSTs, LCIs, and smaller amphibious craft available to Seventh Fleet to support the operation. Close on the heels of this commitment, Admiral Barbey protested the exposure of his priceless transports to enemy attack and proposed instead "to restrict the assault ships to those which could discharge their troops directly to the beaches," in order "to reduce the turn-around time and thereby reduce the hazards from air attack." [6] The matter was brought to MacArthur's attention, but he refused to specify the equipment to be used; however, he did relay to General Krueger his intention that all "troops and supplies that you wished landed must be landed and in such order as you consider necessary." [7] The Seventh Fleet commander then made arrangements to borrow six APDs from Third Fleet in return for extending the loan period of four APDs then being used by Halsey in South Pacific operations. Once replacement ships were obtained, the attack transports were scratched from the task organization of assault shipping.

When the first ALAMO plan for DEXTERITY was being prepared, the probable enemy garrison in the target area was estimated at being between 3,000 and 4,000 men. Toward the end of October, the evidence assembled by coastwatchers, scouts, and other intelligence agencies pointed strongly to a sharp increase in the number of defenders, particularly in the Cape Gloucester vicinity. Krueger's order of battle officers now considered that there were as many as 6,300 troops to oppose the landings and probably no less than 4,100. In order to counter this new strength, it seemed imperative to the commanders concerned that the BACKHANDER landing force be reinforced.

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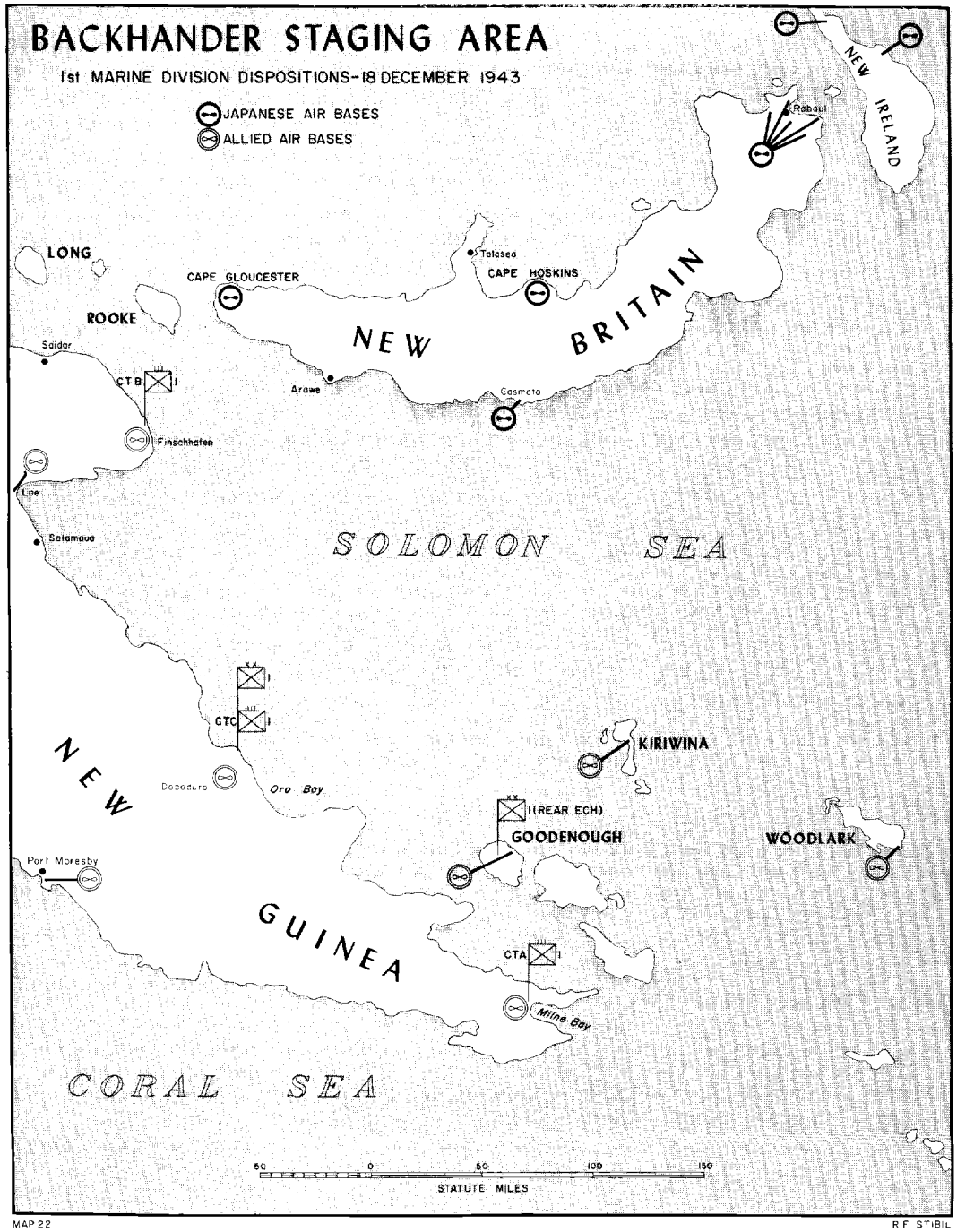
[6] VAdm Daniel E. Barbey ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 10May62, hereafter *Barbey ltr.* Admiral Barbey argued against the use of the transports after General Kenney said that he could not provide adequate air cover for the Gasmata operation.

[7] CofS, GHQSWPA ltr to CG, ALAMO For, dtd 18Oct43, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 3.*



MAP 22 R.F. STIBIL

On 2 November, during a conference at 1st Marine Division headquarters attended by the division commander, Major General William H. Rupertus, Admiral Barbey, and Colonel Clyde D. Eddleman, Krueger's G–3, the matter was considered at length. Under existing plans, the ratio of assault troops to defenders would be 1.8 to 1 if the 503d landed and only 1.3 to 1 if weather prevented the drop. If an additional Marine battalion landing team was committed, the ratio would rise to 2 to 1 (or 1.7 to 1 without paratroops), a balance closer to the clear superiority experience demanded for an attacking force. Eddleman recommended to Krueger that a landing team of Combat Team B be employed at Tanali and that all of Combat Team C land east of the airfield. General Rupertus seconded this finding with proposals for several alternative landing schemes, one favoring the change endorsed by Eddleman. Conclusively, the ALAMO staff came up with a new estimate of the situation on 5 November that recommended an additional battalion be employed. A query from ALAMO headquarters to GHQ at Brisbane brought a quick reply that Krueger had full authority to use the battalion if he so desired.

In addition to getting a sufficient number of assault troops ashore at BACKHANDER, Krueger's staff was gravely concerned about the possible need for reinforcement. To meet this contingency, they recommended that shipping to lift the remainder of Combat Team B to the target be available at its staging area on D-Day. The same requirement was stated for Combat Team A, then at Milne Bay and the unit of the 1st Division farthest from Cape Gloucester. Admiral Barbey was prepared to furnish the ships required, using LCIs to move Combat Team B and transports to shift Combat Team A to Oro Bay, where it could move on, should it prove necessary, in APDs and LCIs. Many of the vessels Barbey designated would have to do double duty; first at Gasmata, then at Gloucester.

With amphibious shipping heavily committed until late November to support Huon Peninsula operations, the time for rehearsal, training, and reoutfitting before DEXTERITY got underway was woefully short. The lapse of six days then figured between LAZARETTO and BACKHANDER landings gave planners little leeway, and tight scheduling for maximum shipping use made no provision for losses at Gasmata. Under the circumstances, General Krueger asked General MacArthur for permission to set back the landing date for LAZARETTO to 2 December. At the same time, in consideration of the delay in the completion of the Huon airfields and the increased demand for shipping, Krueger suggested a BACKHANDER D-Day of 26 December. MacArthur approved deferral of the landing dates for the two operations and eventually decided upon 15 and 26 December after additional changes in forces and objectives.

Even while the date for LAZARETTO was being altered, the need for undertaking the operation at all was being seriously questioned, particularly by Allied Air Forces.[8] Kenney's staff was swinging strongly to the opinion that the forward airstrip planned for the Linden-

[8] Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, Commander, Advanced Echelon, Fifth Air Force thought that the whole New Britain operation was unnecessary. See his letter to General Kenney, dtd 11Nov43, quoted in Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, pp. 329–330.

hafen Plantation beachhead was not necessary to future air operations. Reinforcing this conclusion was the fact that long-range fighter planes would be in short supply until February 1944. Replacement and reinforcement aircraft scheduled to arrive in the Southwest Pacific had been delayed, and, in November, Kenney had to curtail daylight strikes on Rabaul to conserve the few planes he had. The Allied air commander could promise fighter cover over the initial landings at Gasmata, but nothing thereafter. The assault troops would have to rely on antiaircraft fire to fend off Japanese attacks. Perhaps the most disquieting news was that the enemy was building up his garrison at Gasmata, apparently anticipating an Allied attack.

With General Kenney reluctant to regard LAZARETTO as an essential operation and unable to provide aerial cover after it began, the Gasmata area lost its appeal as a target. On 19 November, following a conference with air, naval, and landing force representatives, the ALAMO Force G–3 concluded that carrying through the operation would mean "that we can expect to take considerable casualties and have extensive damage to supplies and equipment as a result of enemy bombing operations subsequent to the landing." [9] An alternative objective, one closer to Allied bases, less vulnerable to enemy air attack, and more lightly defended, was sought.

Generals Krueger and Kenney and Admiral Barbey met on 21 November to decide on a new objective. They chose the Arawe Islands area off the south coast of New Britain, 90 miles closer to Cape Gloucester than Gasmata. Kenney's staff had considered placing a radar station at Arawe before the LAZARETTO project clouded and still was interested in the area as a site for early-warning radar guarding the approaches from Rabaul. The conferees agreed that Arawe would also be a good location for a motor torpedo boat base from which enemy barge traffic along the coast could be blocked. There is evidence that the Commander, Motor Torpedo Boats of the Seventh Fleet was less convinced of the need for this new base, but his objections were evidently not heeded at this time.[10] A powerful argument in favor of the choice was the denial of the site to the Japanese as a staging point through which reinforcements could be fed into the Cape Gloucester area. Then, too, the diversionary effect of the attack might draw off defenders from the main objective.[11]

General MacArthur quickly approved the findings of his field commanders and confirmed the landing date they asked for, 15 December.[12] On 22 November, amend-

[9] ALAMO G–3 memo to CofS, dtd 19Nov43, Subj: Rept of Conference, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 4.*

[10] Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*, p. 372; ALAMO ForEngr memo of conference with Cdr Mumma, dtd 5Dec43, Subj: PT Boat Requirements DIRECTOR in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 5.*

[11] "The determining factor in the selection of Arawe was a statement by Kenney that he could supply air protection for the assault from his air bases on New Guinea. . . ." *Barbey ltr.*

[12] Once Arawe's landing date was set, the final decision on D-Day at Cape Gloucester could be made. At a meeting at General Krueger's headquarters on Goodenough early in December, General MacArthur suggested 21 December, but approved the 26th "so that the assault craft used in the Arawe landing could return in time for a brief training period with the 1st Marine Division before the BACKHANDER operation." RAdm Charles Adair ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, dtd 1Jun62.

ed operations instructions for DEXTERITY were issued by GHQ cancelling LAZARETTO and substituting for it the DIRECTOR (Arawe) operation. An immediate benefit of the switch was a gain in shipping available for BACKHANDER and an increase in the number of troops ready for further operations. The suspected enemy garrison at Arawe was far weaker than that known to be at Gasmata, and the mission assigned the landing force was less demanding in men and materiel resources.

The LAZARETTO task force built around the 126th Infantry was dissolved and its elements returned to ALAMO Force reserve. A new task force, half the strength of its predecessor, was formed using troops released from garrison duties on Woodlark and Kiriwina. Named to command the DIRECTOR Force, which centered on the 112th Cavalry, was Brigadier General Julian W. Cunningham, who had commanded the regiment during the occupation of Woodlark.

The abandonment of LAZARETTO gave GHQ planners a welcome bonus of combat troops available for further DEXTERITY operations. Once the Japanese threat at Cape Gloucester was contained and both flanks of Vitiaz Strait were in Allied hands, the seizure of Saidor on the north New Guinea coast could follow swiftly. An outline plan for the Saidor operation issued on 11 December mentioned that either an RCT of the 1st Marine or the 32d Infantry Divisions might be the assault element. Within a week, changes in the composition of the BACKHANDER Force had narrowed the choice to an Army unit.

On 17 December, impressed by the evident success of DIRECTOR operations, General MacArthur ordered preparations for the capture of Saidor to get underway with a target date on or soon after 2 January. Many of the supporting ships and planes employed during the initial landings at BACKHANDER would again see service at the new objective. ALAMO Force issued its field order for Saidor on the 22d, assigning the 126th Infantry (Reinforced) the role of assault troops. Krueger saved invaluable preparation time by organizing a task force which was essentially the same as the one which had trained for LAZARETTO.

One aspect of the BACKHANDER plan of operations—the air drop of the 503d Parachute Infantry—gathered opposition from all quarters as the time of the landing grew nearer. Krueger's staff was never too enthusiastic about the inclusion of the paratroopers in the assault troops, but followed the outline put forward by GHQ. Rupertus was much less happy with the idea of having a substantial part of his force liable to be cancelled out by weathered-in fields or drop zones at the most critical stage of the operation.[13] On 8 December, Allied Air Forces added its opposition to the use of the 503d with Kenney's director of operations stating that "ComAAF does not desire to participate in the planned employment of paratroops for DEXTERITY."[14] The air commander understood that a time-consuming plane shuttle with a series of drops

[13] MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, dtd 7Dec43 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC). Rather graphically, General Rupertus noted "if the weather is bad, then the jumper boys won't be there to help me & I'll be on the beach with a measly C. T.!"

[14] DirOps, AAF Check Sheet to G–3, GHQ, dtd 8Dec43, in *GHQ G–3 Jnl*, 8Dec43.

was planned, a maneuver which would greatly increase the chance of transports being caught by the expected Japanese aerial counterattack on D-Day. In addition to this consideration, Kenney found that the troop carriers needed to lift the 503d would crowd a heavy bomber group off the runways at Dobodura, the loading point for the air drop. The displaced bombers would then have to operate from fields at Port Moresby, where heavy weather over the Owen Stanley Mountains could keep them from supporting the operation.

The stage was set for the change which took place on 14 December at Goodenough Island where MacArthur and Krueger were present to see the DIRECTOR Force off to its target. The two generals attended a briefing on the landing plans of the 1st Marine Division where Colonel Edwin A. Pollock, the division's operations officer, forcefully stated his belief that the drop of the parachute regiment should be eliminated in favor of the D-Day landing of the rest of Combat Team B to give the division a preponderance of strength over the enemy defenders. Pollock's exposition may have swung the balance against use of the paratroops,[15] or the decision may have already been assured;[16] in either event, the order went out the next day over Krueger's signature changing the field order for BACKHANDER. The seizure of Cape Gloucester was now to be an operation conducted by a unit whose components had trained and fought together.

[15] LtCol Frank O. Hough and Maj John A. Crown, *The Campaign on New Britain* (Washington: HistBr, HQMC, 1952), p. 19, hereafter Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*.

[16] MajGen Clyde D. Eddleman, USA, ltr to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 28Apr52.

TRAINING AND STAGING BACKHANDER FORCE[17]

For effective planning of DEXTERITY operations, General Krueger and the Allied Forces commanders had to strike a balance between the flexibility necessary to exploit changing situations and the exact scheduling required for effective employment of troops, ships, and supplies. The changes wrought in ALAMO Force plans were keyed, therefore, to the physical location of troops in staging and training areas, to the contents and replenishment potential of forward area depots, and to the number and type of amphibious craft available. Throughout the later stages of the planning for BACKHANDER, the variations in scheme of maneuver and number of troops employed were based upon a constant factor, the readiness of the 1st Marine Division for combat.

When the division left Guadalcanal on 9 December 1942, many of its men were walking hospital cases wracked by malarial fevers or victims of a host of other jungle diseases. All the Marines were bone tired after months under constant combat strain and a rest was called for. No more

[17] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl*; VII PhibFor ComdHist 10Jan43–23Dec45, n.d., hereafter *VII PhibFor ComdHist*; VII PhibFor Rept on Cape Gloucester Op, dtd 3Feb44, hereafter *VII PhibFor AR*; CTF 76 (VII PhibFor) WarD, Aug43, n.d. (COA, NHD), hereafter *CTF 76 Aug43 WarD* and following appropriate months; *CTF 76 Sep–Dec43 WarDs;* 1st MarDiv SAR Cape Gloucester Op, Phase I, Planning and Training, n.d., hereafter *1st MarDiv SAR* with appropriate phase or annex; 1st MarDiv WarD, Oct43, n.d., hereafter *1st MarDiv WarD* with appropriate month; *1st MarDiv Nov43 WarD;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

perfect tonic could have been chosen than Australia.

Melbourne, where the division arrived on 12 January, became a second home to the men of the 1st. Fond memories of the city and of the warm reception its people gave the Marines were often called to mind in later years by those who served there. Rewarded in a hundred ways by its release from the jungles of the Solomons and a return to civilization, the 1st Division slowly worked its way back to health and battle fitness. Although at first as many as 7,500 men at a time were down with malaria or recovering from its ravages,[18] the number dwindled as climate and suppressive drugs took effect.

A training program, purposely slow-starting, was begun on 18 January with emphasis during its initial phases on the reorganization and reequipment of units and the drill and physical conditioning of individuals. By the end of March, practice in small-unit tactics was the order of the day. Through April, May, and June, all men qualified with their new basic weapon, the M–1 rifle, a semi-automatic which replaced the bolt-action Springfield M–1903 carried by American servicemen since the decade before World War I. Nostalgia for the old, reliable '03 was widespread, but the increased firepower of the M–1 could not be denied.

In April and May, battalions of the 5th and 7th Marines practiced assault landings on the beaches of Port Philip Bay near Melbourne. One of the two ships used was a converted Australian passenger liner and the other was the only American attack transport (APA) in the Southwest Pacific. Sent over from Halsey's area, the APA was assigned to Barbey's command to give him at least one of the Navy's newest transports for training purposes.[19] With the help of the experienced Marines, VII Amphibious Force officers worked out a series of standing operating procedures during the exercises which would hold for future training and combat usage.

While it was in Australia, the 1st Division had no opportunity to use the variety of specialized amphibious shipping that had come into use since its landing on Guadalcanal. Most LSTs and LCIs were sent forward to Papuan waters as soon as they arrived from the States; the LCTs, which were shipped out in sections, joined the ocean-going ships as soon as they were welded together. In the combat zone, the landing ships were urgently needed to support the operations of New Guinea and ALAMO Forces. The Marines' chance to familiarize themselves with the new equipment would come in the forward area where GHQ planned to send the division after it completed a summer of intensive field training in the broken country around Melbourne.

As a necessary preliminary to effective large unit training and operations, the division was organized into combat and landing teams on 25 May. Many of the supporting unit attachments were the same as those in regimental and battalion em-

[18] Col John E. Linch comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 11Apr52.

[19] Commenting on the state of this APA, the *Henry T. Allen*, Admiral Barbey noted: "It was not the newest, but if not the oldest, it was in the worst condition. It arrived in our area in need of an overhaul so extensive that Australian yards were reluctant to undertake it. It leaked oil so badly that it never could be used in the combat zone throughout the campaign. It was used as an administrative flagship in the rear areas." *Barbey ltr.*

barkation groups already in existence. In terms of the general order outlining the assignments, the combat team was described as "the normal major tactical unit of the division," and the landing team was "regarded essentially as an embarkation team rather than a tactical unit." [20] Many of the reinforcing units in the battalion embarkation groups would revert to regimental control on landing, and, similarly, the division expected to regain control very soon after landing of supporting headquarters and reserve elements included within regimental embarkation groups.

In mid-summer, while 1st Division units were either in the midst of combat team exercises, preparing to take the field, or squaring away after return, a Sixth Army inspection team made a through survey for General Krueger of the Marine organization. The Army officers came away much impressed, noting:

> [This division] is well equipped, has a high morale, a splendid esprit and approximately 75% of its personnel have had combat experience. The average age of its enlisted personnel is well below that in Army divisions. . . . At the present time, the combat efficiency of this division is considered to he excellent. In continuous operations, this condition would probably exist for two months before declining. With rest and replacements between operations, it is believed that a better than satisfactory combat rating could be maintained over a period of six months.[21]

The inspection team expressed some concern about the substantial incidence of malaria in the division's ranks, but made its finding of combat efficiency "Excellent" despite this. The very apparent high morale was attributed to the 1st's experienced leadership, as all the division staff, all regimental and battalion, company and battery commanders had served on Guadalcanal.[22] This pattern of veteran leadership was evident down through all ranks of the division with a good part of the infantry squads and artillery firing sections led by combat-wise NCOs.

The first echelons of the division to move northward to join ALAMO Force were the engineer and pioneer battalions of the 17th Marines. On 24 August, the engineers (1/17) sailed from Melbourne for Goodenough Island to begin construction of the division's major staging area. The pioneer battalion (2/17) moved by rail to Brisbane, "where it drew engineering supplies, transportation, and equipment of the regiment, and stood by to load this material on board ship if a wharf labor shortage developed." [23] It departed for Goodenough on 11 September. The 19th Naval Construction Battalion, which served as the 3d Battalion, 17th Marines, was working at the big U.S. Army Services of Supply (USASOS) base at Cairns, north of Townsville, and remained there under Army control until the end of October.

The formal movement orders were issued to the division on 31 August, setting forth the priority of movement of units and the amount and type of individual

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[20] 1st MarDiv GO No. 83, dtd 25May43, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 1.*

[21] Rept of Inspection 1st MarDiv by Sixth Army Inspection Team, 9–13Aug43, dtd 2Sep43, Anx 1, p. 11. "On 22 August, General Krueger himself arrived in Melbourne for a two-day inspection of the division and upon his departure commented favorably on the observations he had made." *Shepherd ltr.*

[22] Rept of Sixth Army Inspection, dtd 2Sep43, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[23] BGen Robert G. Ballance ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 14Jun62, hereafter *Ballance ltr.*

and organizational equipment that should be taken. In general, 40-days' rations, quartermaster, and medical supplies were to be loaded, as well as a month's supply of individual and organizational equipment and 10 units of fire for all weapons. Reserve stocks of all classes of supply, and any material not available on first requisition to USASOS, were to be forwarded to the division's resupply points. The troops themselves were to take only the clothing and equipment necessary to "live and fight," [24] storing service greens and other personal gear in sea bags and locker boxes for the better day when the pending operation would be over and a hoped-for return to Australia the reward for success.

The division's main movement began on 19 September when Combat Team C finished loading ship and sailed from Melbourne in a convoy of three Liberty ships; its destination was Cape Sudest near Oro Bay. Three more convoys carrying the remainder of the division cleared Melbourne over the next several weeks, with the last Libertys pulling out with the rear echelons of division headquarters and Combat Team B on 10 October. The 18 ships used, hastily converted from cargo carriers, were far from ideal troop transports. Galleys, showers, and heads had to be improvised on weather decks, and the holds were so crowded that many men preferred "to sleep topside, fashioning out of ponchos and shelter halves and stray pieces of line rude and flimsy canvas housing." [25] Happily, the voyage had an end before the objectionable living conditions became a health hazard.

After its move, General Rupertus' command was dispersed in three staging areas that corresponded, in nearness to the target, with the roles the combat teams were scheduled to play in BACKHANDER operations. Encamped at Cape Sudest was the main assault force, Colonel Julian N. Frisbe's 7th Marines, suitably reinforced as Combat Team C. At Milne Bay, farthest from Cape Gloucester, was Combat Team A, centered on Colonel John T. Selden's 5th Marines; Selden's troops, scheduled for a time to be the assault force at Gasmata, were now ticketed as reserves for Gloucester. On Goodenough Island, Combat Team B, under Colonel William J. Whaling, and the remainder of the division moved into camps the 17th Marines had wrested from the jungle. On 21 October, ALAMO Force Headquarters joined the division on Goodenough, moving up from Milne Bay in keeping with General Krueger's desire to keep close to the scene of combat. (See Map 22.)

Each division element, immediately after arrival in its new location, unloaded ship and turned to setting up a tent camp. Before long, combat training was again underway at Oro Bay and Goodenough with emphasis on jungle operations, a species of warfare all too familiar to Guadalcanal veterans. At Milne Bay, Combat Team A had to clear and construct its own camp area while providing 800–900-man working parties daily to help build roads and dumps in the base's supply complex. Colonel Selden rotated the major labor demand among his battalions, giving them all a chance to work as a whole to finish their living area and get a

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[24] 1st MarDiv AdminO 4–43, dtd 7Sep43, in *1st MarDiv Oct43 WarD.*

[25] George McMillan, *The Old Breed, A History of the First Marine Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), p. 162, hereafter McMillan, *The Old Breed.*

start on jungle conditioning and combat training.[26]

On 1 November, with the arrival of the Seabees of 3/17 at Goodenough, the organic units of the 1st Division were all assembled in the forward area. The Japanese attempted a lively welcome by sending bombers and scout planes over Oro Bay and Goodenough throughout the staging period; these raids, seldom made in any strength or pursued with resolution, caused no casualties or damage in Marine compounds and only slight damage to adjoining Army units. The enemy effort had nothing but nuisance value as far as stemming preparations for future operations was concerned, but it did give the Japanese a pretty fair idea of the Allied buildup along the New Guinea coast.

In order to give the troops assigned to DEXTERITY adequate opportunity to familiarize themselves with the landing craft they were to use, Admiral Barbey had to devise a system that would allow him to use a small number of craft to train a large number of men. There was no time to fit the construction of an amphibious training base on New Guinea, similar to those in Australia, into support plans for the move against New Britain. Five months was the lowest estimate of the time necessary to complete such an undertaking, and the men, materials, and ships necessary to support it could not be spared from current operations. On 16 August, Barbey recommended the establishment of a mobile training unit consisting of enough landing craft and supporting auxiliaries to perform the amphibious training mission in the forward area. Carpender and MacArthur both concurred in the recommendation, and the mobile group was organized with headquarters at Milne Bay.

Marines from all three 1st Division staging areas made their practice landings on the beaches of Taupota Bay, a jungled site on the north shore of New Guinea in the lee of the D'Entrecasteux Islands. At Taupota there was opportunity to put ashore enough troops, vehicles, and supplies to test landing and unloading techniques. On 22 October, 1/1 in two APDs and two LSTs lifted from Goodenough to the practice beaches. There the assault troops went ashore in LCVPs from the destroyer-transports and were followed by landing ships with a full deck-load of vehicles plus 40 tons of bulk stores. Since all of the division pioneers were attached to the 7th Marines at Cape Sudest, there was no experienced nucleus for the shore party. One LST took three hours to unload, the other four and a half, prompting VII Amphibious Force to observe that "unloading parties provided were quite inadequate and very little appreciation was shown for the necessity of getting the craft off the beach as quickly as possible." [27]

The critique of the faults of this landing, together with a more comprehensive application of the newly promulgated Division Shore Party SOP,[28] enabled 2/1, using the same ships and landing scheme

[26] 2/5 Record of Events, 16Sep43–9May44, entry of 20Oct44.

[27] *CTF 76 Oct43 WarD*, p. 22.

[28] When General Shepherd reported as ADC of the 1st Division, he found the Shore Party SOP to be "woefully deficient." With General Rupertus' approval, he prepared a new SOP based on that of the 3d Marine Division which he "had helped prepare under the direction of Major General Charles D. Barrett, who had made a study of the deficiencies noted during the Guadacanal landing and subsequent developments in this important phase of a landing operation." *Shepherd ltr.*

two days later, to halve unloading time. On 28 and 31 October, the 7th Marines mounting out from Oro Bay and Cape Sudest was able to land all infantry battalions and supporting elements in the pattern of assault waves coming from APDs, followed by LCIs with support troops, and LSTs with vehicles and bulk cargo. The unloading time per LST was cut to less than an hour by means of adequate troop labor details and the application of cargo handling techniques developed in training for the landings. Combat Team A was able to profit from this experience when the reinforced 5th Marines' battalions made a series of trouble-free practice landings from LSTs and LCIs between 14 and 30 November.[29]

During the amphibious training period, Marine assault troops landed as they would at Cape Gloucester in ships' boats, LCVPs and LCMs. No serious obstacles existed off the chosen beaches which could bar landing craft from nosing ashore, and the amphibian tractors organic to the 1st Division were reserved for logistical duties. That role promised to be quite important to the success of the operation. Extensive tests in the jungles that fringed the staging areas showed that the LVT could negotiate terrain, particularly swamp forest, that was an absolute barrier to other tracked vehicles, even the invaluable bulldozer. The cargo space of 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion's standard LVT(1) Alligator could hold 4,500 pounds, and that of the few newer, larger LVT(2) Buffaloes that were received a few days before embarkation could contain 6,500 pounds.[30] The tests also revealed that the LVT was a splendid trail breaker for tractors, a fact that had immediate application in the plans for employment of artillery at Cape Gloucester.

In Combat Team C's Oro Bay training area, Alligators were used successfully to smash a path through the jungle for 4/11's prime movers and the 105mm howitzers they towed. To distribute the weapons' weight over a large area, truck wheels were mounted hub to hub with the howitzer wheels.[31] The one-ton trucks assigned to haul 1/11's 75mm pack howitzers proved unequal to the task of following in the LVTs' rugged trace, and the 11th Marines' commander, Colonel Robert H. Pepper, took immediate steps to secure light tractors from the Army as supplementary prime movers for his three pack battalions.[32] The potential of the LVTs was firmly demonstrated to the ALAMO Force artillery officer who watched them work in a swampy area of Goodenough on 4 December. He reported to the ALAMO chief of staff:

> Performance was impressive. Knocked over trees up to 8" in diameter and broke a trail through the densest undergrowth. The branches, trunks, and brush formed a natural matting capable of supporting tractors and guns. I believe that with a limited amount of pioneer work practically any jungle country can be traversed with artillery drawn by tractors if preceded by two LVTs.[33]

As this demonstration was being conducted, the movements to final staging areas had begun. On 3 December, a detachment of Combat Team B left Good-

[29] *Ballance ltr.*

[30] ONI 226, Allied Landing Craft and Ships, dtd 7Apr44 and Supplement No. 1, *ca.* Jun45.

[31] LtCol Joe B. Russell ltr to CMC, dtd 14Mar 52.

[32] Col Louis A. Ennis comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 17Apr52.

[33] ALAMO ArtyO memo to CofS, dtd 4Dec43, in *ALAMO G-3 Jnl No. 5.*

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enough for Cape Cretin near Finschhafen, followed on the 11th by the rest of the 1st Marines and its attached units. From this point nearest to the target area, the landing team assigned the role of taking and holding the trail block at Tauali, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, and the rest of the combat team destined to follow the 7th Marines across the main beaches, would mount in separate convoys for D-Day landings. Accompanying Combat Team B was the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., and his staff.

Between 7 and 18 December, all elements of the division that would land with or under command of Combat Team C during the initial phase of BACKHANDER, moved from Goodenough to Cape Sudest. General Rupertus, the task force commander, shifted his CP to Oro Bay at this time, leaving only the division rear echelon on Goodenough. Colonel Selden's Combat Team A at Milne Bay made ready to sail for Cape Sudest on D minus one (25 December) to be in position as division reserve to answer a call for reinforcements. The team was to move from Milne in transports and transfer at the Oro Bay staging area to landing ships for further movement to Cape Cretin. ALAMO Force placed a hold order on the commitment of one 5th Marines battalion (3/5) so that it might be used to seize either Rooke or Long Islands as the site for a sentinel radar guarding the overwater approaches to the main objective from the northwest. Besides this tentative mission, another possible employment of the battalion was as part of the reserve in support of the assault units of the 1st Division.

The major part of the BACKHANDER Force assembled in the staging area for the assault phase of the operation was organic to the 1st Marine Division. One unit, in fact, was peculiarly the division's own, its air liaison detachment. Impressed by the need of a light plane squadron to handle reconnaissance and air spotting, the division commander's personal pilot, Captain Theodore A. Petras, and the division air officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth H. Wier, had recommended in early summer of 1943 that such a unit be formed within the division. General Vandegrift agreed and was able to persuade General MacArthur to provide the division with 12 Army L–4 Piper Cubs. When General Rupertus took over the 1st's command, he endorsed the idea fully and directed Petras to organize the unit and run its training program.

Volunteers with flying experience were called for and 60 men applied; from this group, 12 pilots, 1 officer and 11 enlisted men, were selected. Mechanics for the Cubs were similarly chosen and the maintenance men who kept up Petras' transport served as their instructors. For two and a half months before D-Day, the makeshift air force worked intensively to reawake flying skills and to learn with the artillery suitable techniques for air spotting of targets. The most serious problem faced was the lack of adequate air-ground communication; the radios available were unreliable and a system of visual signals was developed. For movement to Cape Gloucester, the planes were dismantled and loaded on board LSTs scheduled to arrive on D-Day.[34]

In addition to the force of light planes, General Rupertus also had a pool of land-

[34]Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, App V, "The Cape Gloucester Air Force," pp. 202–203.

ing craft under his direct command, both elements which would give him greater flexibility in meeting combat emergencies or in taking advantage of sudden changes of fortune that might affect the Japanese defenders. The boat crews were not sailors, however, but Army amphibian engineers, members of a provisional boat battalion of the 592d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. The engineers, manning LCVPs and LCMs, were products of a special training program in the States through which the Army anticipated and met some of the problems that arose in conducting amphibious operations. Used in strength first in the Lae-Finschhafen campaign, the engineers were prepared to move supplies of troops from ship to shore or shore to shore, to act as a shore party, to man beach defenses, and, in sum, to make themselves generally useful.[35] At Cape Gloucester, since the Marines had their own shore party, the amphibian engineers provided only a part of their services, but these were of inestimable value.

A more usual attachment to BACKHANDER Force in Marine experience was the assignment of Colonel William H. Harrison's 12th Defense Battalion to the operation. The rapid-firing 40mm guns of the battalion's Special Weapons Group would augment the fire against low-level attackers put up by Battery A of the division's 1st Special Weapons Battalion. The searchlight battery and the 12th's 90mm Group would guard the beachhead from bombers making their runs above the reach of automatic weapons. A platoon of 155mm guns from the Seacoast Artillery Group was to come in with the light antiaircraft elements of the battalion,[36] while the remainder of Harrison's artillery would arrive with the garrison force.

BACKHANDER LANDING AND SUPPORT PLANS[37]

Throughout the evolution of BACKHANDER plans, the 1st Marine Division expressed its determination to preserve its tactical integrity as a unit and to place "an overwhelming force on the beach against a determined enemy."[38] The operation plan that finally governed the Cape Gloucester assault mirrored this concept of the division's most efficient employment.

The tasks set General Rupertus' force were threefold: to land in the Borgen Bay-Tauali areas, establish beachheads, and capture the Cape Gloucester airfields; to construct heavy duty landing strips at Gloucester as soon as possible and assist Commander, Allied Air Forces in establishing fighter sector, air warning, and radio navigational facilities; and to extend control over western New Britain to include the general line Itni River-Borgen

[35] BGen William F. Heavey, USA, *Down Ramp! The Story of the Army Amphibian Engineers* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), *passim.*

[36] Col Thomas L. Randall comments on draft manuscript, included in MajGen James M. Masters, Sr., ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 2Jul62.

[37] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl*; CTF 76 OPlan 3Z–43, dtd 20Dec43 (COA, NHD); *VII PhibFor ComdHist; VII PhibFor AR*; BACKHANDER For OpO 2–43, dtd 14Nov43; BACKHANDER For AdminO 2–43, dtd 14Nov43; *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase I, Planning and Training, and Phase II, Landing and Seizure of Cape Gloucester Airfield; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, App IV, "The Shore Party;" Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan.*

[38] MajGen Edwin A. Pollock comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 27Feb52, hereafter *Pollock comments.*

Bay, with patrols to investigate the possibility of developing an overland supply route to Gilnit village on the Itni. Within the airfield defense perimeter BACKHANDER Force was to establish, construction priority was assigned facilities to accomodate an Allied fighter-interceptor group.

Basically, the scheme of maneuver developed to capture Cape Gloucester called for simultaneous landings east and west of the airfields, each site about seven miles from the point of the cape itself. On Green Beach near Tauali, Lieutenant Colonel James M. Masters, Sr., would land his battalion, 2/1, and its attached units, seize a limited beachhead, organize it for defense, and hold it against enemy forces attempting to use the coastal trail to reach the airfields or to withdraw from them. On the opposite side of the cape, on a pair of beaches (Yellow 1 and 2) near Silimati Point, Colonel Frisbie's 1st and 3d Battalions, 7th Marines would land in assault followed by 2/7, with the mission of seizing a beachhead, organizing it for defense, and covering the landing of the rest of the assault force.

Shortly after H-Hour, 3/1 would begin landing behind 3/7 on the westernmost beach, Yellow 1. Once ashore, the battalion, resting its right on the coast, would attack west on a 500-yard front to seize the first of a series of phase lines designated to guide the attack toward the airfields. During the afternoon of D-Day, the remainder of Colonel Whaling's combat team would land, assemble just outside the right flank of the beachhead perimeter behind 3/1, and prepare to attack west on order.

After landing, Combat Teams B and C were to retain a number of the units assigned to them under direct command, but a large portion of their strength was to revert to control of the force commander. The combat teams kept their close-in supporting weapons, tanks, and antitank guns, but lost their artillery and antiaircraft guns to the force. Each team also kept its attached engineer company, its scout platoon, and its detachments from the division medical and service battalions. Since its primary mission was defense of a beachhead perimeter in tangled jungle terrain, Combat Team C could not make best use of some of its attachments. Accordingly, the force shore party was reinforced by the military police, motor transport, and amphibian tractor units once assigned to Colonel Frisbie's command. Similar attached units with Combat Team B remained under Colonel Whaling's control to support the advance up the coastal road.

In planning the disposition and employment of field artillery, Colonel Pepper's 11th Marines' staff picked out the one open area of any extent within the chosen beachhead, a patch of kunai grass on the right flank with a good all-around field of fire, as the post-landing position of 4/11. The 4th Battalion's 105mm howitzers, in direct support of Combat Team B, could reach the airfield but also could fire on counterattacking enemy anywhere along the perimeter and its approaches. With the only good artillery position inside the beachhead going to 4/11, the 75mm pack howitzers of the 1st Battalion landing in direct support of Combat Team C were left to "fend for themselves in an area that appeared fairly open with only scattered growth" near Silimati Point. [39] Both

[39] LtCol Robert B. Luckey, "Cannon, Mud, and Japs," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 28, no. 10 (Oct 44), p. 51, hereafter Luckey, "Cannon, Mud, and Japs."

artillery battalions were assigned a platoon of LVTs to help them reach and maintain their firing positions in what was expected to be very rugged terrain. The 75mm packs of 2/11, sailing and landing with Combat Team B, were to set up in what seemed a suitable area just off the coastal road outside the perimeter. While the field artillery landing on the Yellow Beaches would revert from combat team to 11th Marines' control, Lieutenant Colonel Masters on Green Beach was to keep command of Battery H of 3/11 as an integral part of his landing team. The 12th Defense Battalion's Seacoast Artillery Group commander was to coordinate the fire of all weapons used against seaborne targets.

The antiaircraft units assigned to BACKHANDER Force were to come under Colonel Harrison of the 12th Defense Battalion as senior antiaircraft officer. Initially, he would also control air raid warning throughout the force, but this service would become a function of the Allied Air Forces' Fighter Sector Commander, as soon as this officer landed and had his radar and communications in operation. The sector commander controlled all airborne Allied fighter units assigned to protect the Cape Gloucester area and, in addition, could order antiaircraft fire withheld, suspended, or put up in special defensive patterns through Harrison's fire direction center.

The engineer plan for BACKHANDER operations gave primary responsibility for tactical support to Colonel Harold E. Rosecrans' 17th Marines, with airfield repair and construction assigned to a base engineers group built around two Army engineer aviation battalions. In addition to the usual combat engineer tasks of construction, demolition, and repair, the lettered companies of 1/17, attached to combat teams, provided flamethrower teams to work with infantry against enemy fortifications. Colonel Rosecrans' regimental Headquarters and Service Company, 1/17 (less Companies A, B, and C), and 3/17 formed a combat engineer group which was responsible for water supply, for construction, repair, and maintenance of roads, bridges, and ship landing facilities, and for any other construction task assigned. Through contacts made by officials of the Australia-New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) accompanying the task force, it was hoped that maximum use could be made of native labor in all engineer missions.

The 17th Marines' 2d Battalion, the division's pioneers, formed the backbone of the shore party. Reinforced by two companies of replacements and the transport and traffic control units drawn from Combat Team C, the shore party under Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Ballance was responsible for the smooth and effective unloading of all task force supplies. In order to expedite the job of getting bulk stores off LSTs, a system of overlapping dumps was planned, with each beached LST sending its cargo to its own class dumps, sharing with other ships only those on the flanks of its unloading area. Most of the supplies were mobile loaded on trucks to be run off LSTs to the dumps. In order to make mobile loading work, General Krueger's headquarters assigned 500 reconditioned 2½-ton trucks to temporary use of BACKHANDER Force, with the drivers recruited from an Army artillery battalion not actively committed to ALAMO operations. The trucks were to make a round trip circuit from LST to dump and return with the ships to the staging areas. All tractors and trucks or-

ganic to 1st Marine Division units, that were not needed for tactical purposes in the early stages of the landing, were to report to the shore party for use in moving supplies.

Assault troops headed for Cape Gloucester were to carry 20-days' replenishment supplies of all types as well as three units of fire for task force weapons. The garrison troops would bring in 30-days' supplies, three units of fire for ground weapons, and five units of fire for antiaircraft guns. In order to insure a smooth flow of supplies to Cape Gloucester, and the eventual maintenance of a 30-day level there, the 1st Division established a control system for loading and resupply. At Cape Sudest on Oro Bay, the main supply base for BACKHANDER operations, an officer from the division quartermaster's office acted as forwarding officer, his main duty to insure the movement of essential materiel to the combat zone. Supplies and personnel needed at the objective were to be funnelled through a regulating officer, who established priorities for loading and movement, and a transport quartermaster, who planned and supervised the actual loading.

Admiral Barbey's allocation of shipping to lift the BACKHANDER Force made the LST the main resupply vessel. With mobile loading of most bulk stores, a practiced shore party, and a dump plan that promised swift clearance of ships' cargo space, the amphibious force commander felt that he could risk the vulnerable LSTs in the combat area. The schedule of arrival and departure of the hulking landing ships, often dubbed Large Slow Targets by crew and passengers, was kept tight to lessen exposure to enemy air attack. Since the logistic requirements of shore-to-shore operations meant that many vessels would make repeated trips to the Yellow Beaches, the speed of unloading promised to pick up as shore party and ships' crews became more experienced.

The LST had a prominent part, too, in the medical evacuation plan for BACKHANDER. The flow of casualties during the first days of the operation would be from landing force units through the evacuation station run by the naval element of the shore party. Men hit during fighting immediately after H-Hour would be sent out by the first landing craft available to APDs riding offshore; once landing ships had beached, the wounded would be carried on board over the ramps into special areas set aside for casualty treatment. Medical officers and corpsmen from Seventh Fleet were assigned to all ships used as transports for the assault forces. To give the best possible care to the seriously wounded on the return voyage to New Guinea, Army surgical-medical teams were present on one LST of every supply echelon. At Cape Sudest, an LST equipped as an 88-bed hospital ship was ready to receive casualties from Cape Gloucester and pass them on to base hospitals ashore when their condition warranted. As soon as the combat situation permitted, casualties requiring less than a month's bed care and rest would be kept at Cape Gloucester in garrison force hospitals.

The total of shipping assigned to BACKHANDER support was not impressive in comparison to the large number of vessels needed to land and protect a division in the Central Pacific. There was no need, however, for massive invasion armadas. Because of the wider range of objectives that the large islands of the southern Pacific gave them, MacArthur and Halsey seldom had to send their assault

troops against heavily fortified Japanese positions. This fortunate circumstance shaved the requirement for naval gunfire support ships, or at least gave the operations against Central Pacific fortress islands a higher priority of assignment. Similarly, the availability of land-based Allied air in significant force made the use of carrier planes wasteful when the naval pilots could be better employed against other targets.[40]

In total, Admiral Barbey as Commander, VII Amphibious Force assigned himself as Commander, Task Force 76, the BACKHANDER Attack Force, 9 APDs, 23 LSTs, 19 LCIs, 12 LCTs, and 14 LCMs to transport, land, and maintain the assault and garrison troops. The LCTs and LCMs plus five LCIs were assigned to the Western Assault Group (Green Beach) under Commander Carroll D. Reynolds; the rest of the LCIs, the APDs, and the LSTs were part of the Eastern Assault Group scheduled for the Yellow Beaches. Admiral Barbey commanded the ships at the main landing as well as the naval phases of the whole operation.

For fire support duties, Commander Reynolds had two destroyers and two rocket-equipped amphibious trucks (DUKWs) carried in LCMs. To cover the landings on the eastern side of Cape Gloucester, Barbey had 12 destroyers in addition to his flagship and two rocket-firing LCIs.[41] Escorting and supporting the attack force would be TF 74 under Vice Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, RN, who had two Australian and two American cruisers with eight destroyers. The bombardment plan called for TF 74 to guard the approach of the main convoy against surface attack, to shell the airfield area before and immediately after the landing, and to retire westward when released by Barbey to take part in further operations.

All air units supporting the Cape Gloucester landings came under Brigadier General Frederick A. Smith, Jr.'s 1st Air Task Force with headquarters at Dobodura. From first light on D-Day, a squadron of fighters would escort the Eastern Assault Group to the target, with three squadrons successively covering the landings, and a fifth screening the planned retirement in midafternoon. Several destroyers in the attack force, including the *Conyngham*, had the special communications equipment and trained personnel to act as fighter director ships. During the time the main convoy was in the Cape Gloucester area, fighter control would remain afloat. Bomber control was a function of the Army's 1st Air Liaison Party, part of BACKHANDER Force, which was to land with General Rupertus' headquarters, establish contact with Dobodura, and direct aerial support of ground operations.

[40] Commenting on the predominence of naval support given the Central Pacific, Admiral Barbey noted that his sailors characterized the situation as "never had and won't get," but quoted Admiral Nimitz in a contemporary comment as saying: "When conflicts in timing and allocation exist, due weight should be accorded to the fact that operations in the Central Pacific promise at this time a more rapid advance toward Japan and her vital lines of communication; the earlier acquisition of bases closer to the Japanese homeland; and, of greatest importance, are more likely to precipitate a decisive engagement with the Japanese fleet." *Barbey ltr.*

[41] These LCIs were improvised support ships using Army surplus 4.5-inch rockets; techniques for their employment were worked out by practice in the vicinity of Milne Bay. VAdm Daniel E. Barbey interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 22May62.

In the hour immediately preceding H-Hour, high-level bombing by five squadrons of B–24s would hit defensive positions back of the Yellow Beaches while destroyers shelled the same target area. When naval gunfire was lifted, three squadrons of B–25s would streak across the coast bombing and strafing the immediate beach area, while a fourth squadron blanketed a prominent hill behind the beaches with white phosphorus bombs. At the same time, across the cape, another medium bomber squadron was slated to bomb and strafe Green Beach defenses before 2/1's landing craft touched down.

On overhead standby during the initial landings would be four squadrons of attack aircraft; if they were not called down, these A–20s would hit targets south and east of the airdrome before returning to base. Later on D-Day morning, both a heavy and a medium bomb group would attack enemy bases and routes of approach along the southern coast. Nine squadrons of B–24s and four of B–25s that took part in the morning missions were to refuel and rearm immediately after landing at their home fields on New Guinea, and strike again in the afternoon at enemy installations west of the beachhead.

As the time of the main landings at Cape Gloucester neared, the Japanese defenders of New Britain were increasingly alert to the probability of Allied attack. The enemy commanders at Rabaul, however, could only guess where and in what strength the assault would come. Cape Gloucester's airfields seemed a logical main target but so did Gasmata's, and there were a number of lesser bases on both coasts that had to be considered and defended. The terrain of the island itself may perhaps have played the largest part in determining the ALAMO Force objectives and *Eighth Area Army's* countermoves.

The Enemy: Terrain and Troops

THE OBJECTIVE [1]

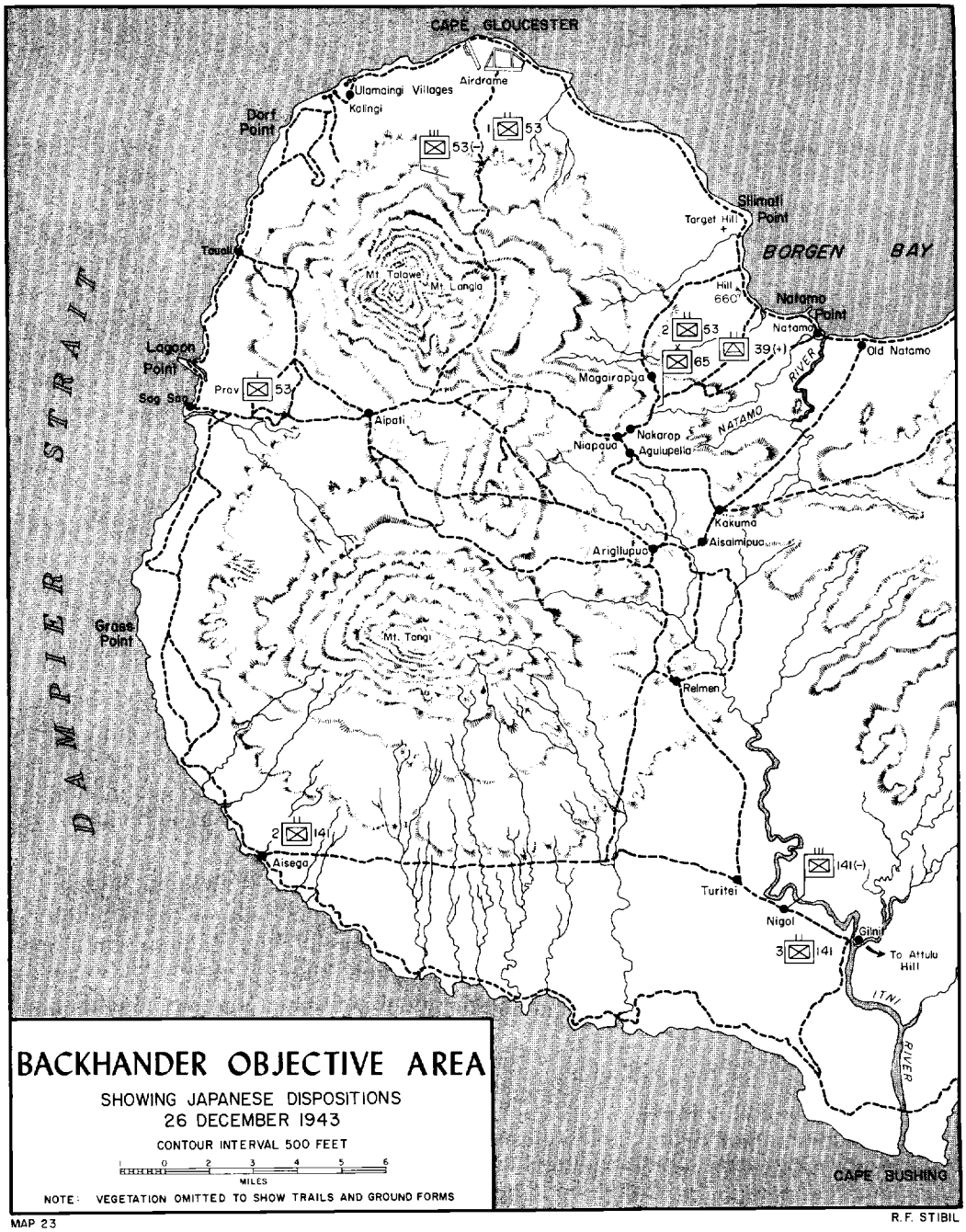
Two narrow straits, Vitiaz (Dampier) and St. George's Channel, join the Bismarck and Solomon Seas. Between them lies New Britain, a 350-mile-long island that forms a crescent-shaped link between New Guinea's Huon Peninsula and New Ireland. In width New Britain varies between 20 and 60 miles, narrowing toward Cape Gloucester in the west, and in the northeast joining Gazelle Peninsula to the trunk of the island. Jutting out from the northern shore for a distance of 30 miles is the narrow Willaumez Peninsula, a natural barrier to coast-hugging small boat traffic. Japanese troop and supply craft bound to and from Rabaul frequently avoided Willaumez by making night runs across the open sea to Garove, largest of the Witu Islands group, standing some 40 miles northwest of the peninsula. (See Map III, Map Section.)

There is a fringing reef along most of New Britain's 1,000-mile coast with occasional breaks that open the shore to the sea. Beyond the reef fringing the north and southwest coasts, barrier reef formations abound. Numerous islets crop up among these reefs, many of them jungled with hilly spines, copies in miniature of the vegetation and terrain of New Britain. Prominent among these islands is the Arawe group, which clusters thickly about the Cape Merkus peninsula, a crooked finger of land lying half-way between Cape Gloucester and Gasmata.

Fourteen miles off the coast of New Britain at Grass Point, its western tip, is Rooke or Umboi Island. Rooke, like so many islands in the Southwest Pacific, is no more than the crest of a mountain range rising steeply from the sea; its bulk splits Vitiaz Strait into two parts. The reef-studded channel between Rooke and New Britain is known as Dampier Strait, a name that the Japanese applied to both Vitiaz and Dampier without distinction. In 1943, hydrographic information available to the Allies about this area was sketchy and unreliable, enough so that Barbey would not risk his larger ships in Dampier's waters. The approach route chosen to Cape Gloucester skirted Rooke on the west and passed between that island and smaller Tolokiwa to the north, offering a safer passage as well as one less likely to be discovered by the enemy.

The coastline of western New Britain is generally regular in outline, with a series of gentle capes and shallow bays marking its length. On the south shore, the most prominent land projection is tipped by

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MID, WD, Surv of Bismarck Archipelago (S30-675), dtd 5Oct43; Allied Geographical Sect, SWPA, Terrain Handbook No. 7—New Guinea—Cape Gloucester, dtd 24Sep43; Sixth Army G-2, Terrain Est Cape Gloucester Area, dtd 15Aug43; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, App II, Capt Levi T. Burcham, "The Vegetation of New Britain and its Effect on Military Operations."



MAP 23

R.F. STIBIL

Cape Merkus, and on the north the deepest cut forms Borgen Bay. For a mile and a half on each side of Cape Gloucester there is no fringing reef, and large ships can lie close inshore in the immediate vicinity of the cape. Throughout the area there is a firm beach of black volcanic sand strewn with large stones. Bordering the beach is a 5–10-foot red clay embankment; during normal high tides water covers the beach to the bank. In heavy weather a deep swell and high-breaking surf made the approaches dangerous and unloading operations impracticable. (See Map IV, Map Section.)

The only other areas near Cape Gloucester where a significant break occurs in the offshore reefs are at Tauali on the shore of Dampier Strait and on both sides of a small, unnamed cape a mile and a half northwest of Silimati Point. These beaches exposed by gaps in the reef were the ones chosen for the BACKHANDER assault.

Just north of the village of Tauali the reef fades away for a stretch of 400 yards, and the usual black sand beach is backed by a three-foot bank. Inland, the coastal flat is narrow and covered with secondary growth, and the ground rises sharply to bluffs overlooking the shore. The beach itself is 8–10-feet wide at high water, when the three-foot depth is located 10–15-feet offshore; at low tide, the same depth is found 40 feet from shore.

The reef around Silimati Point narrows and disappears about a half mile from the point, and for a thousand yards the beach is free of close-in obstacles. After the reef crops out again for a few hundred yards, there is another half-mile of open beach. BACKHANDER Force's Yellow Beach 1 was plotted in on this second stretch of black sand, which is quite narrow and overhung with jungle growth. Yellow 2 was planned for the sector nearest Silimati Point where the beach varies in width between 30 and 60 feet. Both beaches fall away steeply underwater, a six-foot depth being 20 feet out at low water and 25 at high. Barrier reef formations in the area are scattered and far enough offshore to give large landing ships access to the beaches.

Behind the Yellow Beaches is an area that was labeled on Marine operation maps as "damp flat" and discussed in intelligence studies as being covered at times by storm water. Forewarned, landing force commanders were prepared to encounter the area's reddish brown volcanic soil as sticky mud and even for a good deal of standing water, but no one was quite ready for the swamp that stood just back of the low embankment behind the beaches. Fortunately, the plans laid to counter known terrain problems proved adaptable to meeting the graver situation posed by the unexpected obstacle.

The reason intelligence officers did not detect the presence of the swamp was the concealment trees and undergrowth afforded against the probing aerial camera. One 1st Marine Division officer, a forester in peacetime, wrote a good description of the vegetation that covers much of the beachhead area and the ground to both flanks; he called it "the dank, steaming tropical jungle of the fiction writer," the "swamp forest" which is:

> . . . characterized by widely spaced trees of very irregular height, the tallest being upwards of 100 feet high. Quite commonly these trees have widely spreading buttress roots, which give a fluted appearance to the bottom of the trunk. Wide spacing and irregular height of the mature trees permit a

> moderately dense to very dense undergrowth of varying heights. Both undergrowth and mature trees are generally thickly matted with lianas, vines, and lawyer cane. . . .
>
> Cover and concealment are complete in swamp forest. Ground observation usually is restricted to a few yards. Movement of troops or vehicles is very difficult. Flooded areas virtually preclude movement during the wet season. Large areas of swamp forest occur in the Cape Gloucester-Borgen Bay area: the vegetation behind the landing beaches is a strip of swamp forest which extends nearly to the airdrome area on the west, as well as eastward around Borgen Bay.[2]

The coastal flat west of the beachhead widens back of Cape Gloucester to two miles of gently rolling ground covered by kunai grass and then narrows as it nears Dorf Point. One of the few major areas of New Britain not covered by jungle growth, the grassland was the site of a prewar emergency landing strip used by the planes of an island-hopping commercial line. The Japanese moved in during December 1942 and began building a new runway diagonally across the trace of the old; in April 1943, a second airstrip was started about 1,000 feet southeast of the original one. A small stream emptying into the sea east of Cape Gloucester separated the two. By October, Allied air attacks and the demand for Japanese planes to garrison existing bases had combined to arrest development of the airfields. Kunai grass had laid claim to one and was encroaching on the other in December 1943.

Southeast of the airfields the ground rises gradually then steeply toward the twin volcanic cones of Mt. Talawe (6,600 feet). Ten miles to the south, Mt. Tangi (5,600 feet) breaks the horizon, and close to Talawe, along a ridge connecting the two mountains, three smaller peaks are readily identifiable. The middle of these lesser heights, Mt. Langila (3,800 feet), is a dormant volcano from which a wispy plume of steam issues steadily; the other mountains are all extinct volcanoes. The whole complex of high ground is deeply cut by ravines, many the path of streams coursing downhill to the sea. On the southern and western slopes, ridge spurs reach out to the shore of Dampier Strait; on the north, the foothills of Mt. Talawe edge the coastal flat; and on the east, those of Mt. Tangi form one side of the broad Itni River valley.

The vegetation covering the mountains is tropical rain forest, common to all New Britain at elevations of 500 feet and above. Here the tallest trees, usually 125 to 150 feet high, form virtually a complete canopy underneath which the crowns of a second layer of smaller trees crowd. Frequently there is:

> . . . an understory of brush and young trees beneath these, ranging up to twenty or thirty feet tall. Sometimes there is a fairly complete ground cover of ferns and herbs up to about two feet in height. The actual interior of such a forest is relatively open except for occasional small tangles of climbing bamboos, rattan palms, or lianas. . . .
>
> Complete cover and concealment from air observation is afforded. Ground observation is limited—a standing man can be observed at about 50 yards; a prone man usually will be concealed at 10 yards. Foot troops can move through rain forest with little difficulty and require practically no trail cutting. Physical character of the terrain—spur ridges, deep stream channels, or the like—may make travel difficult, but the vegetation itself offers little hindrance. . . .[3]

[2] Burcham, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

One other type of jungle vegetation, secondary growth, is frequently found in western New Britain, particularly in the vicinity of native villages. Because of the local practice of abandoning garden patches of bushy vegetables and fruits after one year's cultivation, wild plants in tangled profusion quickly reclaim the temporary clearings. Wide areas of secondary growth, all of them a formidable barrier to troop movement, occur in the regions most heavily settled by the natives.

In prewar years, about 3,000 Melanesians inhabited New Britain west of the Itni River; the only Caucasians who lived there were three missionaries, a Catholic priest who ran a mission at Kalingi near Dorf Point, and a Church of England couple who served a mission at Sag-Sag, three miles south of Tauali. The native villages were in four main groups, two near the missions and the others on the eastern slopes of the mountains, one clustered near the mouth of the Itni and the second fanned out along the upper reaches of the river.

The trail network connecting the villages is the only practical means of penetrating the interior, and the frequent ridges and streams cutting the tracks on the mountainsides limit travel to men on foot. No waterway connects the coasts, and of all the rivers and streams in western New Britain, only the Itni is navigable; the others are shallow and fordable through all their length. On the Itni, native canoes can reach Relmen, 14 air miles from the river's mouth, and small landing craft can reach a point about two-and-a half miles above Gilnit.

The location of the various trails had an important effect on the progress of the fighting at Cape Gloucester. The layout was such that the Japanese could feed reinforcements into the combat zone or withdraw their troops from contact almost at will. A coastal track, usable by motor vehicles between the airfields and Silimati Point, bordered the entire objective area. From Tauali east across the saddle between Mts. Talawe and Tangi, a cross-island trail led to Natamo on Borgen Bay. Joining this track was another, running over the shoulder of Talawe to the airfields, and a second which led southeast then south, eventually reaching Gilnit. A most important trail, its existence unknown to Allied intelligence, linked the area picked for the BACKHANDER beachhead to the Tauali-Natamo track.

The climate of western New Britain is what might be expected of a region of jungle-covered mountains and swamps. At all times during the year, the humidity is high, and the daytime temperature range hovers around 90 degrees; at night the temperature seldom drops below 72 degrees. The annual rainfall usually totals 150–200 inches and much of this, an average of 30 inches a month, comes during the period of the northwest monsoon, mid-December to mid-February. In this wettest season, rain may fall almost every day and squalls with torrential downpours are frequent. The northwest winds are strong and fairly steady, making the sea rough and the surf heavy. The dry season at Cape Gloucester occurs during the summer months when the prevailing southeast winds vent most of their force on the south slopes of the mountains. The periods between the two seasons, and the period of the southeast monsoon itself, are times of comparatively calm weather.

The campaign to seize control of western New Britain would be fought in the worst possible weather of the year. Low-lying terrain would disappear beneath a

cover of standing water, and, on the higher ground, the trees, the undergrowth, and the land itself would become and remain, rainsoaked. The prospect was that attacker and defender alike, mired in combat in the dripping jungle, would curse the day they set foot on the island.

JAPANESE DEFENSES [4]

While, at times during the war, Japanese planners at *Imperial General Headquarters* seemed unreasonably optimistic in the face of repeated setbacks, that mood vanished when Tokyo appraised the strategic situation in late September 1943. The Army and Navy headquarters staffs conceded that the Allied forces were strong enough to break through the outpost cordon of defenses in the Central and Southwest Pacific and reach the inner perimeter of island bases in western New Guinea, the Marianas, Palaus, and Philippines. To stave off that event, enemy commanders of the garrisons manning the barrier positions were ordered to "do their utmost to hold out as long as possible." [5] With the time thus gained, the Japanese intended to strengthen the fortifications and reinforce the defending troops of the islands that directly barred the approaches to Japan.

In Rabaul, the decision that the *Eighth Area Army's* zone of responsibility was outside the vital inner perimeter came as no shock. General Imamura believed that the Allied advance was inevitable, but that its force could be blunted considerably. Reinforcements were dispatched to threatened bases in the northern Solomons, the Bismarcks, and eastern New Guinea, but there was a strong inclination to keep back a substantial force at Rabaul itself. In the eyes of the Japanese, Rabaul was an objective that could not be bypassed, and in estimating Allied intentions, Imamura's staff considered its major problem to be a decision whether:

> . . . the enemy will attempt to capture Rabaul immediately after the occupation of the Dampier Strait Area and Bougainville island or the enemy will invade Rabaul after isolating our forces there by severing our line of communications in the rear through the occupation of the Admiralty Islands and New Ireland, especially the Kavieng sector of the latter. However, in view of the absolute superiority of the enemy naval and air strength and the value of Rabaul from both the political and strategic viewpoint, it is more probable that the enemy will take the shortest course for capturing this valuable base, presumably in February or March of next year (1944).[6]

The Japanese shared, along with this conviction that Rabaul would be attacked, a feeling that its defenses could be held against Allied landing forces. Intelli-

[4] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MilHistSec, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 127, Army Southeast Area OpsRec Part IV, Eighth Area Army Ops, rev. ed., dtd Jul49 and Japanese Monograph No. 128, Army Southeast Area OpsRec Part IV Supplement, 17th DivOps in Western New Britain, dtd Jul49 (OCMH), hereafter *Eighth Area Army Ops* and *17th Div Ops; 1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, Intelligence; IntelSec, ADC Hq, 1st MarDiv, Documents and POW Repts Folder, n.d., hereafter *ADC IntelDocuments;* Takushiro Hattori, *Dai Toa Senso Zenshi [The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War]*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Masu Publishing Company, 1953—MS translation at OCMH), hereafter Hattori, *Complete War History*; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

[5] "Army-Navy Central Agreement on Central and South Pacific Area Operations," with IGHQ Army Dept Directive No. 1652, dtd 30Sep43, in HistDiv, MilIntelSec, GHQ, FEC, IGHQ Army Directives, v. III (OCMH).

[6] *Eighth Area Army Ops*, pp. 85–86. Although this document was compiled after the war, it is contemporary in tone and content.

gence and operations officers on both sides felt a struggle to take the base would require extensive assault forces and a bitter, costly battle. What the enemy failed to appreciate, however, was that predominant Allied air and naval strength made the seizure of Rabaul unnecessary if an encompassing ring of less important bases was captured.

Even if the Japanese had been willing to denude Rabaul's defenses to reinforce outlying positions, the problems of transferring troops and equipment were formidable. The sea was the only feasible supply route, but its use was dangerous. Allied fighters and bombers vied with torpedo boats to cut down enemy barge and destroyer traffic in the forward area, and the losses suffered by the Japanese crippled their plans to meet the expected attacks. Personnel losses were heavy, but even more damaging was the destruction of supplies and the means of transporting them. In general, the closer to the Vitiaz Strait enemy troops were stationed, the more likely they were to be scantily equipped, poorly clothed, and on short rations.

The barge traffic from Rabaul to New Guinea was largely responsible for the buildup of Japanese positions in western New Britain. Aside from the Cape Gloucester airfields and the defenses that grew up around them, enemy installations west of Gasmata and Willaumez Peninsula were mainly way stations on the coast-hugging barge route forced upon the Japanese by Allied attacks. The miscellaneous collection of motor sailers, launches, and landing craft, that were collectively known as barges, found shelter from probing aircraft wherever a gap in the fringing reef, a narrow beach, and overhanging foliage combined to give them a chance to escape detection.

On the south coast west of Cape Merkus, the principal enemy barge hideouts were located at Cape Bushing, where the Itni River emptied into the sea, and near the villages of Aisega, Sag-Sag, and Ulamaingi. Before the Allies seized control of the Huon Peninsula, a steady traffic passed through these points to Rooke Island, and then on to New Guinea. Routes along the north coast, less vulnerable to attack and therefore more heavily travelled, crossed the open sea, stopping at Garove Island, or followed the coast around Willaumez Peninsula. In succession west from Willaumez, the major barge stations were Iboki, Karai-ai, Kokopo, and Natamo. (See Map 29.)

Elements of the *1st* and *8th Shipping Engineer Regiments* manned and maintained the boats used along the coastal barge routes, mainly standard Japanese landing craft. Most of the vessels that followed the Rabaul-Garove-New Guinea course were larger, deeper-draft coastal schooners and fishing trawlers handled by crews of the *5th Sea Transport Battalion.* Although Japanese destroyers were occasionally called upon for emergency, high-speed movement of troops and priority cargoes, the burden of supply fell upon shipping manned by soldiers. Detachments of the *1st Debarkation Unit* acted as shore party at the barge bases near Cape Gloucester, while a variety of service units performed that mission at other points. The shipping engineers and other troops concerned with moving personnel and supplies were all armed and able to act as infantry.

In May 1943, General Imamura sent the *65th Brigade* from Rabaul to take over the defense of western New Britain. The *65th*, which had earned an Imperial citation for its part in the capture of Bataan,

was down to a strength of one two-battalion infantry regiment and supporting signal, engineer, and medical troops when it reached New Britain. Only the *141st Infantry* came from the Philippines; the *142d Infantry*, once part of the brigade, remained there, and the *122d Infantry* was sent to the Marshalls. In addition to regimental headquarters and signal companies, the *141st* had an antitank company equipped with six 37mm guns and an artillery company armed with four 75mm mountain guns. Each infantry battalion of the regiment had a headquarters and supply train, three rifle companies, a heavy machine gun company, and a gun platoon manning two 70mm howitzers. (See Map 23.)

Throughout the summer, the *65th Brigade's* main concern was keeping the supply lines to New Guinea open. Most of the units attached to it were companies or smaller elements of service organizations concerned with the barge traffic, airfield construction and operation, or the logistical support of the garrison. One type of unit, however, antiaircraft troops, added significantly to defensive firepower, both against Allied aircraft and ground forces. Each of the *39th Field Antiaircraft Battalion's* three firing batteries had four 75mm guns that could be used against ground targets. The *28th* and *30th Machine Cannon Companies* both had eight dual-purpose 20mm guns and six heavy machine guns.

The *Eighth Area Army's* interest in the defense of western New Britain picked up considerably as the situation in the Salamaua area worsened. On 5 September, a new command, the *Matsuda Force* which took its name from its commander, Major General Iwao Matsuda, took over the *65th Brigade*, the various shipping engineer and debarkation units, and a number of troops of the *51st Division.*[7] The main body of the *51st* was fighting the Australians on New Guinea, but the division's rear echelon units as well as the survivors of transport sinkings were present on New Britain, Garove, and Rooke Islands. Of particular value to Matsuda's force as combat troops were two companies of the *115th Infantry* and a smaller detachment of the *66th Infantry*, two provisional infantry companies formed from artillery and engineer elements of the division, and about half of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment.*[8]

General Matsuda was an infantry officer with considerable experience in the Army's shipping transportation department. He had commanded an infantry regiment in China and an infantry group in Manchuria before taking over the *4th Shipping Command* in February 1943. The command, an administrative headquarters geared to handle shipping activities, moved from Japan to Rabaul by way of eastern New Guinea, arriving in New Britain in early August. On 29 October, when Matsuda was also appointed to command the *65th Brigade*, he formed a composite headquarters for the *Matsuda Force* by merging the staffs and headquarters of the brigade and the shipping command.[9]

About a month after Matsuda established his command post near Kalingi mission at Cape Gloucester, his force came

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[7] Chief, WarHistOff, DefAgency of Japan, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 20Jun62, hereafter *Japanese Comments.*

[8] ATIS 1328, 141st InfRegt OpO A. No. 11, ?Dec43, in ATIS Current Translations No. 122, dtd 31May44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex).

[9] Docu No. 59881, MilServRec of Ex-LtGen Iwao Matsuda, in HistDiv, MilIntelSec, GHQ, FEC, Personal History Statements, 2 vols (OCMH); *Japanese Comments.*

under the *17th Division*. The division, newly arrived in Rabaul from China, was commanded by Lieutenant General Yasushi Sakai. Originally, the *17th* had been slated to reinforce the garrison of northern Bougainville, but General Imamura changed its mission when he was assured by the *Southeast Area Fleet* that it could keep another large body of men supplied in western New Britain. On 5 October, the *Eighth Area Army* commander added the *Matsuda Force* and the Gasmata garrison to General Sakai's command and ordered him to assume responsibility for defense of New Britain west of a line joining Commodore Bay and Vahsel Harbor. Division headquarters was established at Malalia near Cape Hoskins to the east of Williaumez Peninsula.

The first echelon of the *17th Division* left Shanghai on 24 September, arriving at Rabaul on 4–5 October. Three more convoy groups were to bring the remainder of the division, but shipping losses and the mounting danger of attack by Allied planes and submarines combined to cancel the sailing of the last convoy, which was to have lifted a number of service troops and 3,000 infantry replacements. The second and third convoys which departed from Shanghai late in October lost one ship to submarines while passing through the Ryukyu Islands, had another damaged by B–24s south of Truk, and lost a third to a mine off Kavieng. Total casualties from the three attacks were 1,173 men killed and wounded.[10]

The main strength of the *17th Division's 53d Infantry Regiment* and the regimental headquarters and *3d Battalion, 23d Field Artillery* were assigned to General Matsuda's command to reinforce the defenses in the immediate vicinity of Cape Gloucester. Also coming under *Matsuda Force* was the *1st Battalion, 81st Infantry* which was ordered to Cape Merkus. The *3d Battalion, 53d Infantry* and the *6th Company* of the *2d Battalion* were detached from the regiment to serve on Bougainville as was the rest of the *81st Infantry*, a battalion of the *54th Infantry*, and one of the *23d Field Artillery*. The remaining units of the *54th* and *23d* were distributed between Gasmata, Malalia, and Talasea.

With a battalion and a rifle company stripped from its strength, the *53d Infantry* was little stronger than the *141st*. Regimental headquarters and supporting companies in both units were the same, with the *53d* having in addition a platoon of 90mm mortars. The *1st Battalion* of the *53d* had four rifle companies, but the commitment of the *6th Company* on Bougainville pared the *2d Battalion* to three. *Eighth Area Army* kept control of two rifle companies, the 70mm howitzers, and most of the heavy machine guns of the *1st Battalion, 81st Infantry*, leaving the reinforcements for Cape Merkus at a strength of a headquarters and two rifle companies plus a machine gun platoon.

Japanese destroyers were used to transport the *17th Division* troops to western New Britain with most units landing at Karai-ai and carrying on by barge or trail to Cape Gloucester. The waters along the south coast were too close to Allied bases to risk destroyers there, so the skeleton battalion headed for the Arawe area had to march overland to its post. Since the *1st Battalion, 81st Infantry* had been on board the transport torpedoed during the move from China, it had to be reorganized

[10] *17th Div Ops*, pp. 4–5. This source does not provide a casualty breakdown.

and refitted in Rabaul. It was early December before the battalion landed at Iboki, terminus of a cross-island trail to Cape Merkus.

While the last of the *17th Division* reinforcements were moving into position in western New Britain, General Matsuda took steps to increase his combat strength by organizing a third battalion for the *141st Infantry.* The existing two battalions of the regiment furnished the men for the headquarters, one rifle company, and most of the machine gun company; the men of the *66th* and *115th Infantry* detachments formed the remaining two rifle companies and a platoon of machine guns. The new unit began organizing on 12 December and was formally joined to the regiment on the 20th.

The deployment of Matsuda's forces, as the time of the expected Allied assault approached, reflected the importance the Japanese general attached to the various objectives in his defensive area. Holding the vital airfield sector was the *1st Battalion, 53d Infantry*, reinforced by the regiment's 37mm and 75mm guns and a miscellany of service troops. Beach defenses, mainly bunkers connected by rifle trenches, were scattered along the shore on either side of Cape Gloucester. The heaviest concentration was located back of the most logical site for a large-scale landing attempt, a stretch of beach three miles southeast of the cape that led directly into the grasslands. In the foothills of Mt. Talawe, hidden by the lush vegetation, was a bunker-trench complex that commanded the airstrips.

Knowing what lay behind the beaches near Silimati Point, the Japanese paid scant attention to their defense. Just to the south, however, a strong force built around elements of the *1st Shipping Engineers* and the *39th Field Antiaircraft Battalion* held the sector where the trail net from the interior reached the coast. Matsuda's scheme of defense depended upon retaining possession of the trails to move his limited manpower to meet Allied attacks. Two small hills which dominate the area served as focal points for enemy defenses. One, a 450-foot height called Target Hill by the Allies, stands out starkly above the swamp forest, its open, grass-covered crown in sharp contrast to the surrounding sea of trees. A mile and a half south of Target Hill, Hill 660 rises out of the jungle with a cover of tangled growth that blends easily with its environs.

Across the island, in the vicinity of Cape Bushing, was the defensive sector assigned to the *141st Infantry.* The *1st Battalion* was located near the mouth of the Itni, the *2d* occupied defenses at Aisega, and the newly formed *3d* was in reserve at the regimental headquarters at Nigol, a village on the Itni about three miles above Gilnit. Farther down the coast at Cape Merkus the defending force was composed of a platoon of naval personnel manning a communication relay station[11] and two provisional infantry companies formed from elements of the *51st Division.*

The garrisons of Rooke and Garove Islands were also part of the *Matsuda Force.* On Garove, the principal unit was the *5th Sea Transport Battalion* with an antiaircraft battery and shipping service units attached. The headquarters and two companies of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* were still on Rooke on D-Day, but, prior to 26 December, a reinforcing 75mm gun battery and about half of the regi-

[11] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 39.

ment's cavalrymen were sent to New Britain to bolster the *141st Infantry's* defenses.

In November, General Matsuda moved his headquarters from Kalingi to a concealed position in the rain forest near Nakarop, a village on the main cross-island trail about seven miles inland from Borgen Bay and a thousand feet about sea level on Talawe's lower slopes. Close by the new *Matsuda Force* command post, the general stationed the *2d Battalion, 53d Infantry* as general reserve, ready to move by the mountain trails to the airfields, to Cape Bushing, or to Target Hill as the situation demanded.

By mid-December, the effective strength of Matsuda's command, including all classes of troops in the area west of an Iboki-Arawe boundary, stood close to 10,500 men. The figure represents 9,500 that Matsuda reported to General Sakai on 1 December, plus an estimate of the combined strength of the *17th Division* units—*1st Battalion, 81st Infantry; 3d Battalion, 23d Field Artillery; 2d Field Hospital*—that reported from Rabaul later in the month. Roughly half of the total force was located in positions within effective supporting range of Cape Gloucester.

The enemy leaders were well aware that the Allies had the strength to take western New Britain, but the Japanese were determined to make a bloody fight for its possession. On 12 December, in a message addressed to all the officers in his command, General Sakai warned that a landing was imminent and that in meeting the Allied assault force each man was to observe the principle of "certain death warfare to the utmost, in such a way that not even the slightest disgrace will adhere to your name." [12]

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENEMY [13]

Aerial reconnaissance kept the Japanese informed of concentrations of Allied landing craft off the coast of New Guinea, but the traffic was so heavy that no clear picture emerged as to when a move was coming against western New Britain. False alarms were frequent as the end of 1943 approached, but all the reports of pilots of the *Eleventh Air Fleet* at Rabaul and the *Fourth Air Army* at Wewak could do was confirm the estimate that a large-scale landing was in the offing. Even more unsettling to the Japanese commanders was the knowledge that Allied scouting parties had landed repeatedly in the territory defended by the *Matsuda Force* and departed with valuable intelligence.

General Krueger, confronted by a serious lack of information about the terrain, beach conditions, and defenses of possible ALAMO Force objectives, had formed a group of scouts whose job it was to land behind enemy lines and find the answers to vital questions that plagued intelligence officers. The ALAMO Scouts, who operated directly under Krueger, were a composite force of Australians with

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[12] 141st InfRegt Bul, dtd 12Dec43, in ATIS Enemy Publication No. 257, 141st InfRegt Buls and Related Papers, dtd 27Dec44. (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex).

[13] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MIS, GHQ, FEC, Ops of the AlliedIntelBu, GHQ, SWPA—v. IV, Intel Series, dtd 19Aug48; *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx A, Intelligence; 1st MarDiv AmphibRecon PtlRepts, Cape Gloucester and Talasea, 11Oct43–9Mar44, hereafter *1st MarDiv PtlRepts;* Feldt, *Coastwatchers;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

experience in the islands, American intelligence personnel, and natives of proven loyalty and dependability. In preparing for BACKHANDER operations, a number of the 1st Marine Division's own scouts, led by First Lieutenant John D. Bradbeer, took part in pre-D-Day reconnaissance on New Britain with men from the ALAMO Scouts.

Usually, the scouting parties travelled to their objective by torpedo boat, landed in rubber boats, and moved inland to establish a patrol base well off the regular tracks. Fanning out from this point, the scouts contacted the local populace and tried to observe enemy dispositions. When the mission was accomplished, or, as often happened, the Japanese got wind of the presence of the scouts and started to hunt them down, the torpedo boats returned and took off the party. Occasionally, the reconnaissance was an assignment to spot-check preferred beaches and their defenses, a mission in which success depended upon the scouts' ability to obtain essential information quickly and accurately.

Three Australian officers were particularly concerned with the scouting in western New Britain—Major John V. Mather, AIF, who had served with the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal and had been a labor contractor in the Solomons, Sub-Lieutenant Andrew Kirkwell-Smith, RANVR, who had been a coastwatcher at Cape Gloucester before the Japanese came, and Sub-Lieutenant William G. Wiedeman, RANVR, who had been the Anglican missionary at Sag-Sag. The local knowledge of these men was invaluable to division intelligence, as was their understanding of the natives and their ability to teach others how to live and operate successfully in the jungles of New Britain.

The first party with American scouts to go ashore in the objective area was led by Bradbeer and Kirkwell-Smith. After it landed near Grass Point on 24 September, the nine-man patrol operated two weeks in the region south of Mt. Tangi looking for a trail that was supposed to wind south around the mountain and go over the saddle between Tangi and Talawe. Although the search was unsuccessful, the party brought back much useful information, particularly the welcome news that the natives were at odds with the Japanese. In July, the enemy had cleared all the inhabitants from the coastal villages and those near the airfields, forcing an exodus to the interior. Since that time, the natives had noticed that many of the Japanese were sickly and on short rations, so much so that the soldiers had begun to raid the village gardens for food. The scouts retraced their steps to the coast and left the island on 6 October after they received word that enemy patrols were looking for them.

In mid-October, a small Australian-led party, most of its personnel borrowed from the coastwatcher organization, landed on Rooke Island. In two weeks ashore, the scouts found little evidence of a large enemy garrison and pulled out undetected. A month later, a planned 24-hour patrol, led by First Lieutenant Robert B. Firm of the 5th Marines R–2 Section, went ashore below Dorf Point to check possible landing beaches in the vicinity. The enemy was too active to make any move inland feasible, but Firm was able to determine that the beach was not usable before he had to order his men back into the rubber boats.

Since Admiral Carpender did not want to risk torpedo boats north of Cape Gloucester, it proved impossible to make

a reconnaissance of the main beaches near Silimati Point. An ALAMO Scout party did land at Arawe, however, on the night of 8–9 December and concluded that few Japanese were present to hinder the projected assault there. On the night of 21–22 December, Bradbeer and First Lieutenant Joseph A. Fournier of 2/1 led two parties ashore to check the beaches near Tauali. The Marine scouts confirmed the selection of Green Beach as the best that could be found for the landing; no enemy forces were encountered. Coming away from New Britain the torpedo boat transporting the scouts attacked some Japanese barges; in the exchange of fire, three American crewmen were wounded and an engine was knocked out, but the boat got back to base safely.[14]

The ALAMO Scouts were not the only group to penetrate the Japanese defenses on New Britain. As usual, the coastwatchers were there, a constant irritant to the enemy. One station set up inland from Cape Orford was in operation through the summer, giving warning of flights from Rabaul and passing on information of the Japanese forces. On 30 August, General Kenney requested that a series of air spotting stations be established across the base of Gazelle Peninsula. General MacArthur agreed and his G–2 ordered the coastwatcher directorate, Allied Intelligence Bureau, to have the spotters in position by November. Sixteen coastwatchers and 27 natives landed from a U.S. submarine on 28 September and separated into five parties to take their posts in the rain forest cover on the island's mountainous spine.

The Japanese managed to capture one of the parties, but the others kept free of searching patrols, sending their reports of enemy flights directly to fighter controls at Woodlark and Dobodura that alerted interceptors at Nadzab's fighter strips. The location of the chain of observers promised 30 to 60 minutes' advance warning of Japanese attacks on Cape Gloucester, time enough for Allied fighters to rendezvous at the most favorable altitude and meet the raiders.

The reports of scouts and coastwatchers were only a portion of the intelligence sifted to get accurate information about New Britain and its defenders. Japanese documents and prisoners taken on New Guinea and Bougainville proved a fruitful source of order of battle data, and at MacArthur's, Krueger's, and Rupertus' levels of command there was a constant re-evaluation of the strength of the defending force in western New Britain. In light of the difficulty of piecing together the various scattered segments of news, the picture of its opponents that the 1st Marine Division was able to assemble was a remarkably good one.

When the BACKHANDER Force operation plan was issued on 14 November, the intelligence estimate of enemy strength west of Arawe on New Britain and on Rooke and Garove was 7,071 men. The total moved steadily upward as elements of the *17th Division* were identified as part of the garrison. On 9 December, the various Allied headquarters published minimum-maximum enemy strength figures for western New Britain that differed considerably. While MacArthur's and Blamey's intelligence officers were content to count only the sure identifications, there was little disposition at Krueger's or Rupertus' command posts to ignore signs, however slight, of Japanese units that might dilute the superiority of attackers

[14] McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 168.

over the defenders. Where GHQ and Allied Land Forces found a strength range of 4,000–5,000, ALAMO Force had 5,668–9,344, and the 1st Marine Division figured 7,416–9,816 enemy were present.[15] The final division estimate before the Arawe landing placed the lowest strength at 8,400 and the highest at 12,076.[16] Although the division's educated guess proved to be high, the figures were reasonable in view of the information available.

A scattering of evidence indicated that the *65th* might have been raised from brigade to division status, providing a basis for a belief that at least one other of its regiments besides the *141st Infantry* was present. Accordingly, the *142d Infantry*, which could not be accounted for elsewhere, was added to the order of battle. Similarly, additional companies of units known to be at Cape Gloucester in some strength were counted present if they failed to turn up in other sectors. In the absence of more exact figures, Japanese tables of organization were used as the basis for strength estimates, with 20 percent deducted for losses of all types. Acting to counterbalance the inflated totals was the fact that the presence of the remnants of the *51st Division*, including the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment*, went undetected.

The location of the various elements of the *Matsuda Force* remained a worrisome problem to Allied intelligence officers. The *17th Division* reinforcements arrived so close to D-Day that their defensive assignments were unknown, and it was not clear just what combat units occupied the located defenses. Confusing the situation further was the fact that Japanese place names on western New Britain were a far cry from the names found on prewar Australian maps.

While the enemy accepted and used most of the native place names in western New Britain, the result of such use was often an unrecognizable title. Allied POW interrogators and the translators of Japanese documents had to judge how native speech had been rendered in Japanese and then, in turning the result into English, to try to come close to the original. And often this transition involved the additional problem of considering how differently native dialects would be set down by persons used to Australian and American speech. Intelligence officers, at least, became well acquainted with the Japanese name for Cape Gloucester, translated interchangeably as Tuluvu or Tsurubu. Other names could not be identified. The headquarters of General Matsuda appeared as Egaroppu when translated, a fact that prevented its recognition as Nakarop on prewar maps.[17] And there were puzzling references to villages that could not be plotted anywhere along known trails.

On the whole, however, the maps available to BACKHANDER Force were useful, if not precisely accurate. A German survey of the island, made prior to the first World War, was the base on which later maps were constructed. On these, the trails along the coast were plotted with some care, but the location of trails crossing the interior were at best approximations. As western New Britain attracted Allied attention as a possible objective, repeated aerial photographic missions were flown over it in an effort to improve knowledge

[15] ALAMO Force G–2 PeriodicRept No. 18, dtd 9Dec43, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 6.*

[16] 1st MarDiv D–2 Sect, Enemy O/B Estimate, dtd 13Dec43.

[17] In the text, the names used by BACKHANDER Force for locations on New Britain have been used.

of its terrain. When MacArthur's cartographers were ready to draft operation maps in October 1943, the aerial photographs gave them a clear picture of coastline and offshore reefs, terrain in the few open areas, and prominent heights, but the jungle trees gave up little of the secrets that lay beneath their branches. Information needed to plot inland trails, villages, and streams was often taken from old maps and charts and from the memories of islanders who had visited or lived on New Britain.

The map most often used by planners and combat troops was drawn in a scale of 1:20,000 with a thousand-yard military grid superimposed. On the back of each of the seven sheets it took to cover the coast from Borgen Bay to Cape Bach and the interior to include Mt. Talawe was the photo mosaic used in making that segment. Two other maps frequently used by higher headquarters were also printed in quantity; one covered the immediate objective area in a one-mile scale and the other showed all of New Britain at an inch to every four miles. To help troop leaders visualize the terrain where they would be fighting, the 1st Division's relief mapping section modeled the ground forms of the Yellow Beach, Green Beach, and airfield areas in several small scales. Copies of these relief maps were then moulded and distributed to division units and other elements of the landing force.

While Marine intelligence officers worked hard to assemble information on the enemy and the objective in order to brief assault troops, they devoted as much attention to the problem of procuring information after the landing. Deliberate and repeated stress was given in all division training to the need for passing along promptly any enemy papers or material that were found. Emphasis was laid, through demonstrations and review of combat experience, on the fact that the most insignificant appearing document might provide the key that would shorten the battle and save lives. The Marines were reminded of the importance of taking prisoners and of the ordinary Japanese soldier's willingness to cooperate with his captors in providing military information once he had surrendered.

To process the flow of intelligence on D-Day and after, the intelligence sections of combat teams and division were set up to give a quick evaluation to captured enemy maps, diaries, and orders. Information of immediate use to Marine commanders was to be extracted and the documents passed on to the ALAMO Force headquarters for definitive translation. In the same manner, prisoners were to be interrogated as soon as possible after capture to extract what intelligence they had of use to BACKHANDER Force, and then shipped out for further questioning in New Guinea. To help speed the search for useful information in enemy documents, ten Nisei were borrowed from Sixth Army to augment the division's own language section.

One other source of up-to-date information of the enemy was available before D-Day—the DIRECTOR operation. If the Arawe assault had its hoped-for diversionary effect, Japanese troops would be drawn off from the area of the main landings. Any contact General Cunningham's cavalrymen had with elements of the *Matsuda Force* promised intelligence of value to the Marines who were headed for Cape Gloucester. Exact answers to questions about the enemy's ability and will to fight and his dispositions to meet Allied attack could only be found ashore on New Britain.

DEXTERITY Landings

ARAWE—Z-DAY TO D-DAY [1]

The focal point of DIRECTOR operations was a boot-shaped peninsula with Cape Merkus as its heel. Lying offshore from the boot's sole are three islands, Ausak, Arawe, and Pilelo, which bound Arawe Harbor, an anchorage used by coastal shipping before the war. The beach chosen for the main Allied assault is about 1,000 yards due north of the cape on the harbor's shore. Behind the beach, designated Orange Beach by planners, the ground slopes up sharply through a break in the cliffs that line the peninsula's western and southern coasts. Most of the north shore of the peninsula and its bulbous toe are taken up by mangrove swamp, which occurs frequently in this part of New Britain; the high ground is occupied by the coconut trees of Amalut Plantation. (See Map 24.)

Between Cape Merkus and Sipul village, about 30 miles to the west, is a trackless region of swamp and jungle, a formidable barrier to movement. From the cape east, the coastal trail springs up again, forking at the Pulie River with one path leading cross island to Iboki and the other continuing along the shore until it disappears in dense rain forest. Four miles east of the neck of Arawe Peninsula (to give it the name used by Allied forces) is Lupin village, the site of a small prewar emergency landing ground. Unused by the Japanese, the airstrip was choked with kunai grass in December 1943.

The most practical way to travel along New Britain's south coast is by boat, a fact that played the most important part in the selection of Arawe as an ALAMO Force target. Once General Cunningham's landing force was ashore on Arawe Peninsula, it could put an end to enemy barge traffic and sever the supply and reinforcement route to Cape Gloucester. Since the Arawe-Iboki trail was known to be difficult and little-used—hardly more than a footpath—Allied planners thought it unlikely that the Japanese could move enough troops overland to threaten seriously Cunningham's position. The proven hunting ability of Allied planes and torpedo boats made remote the prospect of any large-scale enemy movement by sea against Arawe.

In planning DIRECTOR operations, General Cunningham was hampered by a lack of intelligence of both terrain and enemy dispositions. To meet the situation as he understood it, he planned two subsidiary landings before making the assault

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl;* CTF 76 OPlan No. 3A–43, dtd 10Dec43; ComVIIPhibFor (CTF 76) Rept of Arawe Op, dtd 10Jan44; 112th CavRegt HistRept 24Nov43–10Feb44, dtd 10Feb44; *17th Div Ops; SE Area NavOps-III;* MilIntelSect, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 142, Outline of SE Area NavAirOps, Part V (Dec43–May44), n.d., hereafter *SE Area NavAirOps-V;* Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

on Arawe Peninsula. The object of one landing was the seizure of a reported Japanese radio station and defensive position on Pilelo Island which commanded the best passages into Arawe Harbor. The second landing was designed to put a blocking force across the coastal trail just east of the foot of the peninsula. In both instances, General Cunningham strove for surprise, planning predawn assaults without air or ships' gunfire support. The troops were to land from rubber boats instead of powered landing craft.

For the main landing, both air strikes and naval bombardment were scheduled to cover assault waves in LVTs and following waves in LCVPs and LCMs. The amphibian tractors were to be manned by Marines of the 1st Division and the landing craft by Army engineers of the 2d Engineer Special Brigade. So little sure knowledge existed of reef conditions in and around Arawe Harbor that Admiral Barbey, who commanded the attack force, asked that ALAMO Force make LVTs available to carry the first waves ashore. The amphibian engineers and their boats were detailed to DIRECTOR Force to provide General Cunningham with a boat pool after the initial landings had been made.

On 30 November, General Krueger directed General Rupertus to assign 29 LVTs and their crews to DIRECTOR Force plus the Marines needed to operate 10 new armored Buffalo amtracs to be provided by the Army. The ALAMO Force commander pointed out that the tractors would be returned to division control before D-Day. The choice of the unit to fill the assignment logically fell on Company A, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion. The company was part of the reserve combat team of the division and had had more experience handling the new Buffaloes than any other battalion unit.[2]

Plans called for the DIRECTOR assault troops to be carried to the objective in fast ships, vessels that could unload quickly and promptly leave the area. Later echelons carrying reinforcements and supplies would use LCTs shuttling from Finschhafen. Admiral Barbey was reluctant to risk any of his LSTs at Arawe with the BACKHANDER Operation so close at hand. He did approve, however, the use of the *Carter Hall*, a landing ship dock (LSD) which had just arrived in the Southwest Pacific, and of the Austrialian transport *Westralia* to move the men, amphibious craft, and supplies involved in the main landing. Two APDs were assigned to transport Troops A and B, 1st Squadron, 112th Cavalry, chosen to make the two rubber boat landings.

General Cunningham issued his formal field order for the seizure of positions in the Arawe area on 4 December; the assault troops had been alerted to their mission earlier as they assembled at Goodenough from Woodlark and Kiriwina. In addition to the task of securing Arawe Peninsula and the islands forming Arawe Harbor, the cavalrymen were to outpost the trail leading to the Pulie River and patrol vigorously to guard against enemy attacks. As soon as the task force position was consolidated, Cunningham was to send an amphibious patrol to the Itni River and Gilnit to check the possibility of overland contact with the Marines at Cape Gloucester.

The torpedo boat base called for in GHQ, Seventh Fleet, and ALAMO Force plans for Arawe remained a vague affair

[2] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx D, Amphibian Tractors, p. 1.

at the operating level despite the definite language directing its establishment. In conferences with General Cunningham on 5 December, the fleet's motor torpedo boat commander, Lieutenant Commander Morton C. Mumma, stated that he would assign two boats based at Dreger Harbor on New Guinea to patrol east of Arawe each night after the landing. The boats would report to the task force intelligence officer for briefing on arrival and be available for special missions on request, but they would return to Dreger with dawn. The only naval installations Mumma asked for at Arawe were emergency fueling facilities. In addition to the torpedo boats hovering near Arawe, he said another pair from Dreger would hunt barges nightly between Tauali and Sag-Sag and two others from Kiriwina would scout the vicinity of Gasmata. No boats would patrol the sector from Arawe west to the Itni because of the poorly charted reefs and shallows among the offshore islands.

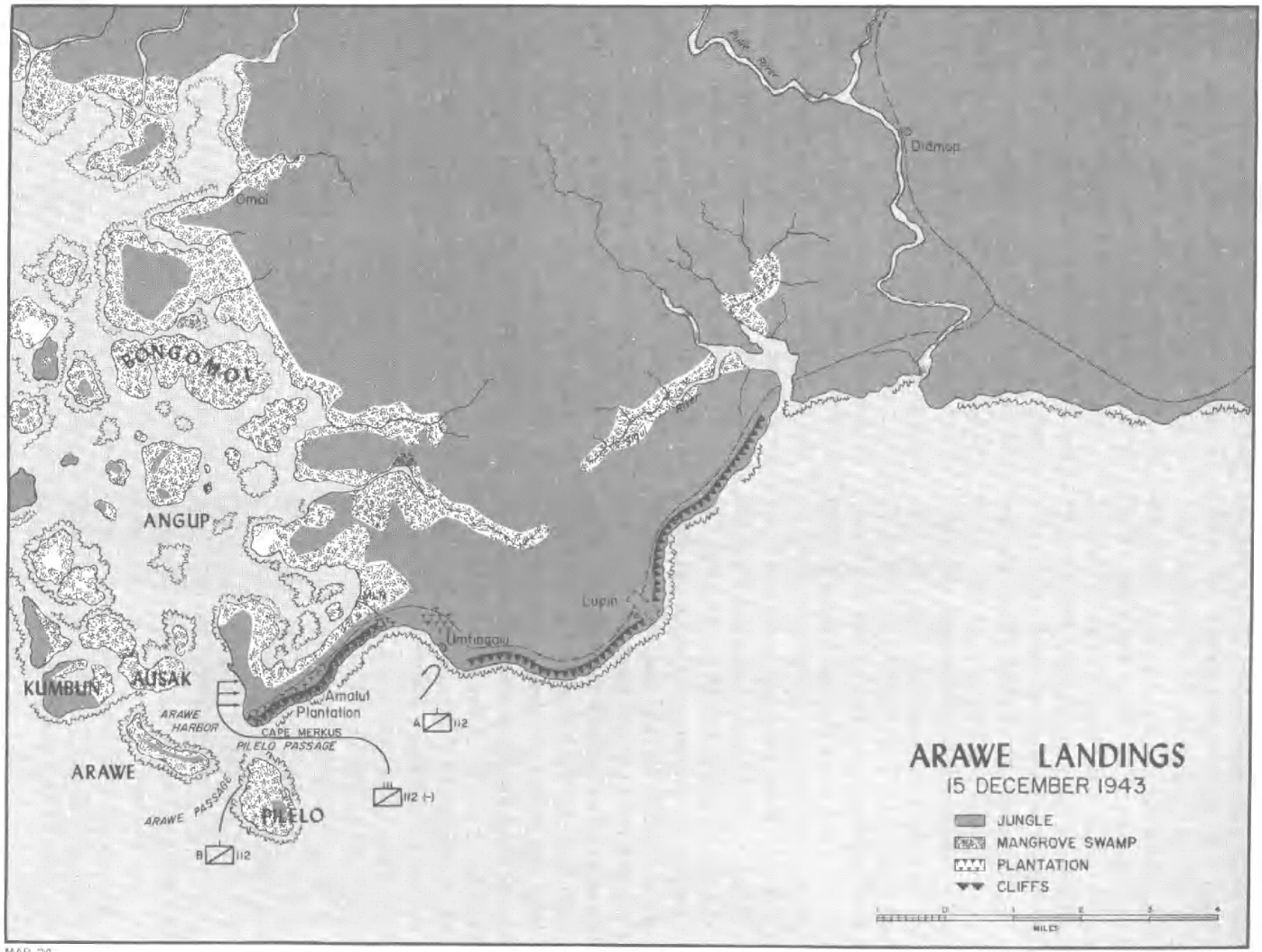
The *Carter Hall* loaded Marine tractors and crewmen at Milne Bay on 5 December, as the *Westralia* picked up a company-size task group from the Boat Battalion, 592d Boat and Shore Regiment. At Goodenough the two larger ships were joined by the APDs *Sands* and *Humphreys*, and the 112th's assault troops came on board to take part in two practice landings, one a full-scale rehearsal of the operation. The results of the training showed that boat wave timing was off, that some junior leaders were not sure of themselves in the unfamiliar amphibious role, and that unit commanders did not always have control of their men—all faults that could be corrected with further rehearsal. Time was too short for more practice, however, as Z-Day (15 December) was approaching fast and the ships and men had to make last-minute preparations for the assault.

When the DIRECTOR operation was decided upon, the Japanese defenders of Arawe were calculated at 100–150 men with the only identified units a naval antiaircraft platoon and a small radio detachment. On 5 December, reconnaissance planes sighted 12–14 enemy barges at Kumbum Island near Arawe and four more along the peninsula's shore. Although it was conceded that these craft might be taking part in a routine supply run, ALAMO intelligence officers felt it was "prudent to assume the enemy at Arawe now has at least 500 [men] and considerable reinforcement potential." [3] General Cunningham asked General Krueger for reinforcements to meet the added threat. On 10 December, a battalion of the 158th Infantry, a non-divisional regiment, was alerted as reserve for DIRECTOR.

Cunningham also asked that a 90mm gun battery be assigned to his force to supplement the antiaircraft fire of the two batteries of automatic weapons he already had. Although the strength of the Japanese ground garrison at Arawe and its defensive potential were perplexing questions, there was little doubt in the minds of Allied commanders that the enemy air reaction to the landing would be swift and powerful. The few heavy antiaircraft guns available were already committed to other operations, however, and Cunningham's force had to rely on machine guns and 20mm and 40mm cannon for aerial defense.

Loading for the Arawe landings got underway at Goodenough during the afternoon of 13 December. As Generals Mac-

[3] ALAMO For G-2 PeriodicRept No. 18, 1-8Dec43, dtd 9Dec43, in *ALAMO G-3 Jnl No. 6.*



MAP 24

RF STIBIL

Arthur and Krueger looked on, the Marine LVTs and two rocket-firing DUKWs, manned by Army engineers, drove into the water and churned through the stern gate and into the flooded well deck of the *Carter Hall* standing offshore. The assault troops who would ride the tractors, the 112th's 2d Squadron and supporting units, boarded the LSD while the 1st Squadron and regimental and task force headquarters rode the *Westralia*. Replacing the regular landing craft on the Australian ship's davits were 16 LCVPs and 2 LCMs of the amphibian engineers. The troopers slated to make the rubber boat landings bedded down on the *Sands* and *Humphreys*, 150 men to each ship.

At midnight, the convoy sailed for Buna where General Cunningham boarded the destroyer *Conyngham*, Admiral Barbey's command ship for the operation. After feinting a movement toward Finschhafen, the task force turned toward its target after dusk on 14 December and headed across the Solomon Sea. Guarding the west flank were cruisers and destroyers of Admiral Crutchley's force and to the east was a cordon of Commander Mumma's motor torpedo boats. Escorting the transports were nine destroyers, five of them designated a shore bombardment unit.

About 15 minutes before the convoy arrived in the transport area, a Japanese float plane scouted the ships, dropping a bomb near one of the destroyers. There was no return fire, in accordance with Barbey's orders for dealing with night snoopers; gun flashes might reveal the presence of a ship and offer an aiming point to lurking attackers. But the Japanese pilot had reported the ships he had sighted as five destroyers and five transports, and Admiral Kusaka at Rabaul ordered planes of the *Eleventh Air Fleet* to attack. A Japanese submarine had also sighted the Allied ships late on the 14th, but its report did not reach enemy headquarters until after the landing.

The *Carter Hall* began taking on ballast before it arrived in the transport area about five miles from Orange Beach. By 0400 there was 4½ feet of water in the well deck and launching began. Within ten minutes all the vehicles had cleared the LSD. At about the same time, the *Westralia* lowered its landing craft and men began clambering down nets into the boats, while winches and rope slings handled the 40 tons of supplies and equipment figured as essential to sustain the assault troops in their first hours ashore. At 0500, the two large transports headed away in the darkness for New Guinea.

While the LVTs made ready for the run to Orange Beach and the landing craft circled waiting to follow the tractors' lead, the surprise landings got underway. The APDs carrying Troops A and B hove to about 1,000 yards offshore, unloaded the cavalrymen and their boats, and started to withdraw immediately. As they had practiced, the soldiers paddled toward their target beaches in three waves of five boats each.

Troop A, which had the mission of cutting the coastal road near Umtingalu village, never reached its objective. At 0522, enemy automatic weapons cut loose from the featureless black outline that marked the shore, raking the oncoming boats. Within a few minutes, only three of the rubber craft were still afloat. From its position 3,000 yards out from Umtingalu, the supporting destroyer *Shaw* had difficulty seeing if the soldiers struggling in the water were in its line of fire. At 0542,

when the *Shaw* finally had a clear shot, two salvos of 5-inch high explosive shell were all that was needed to silence the enemy guns. The abortive landing attempt cost the 112th Cavalry 12 men killed, 17 wounded, and 4 missing in action.

When the Japanese fired on Troop A's boats, Troop B abandoned its original landing plan for Pilelo and headed for the nearest beach on the island. Moving quickly inland after they landed, the cavalrymen isolated the small enemy garrison in caves near Winguru village and wiped them out after a fight at close quarters with bazookas, flame throwers, and grenades called into use. The troop lost one man and accounted for seven defenders in seizing its objective.

While the subsidiary landings were taking place, a column of Marine amphibian tractors started on the 5,000-yard run to Orange Beach. The armored Buffaloes in the lead, traveling at six knots, soon outdistanced the Alligators which were hard put to make 4½ knots. One of the control boats for the main landing, the *SC–742*, spotted the LVTs moving into Pilelo Passage well ahead of schedule and headed them off. The Buffaloes then circled off Cape Merkus waiting for the Alligators to catch up. Meanwhile, the slower tractors had gotten off course and had to be herded back into the prescribed boat lane. The upshot of the confusion was that the landing was delayed 40 minutes.

The pre-H-Hour destroyer bombardment was extended when it became clear that the LVTs were falling behind schedule, but the cease fire was sounded on board the ships at 0641 to conserve ammunition for antiaircraft defense. When the 5-inch shells stopped falling, the standby control boat, *SC–981*, began firing a spread of rockets on Cape Merkus to cover the movement of the landing vehicles through Pilelo Passage. At 0710, the DIRECTOR Force air support officer on the *Conyngham* called down a waiting squadron of B–25s to strafe and bomb the beach. Shortly thereafter, behind a barrage of rockets fired by the engineer DUKWs and *SC–742*, the assault troops of 2/112 landed.[4]

The bombardment silenced what little opposition there was at the beach, and the squadron moved inland cautiously but easily. Two of the Marine amtracs in the first wave were able to negotiate the steep bank behind Orange Beach and accompany the soldiers to their destination, the narrow neck of the peninsula. When enemy machine guns firing from the edges of the mangrove swamp pinned down the troopers, the armored Buffaloes crushed the defenders' positions and silenced the guns. By mid-afternoon the 2d Squadron was digging in on its objective. A pocket of Japanese riflemen left behind by the assault troops was eliminated by the 112th's Headquarters Troop, and the peninsula was cleared of enemy forces by nightfall.

Survivors of the 120 Japanese soldiers and sailors who had defended Arawe Peninsula, Pilelo, and Umtingalu had withdrawn from contact with the landing force. The Army units, detachments from two temporary companies of the *51st Division*, one of infantrymen, the other of artillerymen, rejoined their parent unit in

[4] Contemporary reports differ considerably on the exact time of the landing, but it appears that 0728, the time reported by the LVT commander, is correct. Co A, 1st PhibTracBn Rept of PhibTrac Ops in Arawe Landing, dtd 27Dec43, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 12.*

positions near the Pulie River at Didmop.[5] The naval coastal antiaircraft platoon that had repulsed the landing attempt at Umtingalu, abandoned its guns and took off in precipitate retreat north up the overland trail. Coming south along the same trail, hurrying as best the jungle, rain, and frequent swollen streams would allow, was Major Shinjiro Komori's *1st Battalion, 81st Infantry.* Komori had arrived within earshot of the preliminary bombardment at Arawe, but was still four days' forced march from the Pulie River, illustrating the difficulties of moving a large body of men through the center of New Britain.[6]

Intensive Japanese ground opposition to the Allied landing was yet to come, but, as expected, the aerial counterattack came on the heels of the landing. At 0855, after one flight of enemy planes had engaged the covering P–38 squadron and led it in a snarling dogfight away from the target, 30–40 naval fighters and bombers struck at the beachhead. From the Japanese point of view, the time of attack was auspicious. The only heavy antiaircraft guns left in Arawe waters were those on the *Conyngham*; all the other escort, control, and bombardment vessels had departed moments before. The first follow-up echelon of five LCTs, accompanied by seven engineer-manned LCMs, had just moved into Arawe Harbor to unload. The fire of machine guns and 20mm cannon mounted on ships, LVTs, trucks, landing craft, and beach proved more than enough to beat off the attack. The total of serious damage was one LCVP blown up and a few men wounded.

Throughout the day the attacks continued, but Allied fighter squadrons were able to turn away most of the enemy planes. The vivid imaginations of the Japanese pilots supplied them with the damage that they were unable to inflict during their attacks, and Rabaul heard tales of many sunken transports and landing craft and damaged cruisers and destroyers.

Returning again and again during the next week, the Japanese planes, mostly carrier aircraft stationed at Rabaul, attempted to wipe out the Allied beachhead. Their effort was unsuccessful, although one LCT echelon arriving late on the 16th was under almost continuous air attack while it was at Arawe and had an escort coastal transport sunk, and an escort minesweeper and seven LCTs badly damaged. This was the high point of the enemy strikes; defending fighters and antiaircraft automatic weapons fire whittled down the attacker's strength at a rate of three, four, or five planes a day, losses the Japanese could ill afford. As the fourth week of December began, large-scale air raids tapered off to night bombing runs and hit-and-run daylight missions by small numbers of enemy planes.

The frequent air attacks on Z-Day and the days immediately following severely disrupted the unloading process. An inexperienced shore party and a short-handed naval beach party, worked to exhaustion, were unable to move supplies from ships to dumps smoothly; congestion on Orange Beach was constant. The beach itself proved capable of handling only two

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[5] ATIS Item No. 8159, Merkus Garrison Intel Rept. dtd 10Dec43, in ATIS Bul No. 614, dtd 8Jan 44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex). Prior to D-Day, the infantry company at Arawe was designated the *10th Company, 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry,* but the association with the regiment at Cape Gloucester was strictly a paper matter.

[6] ATIS Item No. 11249, Diary of Major Komori, 16Oct43–31Mar44, in ATIS Bul No. 999, dtd 6May44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex), hereafter *Komori Diary.*

TROOPERS OF THE 112TH CAVALRY *wade ashore at Arawe as Marine LVTs carry in supplies on 15 December 1943.* (*SC 187063*)

MOVING OFF THE RAMP *of a Coast Guard-manned landing craft, Marines move ashore on D-Day at Cape Gloucester.* (*USN 80–G–44371*)

LCTs at a time, and other ships in each echelon had to stand by under threat of enemy air attack while waiting their turn to unload. Under the circumstances, LCT commanders were unwilling to remain at Arawe any longer than their movement orders stated, and, on occasion, cargo holds were only partially cleared before the ships headed back for Finschhafen. The problem grew steadily less acute as Japanese air raids dwindled in number and strength and the reserve supplies of the landing forces reached planned levels.

General Cunningham lost no time in making his position on Arawe Peninsula secure behind a well-dug-in defense line closing off the narrow neck. Engineer landing craft gave the general protection on his open sea flanks, and a series of combat outposts stretching up the coastal trail beyond Lupin airstrip promised adequate warning of any attempt to force his main defenses. The 112th was brought up to strength; Troop A was re-equipped by air drop on the 16th, and, two days later, APDs from Goodenough brought in the 3d Squadron. The cavalry regiment acting as infantry and a reinforcing field artillery battalion seemed quite capable of handling any Japanese units that might come against them.

Pursuing his mission of finding out all that he could about Japanese forces in western New Britain before the BACKHANDER Force landed, Cunningham dispatched an amphibious patrol toward the Itni River on the 17th. Moving in two LCVPs, the cavalry scouts reached a point near Cape Peiho, 20 miles west of Arawe, by dawn on the 18th. There, appearing suddenly from amidst the offshore islets, seven enemy barges attacked the American craft and forced them into shore. Abandoning the boats, the scouting party struggled inland through a mangrove swamp, finally reaching a native village where they were warmly received.

An Australian with the scouts was able to get hold of a canoe and report back to Arawe by the 22d to tell Cunningham that the waters between Cape Merkus and the Itni were alive with enemy barges. The natives confirmed this finding and also said that large concentrations of Japanese troops were located at the mouth of the Itni, Aisega, and Sag-Sag. Special efforts were made to insure that this intelligence reached General Rupertus, and Cunningham sent it out both by radio and an officer messenger who used a torpedo boat returning to Dreger Harbor.

The barges that the 112th's scouts ran up against on the 18th were transporting enemy troops from Cape Bushing to the scene of action at Arawe. As soon as he heard of the Allied landing, General Sakai of the *17th Division* had ordered General Matsuda to dispatch one of his battalions to Cape Merkus by sea. The unit Matsuda selected, the *1st Battalion, 141st Infantry* (less its *1st Company*), landed at the village of Omoi on the night of 18 December, bivouacked, and started overland in the morning, heading for a junction with the Japanese at Didmop. Getting lost repeatedly in the trackless jungle, pausing whenever contact with the Americans seemed imminent, the battalion took eight days to march a straight-line distance of seven miles.

Major Komori, who was designated overall commander of enemy troops in the area, reached Didmop on the 19th, having gathered in the retreating sailors from Umtingalu on his way. For a few days he paused there, organizing his forces, and waiting for *1/141* to arrive. Finally deciding to delay no longer, Komori crossed

the Pulie with his main strength on Christmas Eve and arrived on the edge of the airstrip at dawn. The 112th outposts and patrols were forced back on Umtingalu and, with the troop stationed there, retired into the perimeter. A determined probing attack in company strength was made on the American main line of resistance on the night of the 25th; 12 infiltrators were killed within the cavalrymen's positions before the Japanese were repulsed.

Komori's attack emphasized one of the most successful aspects of the DIRECTOR operation. By the dawn of D-Day for the main DEXTERITY landings, two Japanese infantry battalions that might have fought at the main Allied objective were tied up defending a secondary target. What effect this shift of a thousand enemy troops, most of them combat veterans of the Philippines or China fighting, had on the Cape Gloucester operation is impossible to say with any certainty. It seems probable, however, that the casualties suffered by the 1st Marine Division would have mounted and the seizure of control of western New Britain would have been delayed had the enemy not changed his troop dispositions.

PRELANDING PREPARATIONS[7]

While action at Arawe drew the attention of the Japanese, the BACKHANDER Force made its final preparations for the landings at Cape Gloucester. Rehearsals following the pattern of the Yellow Beach landings, with all assault elements of Combat Team C embarked, took place at Cape Sudest on 20–21 December. The long months of training bore fruit, and the first waves moved from ship to shore without incident and were smoothly followed to the practice beaches by landing ships carrying supplies and reserve forces.

At Cape Gloucester, Admiral Barbey would again control elements of his amphibious force as Commander, Task Force 76 and fly his flag on the *Conyngham* as headquarters ship for the operation. From Seventh Fleet and Allied Naval Forces, now under Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid who had relieved Admiral Carpender on 26 November, would come the escort, covering, and bombardment vessels to support the landings. General Kenney's Fifth Air Force would handle all air support missions except those that could be undertaken by the 1st Division's own squadron of light planes.

The preliminary softening-up of the target was exclusively the province of Kenney's planes and pilots. Air raids were so frequent through the late fall that Japanese soldiers' diaries show little recognition of the fact that air strikes intensified after 18 December, for the condition of the men being attacked was so consistently miserable that the step-up escaped their notice. One ground crewman at the knocked-out airfields noted unhappily that "enemy airplanes flew over our area at will and it seemed as though they were carrying out bombing training."[8] Japanese interceptors and antiaircraft fire never seriously challenged the daily runs of strafers and bombers.

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[7] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl; VII PhibFor AR; CTF 76 Dec43 WarD; 1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx C, Logistics and Supply.

[8] ATIS CurrTranslation No. 1324, Diary of a ground crewman at Rabaul and Tsurubu, 5Nov–17Dec43, in ATIS CurrTranslations No. 122, dtd 31May44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex).

691–360 O—63——23

The weight of bombs dropped on targets in the Cape Gloucester vicinity between 1 December and D-Day exceeded 3,200 tons. Over 1,500 individual sorties were flown to deliver the explosives and to search out enemy targets with cannon and machine gun fire. Up until 19 December, the bombers concentrated their attacks on the airfields and their defenses, but then target priority shifted to objectives that might impede the landings and subsequent advance of the Marines. The attacks resulted in substantial destruction of prepared positions spotted by aerial reconnaissance and in the death of scores of Japanese soldiers. The judgment of air historians viewing the campaign was that mass bombing of the invasion areas at Cape Gloucester by the Fifth Air Force virtually eliminated the combat effectiveness of the Japanese defenses.[9] Hidden by the jungle's impenetrable cover from the probing aerial camera, most of the *Matsuda Force* survived the protracted aerial assault. The damage to defenders' nerves and morale is apparent from contemporary records, however, and the widespread destruction of defensive positions undoubtedly eased the task of Marine attacking forces.

Behind the screen of air activity, the assembly of Barbey's attack force proceeded without major hitch. A complicated schedule of loadings and sailings had to be met that would enable the various echelons to reach the target on time. On the afternoon of the 24th, two LSTs with headquarters and service detachments operating directly under General Rupertus' command and reserve elements of Combat Team C embarked, left Cape Sudest for Cape Cretin near Finschhafen. At Cretin, the two ships were joined by five others loaded with troops of Combat Team B due to land on D-Day afternoon. At 0100 on Christmas morning, six LSTs of the third echelon sailed from Sudest with men of Combat Teams B and C and BACKHANDER Force supporting elements; at Cape Cretin, an LST carrying men and equipment of 3/1 joined the ships which were scheduled to nose into the Yellow Beaches as soon as the infantry-carrying LCIs of the second echelon landed their cargos.

The main convoy of 9 APDs and 11 LCIs got underway from Cape Sudest at 0600, 25 December. Accompanying the ships and their six escort destroyers was the *Conyngham* with Barbey and Rupertus on board. Not long after the assault troops departed, transports carrying reserve Combat Team A arrived in Oro Bay from Milne, and the 5th Marines and its attached units landed at Cape Sudest to await the call for employment at Cape Gloucester. The 14 LSTs which were to land on D plus one (27 December), bringing in engineer, antiaircraft, and medical units and supplies for BACKHANDER Force, loaded out on Christmas and sailed during the night in trace of the D-Day convoys. Each LST bound for Cape Gloucester was fully loaded with trucks carrying bulk cargo; those ships landing on 26 December carried an average of 150 tons of supplies apiece, and the ones due in the next day 250 tons.

To minimize the risk of sailing poorly charted waters, the five LCIs carrying 2/1's assault troops joined the main con-

[9] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 311; Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF HistDiv, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 19Jun62.

voy off Cape Cretin to make the passage through Vitiaz Strait. A small-boat task group, 12 Navy LCTs plus 2 LCVPs and 14 LCMs crewed by amphibian engineers, cut directly through Dampier Strait toward Green Beach. Accompanying the landing craft as escorts for the 85-mile voyage from Cape Cretin to Tauali were an engineer navigation boat, a naval patrol craft, and two SCs; four torpedo boats acted as a covering force to the east flank.

While the Eastern and Western Assault Groups of Barbey's force approached their respective beaches, one possible objective of DEXTERITY operations was occupied by a reinforced boat company of the 592d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. On 20 December, General Krueger approved a plan to set up a long-range radar on Long Island, about 80 miles west of Cape Gloucester, after Australian coastwatchers had reported the island free of enemy troops. Acting on an operation plan published only three days before embarkation, the engineer boat group began its shore-to-shore movement from Finschhafen on Christmas afternoon. Preceded by an advance party that landed from torpedo boats, the engineers and an Australian radar station went ashore on the island on the 26th. The lodgment on Long Island removed one target from the list of those that might be hit by 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, held back from employment at Cape Gloucester.[10]

[10] General Krueger noted in his comments approving the Long Island operation that the Marine battalion slated for possible seizure of Rooke Island might be the source of a detachment to relieve the engineers on Long. ALAMO CofS memo to Gen Krueger with Krueger's comments, dtd 20Dec43, in *ALAMO G-3 Jnl No. 10.*

STONEFACE TRAIL BLOCK[11]

Although they occurred simultaneously as complementary operations within the overall BACKHANDER concept, the landings at Green and Yellow Beaches are seen clearer when examined separately. The primary mission of Lieutenant Colonel Masters' 2/1, reinforced, was a defensive one—to land, seize a trail block, and hold it against all comers. The first mission of the rest of General Rupertus' force was offensive in nature—the capture of Cape Gloucester's airfields. Masters' command, code-named the STONEFACE Group, was scheduled to rejoin the rest of the 1st Division once the airfield objective was secured. (See Map 25.)

The LCIs with the STONEFACE Group embarked broke off from the convoy headed for the Yellow Beaches at 0422 on D-Day morning. Accompanied by two escort and bombardment destroyers, the *Reid* and *Smith*, the troop-laden landing craft headed for a rendezvous point about four miles off the New Britain coast opposite Tauali village. Contact with the small-boat group that had made the voyage through Dampier Strait was made later than had been planned, but the transfer of assault troops to LCMs began

[11] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR,* Phase II, Part II, Green Beach Landing; CTG 76.3 (ComDesDiv 10) AR—Bombardment and Landing Ops at Tauali (Cape Gloucester), New Britain 26Dec43, dtd 29Dec43 (COA, NHD); CO, Det, 2d ESB Rept to CG, 2d ESB, dtd 20Jan44, Subj: Ops CTF 76 LT 21 (Green Beach), in *ALAMO G-3 Jnl No. 19;* OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Amphibian Engineers Operations—Engineers in the Southwest Pacific 1941–45,* v. IV (Washington: GPO, 1959), hereafter OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Amphibian Engineers;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

immediately, and the lost time was recovered.

Engineer coxswains, moving in successive groups of four, brought their boats alongside the three LCIs that carried the two assault companies, E and F. The Marines were over the side and headed for the line of departure within 10 minutes. Accompanying the four landing craft that formed the first wave were two other LCMs carrying rocket DUKWs of the 2d Engineer Special Brigade's Support Battery; the rockets were intended for a beach barrage to silence opposition in the few minutes just before the landing.

As the column of LCMs moved lazily toward the line of departure, throttled down to keep from getting ahead of the landing schedule, the troops could hear the sound of naval gunfire at Cape Gloucester, seven miles away. Falling into formation behind the assault craft, two LCIs with most of Companies G and H on board made up the fourth wave. Bringing up the rear with a cargo of guns and vehicles and 575 tons of bulk stores were 12 LCTs organized in waves of three. The ships carried 20-days' supplies and five units of fire for Masters' 1,500-man force; the men themselves carried one unit of fire and a day's rations.

From his headquarters on the *Reid*, the Commander, Western Assault Group, Commander Carroll D. Reynolds, ordered the prelanding supporting fires to begin on schedule. The two destroyers cruising 5,400 yards offshore fired 675 rounds of 5-inch at targets behind the beach and to its flanks as far as Dorf Point on the north and Sag-Sag to the south. After 20 minutes, the ships' fire was lifted and Commander Reynolds radioed a waiting squadron of B–25s to attack; for insurance the *Reid* fired two star shells as a visual signal. As the medium bombers began making bombing and strafing runs along the long axis of the beach, the first wave of LCMs left the line of departure. The planes were scheduled to cease their bombardment when the landing craft were 500 yards from Green Beach, an event calculated to occur at 0743. At that moment, the engineer DUKWs began firing the first of 240 rockets they arched ashore.[12] Two strafers made a last minute pass at beach targets after the DUKWs opened up but fortunately avoided the plunging rockets.[13] At 0748, the first LCMs grounded on the beach and dropped their ramps.

The Marines of the assault companies moved quickly across the volcanic sand, mounted the slight bank bordering the beach, and then advanced cautiously into the secondary growth that covered the rising ground beyond. There had been no enemy response from the beach during the bombardment and there was none now that the Americans were ashore. Well-dug trenches and gun pits commanding the seaward approaches had been abandoned, and there was no sign of active Japanese opposition. The second and third waves of LCMs landed five minutes apart, adding their men to the swelling force ashore. At

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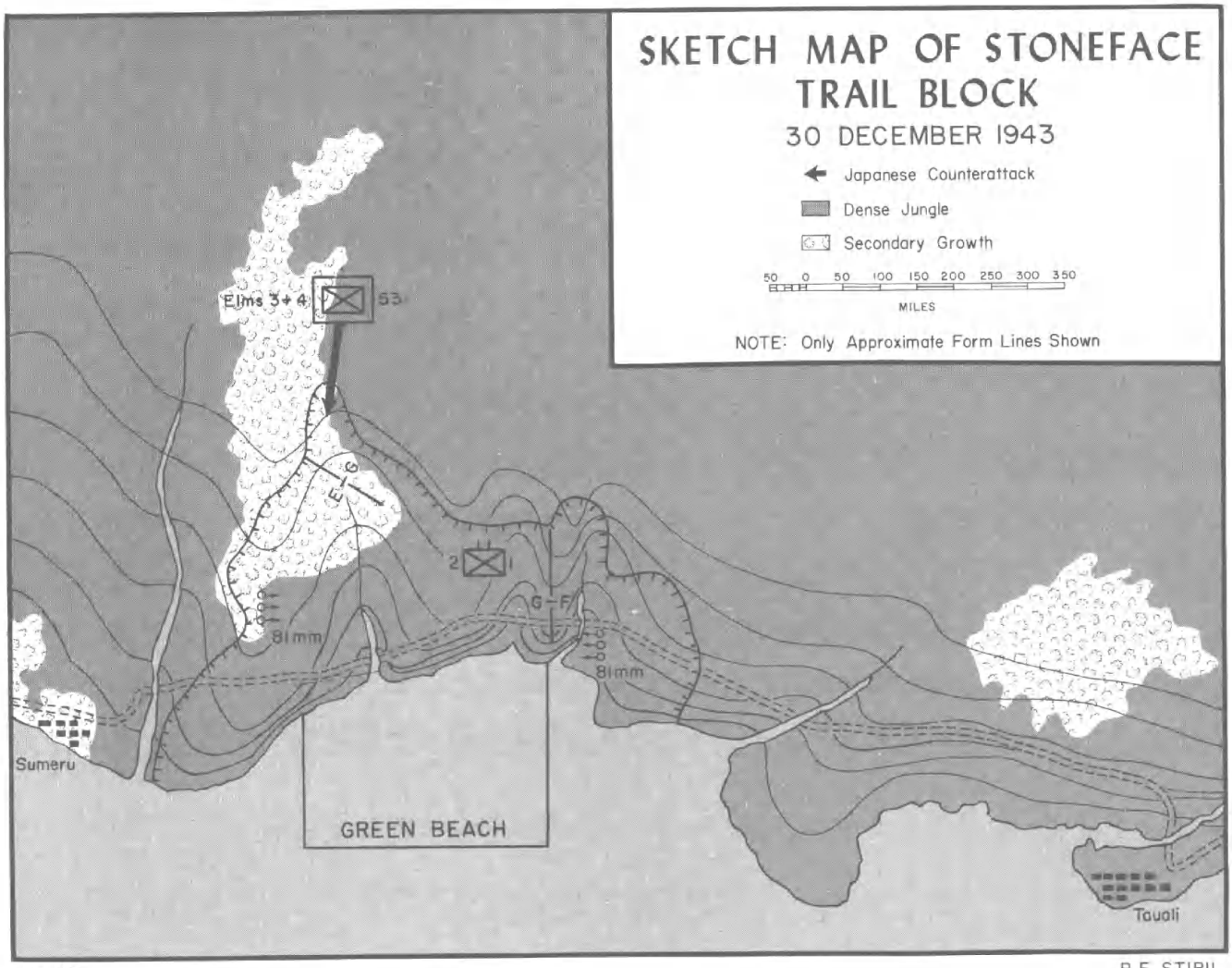
[12] Oddly enough, this barrage of rockets made little impression on some of the troops it supported; it goes unmentioned in the division action report and escaped the notice completely of at least one officer who witnessed the landing. Maj Theodore R. Galysh ltr to CMC, dtd 16Feb52.

[13] The engineer brigade commander had suggested to Admiral Barbey "that the last plane in the final strafing run drop a flare to indicate the way was clear for the rocket barrage to start. The reply was that the airmen 'preferred to work on a strictly time basis,' accordingly no signal was given." OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Amphibian Engineers*, p. 170, n. 96(2).



MAP 25

R.F. STIBIL

0754, an amber star cluster was fired to signal a successful landing to the waiting ships.

The engineer LCMs retracted after delivering the assault troops and headed out to a rendezvous point a mile and a half from shore. When the beach was clear, the LCIs landed, dropped their twin bow ramps, and the Marines of Companies G and H filed down into shallow water. At 0830, the first of the LCTs hit, and the others followed in rapid succession as general unloading began.

The shore party was composed of a headquarters under 2/1's operations officer, a labor platoon of 130 men drawn from all the major elements of the STONEFACE Group, and a beach party of amphibian engineers.[14] Supplies were channelled through four predesignated unloading points into as many dumps set up in the area just off the beach. In each dump, similar amounts of rations, fuel, ammunition, and organizational equipment were further segregated to cut down possible losses to enemy air action. The absence of Japanese planes on D-Day, combined with unseasonably fine weather and a light surf, did much to ease the task of the inexperienced shore party. By 1715 the last LCT had been emptied and was assembled in the rendezvous area for the voyage back to New Guinea.

The convoy departed at 1900, leaving behind two LCVPs and four LCMs for offshore defense. The engineer boats anchored inside a reef outcrop about 200 yards from the beach with their stern guns pointing seaward. Lieutenant Colonel Masters gave the job of organizing the beach defenses to the Army engineer detachment commander, Major Rex K. Shaul, and assigned a platoon of LVTs and a platoon of the 1st Marines Weapons Company to his command. Inland, the STONEFACE commander disposed his three rifle companies along a 1,200-yard-long perimeter that ran along the ridges overlooking the beach. At its deepest point, a salient where a causeway led into the Marine lines, the perimeter was 500 yards from shore. The riflemen were carefully dug in by nightfall, and Company H's heavy machine guns were emplaced amidst the foxholes where their fire could be most effective. The battalion weapons company's 81mm mortars were set up to fire in front of any part of the defensive position. In reserve behind each rifle company was a platoon of artillerymen. These provisional units had been formed on Masters' order as soon as it became apparent that Battery H of 3/11 could not find a firing position that was not masked by precipitous ridges.

By nightfall on D-Day, the STONEFACE Group had established a tight perimeter defense encompassing all the objectives assigned it. The main coastal track lay within the Marine lines, denied to enemy use. Probing patrols into the jungle and along the coast did not discover any Japanese troops until dusk, when there was a brief brush with a small enemy group near the village of Sumeru, just north of the beachhead. The Japanese faded away into the jungle when the Marine patrol opened fire.

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[14] General Rupertus asked that an Army engineer shore company be assigned to support the Green Beach landing, and 2/1's operation order was amended on 23 December to include one in the shore party, but the tentative assignment was never completed. CG, BACKHANDER For msg to CG, ALAMO For, dtd 20Dec43, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 7*; Anx C, 2/1 OpO 3–43, dtd, 23Dec43, in *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Anx D.

Lieutenant Colonel Masters was unable to contact General Rupertus directly to report his situation. Mt. Talawe, looming between the two Marine beachheads, proved an impenetrable barrier to the battalion's radios. Since the set of the amphibian engineers was intermittently able to reach ALAMO Force, word of the STONEFACE Group's dispositions eventually reached the division CP on the morning of the 27th. Except for the fact that his force was located in a radio "dead spot" for overland communication,[15] Masters was in excellent shape to accomplish his mission.

ASHORE AT THE YELLOW BEACHES[16]

On Christmas morning, a Japanese coastwatcher hiding out in the hills above Cape Ward Hunt on New Guinea spotted the Eastern Assault Group en route to its target. This enemy observer's report of the ships' passage, sightings by a Japanese submarine scouting the area, or, perhaps, the last frantic message from a reconnaissance plane that was shot down shortly after noon while it was skirting the convoy, may one or all have been responsible for Rabaul's deduction that the assault group was headed for Cape Merkus. On the strength of this faulty judgment, the *Eleventh Air Fleet* and *Fourth Air Army* planned a hot reception for the ships at Arawe on the 26th.[17]

The path of the invasion convoy during daylight hours had been plotted to mislead the Japanese. Once night fell, the moonless dark that ALAMO planners had waited for, the ships shifted their course to a more direct route through Vitiaz Strait. The destroyers, transports, landing ships, and escorts steamed along at 12 knots while Admiral Crutchley's cruiser force ranged ahead to take position in gunfire support areas lying off the Cape Gloucester airfields.

Maintaining the convoy's pace proved to be too much of a strain on the engines of a harbor mine sweeper (YMS) which was scheduled to clear the waters off the Yellow Beaches. The ship broke down finally and fell out at 2120, returning to Cape Cretin; earlier, another YMS had been taken in tow by an APD to keep it in the convoy. As Admiral Barbey's ships began to move into the transport area, the two YMSs that had completed the voyage, two destroyers, and two SCs operated together to locate, clear, and buoy the channel leading to the Yellow Beaches. (See Map IV, Map Section.)

The destroyers, taking a radar fix on the wreck of a Japanese destroyer that was hung up on the reef 7,000 yards offshore, found the entrance to the channel in the darkness. Using their sound gear to locate shoals along the passage, the destroyers gave their bearing and distance to the YMSs which would then "strike off for the shoal as a dog after a bone."[18] The mine

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[15] LtCol Robert Hall ltr to CMC, dtd 4Mar52.

[16] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl; VII PhibFor ComdHist; VII PhibFor AR; CTF 76 Dec43 WarD; 1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I, Yellow Beach Landings and Plan Annexes; 1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl, 24Dec43–29Feb44, hereafter *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I; 17th DivOps;* Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier.*

[17] *SE Area NavOps—III*, pp. 47–48; *SE Area AirOps*, pp. 28–30.

[18] CTU 76.1.42 (CO, USS *Flusser*) AR of Cape Gloucester Op on 26Dec43, dtd 29Dec43 (COA, NHD).

sweepers and a destroyer's whaleboat buoyed the three principal reef obstacles on schedule, and one of the YMSs swept the channel which proved to be free of mines. Immediately, the destroyers moved inside the outlying reefs to deliver close-in fire on the eastern flank of Yellow 2. The SCs, which had also controlled the Arawe landing, proceeded to line of departure and standby stations to handle the waves of landing craft.

Throughout the clearance and marking of the channel, a mounting drumfire of naval bombardment marked the approach of H-Hour (0745). At 0600, the two Australian heavy cruisers of Task Force 74 opened up on targets in the vicinity of the airfields with the first of 730 rounds of 8-inch high explosive fired during the next 90 minutes. The 6-inch guns on the American light cruisers sounded next, firing 2,000 rounds between 0625 and 0727 at Target Hill and the Yellow Beach area. Escort destroyers with the cruiser force and those that had worked with the harbor control unit exploded 875 5-inch shells ashore while the larger ships were firing and, later, in the few moments immediately preceding H-Hour. The ground just inland from the beaches and the hills to the southeast drew most of the destroyer fire. Targets of opportunity were few since no evidence of enemy movement or opposition developed ashore during the Allied bombardment.

From 0700 to 0720, while naval gunfire was concentrated on the beaches and airfields, five squadrons of B–24s dropped 500-pound bombs on the Target Hill area. Then, on schedule, at the call of a command plane aloft, naval gunfire on the beaches lifted and a squadron of B–25s streaked in over Target Hill to let go eight tons of white phosphorous bombs on its naked crest. Smoke soon obscured the vision of any enemy who might still have been using the hill as an observation post, and three medium bomber squadrons began working over the beaches.

As General Rupertus had feared when he argued against its use,[19] smoke from Target Hill drifted down across the landing beaches pushed on by a gentle southeast breeze. By H-Hour the shoreline had disappeared in a heavy haze, and within another half hour the approach lanes were obscured as far as the line of departure, 3,000 yards out. Coxswains of the leading boat waves handled their craft boldly, however, and the smoke posed no severe problem of control or orientation.

The first four waves of LCVPs assembled in succession as the APDs carrying the assault troops sailed into the transport area, two and three ships at a time. Once the Marines of 1/7 and 3/7 were over the side, the APDs left for positions outside the reef to await the return of their boats. The 12 landing craft in the first wave, 6 for each beach, moved from column into line at the control boat centered on the line of departure. At about 0730, the *SC–981* dropped the wave number flag it was flying, and the assault platoons headed for the smoke-shrouded beaches. Following waves were dispatched at five-minute intervals.

Taking station on the flanks of the first wave as it moved shoreward, two rocket LCIs made ready to fire a stunning barrage onto possible beach defenses to cover

[19] The 1st Division commander was convinced that smoke and dust from exploding fragmentation bombs, rockets, and shells would provide enough concealment for approaching landing craft. *Pollock comments.*

SHORE PARTY MARINES *struggle to build a sandbag ramp for LST's in the surf at Cape Gloucester's Yellow Beaches.* (*USMC 68999*)

105MM HOWITZERS *of 4/11, set up in a kunai grass clearing, fire in support of Marines attacking toward Cape Gloucester's airfields.* (*USMC 69011*)

the interval between the last B–25 strafing run and the wave's landing. When the boats were 500 yards out, the LCI rockets began dropping ashore and worked inland as the Marines approached the beach. At 0746 on Yellow 1 and 0748 on Yellow 2, the LCVPs grounded and dropped their ramps.

Charging ashore to the sound of their own shouts, the Marines splashed through knee-deep water onto narrow strands of black sand. There was no enemy response—no sign of human opposition—just a dense wall of jungle vegetation. On many stretches of Yellow 1, the overhanging brush and vines touched the water; there was only a hint of beach. Led by scouts forced to travel machete in one hand, rifle in the other, the assault platoons hacked their way through the tangled mass, won through to the coastal trail, and crossed it into the jungle again. Once they had passed over the thin strip of raised ground back of the beaches, the men encountered the area marked "damp flat" on their maps. It was, as one disgusted Marine remarked, "damp up to your neck." [20]

Under the swamp's waters was a profusion of shell and bomb craters and potholes, places where a misstep could end in painful injury. An extra obstacle to the terrain's natural difficulty were the hundreds of trees knocked down by the air and naval gunfire bombardment. The roots of many of the trees that remained standing were so weakened that it took only a slight jar to send them crashing. The swamp took its own toll of casualties, dead and injured, before the campaign ended.

[20] Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, p. 48.

Enemy firing first broke out to the west of Yellow 1 where Company I of 3/7 had landed. Confused by the smoke, the LCVPs carrying the company's assault platoons reached shore about 300 yards northwest of the beach's boundary. Once the Marines had chopped through the jungle to reach the coastal trail, they came under long-range machine gun fire issuing from a series of bunkers lying hidden in the brush. The company deployed to take on the Japanese and gauge the extent of the enemy position.

The task of reducing the bunkers fell to 3/1 which was charged with leading the advance up the trail toward the airfields. The men of the 1st Marines' battalion began landing from LCIs on Yellow 1 at 0815, and the last elements were ashore and forming for the advance west by 0847. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Hankins started his men forward on a two-company front 500 yards wide, passing through 3/7, which temporarily held up its advance to the beachhead line. The swamp on his left flank soon forced Hankins to narrow his assault formation to a column of companies. At 1010, the Japanese opened up on Company K in the lead, soon after it had passed through the firing line set up by Company I of 3/7. The ensuing fight was the bitterest struggle on D-Day.

For a short while the course of the battle seemed to turn against the Marines—both the commander and executive officer of Company K were killed; bazooka rockets failed to detonate in the soft sand covering the enemy bunkers; flame throwers malfunctioned when they were brought into play; and antitank and canister shot from 37mm cannon proved ineffective against the log-reinforced dugouts. The

break of fortune came when an LVT which had come up from the beachhead with ammunition tried to crash into the enemy position. The vehicle got hung up between two trees, and the well-protected Japanese broke from cover to attack the cripple, killing its two machine gunners. The driver managed to work the tractor loose and caved in the nearest bunker by running over it. The Marine riflemen took advantage of the LVT's success and cracked the defensive system, killing or scattering the defenders of the four bunkers that had held up the advance.

Medium tanks had been requested for support as soon as it became apparent that 3/1 was up against a fortified position. A platoon of Shermans arrived shortly after Company K won its fight,[21] and led Company I forward through the ruined emplacements. Only a few snipers were encountered on the way to the 1–1 Line, the first objective on the coastal route to the airfields. Lieutenant Colonel Hankins reported 1–1 secure at 1325 and received orders to hold up there and dig in for the night. The brief but bitter fight for the bunkers cost 3/1 seven Marines killed and seven wounded. The bodies of 25 Japanese lay in and around their shattered defenses.

On the opposite flank of the beachhead, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel John E. Weber), making Combat Team C's main effort, had driven to Target Hill by noon and seized the left sector of the beachhead line. A platoon of Company A flushed and finished off the only opposition, the few dazed defenders of two gun positions on Silimati Point. Company B's men, picking their way through the swamp in an area where two feet of mud underlay a like cover of water,[22] took the day's prime objective and found ample evidence that the Japanese had used Target Hill as an observation post.

The task of seizing the center of the beachhead was assigned to Lieutenant Colonel Odell M. Conoley's 2d Battalion of the 7th. The unit was ashore and assembled by 0845, though the men on two LCIs that had eased their way into the beach had to wade through neck-deep surf. The sodden condition of the unfortunate Marines that had to breast the water to shore was soon matched by that of many others when 2/7 had its bout with the swamp. The battalion passed through a Japanese supply depot south of the coastal trail and ran into scattered opposition as it advanced into the jungle again. A scout in Company G was the first Marine killed and other casualties occurred as the leading companies struggled through the 900-yard width of the swamp to rising ground. By late afternoon, Conoley could report his battalion had reached dry land and was digging in. LVTs brought up ammunition, and 2/7 got set for counterattacks that irregular but hot enemy fire promised. Both flanks hung open until they were dropped back to the swamp's edge.

The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, led by Lieutenant Colonel William R. Williams, reached its assigned portion of the beachhead line after threading its way through the swamp barrier and crossing the only

[21] Maj Hoyt C. Duncan ltr to CMC, dtd 14Mar52. The tank company commander recalls that the tank took part in the last stages of the action against the bunkers. Col Donald J. Robinson ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 5Jun62.

[22] CWO Sidney J. Fishel comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 14Feb52.

large patch of kunai grass within the planned perimeter. Williams' unit met no serious opposition during its advance, but late in the afternoon, when division ordered a shift to the west to link up with Combat Team B, a small group of enemy troops attempted to infiltrate through the gap that opened. The battalion was recalled to its original positions and dug in along the edge of the kunai grass for night defense.

When the second echelon of LSTs arrived and began unloading on D-Day afternoon, the remaining rifle battalion assigned to the BACKHANDER assault force landed and moved into position. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Walker A. Reaves) filed up the coastal trail past long lines of trucks waiting to move into the limited dump areas available. The unit's own equipment and combat team supplies, mobile loaded in organic vehicles, followed when traffic would allow. Accompanying the infantrymen when they moved out of the beachhead to the 1–1 Line was the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines (Major Noah P. Wood, Jr.), Combat Team B's direct support pack howitzer battalion. The artillery batteries set up along the coastal trail within the perimeter established by 1/1 and 3/1. General Shepherd and Colonel Pollock visited Colonel Whaling's CP at 1800 to pass on a division attack order for 0700, 27 December.

In contrast to the relative ease with which 2/11 reached its firing site, the two artillery battalions assigned to Combat Team C spent most of the day getting their guns into effective supporting positions. The lighter 75mm howitzers of 1/11 had been loaded in LVTs in anticipation of the difficulties that would be met in the "damp flat." This forethought paid dividends, since the amphibian tractors were able to move the guns directly from the LVTs to the battery locations which had been picked from maps and aerial photographs. The battalion's preselected positions proved to be in the midst of the swamp, but Lieutenant Colonel Lewis J. Fields directed his commanders to set up their guns around the edges wherever a rise of ground gave firm footing. The LVTs knocked down trees to clear fields of fire, hauled loads of ammunition and equipment to the guns, and helped the tractor prime movers and trucks get across the swamp. Fields' howitzers began registering at 1400,[23] five and a half hours after they landed, and 1/11 was ready to fire in direct support of the 7th Marines all along the perimeter by nightfall.

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas B. Hughes' 4th Battalion's 105mm howitzers needed every bit of assistance they could get to reach the kunai grass patch. LVTs broke a path through the swamp's tangle of trees and undergrowth for the tractors and guns and provided extra pulling power where it was needed. And the need was constant. The progress of each howitzer through the swamp was a major operation which often found the men of the firing section chest deep in water hauling on drag ropes or pushing mired wheels while tractor winches and LVTs in tandem applied full power to keep the guns moving. All supplies and ammunition had to be carried in amphibian tractors, since no truck could negotiate the tortuous trail through the swamp. Despite the incredible difficulties, the first battery was in position and ready to fire at 1330, the second was registered by 1700,

[23] ArtyLiaisonO msg to ArtyO, ALAMO For, dtd 22Jan44, Subj: Rept on Arty in BACKHANDER Op, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 17.*

and the third was pulling into the clearing as darkness fell.[24]

While the division assault troops were consolidating their hold on the beachhead, Lieutenant Colonel Ballance's shore party was coping with the confusion of problems arising from the unloading of equipment, vehicles, and bulk stores brought in by the LSTs. The carefully-thought-out plan of overlapping dumps to be used by each landing ship was adapted to meet the situation posed by the swamp. All supplies had to be crowded on the narrow strip of dry land between beach and swamp, nowhere more than a couple of hundred yards wide. The coastal track was crammed with vehicles almost as soon as the first seven LSTs beached at 0840, and the jam never eased during the rest of the day.

On the beaches themselves, the shore party constructed sandbag causeways out to the LSTs that grounded and dropped their ramps in the water. Although VII Amphibious Force reported that D-Day's "four foot surf around the ramps was of no consequence," and that "thick growth and soft ground behind the beach was the retarding factor" [25] in unloading operations, the men that wrestled sandbags in the water had a different opinion. Actually, the slowness of unloading was due to a combination of factors, not the least of which was the reluctance of the drivers of the mobile loaded trucks borrowed from ALAMO Force to chance being left behind on New Britain when the LSTs pulled out. Numerous trucks were abandoned and "stranded on the beach exits for quite some time" [26] before Marines could move them to the dumps and get them unloaded.

The first echelon of LSTs retracted at 1330 with about 100 tons of bulk stores still on board in order that the D-Day landing schedule could be kept. As the seven ships in the second echelon beached and started unloading about an hour later, the long-expected Japanese aerial counterattack materialized. As the enemy planes dove through the gunfire of American fighters covering the beachhead, a squadron of B–25s bound for a routine bombing and strafing mission in the Borgen Bay area flew low over the LSTs. In a tragic mistake of identity, the ships' gunners shot down two of the American planes and badly damaged two others. Compounding the original error, the B–25s that had weathered the LSTs' fire bombed and strafed 1/11's position on Silimati Point, killing one officer and wounding 14 enlisted men.

The enemy planes that hit the beachhead were only a small portion of an attack group of 88 naval fighters and dive bombers dispatched from Rabaul after they had returned from a morning's fruitless raid on Arawe. Most of the Japanese pilots concentrated on the ships offshore and the damage they did was severe, although they suffered heavily in the process. The radar on the fighter director ship, the destroyer *Shaw*, had picked up the enemy when they were about 60 miles away and vectored two P–38 squadrons to intercept, while the escort vessels cleared the reef-restricted waters off the coast and steamed out to sea to get maneuver room. The interceptors missed contact but wheeled quickly to get on the enemy tails, and a vicious dog fight took place all over the sky as the American and Jap-

[24] *Ibid.*; LtCol Dale H. Heely ltr to CMC, dtd 1Mar52.

[25] *CTF 76 Dec43 WarD*, p. 35.

[26] Maj George J. DeBell comment on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign, ca.* Feb52.

anese fighters tangled. Some of the dive bombers evaded the defending fighters to strike at the destroyers. The *Shaw* was badly crippled by near misses, two other ships were damaged, and the *Brownson*, which took two bombs directly back of its stack, sank within a few minutes. One hundred and eight officers and men went down with their ship, but the rest of the crew was rescued while the enemy planes were being driven off.

The toll of lost planes, pilots, and crews was still enough so that the Japanese never again attempted a daylight raid on Cape Gloucester in comparable strength. Just what the exact enemy loss was in the several attacks mounted by Army and Navy pilots on 26 December cannot be discovered. The total was probably more than the 18 planes recalled by the Japanese in postwar years,[27] and a good deal less than the 57 planes claimed by American pilots while the heat of battle was on them.[28] From 27 December on, Allied air strikes mounted from South Pacific bases kept Rabaul's air garrison too busy flying defensive missions to devote much effort to Cape Gloucester.

By nightfall on D-Day, it was evident that the BACKHANDER Forces' main beachhead on New Britain was secure. General Rupertus had left the *Conyngham* at 0800 and was on the beach before the advance echelon of his command post set up at 1030. The CP location, like so many positions chosen prior to the landing, proved to be too "damp" for effectiveness and was moved to dry land by noon Troops landed according to plan, and 11,000 men were ashore when the second LST echelon retracted at 1800. Although 200 tons of bulk stores returned in these ships to New Guinea, they were sent back on turn-around voyages and the temporary loss was not a vital one. All guns and vehicles on the LSTs had landed. During the day's sporadic fighting, the 1st Division had lost 21 killed and 23 wounded and counted in return 50 enemy dead and a bag of 2 prisoners.

At 1700, after it became evident that the Japanese were warming up to something more effective than harassing fire, particularly on the front of 2/7, Rupertus dispatched a request to ALAMO Force that Combat Team A be sent forward immediately to Cape Gloucester. While it seemed obvious that the troops already ashore could hold the Yellow Beaches perimeter, the task was going to require all of Colonel Frisbie's combat team. The planned employment of 3/7 as Combat Team B reserve could not be made, and Rupertus considered that the 5th Marines was needed to add strength to the airfield drive and to give him a reserve to meet any contingency.

All along the front in both perimeters, the Marines were busy tying in their positions as darkness fell, cutting fire lanes through jungle growth, and laying out trip wires to warn of infiltrators. For a good part of the men in the foxholes and machine gun emplacements, the situation was familiar: Guadalcanal all over again, Americans waiting in the jungles for a Japanese night attack. The thick overhead cover was dripping as the result of an afternoon rain that drenched the beachhead and all that were in it. The dank swamp forest stank, the night air was humid and thick, and the ever present jungle noises mingled with the actual and the imagined sounds of enemy troops readying an assault.

[27] *SE Area AirOps*, p. 30; *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 48.

[28] 1st MarDiv D-2 Jnl., 26Dec43–26Jan44, entry of 1035 on 27Dec43.

Capture of the Airfields

ENEMY REACTION [1]

The D-Day landings on the Yellow Beaches came as a surprise to the Japanese.[2] To the enemy, the extensive swamp along the north coast between the airfields and Borgen Bay seemed an effective barrier to a large-scale amphibious assault. Generals Sakai and Matsuda hoped and prepared for landings aimed directly at Cape Gloucester's beaches, but actually expected the blow to come elsewhere. Instead of hitting these prepared defenses, the Japanese leaders saw the principal Allied thrust being made against Cape Bushing, to be followed by overland and shore-to-shore advance to the airfields.

As soon as he received word of the actual BACKHANDER landing scheme, the *17th Division* commander ordered General Matsuda to counterattack and annihilate the Allied assault forces "at the water's edge." [3] Colonel Kouki Sumiya of the *53d Infantry*, who commanded the 1,400-man airfield defense force,[4] was directed to concentrate his troops against the main beachhead, leaving the Tauali trailblock to the attention of minor elements of his regiment's *1st Battalion.* Matsuda's reserve, the *53d*'s *2d Battalion* under Major Shinichi Takabe, started moving down the trail from Nakarop to Target Hill shortly after General Sakai's order was received. The leading elements of Takabe's battalion reached the ridges in front of the Marine line late in the afternoon of D-Day. The shipping engineer and antiaircraft units defending Borgen Bay and Hill 660 were directed to hold their positions and support Takabe's counterattack. (See Map 23.)

The strongest combat force available to General Matsuda was Colonel Kenshiro Katayama's *141st Infantry* and its reinforcing units defending the Cape Bushing sector. After the dispatch of the major part of the regiment's *1st Battalion* to Arawe, Colonel Katayama's command amounted to some 1,700 troops,[5] the majority veteran infantrymen and artillerymen. The *17th Division* operation order of 26 December that directed Matsuda to commit his reserve also called for the *141st Infantry* to move overland from Cape Bushing to help wipe out the Allied beachhead. The elements of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* on Rooke Island were ordered to sail for Aisega and march

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ADC IntelDocuments;* ATIS Item No. 9115, Matsuda For and 141st InfRegt OpOs, 26Dec43–8Jan44, in ATIS Bul No. 721, dtd 14Feb44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex); *17th Div Ops.*

[2] Docu No. 52399, Statement of ex-LtGen Yasushi Sakai in HistDiv, MilIntelSect, GHQ, FEC, Statements of Japanese Officials on WW II, V. III, p. 190 (OCMH).

[3] *17th Div Ops*, p. 15.

[4] ATIS Item No. 9657, MatsudaFor IntelRept No. 3, dtd 23Dec43, in ATIS Bul No. 788, dtd 11Mar44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex); *Japanese comments.*

[5] ATIS Item No. 9657, *op. cit.*

from there to the north coast to join in the fighting.

Abandoning their positions at Cape Bushing, Aisega, and Nigol, most of Katayama's units were underway for an assembly area near Nakarop by the evening of D-Day. After 27 December, only a reinforced rifle platoon remained at Aisega to man the defenses once occupied by a battalion, and a scattering of service troops was all that was left in the *141st*'s posts along the Itni. The commander of the token defense force at Aisega gloomily predicted in his diary that "we shall surely make Aisega our graveyard," but his guess proved wrong, at least in location.[6]

In a week's time, this platoon, too, was ordered into the battle to contain the advancing Marines.

In the immediate area of the Yellow Beaches on D-Day, most of the Japanese troops that tried to stem the Marine advance came from small detachments of the *1st Shipping Engineers* and *1st Debarkation Unit*. These enemy soldiers, who had operated the supply depot overrun by 2/7, fell back before Combat Team C's assault platoons until they ran into Major Takabe's battalion moving up to launch a counterattack. By late afternoon of 26 December, enough of Takabe's unit had filed down the trail from Nakarop to the area opposite the center of the Marine perimeter to man a strong firing line.

Just why the position of 2/7 was chosen as the point of attack is not known, although it is logical to assume that General Matsuda considered this segment of the 1st Division's beachhead would be lightly held. The swamp to the rear of the thin band of Marine foxholes appeared to isolate the defenders from the beach. Darkness veiled the American position before enemy scouts discovered that both flanks of 2/7 were open.

HOLDING THE PERIMETER[7]

The night of D-Day was moonless, and no trace of light penetrated the jungle canopy to reach the men of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines or the Japanese of the *2d Battalion, 53d Infantry* who faced them. Occasionally the adversaries caught a glimpse of the flash of fire at a rifle or machine gun muzzle or the momentary flare when a mortar or artillery shell exploded, but, in the main, the battle was fought by sound. One man, one gun, one group fired and drew a response from the other side aimed at the sound of the firing; then the tempo would pick up sharply and firing would break out all along the front to die away slowly and crop out again at another point. Despite the handicaps of fighting in the pitch-black gloom, Marine fire discipline was good, and Lieutenant Colonel Conoley repeatedly cautioned his company commanders to keep a tight rein on ammunition expenditure. Experience in fighting the Japanese indicated that a headlong assault would be launched at the height of the fire fight.

[6] Diary of 2dLt Takashiro Sato, 1st Plat, 6th Co, 141st InfRegt in *ADC IntelDocuments*. The diary was found in front of the positions of 3/5 during the fighting around Aogiri Ridge.

[7] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO For G–3 Jnl No. 11;* Maj Harry A. Stella memo to ALAMO For G–3, dtd 5Jan44, Subj: Rept of Observer with CT C, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 14; 1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I, Yellow Beach Landing; 1st MarDiv D–2 Daily Buls Nos. 1–6, dtd 27–31-Dec43; *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I;* LtCol William J. Dickinson ltr to CMC, dtd 14Mar52; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*.

Keeping an adequate reserve of ammunition on 2/7's side of the swamp was a problem handled by the regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. Puller, and his solution for it was carrying parties. LVTs could not be used to haul cargo until daybreak gave the drivers a chance to see the obstacles in their path. In the early evening, files of men from the Regimental Headquarters and Service Company snaked their way through the swamp to Conoley's CP with belted ammunition, bandoliers of rifle clips, and loads of 60mm and 81mm mortar shells. At about 2000, Colonel Frisbie decided to commit Battery D, 1st Special Weapons Battalion as infantry to reinforce 2/7, and Lieutenant Colonel Puller told the battery commander to leave his 37mm guns behind, have each man pick up a load of ammunition at the regimental dump, and then set out across the swamp.

Soon after an officer guide from 2/7 met the ammunition-laden column, a violent storm lashed the beachhead area and all trace of landmarks and trail signs vanished in a solid downpour of wind-driven rain. The men of the antitank battery, each holding to the belt of the Marine ahead of him, spent the night struggling to get through the morass and deliver the vital ammunition. It was 0805 before the guide was able to lead Battery D into 2/7's command post. Lieutenant Colonel Conoley immediately sent the reinforcements to his right flank to plug the gap between the 2d and 3d Battalions.

The Marines of 2/7 had fought with the Japanese all through the wild night-long storm. The drenching rain filled foxholes and emplacements and forced the men to scramble for cover on top of the ground. Rifles and machine guns fouled by mud and water refused to work, and the fire of battalion and company mortars "layed by guess and by God"[8] was invaluable in beating back repeated Japanese attacks. When the storm subsided and daylight began to filter through the tree tops, the tempo of battle increased and the weight of the enemy thrusts shifted west toward 2/7's open right flank.

As they arrived at their designated position, the special weapons men of Battery D tangled with the Japanese that had infiltrated the gap between the 7th's battalions. The Marines counterattacked, threw back the enemy troops, and built up a hasty defense line. Company F on the battery's left flank took the brunt of Major Takabe's attack and in a violent, seesaw battle, during which two of its machine guns were lost and recaptured, finally forced the Japanese to withdraw. The estimate of enemy dead in and around the Marine lines was 200–235, but the opportunity to make an accurate count was lost when the action opened anew during the afternoon of 27 December.

The *2d Battalion, 53d Infantry*, reinforced by small engineer and service units, attacked Combat Team C's perimeter repeatedly during the next few days losing more and more of its strength in every futile attempt to penetrate the Marine lines. The gaps that existed on the night of D-Day were closed by dark on the 27th. The 7th Marines' Regimental Weapons Company took over that part of 1/7's defensive sector closest to the beach to enable Lieutenant Colonel Weber to stretch his men thinly around Target Hill and make contact with the 2d Battalion. On the right flank, Company F was relieved in position by Company I of 3/7 and Battery

[8] Col Odell M. Conoley ltr to CMC, dtd 7Mar52.

691-360 O—63——24

D was attached to Lieutenant Colonel Williams' command.

The center of the perimeter continued to be the focus of enemy attacks, and Colonel Frisbie was able to concentrate what few reserves he had in the area of greatest threat. Wherever the fighting reached a peak, a regimental casual detachment of 30-odd men was committed, then pulled out and used again to meet the next emergency.[9] Pioneers from the shore party manned strong points in the rear of 2/7's lines to provide defense in depth. The Japanese did not discover how sparsely manned the perimeter was to either flank and persisted in their attacks on what became its strongest sector.

In three days of intermittent but intense fighting, the 7th Marines lost 18 men killed, 58 wounded, and 3 missing in action. Surviving records indicate that in the same period the attacking Japanese suffered at least five times as many casualties and that *2/53* was badly crippled, remaining a battalion in name only.

With Combat Team C fully committed just to hold the beachhead it had seized on D-Day, General Rupertus was unable to use 3/7 as he had intended, as a reserve for the 1st Marines advance on the airfields. Neither was Colonel Frisbie in a position to mount an offensive and drive back the Japanese troops attacking his lines. This situation reinforced the opinion that the 1st Division staff had held throughout the latter stages of BACKHANDER planning—the 5th Marines were needed on New Britain. At 2314 on D-Day, Rupertus sent a request to Krueger asking that Combat Team A be sent forward to Cape Gloucester with the advance echelon transported in nine APDs. The request was repeated several times and sent by different means to insure its receipt at ALAMO Force advance headquarters at Cape Cretin.

Krueger had agreed to release two battalions of the 5th Marines to Rupertus if the Marine general asked for them after he had landed at the objective.[10] At 0751 on 27 December, Krueger sent a liaison officer to Cape Sudest with orders for Combat Team A (less 3/5) to get underway for the Yellow Beaches. At the same time, the ALAMO Force commander sent a radio dispatch to Admiral Barbey informing him of the decision. Bad weather delayed the plane carrying the messenger and played havoc with radio reception so that Barbey received word too late in the afternoon for the APDs to load Marines of 1/5 and 2/5 and still reach the beachhead by dawn on the 28th. Accordingly, the admiral, who did not wish to expose the loaded transports to the chance of daylight air attack, delayed the whole movement 24 hours.

Colonel Selden and his entire combat team stood by all through the morning of 27 December ready to load out. The first troops were already embarked in DUKWs and headed for the APDs offshore when word of the change in orders was passed. On the 28th, while LSTs loaded rear elements of the combat team and all its supplies and equipment, the 1st and 2d Battalions boarded their fast transports and left for the target. At 2100, after a day of hard work, the landing ships followed, setting a course by Cape Cretin to drop off Lieutenant Colonel David S. McDougal's 3d Battalion.

[9] LtCol Charles S. Nichols, Jr., interviews with HistBr, G-3, HQMC, *ca.* Jan55.

[10] *Pollock comments.*

While Combat Team A was en route, Rupertus sent Krueger "an earnest plea" [11] that no part of the 5th Marines be held back from employment at Cape Gloucester. The Marine general stated that increasing pressure on the perimeter required a landing team reserve in that area, while the remainder of the combat team was used in the airfield attack. Krueger responded almost immediately that he "had no intention to deprive you of its use" [12] should the battalion be needed and that 3/5 would be sent forward with the remainder of Combat Team A.

On 28 December, while the reinforcements he had requested were loading at Cape Sudest, the 1st Division commander moved his CP to a position behind Combat Team B's front line where he could better direct the advance west. Control of the beachhead defenses was turned over to General Shepherd, whose ADC command group paralleled the organization of the division staff. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was slated to report to Shepherd for orders when Combat Team A's LST-borne echelon arrived. With the addition of a sorely-needed maneuver element, the ADC planned an attack toward Borgen Bay to eliminate the Japanese menacing the perimeter.

The steady influx of supplies planned for BACKHANDER operations went on without a major hitch while Combat Team C fought to hold the beachhead and Combat Team B drove forward toward the airfields. Through hard, demanding work, Lieutenant Colonel Ballance's shore party was able to overcome the considerable handicap to its operations posed by the limited stretch of dry land between sea and swamp. The LST unloading rate improved considerably after 27 December, when it was no longer necessary to handle two echelons daily. As many as 300 deadweight tons of stores and a full shipload of vehicles were unloaded in under six hours. Ballance's 1,400-man force was able to do its job well despite the fact that the replacement companies and pioneers that made up the bulk of its strength were often committed to hold reserve positions backing up Combat Team C's lines.

Aside from the human workhorses of the beachhead, the shore party Marines, the most important logistical elements were the amphibian tractors. The versatile LVT was the only vehicle capable of negotiating the swamp unaided, and it was used to solve every conceivable cargo and personnel-carrying problem that arose. When it appeared that the tractors used at Arawe might be a maintenance liability at Cape Gloucester, a provisional company using reserve LVTs and crews from both Company A and the tractor battalion's Headquarters and Service Company was organized and loaded out to arrive with Combat Team A.[13]

Almost as useful in their way as the LVTs were the boats of the amphibian engineers, particularly the LCMs which could stand the buffeting of heavy surf more easily than the lighter and smaller LCVPs. The 592d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment's detachment at the Yellow Beaches, including LCVPs that were carried in on ships' davits on D-Day and LCMs that arrived in tow behind LSTs on the 27th, were used mainly to transport supplies to Combat Team B. The coastal

[11] *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I*, entry No. 20 of 28Dec43.

[12] *Ibid.*, entry No. 20 of 29Dec43.

[13] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Anx D, Amphibian Tractors, pp. 1–2.

road used as the axis of advance by the 1st Marines quickly became a quagmire as the result of frequent rain and the damage caused by traffic far heavier than its bed could stand. Moving directly behind the assault troops, Marine engineers with Seabees following close in their trace attempted to keep the supply route in operation. When road maintenance efforts failed, the Army boatmen gave General Rupertus the assurance of adequate supplies he needed to keep the offensive rolling forward.

CAPTURE OF HELL'S POINT [14]

Colonel Whaling's combat team spent a quiet first night ashore, its position unchallenged by the Japanese. While the rifle companies of the 7th Marines were hotly engaged repelling counterattacks on 27 December, assault companies of the 1st advanced cautiously but steadily toward Cape Gloucester. A series of phase lines, ½ to ¾ of a mile apart, marking terrain objectives in the zone of attack, were reached and passed without opposition. (See Map IV, Map Section.)

The narrow coastal corridor forced Whaling to confine his attack formation to a column of companies with 3/1's Company I in the lead. A squad of scouts acting as point was followed by a section of three medium tanks, each machine trailed in turn by a rifle squad to give it covering fire in the event of attack. Support to this advance party was furnished by another section of tanks and a rifle platoon which preceded the rest of the 3d Battalion. Peeling off the head of 3/1's column, a succession of small combat patrols took position in the swamp to guard the left flank and then fell in to the rear when the main body had passed.

During the day's advance, two belts of enemy defensive positions were overrun and destroyed. When the scouts spotted a pillbox or bunker, they signaled to the tank platoon commander who came forward on foot, located the targets, and then directed the tanks' fire to knock them out. Despite day-long rain that slowed the forward movement, the lack of opposition enabled 3/1 to reach the 4–4 Line, 5,000 yards from the morning's line of departure, by 1350. Division ordered Combat Team B to remain at 4–4 for the night and set up a perimeter defense.

The next day's objective was the final phase line designated before the landing to control the advance on the airfield. This 0–0 Line was plotted along a low, grass-covered ridge leading northeast through the jungle to a promontory, soon dubbed Hell's Point by the Marines, which formed one arm of a crescent-shaped beach. Fifth Air Force pilots had located an extensive system of bunkers and trenches in back of this beach with the heaviest concentration on Hell's Point. Although the enemy positions were obviously sited to oppose a landing, they stretched along 300 yards of the long axis of the coastal corridor and promised to be a formidable obstacle if they were defended.

At the time the 1st Division attack plan for 28 December was laid out, the arrival of the advance echelon of the 5th Marines was expected in the early morning. H-Hour was consequently moved up to

[14] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I, Yellow Beach Landing; *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I;* LtCol Donald J. Robinson ltr to Dir, HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 7Aug52, enclosing OpLog of Co A, 1st TkBn; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

permit the reinforcements to get ashore and started into position to exploit any successes won by 1st Marines assault troops. The starting time and span of air and artillery preparations for the attack were adjusted accordingly. General Krueger sent General Rupertus a dispatch explaining the 24-hour delay of Combat Team A as soon as he knew of it, but the message was received in garbled form and could not be decoded until numerous transmissions regarding corrections had passed between the two headquarters.[15] Confirmation of the 5th Marines arrival finally came in a message received at 0040 on 29 December.

On the 28th, 2/11 culminated a night of harassing and interdiction fire with an hour's heavy shelling of suspected enemy positions immediately to the front of the 4–4 Line. Then at 0900, American A–20s began strafing and bombing targets from the 0–0 Line to the airfields, observing 0–0 as a bomb line beyond which they could attack with no danger to friendly troops. At 1000, when the last of the planes drew off, a further delay in jump-off time was authorized to get additional tanks into position to support the assault.

When the order to attack was finally issued at 1100, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines moved out in the same formation it had used during the previous day's advance. Company I was again at the head of the battalion column, working this time with a fresh platoon of medium tanks. In an effort to broaden the regimental frontage, Colonel Whaling had 1/1 simultaneously start a company through the jungle on the left flank in an attempt to reach the open ground along the 0–0 ridge.

The importance of the Marine attack objective was evident to the Japanese, and Colonel Sumiya had no intention of letting it fall without a fight. During the night of 27–28 December, the airfield defense troops who had been held under cover of the jungle on the mountain slopes moved into positions that ran roughly along the 0–0 Line. Waiting for the advancing men of Combat Team B was the major part of the *1st Battalion, 53d Infantry* and elements of the Japanese regiment's 75mm gun company.

Company A of 1/1, which drew the rugged assignment of cutting through the swamp forest, hit Sumiya's defenses first. At about 1145, the Marine unit reached the edge of an extensive clearing in the jungle about 500 yards from the coast. As the scouts and leading squads started to move through the chest-high kunai grass, a fusillade of rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire broke out from enemy positions hidden in the dense undergrowth across the open ground. Falling back quickly to the cover of the jungle on their own side, the Marines replied in kind, and the grass was whipped by a killing crossfire. It was soon apparent that the Japanese strength was at least equal to Company A's and neither side could gain an advantage.

For four hours the fire fight dragged on. The enemy force, mainly from the *1st Company, 53d Infantry*, held its ground but could not drive the Marines back.

[15] The last correction needed to enable BACKHANDER Force to break the original message was received at 1133 on 29 December well after Combat Team A's advance echelon had landed. *1st MarDiv G–3 Jnl—I*, entry No. 17, dtd 29Dec43.

Company A easily beat off two Japanese counterattacks and an attempt to turn its flank. At 1545, the Marines, who were running low on ammunition, began to disengage and pull back to the 1st Battalion's position for the night. Fire from 2/11 covered the withdrawal and discouraged any Japanese attempt to follow. Clearly the task of overcoming the enemy defenses required an attacking force of greater strength. Next morning when this position was found abandoned by advancing Marines, it contained 41 dead enemy soldiers. The cost to Company A of this hard-fought action was 8 men killed and 16 wounded.

In a sense, the skirmish in the jungle was a grim side show to the main event, the battle for Hell's Point. This Japanese strongpoint of mutually supporting bunkers and trenches was covered by belts of barbed wire and land mines. Hastily cut gun ports enabled enemy crews to train their weapons along the coastal trail to meet the attack. At least three 75mm regimental guns, a 70mm gun, a 20mm machine cannon, and a dozen or more heavy and light machine guns and mortars were brought into play against the Marines. Steady rain and thick foliage cut visibility to 10–20 yards, and Marine riflemen all too frequently stepped into the fire lanes of enemy bunkers before they spotted the Japanese positions. In this kind of blind fighting, tanks proved invaluable and helped hold down infantry casualties that might have soared had the attack been made without the assistance of armor. The support was mutual, however, and each tank's protective rifle squad kept its sides and rear free from suicide attackers.

The fight to capture the beach defense positions was joined about noon when Japanese troops opened fire on the leading platoon of Company I and its spearhead section of tanks. The tanks crushed trenches and bunkers and blasted guns and crews alike, while the infantry shot down the Japanese who tried to flee. When the 75mm guns on two tanks malfunctioned, the advance was halted while tank machine guns poured out covering fire and fresh armor was ordered into the fight.

In its advance and systematic destruction of the enemy positions in its path, Company I had veered to the left of the coastal road. As a new tank platoon lumbered up to the front lines, Lieutenant Colonel Hankins decided to use Company K on a platoon-wide front to cover the 50-yard stretch between beach and road. One section of mediums fought with Company I and another with K. The reduction of Hell's Point was the job of Company K, whose commanding officer later recounted the fight that eliminated the defenses;

> I put one squad of the Second Platoon behind each tank and deployed the Third Platoon to set up a skirmish line behind the tanks. We encountered twelve huge bunkers with a minimum of twenty Japs in each. The tanks would fire point blank into the bunkers; if the Japs stayed in the bunkers they were annihilated, if they escaped out the back entrance (actually the front as they were built to defend the beach) the infantry would swarm over the bunker and kill them with rifle fire and grenades. By the time we had knocked out twelve bunkers the Second Platoon, which had originally been behind the tanks, were out of ammunition and had been replaced by the Third Platoon and they too were out or down to a clip of ammunition per man. I called a halt and sent for the First Platoon. By the time the First Platoon arrived and ammunition was resupplied forty-five minutes had elapsed. We

continued the attack and found two more bunkers but the enemy had escaped.[16]

The third platoon of Company A, 1st Tank Battalion, to be committed during the day's action was called up and reached Hell's Point about 1630 in time to destroy the last enemy bunker on the point. It was undefended. Apparently, Colonel Sumiya had ordered a general withdrawal of the survivors of the force which had fought the 1st Marines. Combat Team B was able to occupy the entire defensive position and dig in for the night without any harassment from the Japanese. The night's only excitement was furnished by a false alarm of the approach of enemy tanks, which was countered by positioning two platoons of Marine mediums along possible approach routes with mortars ready to fire illuminating shells to help them locate targets.

After the action of 28 December, the Japanese undoubtedly wished they had tanks and plenty of them since their guns proved no match for the American armor. The count of enemy dead reported to division, before darkness stopped the search, was 266.[17] In return, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines suffered casualties of 9 killed and 36 wounded. With the complete reduction of Hell's Point,[18] the way was open to the BACKHANDER Force's major objective—the Cape Gloucester airdrome.

[16] Maj Hoyt C. Duncan, Jr., ltr to CMC, dtd 14Mar52.

[17] At least one participant in the day's action questioned this total, and, on the basis of a personal count, estimated the enemy loss at a much lower figure—68–88. Maj William W. Wright ltr to CMC, dtd 15Feb52.

[18] General Rupertus later renamed this spot Terzi Point after the commanding officer of Company K, 3/1, who was killed on D-Day—Captain Joseph A. Terzi.

OBJECTIVE SECURED [19]

A new landing point, Blue Beach, located about four miles northwest of the beachhead and a few hundred yards behind the 0–0 Line was opened on 28 December. General Rupertus decided to land the assault battalions of the 5th Marines there in order to have them closer to their proposed zone of attack on the 29th. The order detailing the change in landing sites reached Combat Team B while some units were disembarking from their APDs and others were en route to their original destination, Yellow 2. As a result, Colonel Selden, his headquarters, two companies of 1/5, and most of 2/5 reached Blue Beach about 0730, while the rest of the assault echelon landed within the original perimeter. (See Map IV, Map Section.)

General Rupertus was present on Yellow 2 when the first units came ashore, and he got them started toward Blue Beach to rejoin the rest of the combat team.[20] The march was made by truck where possible and by foot whenever the condition of the river of mud called a road demanded. The beachmaster reported the last elements of the 5th Marines on their way west by 0935.

While his regiment regrouped behind the 1st Marines' lines, Colonel Selden conferred with Colonel Whaling, receiving a thorough briefing on the combat situation and word that the attack on 29 December

[19] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl Nos. 13–17; 1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I, Yellow Beach Landing; *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I;* BGen John T. Selden ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 27Jan 51; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

[20] LtCol Charles R. Baker comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign, ca.* Mar52.

was to be delayed until both the 1st and 5th Marines could join in the advance. General Rupertus and Colonel Pollock reached Whaling's CP shortly after this and outlined the day's operation plan. At 1200, following an air and artillery preparation, Combat Team B, with 1/1 in assault, would drive forward on the right with the coastal road as its axis of advance and Airfield No. 2 as its objective. At the same time on the left flank, Combat Team A, with 2/5 in the lead, would attack through an area in Talawe's foothills believed to contain prepared enemy defensive positions and then strike north toward the airfields.

After the attack order was issued, Selden and Whaling went up to the front lines to establish the left flank of the 1st Marines' position along the 0–0 Line. Selden then took his battalion commanders, Major William H. Barba (1/5) and Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt (2/5), up to the boundary for a brief inspection of the terrain. Deciding to advance with his assault battalion, Selden accompanied Walt when 2/5 moved to its line of departure 1,200 yards inland. Barba's orders called for his battalion to follow the 2d in attack, keeping contact with the tail of Walt's column.

On its way to the line of departure, the 2d Battalion, 5th found itself wading through a swamp, one that the regimental commander had been assured contained only a few inches of water. Instead Selden found "the water varying in depth from a few inches to 4 and 5 feet, making it quite hard for some of the youngsters who were not much more than 5 feet in height." [21] The advancing Marines had to move through the swamp and a thick bordering belt of forest in single file, and progress was unexpectedly slow. Before the leading company was in position to move out from the 0–0 Line, division had had to put off the time of attack several times. When 2/5 finally jumped off at 1500, a good part of the battalion was still in the swamp, and Barba's men were just entering. At dusk, the rear elements of 2/5 were clearing the line of departure as the leading units of 1/5 came out of the forest.

While Barba held up his men to get the companies organized in approach march formation, the 2d Battalion pulled away from the 1st and contact was lost. Patrols sent out in the gathering darkness and unfamiliar terrain were unable to link up, and 1/5's commander, whose radio to regiment was out, decided to hold up where he was for the night. The battalion established an all-around defensive perimeter in the middle of the open grassy area and spent a quiet night without enemy challenge.[22]

The terrain forward of Combat Team A's line of departure proved to be much more rugged than it appeared on operation maps. The 2d Battalion column, with Selden and Walt moving close to its head, found the stretches of kunai grass in its path were broken by ridges and bordered by gullies and ravines choked with jungle growth. As 2/5 swung north to move down to Airfield No. 2, it passed through an area of hidden trenches and bunkers all showing signs of recent occupation. There were no enemy troops to be seen. The battalion advanced unchecked and, by 1925, had reached the center of the airstrip and linked up with Combat Team B.

[21] Selden ltr, *op. cit.*

[22] Col William H. Barba ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 24Mar51.

The only enemy opposition met on 29 December was encountered by the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, shortly after it passed through 3/1's positions on the 0–0 Line. A few scattered rifle shots fired at long range by small groups of Japanese troops did nothing to slow the advance. When the open ground along 0–0 was crossed, Lieutenant Colonel Reaves' assault companies moved as skirmishers through 300–400 yards of jungle. Supporting medium tanks, and half tracks mounting 75mm guns from the Regimental Weapons Company, were forced to stick to the coastal road and kept pace with the infantry while filing around the right flank of the forest barrier. Once they had cleared the trees, the assault troops, tanks, and half tracks joined forces again, ready for a final push to the airfield in sight ahead.

Artillery of 2/11 and 4/11 fired on suspected Japanese positions, and two rocket DUKWs of the amphibian engineers which had driven up to the front lines added 50 rounds to the preparation.[23] As if in honor of the occasion, the rain even stopped for a few brief moments. The advance was anticlimactic, and, at 1755, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines reached the edge of Airfield No. 2.

As rain started falling and hastened the approach of darkness, 1/1 hurriedly dug in along a perimeter that looped from the coast inland to the east of the airfield. The 3d Battalion, 1st, which had followed the attacking troops in echelon to the left rear, linked up with 1/1 and extended the perimeter farther around the center of the field. When 2/5 came down out of the hills, the battalion was directed to fill in the remaining segment of the night's defense line which included all of Airfield No. 2.

Although surviving enemy records do not detail Colonel Sumiya's orders to his troops, prisoner of war interrogations and Japanese actions on 30 December provide a reasonable picture of what transpired on the 29th when the Marines were allowed to seize their objective unopposed. The enemy commander and the surviving members of his reinforced battalion had hidden in the rain forest that blanketed the hills south of the airfield. Conceding to Marine tanks and infantry the ownership of the low, open ground of the airdrome, Sumiya planned to take advantage of the terrain, his most important defensive asset. Moving at night, the remnants of the *1st Battalion, 53d Infantry* units which had fought at Hell's Point plus at least half of the *2d Company* that had not yet been engaged [24] occupied the prepared defenses hidden in the dense vegetation on the hillsides and in the cuts that laced the slopes. The most significant feature of the defensive system was Razorback Hill, a high, narrow, north-south ridge with a grass-covered crest that overshadowed both airstrips. To aerial observers and mapmakers, Razorback appeared to be just another kunai patch among many; from the ground it was clearly the key height in the hills bordering the airdrome.

On the morning of 30 December, while two assault companies of 2/5 moved out across Airfield No. 1 to investigate the village area west of the night's positions, Company F in reserve sent out a pair of scouts to locate and guide 1/5 into the

[23] OCE, GHQ, AFPac, *Amphibian Engineers*, p. 177.

[24] ATIS Item No. 9981, Diary of Cpl Ryoichiro Takano, 2d Co, 1/53, 31Oct–29Dec43, in ATIS Bul No. 808, dtd 14Mar44 (ACSI Recs. FRC Alex).

MARINE RIFLEMEN, *joined by a stray dog, pause behind a medium tank as they reach the outskirts of the Cape Gloucester airdrome.* (*USMC 69043*)

MEDIUM TANK *crosses Suicide Creek to blast Japanese emplacements holding up the Marine advance.* (*USMC 72283*)

perimeter. On the lower portion of Razorback Hill, where the 2d Battalion had passed through abandoned defenses on the 29th, the Marines surprised a group of 12 enemy soldiers just rising from their night's bivouac. The scouts withdrew after an exchange of fire, and a platoon of Company F immediately returned to wipe out what was thought to be a group of stragglers.

As the rifle platoon neared the top of a small knob in a kunai field, a heavy outburst of rifle and machine gun fire met it, coming from positions in the edge of the forest ahead. As the Marines sought cover on the hilltop, the Japanese launched a screaming charge up its sides which was bloodily repulsed. When the enemy troops withdrew, the fires of grenade launchers, mortars, and an artillery piece were added to the outpouring from the Razorback defenses. A radio message requesting support brought prompt response, and Marine mortar fire crashed down on the enemy position while the rest of Company F moved up.

The Japanese soldiers broke from cover and came racing up the hill in a second attempt to close with the Americans, just as a reinforcing platoon maneuvered to extend the firing line. Heavy fire drove the enemy back into the jungle again and scattered more bodies over the slopes. Tanks were called up and, when the first machine arrived, Company F attacked. Using the tank's gunfire and armor like a crowbar, the Marines split open the first line of the defensive system and drove on through, mopping up the Japanese with grenades and automatic rifle fire. By 1130, the hillside position, which had contained over 30 bunkers, was silent and smoking; its defenders were dead and, in many instances, buried in the ruins of their foxholes, trenches, and emplacements. A count of more than 150 Japanese bodies was reported to division,[25] while Company F had lost 13 killed and 19 wounded.

Company F's discovery that the enemy had reoccupied his defensive positions coincided with a similar unpleasant finding by the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, which was marching in column toward the airdrome. The point of the leading company (A) was fired upon by Japanese who had manned defenses located in the jumbled ridges and ravines east of Razorback Hill. Once it came under fire, Company A deployed to continue the advance, and then, as the battalion commander later recounted the action, it:

> . . . was pinned down by heavy small arms and machine gun fire from enemy positions to the west, and enemy mortar fire began falling within the First Battalion zone of action. B Company was committed to the right of A Company in order to bring more fire to bear on the enemy and to prevent them from pushing down through to the airfield. The enemy made one sally against A Company's left flank and was repulsed with fire. Preparations were made to assault the enemy position following a mortar barrage. . . . The assault was made on the enemy position which was found to be abandoned—the remaining enemy withdrawing to the south into the hills. The First Battalion then withdrew to the airfield evacuating its dead and wounded, which I believe totaled 18, 6 dead and 12 wounded.[26]

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[25] The Commanding Officer, Company F later estimated the dead at a lesser figure, 60 to 70. Maj John B. Doyle, Jr., comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 13Mar52. The battalion commander believed that "a more accurate figure would be about one hundred." BGen Lewis W. Walt ltr to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 13Jun62, hereafter *Walt ltr.*

[26] Barba ltr, *op. cit.*

The finishing blow to the Japanese defenses was delivered by Lieutenant Colonel Hankins' battalion. Working forward with medium tanks in support, 3/1 located the remainder of the occupied defenses in the area west of the strongpoints encountered by the 5th Marines. Attacking in the early afternoon along a three-company front, Hankins' men drove the enemy out of their positions, forced them to retreat up a ravine leading to Razorback's summit, and followed so close in pursuit that the Japanese had no chance to develop a defense. At a cost of one Marine killed and four wounded, 3/1 overwhelmed the last effective resistance of Colonel Sumiya's force. Artillery forward observers with the attacking troops brought down fire on the fleeing enemy to speed them on their way.

A vastly enlarged perimeter, including Razorback Hill in the center and reaching well to the west of Airfield No. 1, marked the Marine position on the night of 30 December. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines took over a sector of the line between 3/1 and 2/5. During the day's fighting, more supporting elements of both combat teams and of the task force reached the airfield area. On the 31st, after the LST-borne echelon of Combat Team A arrived at the Yellow Beaches, the assault battalions' heavy gear and the team's light tank company and artillery battalion (5/11) came up. The American force securing the airdrome, basically four infantry battalions, two artillery battalions, and two tank companies, was far stronger than anything General Matsuda could bring against it.

At noon on 31 December, General Rupertus raised the American flag over Cape Gloucester to mark officially the capture of the airdrome. At least one unscheduled flag-raising, by Company I, 3/1 on Razorback Hill,[27] preceded this event. Undoubtedly, there were others, for combat Marines have a penchant for hoisting the Colors over hard-won heights.

Once the airfields were within Marine lines, General Rupertus radioed General Krueger to offer him the "early New Year gift [of] the complete airdrome of Cape Gloucester."[28] The ALAMO Force commander, in turn, made the present to General MacArthur as "won by the skill and gallantry of the First Marine Division brilliantly supported by our air and naval forces."[29] Both Army generals sent Rupertus their congratulations; MacArthur's was in eloquent language ending with the phrase: "Your gallant division has maintained the immortal record of the Marine Corps and covered itself with glory."[30] Perhaps the best tribute to the men who had seized the BACKHANDER operation's prime objective was written by an Army officer observer attached to Combat Team B when he reported to the ALAMO G–3:

> The front line soldier was superb. These men were in splendid physical condition and spoiling for a fight. They were like hunters. boring in relentlessly and apparently without fear. I never heard a wounded Marine moan. The aid men. unarmed, were right up in the front lines getting the wounded. Fire discipline was excellent.[31]

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[27] LtCol George E. Bowdoin ltr to CMC, dtd 10Mar52.

[28] Quoted in *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part I, p. 13.

[29] Quoted in *CTF 76 Dec43 WarD*, p. 43.

[30] *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I*, entry No. 9 of 31Dec43.

[31] Maj J. B. Bonham memo to Col Eddleman, dtd 4Jan44, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 15*.

TRAIL BLOCK WITHDRAWN [32]

While the 1st Division's attack up the north coast was developing, the Marines who were to close the back door to the airdrome had a relatively quiet time. Lieutenant Colonel Masters' STONEFACE Group spent the first few days after it landed consolidating its hold on the Tauali beachhead and patrolling vigorously to locate the Japanese. Many of the small enemy detachments encountered cared surprisingly little about security, and 2/1's scouts and reconnaissance patrols were often able to jump the Japanese as they were resting or marching at ease, fire a few telling shots, and escape unscathed. No intelligence that the Marines uncovered indicated that a large enemy force was in the vicinity of the Green Beach perimeter. (See Map 25.)

The direct radio link with division that consistently eluded Masters on D-Day could not be made on the 27th either. On the following day, two engineer LCMs with Marine radio jeeps on board were sent north up the coast to get around the communication barrier posed by the mountains. An enemy 75mm gun firing from the Dorf Point vicinity dropped a few rounds near the boats and prompted them to turn back. The coastal voyage proved unnecessary, however, since the battalion's radios "boomed in" [33] to division receivers once the landing craft were 200 yards offshore. Starting on the 29th, the LCM-borne radios made contact with the division on a regular daily schedule.

The first inkling that the Japanese would probably attack the trail block was discovered on the 28th. An alert Marine on outpost duty spotted two Japanese observers on the ridge opposite 2/1's lines and dropped them both with his rifle. A patrol checked the bodies and found the men, carrying field glasses and maps, were officers who had apparently been reconnoitering the American position.

Toward nightfall on 29 December, scattered shots and then a growing volume of sustained fire began to strike the Marine defenses, coming from the jungle inland. A heavy downpour fell steadily, adding to the darkness and deadening the men's sense of hearing as they strained to catch the first sign of the attack that was clearly building. Finally, at 0155, the Japanese charged forward along the one route most likely to let them break through the perimeter—a natural causeway that joined the ridgeline defended by 2/1 and the higher ground inland.

At the point the enemy chose to assault, the lines of Company G formed a narrow salient. Japanese mortars and machine guns poured their fire ahead of the attackers, but in vain. The first thrust was beaten back with the help of the battalion's 60mm and 81mm mortars, and Company G's reserve platoon of artillerymen was rushed up to bolster the line. A second Japanese assault carried one of Company H's machine gun positions, but a counterattack by a mixed force of heavy weapons crewmen and artillerymen won it back. After this repulse, the ardor of the enemy troops cooled perceptibly, and two further attacks were blunted by Marine

[32] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase II, Part II, Green Beach Landing; *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl—I;* CO, Det, 2d ESB Rept to CG, 2d ESB, dtd 20Jan44, Subj: Ops CTF 76 LT 21 (Green Beach), in *ALAMO G-3 Jnl No. 19;* Maj Theodore R. Galysh ltr to CMC, dtd 16Feb52; OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Amphibian Engineers;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*.

[33] LtCol Robert Hall ltr to CMC, dtd 4Mar52.

fire and stopped in front of the lines. Toward dawn, the Japanese fire slacked until, by 0700, it had died away completely. The cost of this victory to 2/1 and its attached units was 6 men killed and 17 wounded.

Mop-up patrols found 89 enemy dead sprawled amongst the Marine positions and in the forest to the front. Five prisoners, all of them dazed and some wounded, were seized. No other wounded Japanese were sighted, and it appeared that the remnants of the attacking force had fled south. The prisoners identified their units as elements of the *3d* and *4th Companies* of *1/53*, and an enemy officer candidate, who surrendered during the day, estimated the attacking strength at 116 men. From intelligence gained later in the battle for western New Britain, it appears that the few men who escaped unhurt from the attack on 2/1 were ordered into the fight to contain the Marines driving southeast toward Borgen Bay.

On New Year's morning, torpedo boats which had patrolled from Grass Point to Cape Bach during the night took 10 of the most seriously wounded Marines and the enemy prisoners back to New Guinea.[34] The ammunition supplies depleted during the fight on the 30th were replenished in an air drop by Fifth Air Force bombers on the 3d. Although almost all signs pointed to a virtual abandonment of the west coast by Japanese troops, Lieutenant Colonel Masters could not chance being caught short. Through the week following the enemy assault, there was scattered opposition to Marine patrols but nothing that indicated the presence of large units.

[34] ComMTBRons, SeventhFlt (CTG 70.1) WarD, Dec43, dtd 27Jan44 (COA, NHD), entry of 31Dec43.

An enemy artillery piece located about 2,500 yards east of the Tauali beachhead began firing ranging shots on the 31st. While the aim of Japanese gunners was atrocious—all of their rounds fell in the sea—Masters wasted no time getting his own artillery in position to reply. Battery H's crews used block and tackle to manhandle their guns to the top of a precipitous bluff that overhung the beach. On the 1st, when the Marine 75s began firing, the enemy gun fell silent. The pack howitzers then furnished support to the patrols that sought the enemy on all sides of the perimeter.

In response to an order from division, Masters sent a small detachment to Dorf Point on 2 January to guide Company E of 2/5 into the STONEFACE position for an overnight stay. The 5th Marines' company found no evidence of Japanese in any strength during its march from the airdrome. The enemy troops that had retreated from the airfield defenses seized by Combat Teams A and B had avoided the coastal track and used the trail that led over the eastern shoulder of Mt. Talawe. Under the circumstances, there was no longer any need for the trail block at Tauali, and General Rupertus issued orders for 2/1 to secure and rejoin.

The movement of Masters' command began on 5 January, when four loaded LCMs, one towing an LCVP, made the trip from Green to Blue Beach. The passage was a rough one for both crews and passengers. The heaving seas of the monsoon season battered the small craft, but the amphibian engineers proved equal to the feat of seamanship required to bring the boats in safely. On succeeding days, most of them equally rain- and wind-swept, LCMs from the detachment at the

Yellow Beaches and those assigned to the STONEFACE Group shuttled supplies, ammunition, and equipment from the west to the north coast. By the 11th, most of 2/1's bulk stores and heavy gear had been transferred, and the main body of the reinforced battalion marched north toward the airdrome. A small rear-guard working party loaded the last supplies during the early afternoon. At about 1600, when several shots were fired from the jungle south of what had been the Marine lines, the remaining troops embarked. To discourage any venturesome Japanese who might want to fire on the boats as they withdrew, the LCMs sprayed Green Beach with machine gun fire as a parting present.

The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines rejoined its regiment on the 12th, after spending a wet and thoroughly miserable night in a bivouac area near Airfield No. 1. On 13 January, Masters' battalion occupied positions near the shore within Combat Team B's sector of the airdrome perimeter. With the successful completion of its mission, the STONEFACE Group was dissolved.