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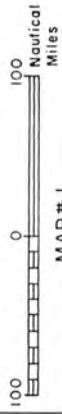
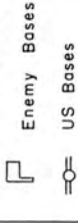
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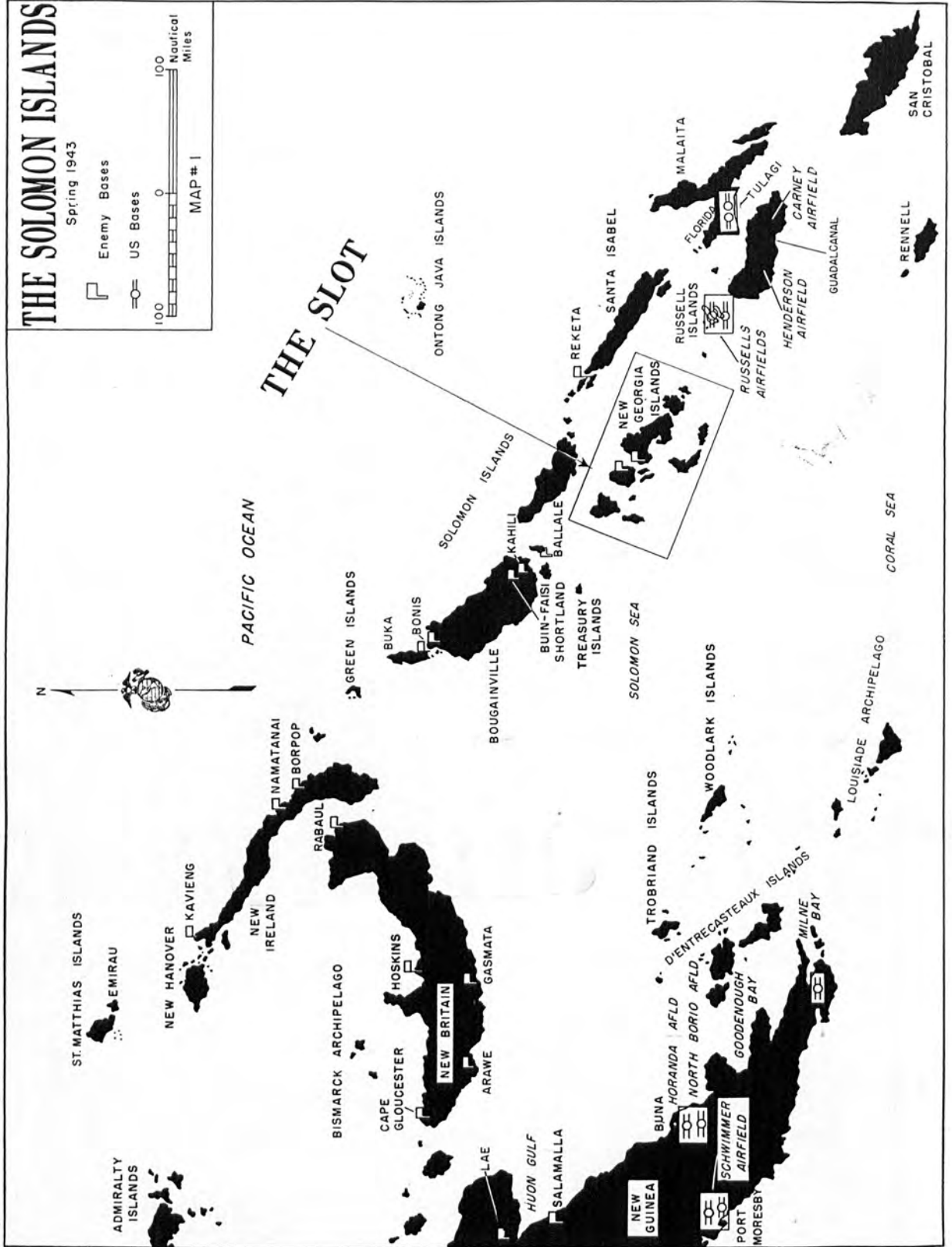
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# THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Spring 1943



MAP # 1





... U.S. Marine Corps.

**MARINES IN THE**

# **CENTRAL SOLOMONS**



**HISTORICAL BRANCH**

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**U. S. MARINE CORPS**

**Major John N. Rentz, USMCR**

# **1952**

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COVER PICTURE: Munda strip, prize won by XIV Corps, as seen from atop Bibilo Hill in late August 1943. In a little over a week after its capture, this strip became a base for ComAirSols planes operating against enemy installations in the Northern Solomons. Seabees, working in the foreground, soon made Munda the major operating airfield in the Solomons. Its occupation enabled South Pacific Forces to move into Bougainville before the end of the year.



## Foreword

---

In the grand strategy of the Pacific War, the Central Solomons operation constituted only a short step in the over-all advance on Japan. But in the neutralization of Rabaul, Japan's key holding in her "Southeastern Area," this campaign played a vital role.

By early 1943 the Central Solomons area might be described as an amphibious no man's land lying between Rabaul and the new Allied citadel of Guadalcanal, across which the two antagonists exchanged air and naval blows. The Japanese, by increasing the strength of their garrisons in New Georgia, had already begun their effort to control this strategic area. The Allied campaign that followed was designed to drive them out and establish a forward base from which Rabaul could be brought under constant assault.

It is a source of extreme pride to me that those Marines who participated in the Central Solomons operations acquitted themselves with such distinction. Despite the most adverse weather, terrain and climate, the enemy was driven out and the mission finally accomplished. Growing out of this campaign was an extremely significant sense of mutual admiration between the Army, Navy and Marine troops involved.

LEMUEL C. SHEPHERD, JR.  
GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS



## Preface

---

MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS is the eleventh in a series of historical monographs treating Marine operations during the recent war with Japan. When this series has been completed, it will be assembled into the Marine Corps' Operational History of World War II in a fashion that will preserve the chronological and strategic continuity of the war.

This study concerns those Solomon Islands actions fought between the Guadalcanal and Bougainville areas. It deals primarily with Marine units in the belief that the activities of other services are more properly covered by their own historical studies. Army and Navy operations performed are treated only as they affected Marine Corps contributions to the eventual victory.

Many officers and men who participated in the Central Solomons campaign have provided information or clarified evidence obscured by inadequate records. To cite each individual by name would be nearly impossible. However, grateful acknowledgement is made to the Office of Naval Records and History, Navy Department, and to the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, for their assistance in furnishing material pertaining to the activities of their particular services. To compile the explanatory and illustrative facts and figures presented in these pages, Mr. Gerald Diamond performed the necessary research tasks involved. Cartographic work was done by the Mapping and Reproduction Section, Marine Corps Schools. All photographs are official Marine Corps unless otherwise specified.

It is hoped that this study may be improved, elaborated upon where desirable, and otherwise corrected. Criticism therefore is invited. Comments and additional material will be incorporated before the monograph is included in the final Operational History. All correspondence concerning MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS should be addressed to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps (Code: A03D), Washington 25, D. C.

T. A. WORNHAM  
BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS  
ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF, G-3



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## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER I

# Introduction

### SOLOMON ISLANDS GEOGRAPHY

WITH THE LANDING of the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Tanambogo and Gavutu in August 1942, a whole new series of place names entered the pages of American military history.<sup>1</sup> The world's press found a new, almost unknown area of the globe on which it could focus its attention for the next 20 months. This area was the Solomon Islands. Here Americans and their Allies fought Japanese soldiers and sailors in one of the bitterest, most difficult campaigns in modern military annals.

The Solomon Islands, a 600-mile-long double, parallel chain lying between the Bismarck Archipelago in the northwest and the New Hebrides in the southeast, represent the spiny backbone of two long-submerged mountain ranges that in some prehistoric era may have formed the northern shore of a then landlocked Coral Sea. In later ages coral islets and reefs grew around the periphery of the larger calcareous and volcanic peaks that jutted up from the water. As geologic years passed, the action of rain, wind and tide caused the mountain slopes to incline gradually to the sea, where beaches of coral sand are washed by warm, tropical water.

<sup>1</sup> For the official account of Marine participation in this initial World War II offensive, see John L. Zimmerman, *The Guadalcanal Campaign*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949.

The easily navigable deep water dividing the northeastern from the southwestern segments of the chain presents an obvious and partially sheltered sea route between the Southern Solomons and the Bismarcks. That particular area from Bougainville and the Shortlands in the north to San Cristobal in the south became known in World War II as "The Slot." (See Map # 1.)

Seven large island groups comprise the principal components of the Solomons chains—a rugged, jungle-covered land surface of approximately 14,600 square miles. At the beginning of the Pacific War, this land of copra, trochus shell and ivory nuts supported an estimated 500 white men, 200 Chinese and 94,700 Melanesian natives.<sup>2</sup>

Chief town of the Solomons is Tulagi. There the British Resident Commissioner for all the Solomons south of Bougainville had his headquarters at the time of the Japanese invasion. And there United States Marines won fame and glory.<sup>3</sup> All other towns worthy of a name are simply collections of grass shacks, usually located near the water's edge where they were easy of access to the all too infrequent inter-island trading vessels with their anxiously awaited cargoes of trade tobacco and fascinating trinkets.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook*, New York: MacMillan Company, 1945, 280.

<sup>3</sup> See Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, 26-33.

## THE SCENE OF BATTLE

In the center of the southwestern branch of the Solomons, between meridians 156° and 158°, lies the New Georgia group. This group, about 130 miles long and 40 miles wide, comprises New Georgia, Kolombangara, Vella Lavella, Rendova, Vangunu and literally hundreds of smaller islands. The group centers on the southwest tip of New Georgia at Munda Point, some 1,000 miles northeast of Townsville, Australia, and approximately 675 miles east of Port Moresby, New Guinea. Munda Point is about 170 miles west-northwest of Tulagi and some 400 miles southeast of Rabaul, principal town in the Bismarck Archipelago. About 125 miles southeast of the group lies a cluster of small islands known as the Russells, a stepping stone between New Georgia and Guadalcanal.

In the New Georgia group numerous symmetrical, volcanic cones, with cloud-obscured summits, reach from 3,000 to 5,000 feet into the air. River-filled mangrove swamps, studded with coral outcroppings and matted with rotting vegetation, fill the surrounding valleys. An almost impenetrable jungle blankets most of the land area. Through this jungle natives have pushed a few trails or tracks, often passable only in dry weather, that skirt the swamps and pass along coral ridges or cling to the sides of precipitous, volcanic cliffs.

An extensive coral barrier reef partially encircles the group. Between the reefs and the islands are extensive lagoons,<sup>4</sup> shallow and encumbered with coral islets and coral pillars known as niggerheads. Marovo Lagoon, separating New Georgia Island from Vangunu, is probably the largest of its kind in the Solomons. Two other large lagoons, Tokovai and Grassi, lie on the main island's northern and northeastern coast. To the south of the main island is Roviana (Rubiana) Lagoon, approximately 30 miles long and from one to three miles wide. Although this lagoon is filled with

<sup>4</sup> Lagoon, as used here, means a shallow lake or inlet of small dimensions found among Solomon Islands reefs. Such lagoons differ greatly from the extensive deep water lagoons found in Central Pacific atolls.

shoals, and at low tide accessible only through Onaiavisi Entrance, natives have erected on its islands and shores the oldest settlements in the group. Baraulu and Dume Islands flank Onaiavisi Entrance, while Sasavele Islet, just inside the lagoon, commands the channel. Westward of the lagoon is Munda Bar, an extension of the barrier reef, which is generally covered by approximately two fathoms of water. Because of heavy swells in this area even small boats ground when attempting to approach Munda Point directly from the sea.

Across Blanche Channel and some seven and one-half miles southeast of Munda Point is Rendova Island, shaped like the haunch and hind leg of a dog. Rendova, as all other islands in the New Georgia group, is surrounded by coral reefs, which along the north coast form a cove or lagoon known as Renard Sound. There ships gain access to a sheltered harbor through two deep-water passages known as Western Entrance and Renard Entrance. Kuru Kuru, Bau and Kokorana, the largest and most prominent islands in Rendova's northern reef, flank these entrances.

To the southeast of New Georgia lie Vangunu and Gatukai in seeming extension of the main island, while to the northwest Kolombangara and Vella Lavella resemble a colon placed above an exclamation point. Kula and Vella Gulfs separate the three islands, with Arundel Island forming the southern base of Kula Gulf and Gizo Island capping Vella Gulf. (See Map # 2.)

All the islands of the New Georgia group have irregular coastlines, pierced by inlets sometimes given the complimentary title of "harbor" or "anchorage," and often dotted with coconut palms and grass shacks. On the New Georgia shore of Kula Gulf the most important of these water features are Rice Anchorage, Enogai Inlet, Bairoko Harbor, Sunday Inlet and Diamond Narrows. In the latter the waters of Kula Gulf meet those of the Solomon Sea.

Into this hodgepodge of islands, reefs, gulfs, lagoons and channels American armed might moved against the Japanese aggressor in the midmonths of 1943. Here the United States and its allies would battle not only a human



**OBJECTIVE RABAUL UNDER ATTACK** by B-25's of ComAirSols Bomber Command. This strategic town became the vortex of attention for south and southwest Pacific planners in 1942 and early 1943. Lakunai, one of Rabaul's five airdromes, lies on the peninsula at the top center of this picture. (Air Force Photo.)

enemy but also tropical heat, omnivorous jungle and unceasing rain until all were conquered and the war passed to the north.<sup>5</sup>

### THE RABAUL REDOUBT

Situated west and slightly north of the Solomons lies the Bismarck Archipelago, a group of islands similar in configuration and terrain but larger and not so numerous as the Solomons. New Britain Island, biggest of the Bismarcks, became the scene of a large-scale campaign fought during World War II.<sup>6</sup> At

<sup>5</sup> All the foregoing geographic information unless otherwise cited has been extracted from Robson, *op cit.*, or USN Hydrographic Office, *Sailing Directions For The Pacific Islands*, Vol. 1, 4th ed., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938.

<sup>6</sup> See Frank O. Hough, *The Campaign on New Britain*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952.

the extreme northeastern tip is Rabaul, site of government for Australia's Pacific mandate, which included the Northern Solomons, the Bismarcks, and Eastern New Guinea.<sup>7</sup>

Rabaul sits on the shores of Simpson Harbor, one of the Southwest Pacific's better anchorages, only 436 miles from Port Moresby and 570 miles from Guadalcanal. Thus the nation holding Rabaul is in an excellent position to exercise military domination over the northern coast of New Guinea, the Solomons chain, the Bismarck Archipelago and all waters bordering on those area.

Clearly, the Japanese high command recognized the strategic importance of Rabaul. As

<sup>7</sup> When the war came to Rabaul in 1942, the Australians were just in the process of moving their government site to Lae.

early in the "Greater East Asia War" as 23 January 1942, Japanese invaders attacked and drove out the town's small Australian garrison. Within a short time the enemy had improved the harbor, making it a major forward operating base for their fleet units. Meanwhile they added to the existing two Australian airfields by constructing three all-weather airfields from which their planes could maintain a continuous aerial umbrella over their planned successive moves toward the south.<sup>8</sup>

Upon completing the capture of Rabaul, the Japanese moved slowly, step by step, into the Solomons and New Guinea, so that by 3 May 1942 they had established themselves at Tulagi and were threatening Port Moresby and Milne Bay. By this time Rabaul had replaced Truk, Japan's prewar military bastion, as the citadel of the Pacific.

Throughout the months marking their southward advance, the Japanese developed Rabaul into the nerve center of their outlying, newly seized positions in the Solomons and New Guinea. As they prepared Rabaul as a springboard for the invasion of Australia,<sup>9</sup> they took measures to protect their citadel from direct counteraction on the part of the Allies. Each of the Solomons being within fighter plane range of most of its neighbors, the enemy constructed forward landing strips at Buka (northernmost of the Solomons), in the Treasuries, the Shortlands and on Guadalcanal. They established garrisons on islands in the Northern, Central and Southern Solomons, and in the Bismarck Archipelago to intercept any attacks directed at Rabaul before the attacker could reach his target.

In August, when the 1st Marine Division

<sup>8</sup> Only four of these fields were operational. (USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 12.)

<sup>9</sup> Some authorities differ as to the purpose of Japanese seizure of Rabaul. Many American students stoutly maintain that the Japanese never intended to launch an invasion of Australia, as indicated here. But USSBS, *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 5n, 46 and 113, and ComSoPac CIC Item #718 (and innumerable other CIC Items) definitely indicate that Australia was a target. A comparison of Gen Imamura's statement (made after the war) on page 87 of the first source with his statement of 7 April 1943, quoted in the second source, indicates that the general is guilty either of falsehood or forgetfulness or both.

invaded Guadalcanal, the enemy occupied strategic points in the New Georgia group to establish small-boat refuges and troop-staging bases for a contemplated counteroffensive. By November the Allies had inflicted a severe defeat upon the Japanese in land, sea and air battles in and around the Southern Solomons. The enemy, therefore, decided to prepare for an all out attempt to retake Guadalcanal and dispose of this threat to Rabaul. Accordingly, on 21 November 1942, the enemy moved into Munda Point to build an airfield intended to provide advanced air support for the proposed operation.

Japanese transports, destroyers, submarines and troop-carrying barges plowed up and down the Slot, meanwhile, carrying supplies and reinforcements to their besieged garrisons in the Southern Solomons. Incessant allied air attacks and the short cruising range of the smaller craft sometimes forced the enemy vessels to lie-to in refuges in the Central Solomons.

## COASTWATCHER ACTIVITIES

Allied commanders in Australia, New Caledonia and Guadalcanal were never unaware of Japanese movements. A few brave men kept the Allies enlightened with a flow of information concerning flights of enemy planes, tracks of enemy ships and activities of enemy troops. Such reports usually enabled American land, sea and air commanders to divine the Japanese intention and take prompt remedial action.

This phenomenon had its inception long before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Immediately after World War I, the Australian government grappled with the problem of protecting itself in the event of a war with Japan. Much of Australia and its island possessions to the north is uninhabited or so sparsely inhabited that an enemy could operate undetected in those areas for long periods. Australian Naval Intelligence, therefore, devised a scheme whereby trusted citizens, living on New Guinea, in the Bismarck Archipelago or in the Solomons, would—in the event of war—observe and report any enemy activity in their vicinity. The government furnished small radios for this purpose. For the most

part government officers, traders, planters and missionaries were selected for this task.<sup>10</sup>

In 1929 the New Zealand Navy likewise set up a coastwatching scheme employing volunteer reserve officers. Operating under the New Zealand Naval Board, these officers were assigned responsibility for territories in the Eastern Pacific. The Naval Board coordinated its coastwatching activities with those of Australian Naval Intelligence, thus providing adequate coverage of all British Empire possessions and mandates in the Pacific Ocean. By 1935 the New Zealanders, too, had decided to utilize the services of trusted civilians. When World War II flared in Europe in 1939, coastwatchers occupied 58 previously assigned posts reaching from the Solomons in the west to Pitcairn in the east.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of the first Japanese incursions into the Bismarcks and Solomons in 1941, the Australian and New Zealand coastwatchers were already operating on a 24-hour basis. As the enemy pushed southward, white men living in the British portions of the Solomons, loath to see the British government leave its territory, volunteered their services to the coastwatching system (known by code-name FERDINAND). These men elected to remain behind in the bush with faithful native followers when the Japanese moved in, and they became the symbols of British authority for the islands.

The Resident Commissioner for the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, William Sydney Marchant, became the acknowledged leader of this intrepid group of new volunteers. At the outbreak of the Pacific war, Marchant, assisted by Lieutenant D. S. Macfarlan, Australian Naval Intelligence Officer for the Solomons, quickly organized small coastwatching units, to augment the regularly established groups, and assigned them areas of responsibility.

Leading these units were Marchant's assistants, the Administrative Officers. In more peaceful times the representatives of the British Government on the various islands, they

now received military commissions from the Australian Government to give them official status if captured. Donald Kennedy, District Officer for the Western Solomons, operated first on Santa Isabel and later at Segi Point, New Georgia; Martin Clemens, stationed on Guadalcanal, did a magnificent job assisting the American forces that landed there; Bill Bengough served on Malaita, Michael Forster on San Cristobal, and Colin Wilson in the Santa Cruz Islands.

FERDINAND itself, as set up in this area before the war by Australia, was composed of experienced bushmen commissioned either in the Australian Navy or Air Force. It was under the immediate direction of Hugh Mackenzie, who first operated at Rabaul and later in the vicinity of Vila, Kolombangara. In the Central Solomons Mackenzie had stationed—among others—Flight Officer J. A. Corrigan in the vicinity of Rice Anchorage, Sub-Lieutenants Henry Josselyn and J. H. Keenan on Vella Lavella, A. R. Evans on Kolombangara and Flight Lieutenants Dick Horton and R. A. Robinson on Rendova. On these men, and others like them, fell the responsibility of reporting enemy land, air and naval movements and of organizing among the natives a system of resistance to Japanese domination of the Solomons.<sup>12</sup> Their exploits are legend.

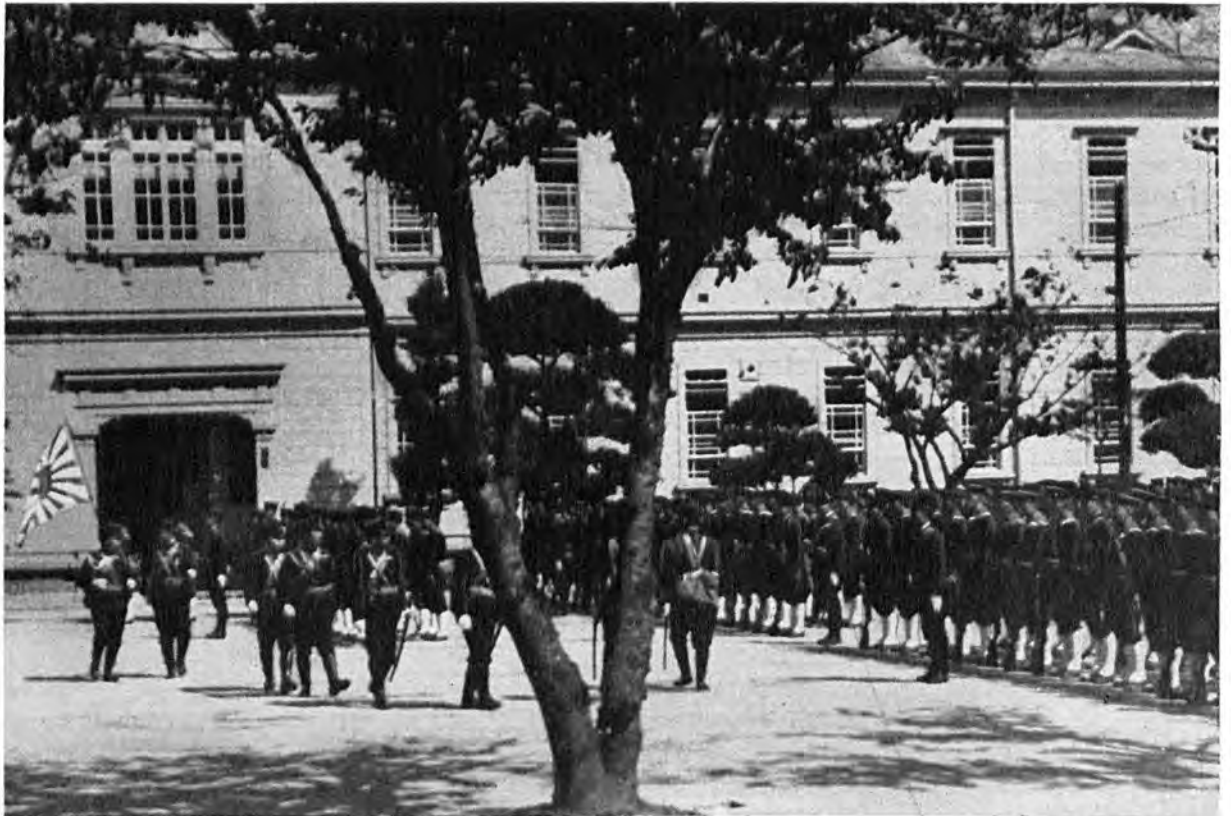
From their vantage points within enemy-held territory the coastwatchers also reported the enemy's progress in building airfields and boat refuges. Moreover, they conducted raids from time to time on the enemy's encampments or ambushed his patrols. By virtue of the information they passed to Allied commanders on Guadalcanal, American airmen compiled record scores in the gigantic air battles fought in the skies above Henderson Field.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, shortly after the landing forces had secured a contested beach, groups of friendly natives at the heels of a nearby coastwatcher would come smiling into the newly won beachhead to assist the Americans in driving the hated enemy from their island.

<sup>10</sup> Eric A. Feldt, *The Coastwatchers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> D. O. W. Hall, *Coastwatchers*, Wellington, New Zealand: Department of Internal Affairs (War History Branch), 1951, 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 78 *et seq.*; Central Office of Information, *Among Those Present*, London: HM Stationery Office, 1946, 7, 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, 147.



**KURE 6TH SNLF STANDS INSPECTION** at its home barracks before embarking for the Midway operation. After Japan's defeat in that battle, this force was deployed to the Central Solomons. (Photograph courtesy of the Morison History Project)

Invariably amphibious scouting patrols contacted the coastwatcher stationed nearest to their targets to get information and assistance in the performance of their mission. To the coastwatchers many a downed Allied pilot or shipwrecked sailor owes his life. Coastwatchers performed all these functions in territory infested with Japanese, where sometimes the loyalty and dependability of the local natives was questionable.

### INITIAL STRATEGIC SITUATION

Various unforeseen considerations faced American planners the moment Japan committed the world to a war in the Pacific. During the inter-war years naval strategists realistically had faced the possibility of a Japanese attack on the United States and its possessions in the Pacific. Accordingly, they had devised ways and means of attacking Japan, not for the purpose of waging war *per se*, but to defend ourselves and to halt aggression. In the 20-year

period following World War I the strategists formulated a series of basic war plans in which each possible enemy was named by a color. The series was known by the term RAINBOW, and Japan was given the designation ORANGE.

In December 1941 the plan then extant was Joint Basic War Plan RAINBOW 5, based on Navy War Plan 46, an outgrowth of a pre-World War I proposal of Captain Earl H. Ellis, USMC, then an instructor at the Navy's war college at Newport.<sup>14</sup> These war plans envisaged an approach to Japan by following a route from Hawaii to the Marshalls, thence in turn to the Carolines, the Marianas, the Palaus, the Bonins, and finally the main islands of the empire itself.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Newport, Naval War College, *The Advanced Base Problem*, 1913. (Capt Ellis). *Vide* Section I, 14 and Section II, 11.

<sup>15</sup> CNO Tentative War Plan for use against Japan, 547, October 1919; MarCorps Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia, 712, 23Jul21; Joint Basic War Plan RAINBOW 5 (Navy WPL 46).

Japan's southward sweep in the early days of the war forced modification of the American planners' basic concepts. Australia and New Zealand, both drawn into the vortex of war, were now available as bases for an Allied offensive. It was incumbent upon the United States, moreover, to protect the line of supply and communications with those Allies. Japanese moves through the Solomons and New Guinea not only posed a threat to these Allied nations, but also seriously threatened to sever that life line. As early as 6 March 1942 it occurred to Admiral Ernest J. King, the Chief of Naval Operations, that with Australia in the war a new, additional route of approach to the Japanese homeland from the south presented itself.<sup>16</sup>

Ten days later the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) accepted this contention for planning purposes. On 30 March they assigned responsibility for conduct of combat operations in the Pacific to two commands: The Pacific Ocean Areas (divided into three subcommands—North, Central and South) and the Southwest

Pacific Area. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, was given command of the Pacific Ocean Area, while General Douglas MacArthur, recently arrived in Australia from the U. S. defeat in the Philippines, was assigned the Southwest Pacific Area.<sup>17</sup> Early in April Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, as a subordinate of Nimitz, received command of the South Pacific Area.<sup>18</sup>

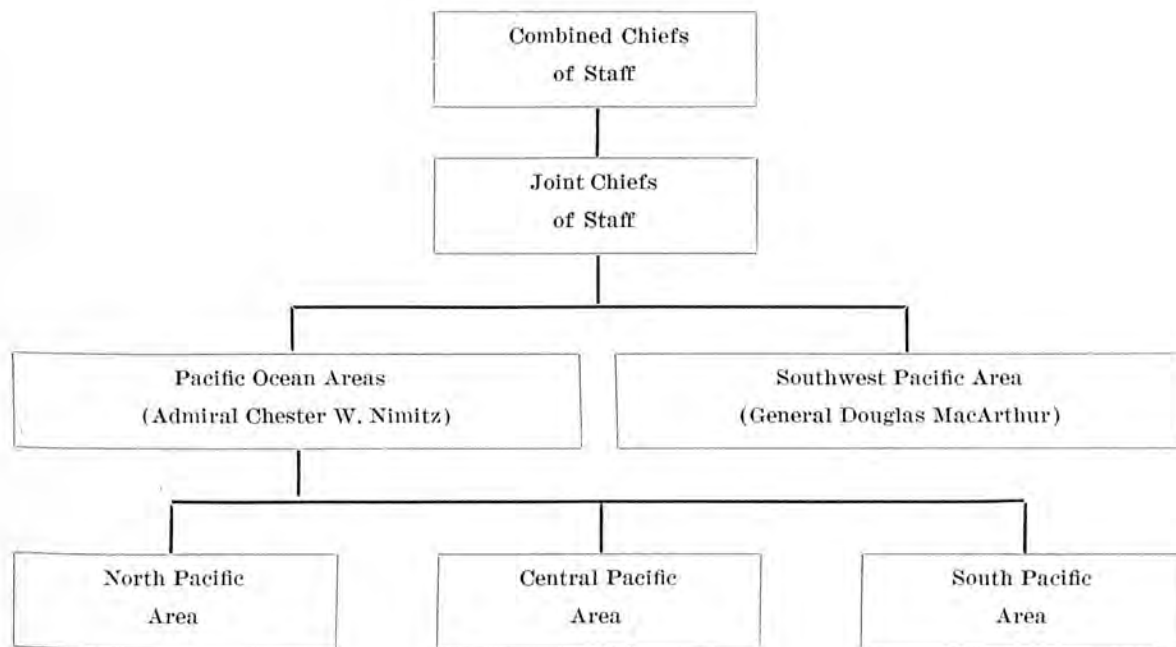
Meanwhile, the Japanese continued their southward thrusts to strengthen their southern approaches and to prepare for further invasions of Allied territory. By 3 May, as we have seen, they moved into Tulagi, observed by coastwatchers on Guadalcanal, who reported the fact to Allied headquarters in Australia. Although the battle of the Coral Sea (4-8 May) slowed the enemy somewhat, Japanese forces in the Solomons area still posed a serious threat to the Allied life line to Australia. Throughout the following month the Japanese

<sup>16</sup> Adm Richmond Kelly Turner, speech to National War College, 23Feb51; JCS Meeting, 16Mar42.

<sup>17</sup> JCS, 30Mar42. The boundary between the South Pacific Area and the Southwest Pacific Area was set at 160° east meridian.

<sup>18</sup> Adm Robert L. Ghormley Memoirs, *ms.*, 6-8.

#### PACIFIC COMMAND STRUCTURE







**ADMIRALS NIMITZ AND HALSEY** began planning for South Pacific Force participation in the TOENAILS operation early in 1943. Frequent face-to-face conferences, such as the one pictured here, ironed out many of the difficulties faced in the initial planning stages. (Navy Photo.)

command at Truk continued to strengthen Rabaul for defense and prepare it as a base for further operations toward the south. But a tremendous defeat suffered near Midway (3-4 June) forced the Japanese to alter their intentions. Proposed operations against New Caledonia, New Zealand and the Fijis were now postponed and the enemy potential at Rabaul increased.<sup>19</sup> Rabaul, the bulwark of Japanese southern perimeter defenses, quickly became the key to Japanese operations and similarly became a consideration of prime importance to Allied planning.

A campaign against Rabaul would have a two-fold purpose: First, it would shift the Allies from the defensive to a limited offensive designed to blunt and turn back the forward prongs that Japan had thrust southward, thus protecting the United States-Australia life line; second, seizure of Rabaul would not only deny its use to the Japanese but also provide a base for further Allied operations into the Marshalls, Carolines, Marianas and Philippines. Although an approach toward Japan

<sup>19</sup> For Marine participation in the battle of Midway see Robert D. Heintz, *Marines at Midway*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948, 28-42. For a discussion of strategy, tactics and operations at Coral Sea and at Midway see Samuel E. Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950, *passim*.

from the south was only one of many considerations in the Pacific war, by the end of June Rabaul had become a *sine qua non* objective, a focal point for the attention of Allied planners.

On 2 July 1942 the Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that Rabaul would be the principal target for Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas, and that moves in that direction from both areas would be undertaken immediately.<sup>20</sup> Code name for the operation was WATCHTOWER.

The campaign to reduce Rabaul began on 7 August 1942 when the 1st Marine Division landed on Tulagi and Guadalcanal. For the next six months the Southern Solomons was the scene of violent conflict as land, sea and air battles raged through the area.<sup>21</sup> Under Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., who on 18 October 1942 relieved Admiral Ghormley as South Pacific commander (ComSoPac), the Allies, after mid-November, won a series of great victories. As the Japanese were inexorably pushed back, they were forced to the expedient of supplying their garrisons in the Southern Solomons by fast destroyer runs down the Slot. This tactic, dubbed the "Tokyo Express" by American Marines, soldiers and sailors, cost the enemy heavily, for sharp-eyed coastwatchers forewarned the ubiquitous Allied airmen of the enemy's approach and Japanese vessels were blasted unceasingly.

As repeated Japanese attacks were defeated, the Americans found they could build up their ground forces on Guadalcanal faster than the Japanese could reinforce theirs. About the last day of 1942,<sup>22</sup> Japanese Imperial Headquarters ordered Lieutenant General Hitoshi Imamura,<sup>23</sup> the senior army commander at Rabaul, to aban-

<sup>20</sup> U. S. Chiefs of Staff Agreement, Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, 2Jul42.

<sup>21</sup> See Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, *passim* and Morison, *op. cit.*, 264-296, for a discussion of the Guadalcanal campaign. John Miller, jr., *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, Washington: Department of the Army, 1949, contains a penetrating and exhaustive analysis of the strategic background to this conflict.

<sup>22</sup> USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 9, says about Christmas Day; Miller, *op. cit.*, 338, puts this date at 4 January 1943.

<sup>23</sup> Commander-in-Chief Eighth Army Area, comprising the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Armies. (USSBS, *op. cit.*, 84-87.)

don plans for reinforcing or retaking Guadalcanal and to concentrate on holding a line stretching through New Georgia and New Guinea. Within six weeks, on 8 February 1943, Radio Tokyo could announce with reasonable accuracy that Vice Admiral Jinichi Kusaka's Southeastern Fleet had successfully evacuated Lieutenant General Haruyochi Hyakutake's Seventeenth Army from Guadalcanal right under American noses.<sup>24</sup>

During the strenuous six-month campaign for Guadalcanal, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had issued few directives affecting the war in the South and Southwest Pacific. Meanwhile, however, planning officers in those two commands proceeded with the development of Operation WATCHTOWER—the detailed plans for Rabaul's destruction. With the Southern Solomons now unquestionably secured for the Allies, the high command prepared for further advances up the Solomons Ladder toward Rabaul. Between the ultimate target and the front line lay the Central and Northern Solomons. In this area the Japanese-held islands of the New Georgia group presented the most immediate barrier. The next campaign, therefore, would be fought in the Central Solomons.<sup>25</sup>

## THE CONCEPT

The war was nearly a year old before the United States, faced with a deficiency of aircraft carriers and assault shipping, could undertake the long over-water movements that marked our later operations. For South and Southwest Pacific forces, therefore, the general scheme of maneuver had gradually evolved into a systematic advance of the land-based bomber line toward Rabaul by improvement of friendly bases with the greatest possible economy of

<sup>24</sup> The commands of Kusaka and Imamura were separate and distinct, both officers reporting independently to separate higher headquarters. However, as the general and admiral were personal friends, they cooperated for their common good. (USSBS, *op. cit.*, 88; Interview with Lt Roger Pineau, USNR, 27Sep51)

<sup>25</sup> USSBS, *Campaigns of the Pacific War*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947, 47–48, hereinafter cited as *Campaigns*; Ernest J. King, *U. S. Navy at War*, Washington: U. S. Navy Dept., 1946; Wm F. Halsey and J. Bryan, III, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1947, 108.



**LIEUTENANT GENERAL HITOSHI IMAMURA**, Japanese Eighth Area Army commander, established headquarters at Rabaul in December 1942. His authority, extended over the Solomons, Bismareks and the eastern half of New Guinea, was confined solely to Japanese Army Forces stationed therein. (Photograph courtesy of the Morison History Project.)

force. In view of the paucity of shipping and the ever-present threat of Japanese counter-measures, Admiral Halsey and General MacArthur could plan no advances beyond the effective radius of land-based fighters. Moreover, without complete control of air and sea, bypassing operations, which might otherwise have isolated enemy bases and concentrations in the rear of our forward positions, were not yet practicable.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after the Joint Chiefs' decision of 2 July 1942, which gave him responsibility for

<sup>26</sup> JCS, Jan43; CCS, 56th Meeting, 14Jan43; ELKTON, 28Feb43; RENO I, 25Feb43; ELKTON III, 26Apr43. The latter three documents originated in MacArthur's headquarters. The ComSoPac and CinCPac War Diaries for 1942 and early 1943 repeatedly imply this view, while CinCSowesPac "Warning Orders for Operations," 30Apr43 treats the concept in detail.



**VICE ADMIRAL JINICHI KUSAKA**, commander in chief, Japanese Southeast Area Fleet, arrived in Rabaul on 8 October 1942 as commander of the Eleventh Air Fleet. He was elevated on 24 December to the higher command, which embraced his own Air Fleet, the Eighth Fleet, and all land-based naval forces in the "Southeast Area". (Photograph courtesy of the Morison History Project.)

the over-all direction of the Allied campaign against Rabaul, General MacArthur conceived the general plan eventually executed by American forces. This plan, known as ELKTON envisaged a step-by-step advance up the Solomons Ladder by South Pacific forces while Southwest Pacific forces approached along the New Guinea coast. At this time MacArthur believed that Rabaul could be assaulted by a relatively small force, so long as the Allies maintained air and naval superiority in the target area and two forces closed in on the target simultaneously from two different directions.

Although basically sound, ELKTON underwent many changes and modifications before receiving Joint Chiefs of Staff approval. Movements of Japanese forces, ever changing for-

tunes on the part of Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific, and combat developments in other parts of the world all had their effect.

Even to the intransigent Japanese, their continuing failure to establish air supremacy over the Southern Solomons during the early battles for Guadalcanal dictated new, decisive action. As has been seen, the enemy undertook construction of a forward airfield at Munda Point about 21 November. They hoped that they could utilize the new field advantageously for mounting innumerable strikes against the American positions to the south, or at least impeding our advance up the Solomons Ladder. The enemy selected this particular location because there—before the employment of later-developed shallow-draft landing craft and the perfection of Underwater Demolition Team operations—topography rendered invasion from the sea almost impossible. With little effort the area could be made easily defensible.

Within a week after the Japanese had begun work on the new strip, observant coastwatchers reported this activity to Allied headquarters. South Pacific reconnaissance planes began making daily flights over the area, but despite the fact that work was in progress the pilots could not perceive the well-camouflaged construction. And although Japanese naval pilots began using the strip for emergency purposes, Allied aerial reconnaissance failed to pinpoint its exact location until the strip was almost completed.<sup>27</sup>

About 4 December the South Pacific Aerial Photograph Interpretation Unit (Commander Robert S. Quackenbush, Jr.) made an amazing discovery. The reports of the coastwatchers had been correct: the Japanese had nearly completed an airstrip on Munda Point.

Japanese camouffleurs had performed wondrous feats in hiding their airfield. After forming a net of heavy wire cables strung beneath the tops of coconut trees, the Japanese engineers had cut out the trunks of many trees below the branches (fronds), leaving the tops in position supported by the cables. By 17 December, when 3,200 feet of coral surfacing

<sup>27</sup> CIC Item #598.

covered the 4,700-foot runway, the enemy rolled back their green canopy and abandoned further attempts at concealment.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly before finishing their Munda strip, the enemy began building an additional air base at the Vila River mouth near the southern tip of Kolombangara Island. These forward air bases, strongly defended by ground forces, presented an immediate barrier to the northward Allied advance and therefore probably would become the next major objectives in the South Pacific campaign toward Rabaul. Accordingly, General MacArthur's ELKTON plans faced some slight modifications. Before Rabaul could be assaulted, operations would have to be conducted in the Central Solomons.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Useful sources in the study of this deception include: SoPac Photo Interpretation Unit Report #42, 4Dec42; SoPacDaily Digest, December 1942; JICPOA Item #2687, translation of a Japanese Diary; Halsey, *op. cit.*, 154; Combat Narratives, 1-2; Karig, *Pacific War: Middle Phase*, 201; POA, Air Target Bulletin #21.

<sup>29</sup> Gen MacArthur's ELKTON plan operations in-

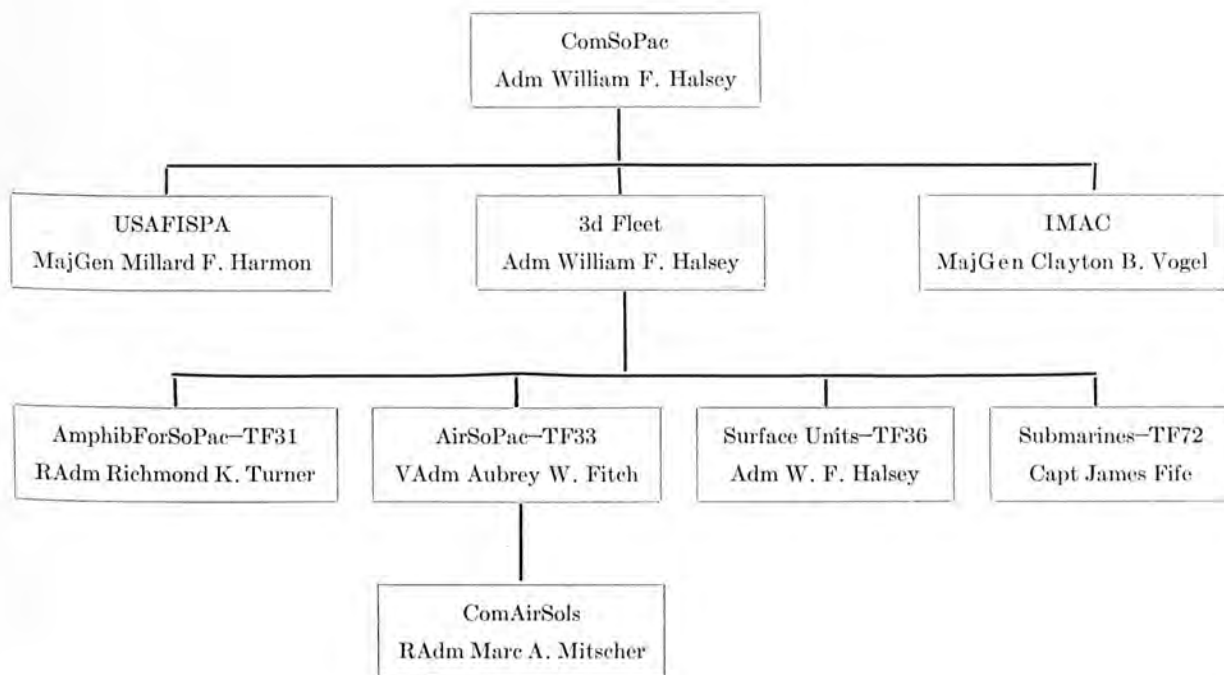
After the Battle of Tassafaronga (30 November 1942), Allied air operations continued with ever increasing severity despite heavy and frequent enemy raids on the Guadalcanal fields. The Japanese acquisition of the new strips in the Central Solomons only served to rouse Allied interest in that area.

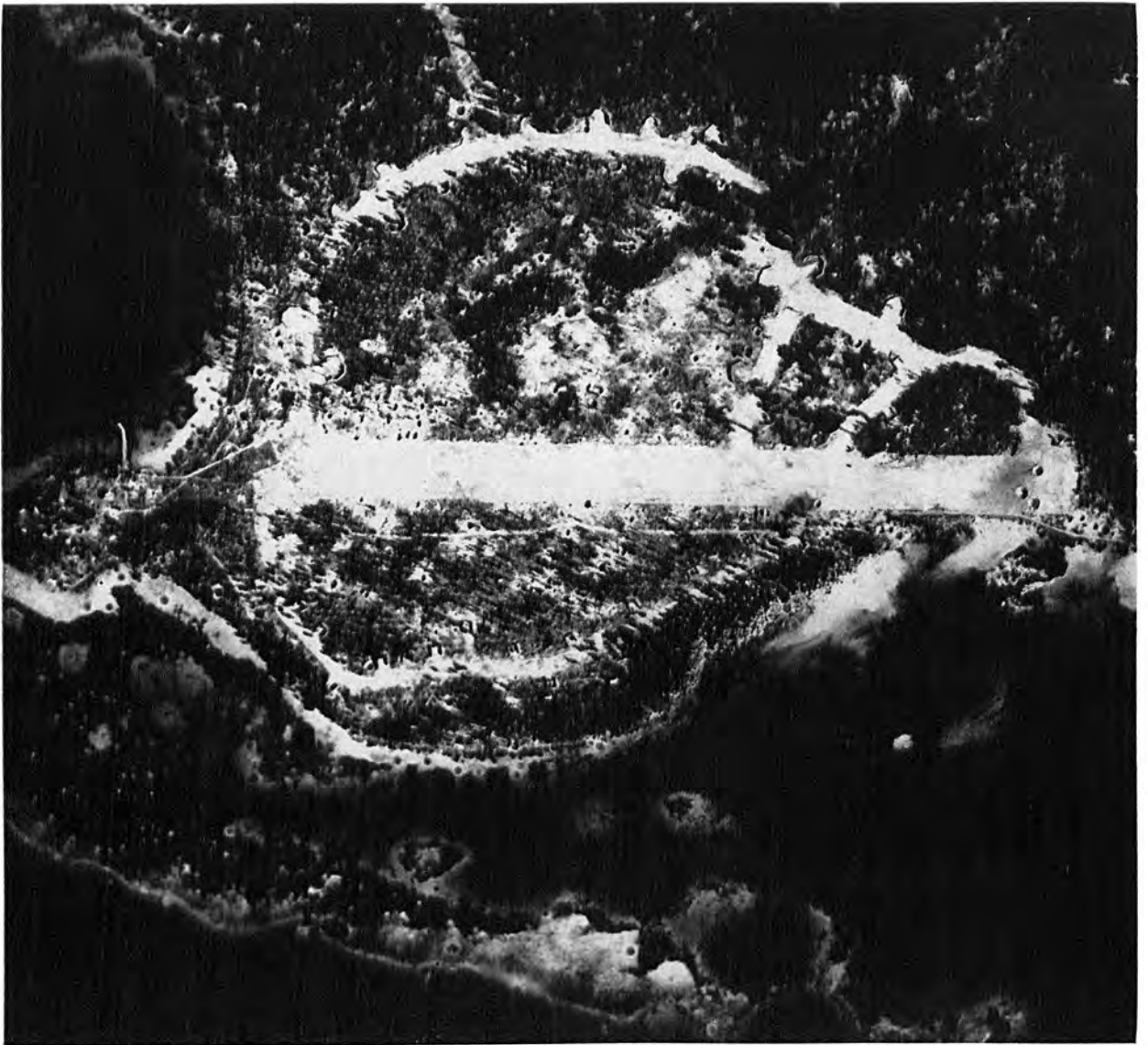
Even before the Guadalcanal campaign had come to a close, Admiral Halsey was eager to bring redoubt Rabaul under heavier attack immediately. In conformity with Joint Chiefs concepts and with MacArthur's ELKTON plan, he envisaged committing a small force to seizure of New Georgia as a base for further operations. South Pacific planners realized the obvious: If the Allies should move against New Georgia at once, before the enemy could provide strong defenses there, then the area could

cluded, among others: Russells, New Georgia, Vella Lavella (which later replaced Kolombangara in the original plan), and Bougainville in the Solomons—all to be executed by SoPac Forces; Huon Gulf, Woodlark, New Britain and New Ireland elsewhere—to be conducted by SoWesPac Forces.

#### SOUTH PACIFIC COMMAND STRUCTURE

30 June 1943





**TARGET: MUNDA POINT.** The Japanese stole a march on South Pacific Forces and built this airstrip in November 1942. From the time of its discovery in early December, until its seizure the following August, this strip received a daily pasting from South Pacific aircraft. Bomb craters pockmark the runway.

be seized with a minimal expenditure of effort.<sup>30</sup>

Three main considerations dictated selection of New Georgia as the target. First, the island group lay within the radius of fighter cover so essential for support of an amphibious operation; second, the ever-present danger of a surface attack by the very potent Japanese fleet required that our shipping scurry from exposed positions as quickly as possible, and such a

<sup>30</sup> ComSoPac memo, serial 00121c, 8Dec42; memo, serial 0070, 13Jan43; memo, serial 0062, 12Jan43; CTF-31 ltr to ComSoPac, serial 0036, 13Jan43.

maneuver would be reasonably simple inasmuch as New Georgia was so close to the Allied base at Tulagi; and third, the new airstrip constructed by the Japanese New Georgia garrison might be seized by friendly forces quite rapidly and utilized promptly with consonant economy of force. (See Map # 1.) Conversely, if the Japanese were permitted to use the new air base, then they might again challenge U. S. domination of the Southern Solomons, so arduously won in the expensive naval and air battles fought around Guadalcanal.

Before proceeding further in his planning for an attack on New Georgia, however, Admiral Halsey had to take one intermediate step. He must seize the Russell Islands.

### SEIZURE OF THE RUSSELLS

Early in their campaign to drive the Americans out of the Southern Solomons, the Japanese had occupied the Russell Islands, only 30 to 35 miles northwest of Cape Esperance, Guadalcanal, as a staging base and small boat refuge. Following their failure to evict the Allies, the enemy used the Russells as a staging base in the withdrawal of their defeated forces to positions in the Central and Northern Solomons. Although they displayed little evidence of resuming the offensive, the enemy continued to strengthen their holdings in the Solomons, the Bismarcks and in New Guinea. To South Pacific planners the Russells loomed as a possible strong point that could impede the Allied campaign against Rabaul. Enemy occupation of the Russells, moreover, posed a distinct threat to the Allied Guadalcanal position should the Japanese decide to utilize the area for staging an attack.

In implementation of the over-all scheme of advance as blueprinted by the ELKTON plan, Admiral Halsey, at the suggestion of his staff and with the strong concurrence of Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur, late in December instituted a plan to occupy the Russells.<sup>31</sup>

Although it had many far reaching implications and required much detailed planning, Halsey's scheme had three fundamental objectives: (1) To prevent Japanese use of the Russells as a base from which to conduct harassing attacks or to stage troops into Guadalcanal; (2) To establish advanced fighter airfields with high radar stations for intercepting bombers headed for Guadalcanal, and to develop forward torpedo boat bases for intercepting the Tokyo Express, then shuttling troops and supplies into and out of Guadalcanal; (3) To construct airfields closer to New Georgia and thus permit our fighters to give

<sup>31</sup> FltAdm W. F. Halsey, Jr., ltr to CMC, 2Mar51.

effective cover during our projected attack on New Georgia.<sup>32</sup>

When Halsey's repeated requests for allocation of additional forces necessary to execute the operation reached Washington, Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, who desired to reach Rabaul quickly and with reasonable economy of force, objected. King, a firm advocate of the "by-pass" tactic, believed that such an undertaking on a relatively unimportant intermediate objective would commit large numbers of troops unnecessarily. But when it was pointed out that Japanese evacuees from and reinforcements for Guadalcanal occupied the Russells in what was believed to be great strength and might constitute a threat to future operations contemplated, King reluctantly agreed to permit the planning to continue.<sup>33</sup>

Even though concrete information concerning the Japanese decision to withdraw from Guadalcanal had reached neither the fighting men on the Southern Solomons front nor the Washington-based strategic planners, Halsey's idea received unexpected yet welcome and appreciated support. The Armed Services Chiefs of the United States and Great Britain, meeting as the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Casa-

<sup>32</sup> Turner ltr to CMC, 22Feb51.

<sup>33</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 97-98; MajGen Orlando Ward ltr to CMC 23Feb51.



**SBD'S CARRIED THE WAR TO THE ENEMY** during the early stages of the Central Solomons campaign. New Georgia, Choiseul, and the Shortlands became oft-visited targets for these planes. (Navy Photo.)

blanca on 23 January 1943, directed the immediate continuation of the attack up the Solomons chain toward Rabaul.<sup>34</sup> A move into the Russells would be a step in the right direction.

That same day Admiral Nimitz met Halsey in Noumea and orally gave final approval to Halsey's plan—designated CLEANSLATE by the ComSoPac Staff. And on 7 February responsibility for detailed planning and actual execution of Halsey's concept fell to Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, commander of the South Pacific Amphibious Forces (CTF-62).<sup>35</sup>

Together with Halsey's subordinate com-

<sup>34</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Turner ltr; Miller, *op. cit.*, 351-352; Halsey ltr. The name TF-62 was changed to TF-31 on 15 March 1943.

mander of all Army troops in the South Pacific Area, Lieutenant General M. F. Harmon, Turner set about drawing up the detailed plans for the operation.

At this time, before the Allies realized that the Japanese had given up Guadalcanal, the situation with respect to possible enemy reaction to further moves was obscure. In view of Admiral Kusaka's fleet dispositions, the past attitudes of Kusaka and General Imamura, and their ever-present capabilities for offensive air and ground operations, the two Americans faced the distinct possibility that the enemy might attempt to retake Guadalcanal. They believed further that should the Japanese adopt such a course of action, we could not occupy the Russells without causing violent reaction. They therefore decided to embark on the operation



**MARINES LAND SUPPORTING WEAPONS** in the Russells on 21 February. Lack of enemy opposition made the operation easy. Here a 37mm gun captain points to the spot where he wishes his weapon emplaced.



**DESERTED COCONUT GROVES** greeted the assaulting infantry as General Hester's landing force swept the Russells. The enemy had fled leaving nothing but fallen coconuts for the Marines and soldiers.

fully prepared to sustain it against a major counterattack and allotted forces accordingly. Turner's estimate of the situation included the enemy capability of defending on the beaches. Any landing in the Russells, then, would require an assault or combat landing of a sizable and powerful force.<sup>36</sup> Another problem facing the planners in February 1943, was the paucity of shipping in the Solomons area. Any forward movement would have to be conducted rapidly with a minimum of ships.

On 10 February 1943, Harmon assigned the 43d Infantry Division (Major General John H. Hester) to Turner for use as a landing force in the **CLEANSLATE** operation. As no authority in the South Pacific area realized that General Imamura had directed the withdrawal of all Japanese forces from the Southern Solomons, Turner decided to use the bulk of the

43d Division (less one regimental combat team) as the assault and occupation force. To this cadre he added the 3d Marine Raider Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Harry B. Liversedge), the 10th Defense Battalion, FMF (Colonel Robert E. Blake), a detachment of the 11th Defense Battalion (Major Joseph L. Winecoff), Marine Air Group 21 (Lieutenant Colonel Raymond E. Hopper), and other reinforcing Army and Navy units. The 43d Division would land on the southernmost island of the group, while the Raider Battalion would spearhead a simultaneous landing on the northernmost. The short run between the bases of operations at Guadalcanal and Tulagi and the target area in the Russells could be accomplished expeditiously, so that only small, light transports, immediately available in the Solomons area, would be used.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Turner ltr; MajGen John H. Hester ltr to CMC, 9Feb51; LtGen M. F. Harmon ltr to War Department General Staff, 1May43.

<sup>37</sup> LtCol E. S. Watson (G-3, 43d Division), "Movement of a Task Force by Small Landing Craft," encl to CG, 43d Div ltr to CG, USAFISPA, 17Apr43; Hester ltr.



Within two weeks the CLEANSULATE operation was underway. At 2300, 20 February, Task Force 62 sailed from Guadalcanal, screened by a strong naval covering force. Eight destroyers of various types, each towing small landing craft loaded to the gunwales, led the convoy. Following were 12 LCT's and a tug-towed barge, piled high with 700 tons of ammunition. At dawn the next morning the Task Force divided into two parts, one heading for Banika Island, the other for Pavuvu Island, in accordance with the tactical plan. Covered by ships' guns and an air umbrella, the landing went off without a hitch. As correctly reported by a reconnaissance party that landed on Banika Island only two days previously, the enemy had vanished.<sup>38</sup> By 1000 the shipping had completely unloaded and withdrawn, and the soldiers held Banika while the Marines held Pavuvu. And, when the Americans fanned out over the islands they found that the Japanese had failed even to construct any defenses for the Russells.

Erection of a radar station and construction of a patrol torpedo boat base and an airstrip started immediately. Within four days PT's

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<sup>38</sup> MajGen H. D. Linscott ltr to author, 17Jan52.

were operating out of a new base at Wernham Cove. A steady stream of men, supplies and equipment poured in nightly. One week after the landing, Turner had more than 9,000 men ashore under his command, including naval base units, the 35th Naval Construction Battalion, the 3d Raider and 10th Defense Battalions from the Fleet Marine Force, and several other, smaller organizations.

Turner's Japanese adversaries apparently remained blissfully ignorant of the size or implications of the new American move, for they did not react until 6 March, when they launched an air attack against the new installations. But after that March date enemy planes raided the Russells almost every day and night for the next four months, despite effective radar interception and violent counteraction by Guadalcanal-based American planes. Nevertheless, construction of roads, airfields, and boat bases continued unabated, and on 15 April planes began operations from the first of two new strips that Seabees had laid out on Banika, second largest island in the group. Soon thereafter the Russells became a major Allied forward operating base and staging area.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> ONI, *Combat Narratives, Solomon Islands Campaign IX*, 33.



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER II

# Plans and Preliminary Operations

#### THE DIRECTIVE

With Japanese opposition to Allied operations in the Southern Solomons confined to harassing air raids after February, the South Pacific Forces finally realized that the battle for Guadalcanal was over. Guadalcanal had grown into a great base, humming with activity and accumulating huge stocks of supplies and equipment. Thousands of men trained in the battle-scarred jungle for operations to come.

In the Russell Islands, some 30 miles to the northwest, other Americans likewise prepared for future moves. Here the PT boats that conducted raids up the slot made their base; here, too, Allied fighters roared up to intercept Japanese planes. The South Pacific forces were in good shape, in an excellent condition of battle readiness. The time had come to consider future moves, to execute further steps in Operation WATCHTOWER by carrying out General MacArthur's ELKTON plan.

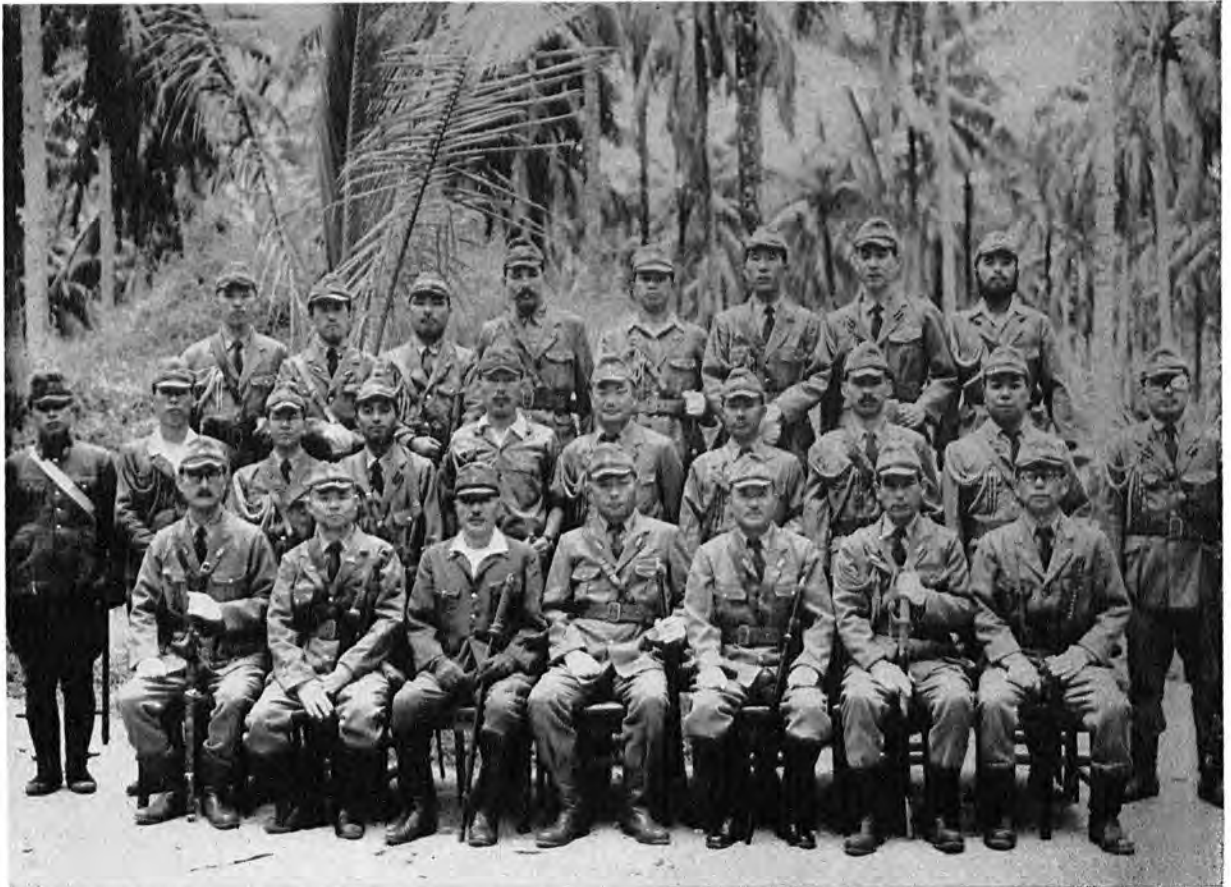
Patrol, pilot and coastwatcher reports, collated and evaluated in Noumea, then forwarded to Washington for information and consideration, dictated the selection of targets in the South and Southwest Pacific areas.

Fully realizing this situation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, apparently impatient at the slowness with which General MacArthur and Admiral Halsey were carrying out the

Combined Chiefs' 23 January directive, ordered ComSoPac and ComSoWesPac to neutralize Rabaul's effectiveness at once by a sustained and coordinated air effort. Meanwhile, land and surface forces in the two commands would continue their attacks on enemy holdings between the front and the ultimate Allied goal. This directive, in effect, simply reiterated the original 2 July 1942 plan.<sup>1</sup>

In their original plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had modified the initial boundary between the South and Southwest Pacific theaters, set at 160° on 30 March 1942, by moving it westward to 159°. Thus all of Guadalcanal was included in the South Pacific area. This enabled the South Pacific commander to exercise direction of the Guadalcanal operation in entirety. On 13 January 1943, when it became apparent that further northward moves in the Solomons were in the offing for South Pacific forces, Rear Admiral Turner recommended that the bound-

<sup>1</sup> Ward ltr; Turner ltr; ELKTON II, 2; JCS 238/5/D. "At the Pacific Military Conference in Washington, March 1943, representatives from CenPac, SoPac and SoWesPac, plus members of the JCS and JPS decided that available means would not be sufficient to take Rabaul in 1943, and that operations in the SoPac-SoWesPac in 1943 would be essentially those set forth as Task Two of the 2 July 1942 directive. Later in 1943 the JCS directed MacArthur and Halsey not to capture Rabaul but to neutralize it by air action." (Dr. John Miller, jr., ltr to author, 4Feb52.)



**JAPANESE DEFENDERS** of the Solomons, pictured at Buin in May 1943. Seated second from left is Admiral Ota, then General Sasaki, and in the center is Admiral Samejima. Immediately behind Sasaki is Major Kamiya. Others in the photograph are Eighth Fleet Staff and Base Force officers. (Photograph courtesy of the Morison History Project.)

ary be moved to 154°. Because of Army objections, this recommendation received short shrift in Joint Chiefs' consultations. By 28 March 1943, however, it became evident that continuation of the Solomons campaign—intrinsically naval in character—should be commanded by Halsey, operating under MacArthur's "general directives." The Joint Chiefs, therefore, so decreed.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Brigadier General DeWitt Peck, the ComSoPac War Plans Officer, with the aid and assistance of Halsey's capable staff, devised a scheme—dubbed TOENAILS—for the invasion of the Central Solomons. Early in January Halsey sent Peck to Washington to present his TOENAILS concept to the Joint Chiefs. Peck pleaded in vain for the additional forces necessary to assault vulnerable Japanese

<sup>2</sup> Ward ltr; JCS CARTWHEEL directive, 29Mar43; Halsey, *op. cit.*, 154–155.

positions in the New Georgia group.

At a meeting at Pearl Harbor in March, South Pacific staff officers suggested execution of the TOENAILS plan, and recommended its commencement about 1 April. MacArthur's representatives at the conference agreed that New Georgia should be struck. But they demurred on the suggested date, 1 April, because this was too close at hand and the Southwest Pacific forces did not have enough time to prepare for concomitant operations. The question, therefore, was referred to the Joint Chiefs for solution. And the Joint Chiefs directive of 28 March solved the problem: MacArthur would determine the date.<sup>3</sup>

### THE BRISBANE DECISION

When apprised of this decision, Admiral

<sup>3</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 94–96.

Halsey directed General Peck and Admiral Turner to continue with their planning and collection of intelligence. A few days later he flew to Brisbane to consult MacArthur, who—in practice—had become Halsey's immediate superior and as such had to approve any stratagem devised by the ComSoPac staff.<sup>4</sup>

Admiral Halsey arrived at General MacArthur's headquarters early in April. Here the two commanders conferred informally, and worked out details for coordination of operations in the Central Solomons and in the Trobriands (the next Southwest Pacific target). As a result of this meeting MacArthur approved the admiral's plan to invade New Georgia at an early date and promised to support the operation by launching neutralizing air strikes against Rabaul before and during the initial stages of the TOENAILS attack. L-Day (the day of the landing) was set for 15 May to coincide with planned advances in New Guinea and the Trobriands.

### AMPHIBIOUS SCOUTING

As soon as the Japanese revealed the magnitude of their Central Solomons undertakings, South Pacific planes and ships had struck the area with repeated blows. But these seemed ineffectual and did not appear to hamper the progress of the Japanese labors. Pilot and naval task group commander reports finally had led Admiral Halsey, after seizing the Russells, to initiate a series of amphibious reconnaissance patrols into the New Georgia area to determine what action he could take to counter the Japanese threat. At this time General Peck's long-range planning was well under way and Halsey desired information for future use when South Pacific forces undertook execution of the TOENAILS operation.

About the end of February the first of these patrols—six Marines led by Lieutenant William Coultis, USN, a ComSoPac staff officer—landed in Roviana Lagoon. For three weeks Coultis and his men scouted beaches, reconnoitered trails, contacted coastwatchers and friendly natives, and closely observed Japanese activities in and around Munda. Coultis re-

turned to Halsey's Noumea headquarters just after the Joint Chiefs issued their 28 March directive and stated that an assault against New Georgia was entirely practicable.<sup>5</sup>

At this time General Peck's plan envisaged a division-landing at Segi Point on the southeast tip of New Georgia. The force would then sweep westward, destroy the Japanese garrisons on New Georgia, and seize Munda airfield. A landing at Segi would be unopposed because Allied coastwatchers there had the friendly natives firmly under their control and no Japanese dared enter the area.

When presented with this plan, General Harmon expressed serious doubts as to the feasibility of landing on Segi's limited beaches or of moving overland through the jungle with such a large body of men. To determine the validity of Harmon's objections, Halsey directed the I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) to send small amphibious reconnaissance parties into the area. This mission was undertaken and action initiated even before Coultis had made his report and Halsey had departed for Brisbane.

On 21 March 1943, four small patrols, made up of personnel from the Marine Raider Battalions and native guides, landed at Segi in PBY's. For the next three weeks, on foot or in native canoes, they reconnoitered the coasts of Kolombangara, New Georgia and Vangunu. The information they gathered proved beyond question that General Harmon's doubts were well founded, and that a new plan would have to be devised.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the Brisbane decision that a landing would be made in New Georgia, coupled with the IMAC patrol reports indicating the difficulties faced by a division landing at the eastern end of New Georgia, Halsey directed IMAC to redouble its efforts to gather information for use in further planning.

For the next three months, therefore, still other amphibious reconnaissance patrols probed the jungle coasts of the New Georgia group in

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Maj Clay A. Boyd, 16Feb51. Boyd was a member of this first and several subsequent patrols.

<sup>6</sup> Col W. E. Coleman, "Amphibious Recon Patrols," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, December, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Halsey, *op. cit.*, 153-157.

search of landing beaches and areas suitable for the construction of airfields and boat bases. One group, led by Lieutenant Colonel Michael S. Currin, made two trips along New Georgia's south coast, surveying beaches and gathering hydrographic information in Roviana Lagoon. A party under Captain Edwin B. Wheeler scouted the shores of Kolombangara; another followed Captain Clay A. Boyd around islands offshore from Zanana Beach (see Map #10) and overland by trails and tracks to the vicinity of Rice Anchorage.

Gunnery Sergeant Frank Guidone headed a patrol that landed in Grassi Lagoon to locate a site for a PT base. A unit under Captain Lincoln Holdzkom operated up and down the western shores of Kula Gulf. Second Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier twice went to Vangunu in June to seek out and mark beaches for a landing projected there, and Captain W. C. Givens reconnoitered Rendova. Another group accompanied Commander Wilfred Painter, USNR, into Segi Point to survey a site for an airstrip. Each patrol received invaluable help from coastwatcher (FERDINAND) units in the areas in which it operated. Each brought back information upon which to base further planning.<sup>7</sup>

For example, amphibious reconnaissance patrols, operating out of Coastwatcher Kennedy's hide-out at Segi Point, shoved off for Wickham Anchorage, Viru Harbor, Rendova Island and

<sup>7</sup> Col Samuel B. Griffith, II, ltr to CMC, 12Feb51; Boyd interview; Feldt, *op. cit.*, *passim*; LtCol Henry H. Reichner, Jr., ltr to Maj Carl W. Hoffman, 5Mar51; Capt. James E. Brown ltr to CMC, 6Mar51.

Zanana Beach on 14 June. After operating in their respective areas for approximately 10 days, they returned to their base with information that eventually led to last-minute changes in the plans. The Wickham Anchorage patrol discovered that it would be impossible to move wheeled vehicles off the beaches. Another patrol observed that it would take a minimum of two days—maybe longer—to move troops overland from Nono to Viru Harbor. No new information could be obtained at Rendova, for the patrols there were unable to enter the Rendova Plantation area, where the projected landing would take place.

As those patrols operating in the Wickham, Zanana and Rendova areas withdrew, they left behind small parties to serve as guides for the assaulting troops on D-Day.<sup>8</sup>

### INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES

Meanwhile, other fact-gathering agencies continued unceasing operations. Reconnaissance planes closely checked developments around Munda airstrip; aerial photograph interpreters pored over shots of hostile installations and suggested landing beaches; coastwatchers made periodic reports on enemy troop and ship movements; and intelligence officers analyzed all available data and made careful estimates of the situation.

By 13 June certain fundamental aspects became apparent. The enemy had dispersed his available troops among several widely separated points. He had occupied Munda with an estimated 3,000 and Kolombangara with ap-

<sup>8</sup> LtCol W. J. McNenny report to CG, IMAC, 17Jul43.

*Actual and Estimated Enemy Land Strength—30 June 1943*

	Estimated	Actual		
		Jap Army	Jap Navy	Jap total
Rabaul.....	30,000 to 40,000	55,000	35,000	90,000
Rekata Bay.....	1,000	800	3,400	4,200
Kolombangara.....	5,000 to 7,000	3,000	1,000	4,000
Vella Lavella.....	250	1,000	100	1,100
Wickham-Viru.....	290-460	260	50	310
Rendova.....	100	150	140	290
Munda.....	2,000 to 3,000	2,000	2,500	4,500
Bairoko.....	500	300	800	1,100

proximately 7,000 more. It appeared that 500 men held the Dragons Peninsula and about 300 were in the Wickham Anchorage area. But evidently he had placed only 20- or 30-man outposts at the other numerous target areas. The ComSoPac staff estimated that the Japanese had about 400 planes, based mainly at Rabaul, which could attack on very short notice. No major warships had been observed in the immediate Solomons area.

On the basis of these estimates, Admiral Halsey's staff made its plan for an operation designed to seize Munda Point.<sup>9</sup>

## JAPANESE DISPOSITIONS

Although some of the American intelligence information was faulty, the general picture it presented was amazingly accurate.

The Japanese high command at Rabaul was divided into two co-equal parts: The Army and the Navy. Both General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka had placed ground forces from their respective commands at identical spots in the Central Solomons. On 2 May 1943, for the defense of this area Imamura had created the Southeast (Nanto) Detached Force and had placed it under the command of Major General Noboru Sasaki, chief of infantry of the 38th Division. Kusaka had assigned similar responsibility to rear Admiral Minoru Ota and the Eighth Combined Special Naval Landing Force.<sup>10</sup>

In general reserve on Eastern New Britain, Imamura had available approximately 55,000 men for commitment anywhere in the Japanese Southeast Area; Kusaka's reserve numbered about 35,000. In his Fourth Air Army Imamura could count about 300 planes, but most of these were charged with the defense of Japanese positions in New Guinea; Kusaka's Eleventh Air Fleet numbered in the vicinity of 290 aircraft. Imamura had only a few small ships (transports) available, but Kusaka had his Eighth Fleet including eight cruisers, eight submarines, about 16 destroyers and nearly 200 miscellaneous smaller craft.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ComSoPac OpnPlan 14-43; CTF-31, OpnPlan AS-43, Annex "C", 1-3; Halsey ltr.

<sup>10</sup> IJN Hq Staff Directive #231, 2May43. See *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 11.



**COMMANDER WILFRED L. PAINTER, USN**, accompanied Marine amphibious scouts into the Central Solomons to survey possible airfield sites. Painter often accomplished these tasks under the very nose of enemy outposts. (Navy Photo.)

After the Guadalcanal disaster, the Allied landings in the Russells, the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, and the failure of their "I" operation,<sup>12</sup> the Japanese commanders at Rabaul were painfully aware of the impending threat to their Central Solomons positions. Upon the withdrawal from Guadalcanal, Imperial General Headquarters had vested over-all responsibility for the defense of the Solomons in Kusaka, while responsibility for New Guinea remained with Imamura. But both these officers had forces committed in both areas, a situation that resulted actually in divided command. The Allied threat facing them demanded clarification of their relationships and immediate positive action.<sup>13</sup>

Frequent face-to-face conferences and close personal friendship on the part of General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka surmounted many of the difficulties imposed on them by divided responsibilities and a vague command

<sup>11</sup> USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 43-46, 51, 82-84, 101; ComSoPac ltr, serial 01244, 2Aug43.

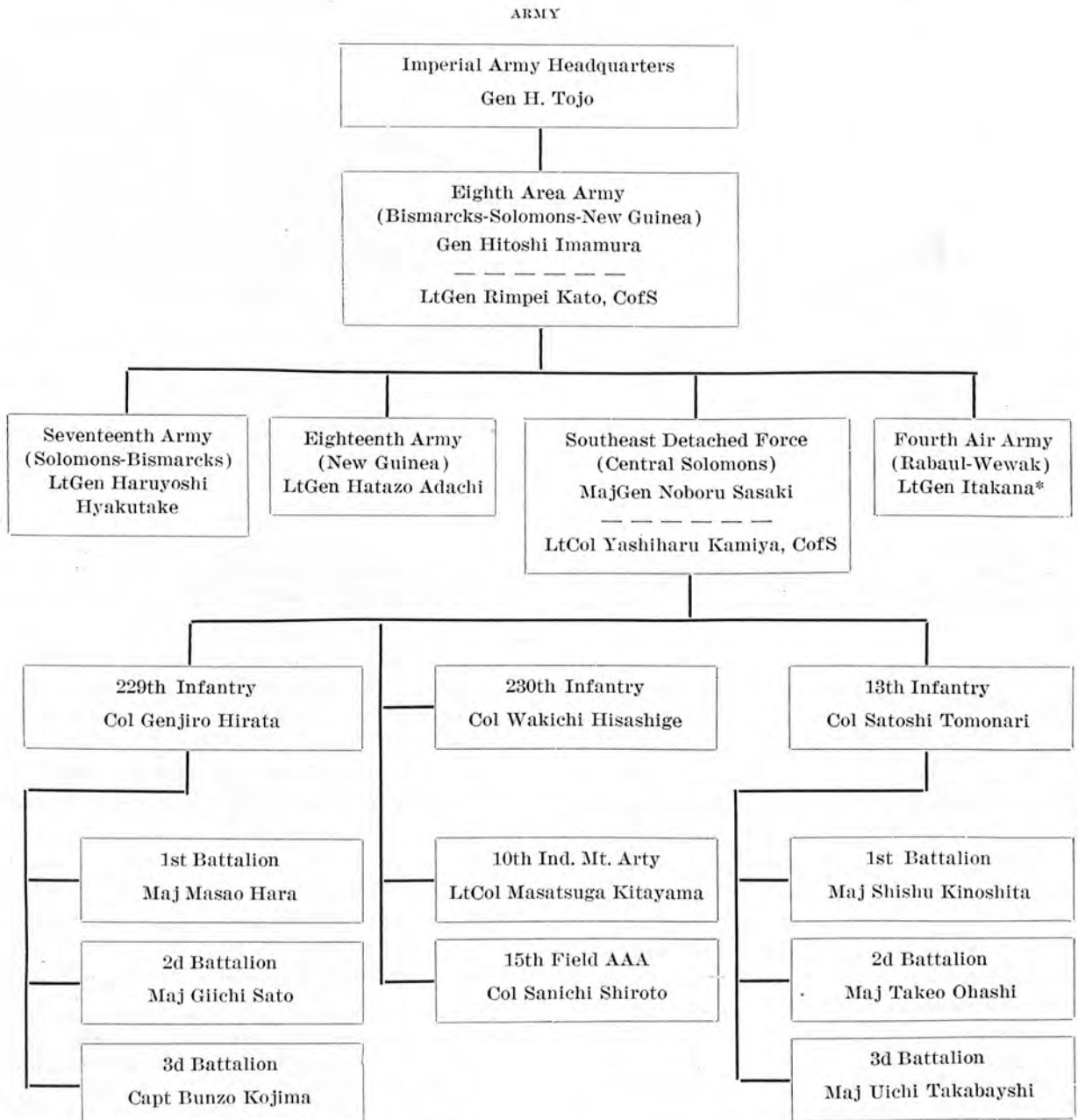
<sup>12</sup> Adm Yamamoto's abortive air offensive of early April, designed to win air supremacy over the Southern Solomons and Eastern New Guinea. See Morison, *Bismarcks*, 117-124.

<sup>13</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 7-18.

structure. Although neither officer was responsible to the other, and both reported individually and separately to different higher headquarters, they arrived at a solution of their joint problem of defending the Central Solomons.

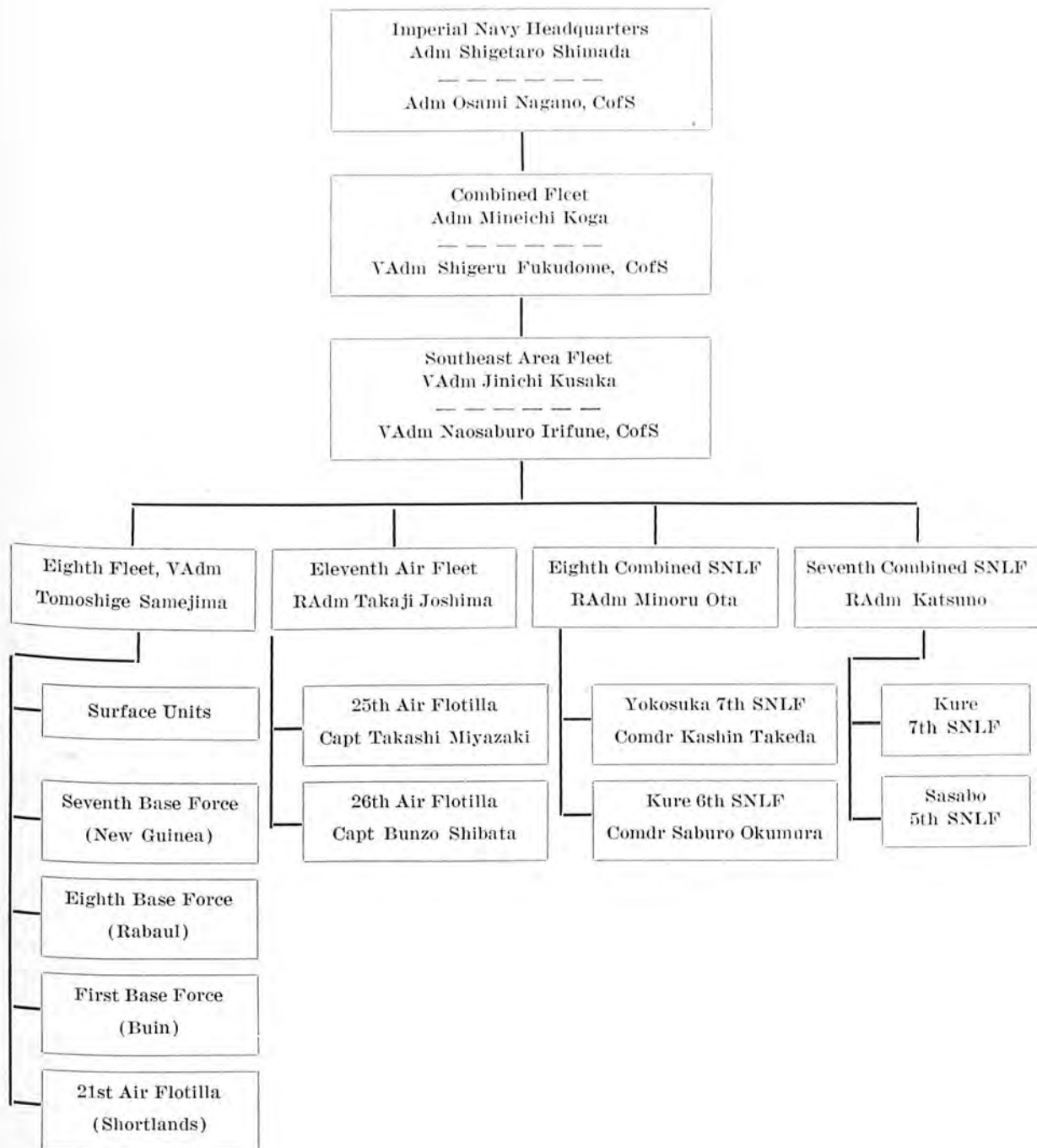
Defense of the Central Solomons was entrusted to Admiral Ota's Force and General Sasaki's command which consisted of small detachments from Lieutenant General Sadaaki Kagesa's 38th and Lieutenant General Masatane Kanda's 6th Divisions. As the Japanese

JAPANESE COMMAND STRUCTURE—CENTRAL SOLOMONS, JULY 1943



\* USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 98.

NAVY

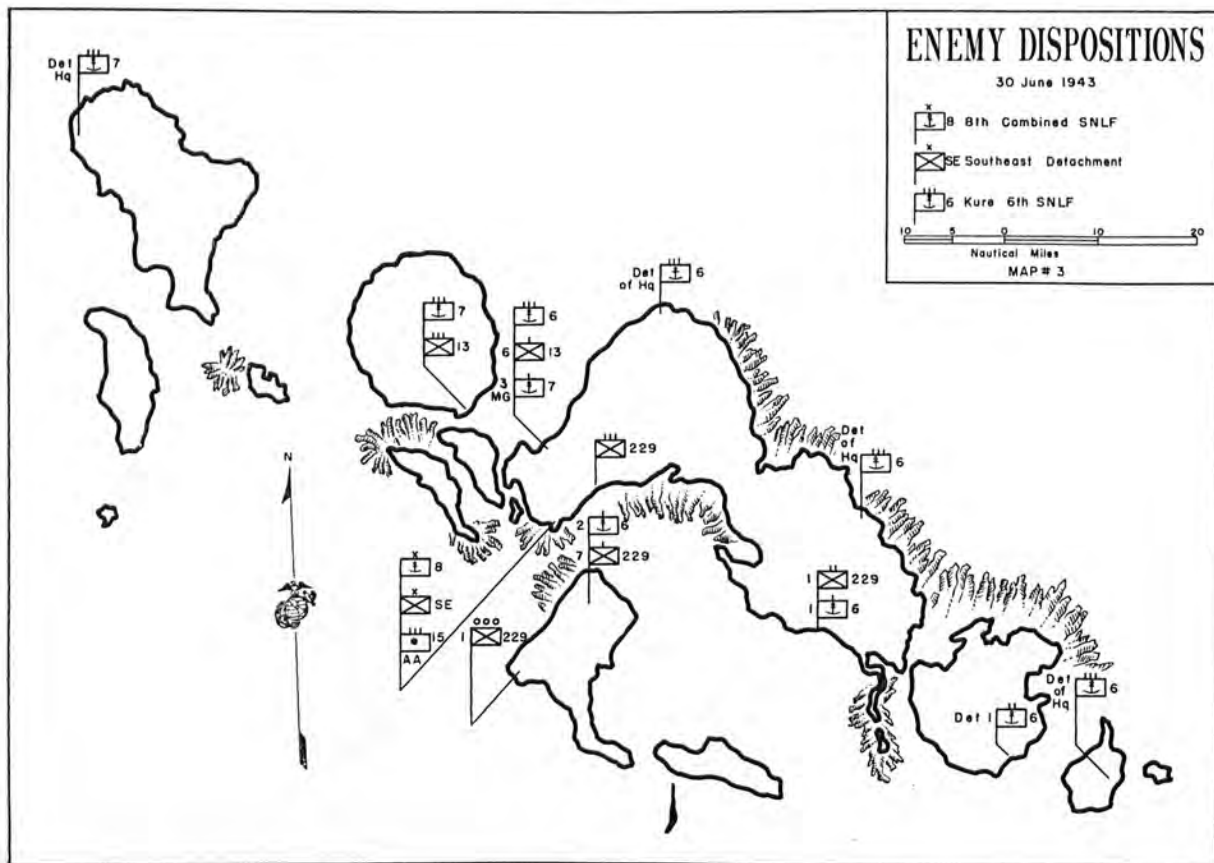


defenders numbered only about 9,000 men in early May, Imamura and Kusaka took immediate steps to move in additional portions of the 6th Division and the 3d Mixed Regiment from staging areas at Rabaul and in Bougain-

ville to Munda. Before the Americans landed at Rendova on 30 June, the Japanese had added three increments of 600 to 800 men each.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 84, 107; CIC Item #43/153; CIC Item #59S, 8; ComSoPac ltr,





Responsibility for employment of ground troops and coordination of all land defenses in the Central Solomons fell to General Sasaki. The general, in turn, delegated responsibility for tactical control of troops in the area to the commander of the 229th Infantry, Colonel Genjiro Hirata, who moved to Munda from Kolombangara shortly after 1 June for that specific purpose. Antiaircraft defenses of Munda Point came under the control of Colonel Shiroto's 15th Field Defense Unit.

Admiral Ota's Eighth Combined Special Naval Landing Force was made up of the Kure 6th, the Yokosuka 7th and the Maizuru 4th<sup>15</sup> Special Naval Landing Forces (SNLF) plus several other assorted naval detachments. The Kure 6th (Commander Saburo Okumura), with its headquarters at Bairoko Harbor, occupied the Dragons Peninsula. Okumura sta-

tioned small detachments on Rendova (the 140-man 2d Company, Lieutenant (j.g.) Funada), and divided the 1st Company between Viru Harbor and Wickham Anchorage. The main strength of Okumura's antiaircraft machine gun company was attached to Colonel Shiroto's unit at Munda airfield. Admiral Ota placed the remaining strength of his force on Kolombangara under the control of Commander Koshin Takeda of the Yokosuka 7th SNLF. Takeda established his headquarters near Vila.

Colonel Hirata put his 7th Company, 229th Infantry (First Lieutenant Suzuki) on Rendova, sent his 3d Company (First Lieutenant Takagi) to Viru Harbor, and deployed the remainder of his force in the vicinity of Munda Point, at Lambeti Plantation and along the Bairoko-Munda Trail.

As naval and army reinforcements reached New Georgia, from Rabaul, Bougainville and Kolombangara, each of these units was built up and augmented. From time to time the de-

serial 01244, A12-1/(25), 2Aug43; ComSoPac ltr, serial 01324, A12-1/(25), 10Aug43.

<sup>15</sup> The Maizuru 4th SNLF was not stationed on New Georgia during the TOENAILS operation.

fense forces for specific areas were rotated.

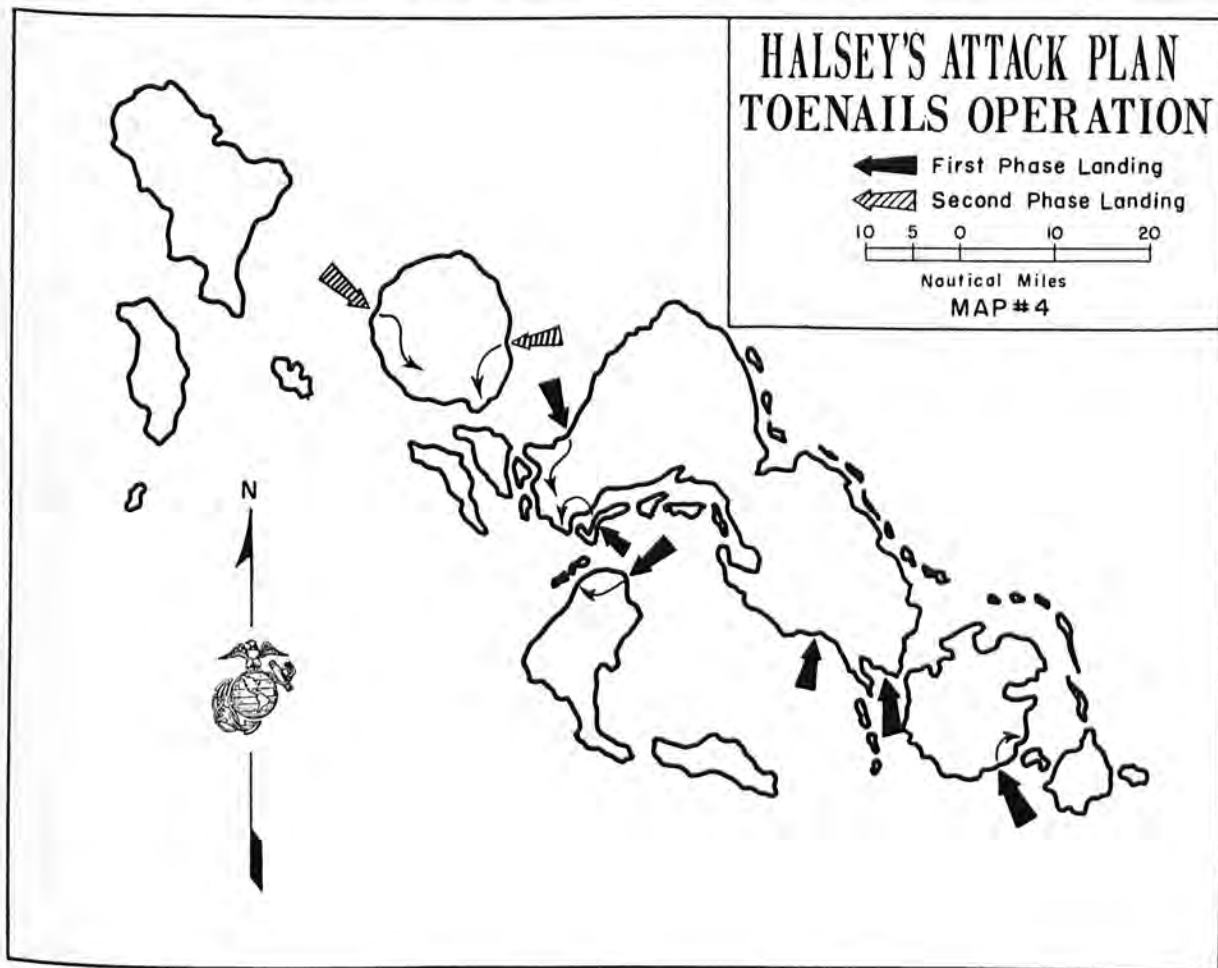
### AMERICAN PLANNING

Shortly after Admiral Halsey returned to Noumea from the Brisbane conference, he received a message from General MacArthur directing a postponement of L-Day. Information had reached the general that the enemy air strength at Rabaul had been augmented by large numbers of Army planes. Moreover, it was evident that the incessant American bombing of Rabaul by large land-based planes was not paying the dividends previously expected. Then, too, General Imamura had recently sent reinforcements to the Eighteenth Army for the defense of Eastern New Guinea. MacArthur's job would be more difficult than anticipated and he would need more time to prepare for his offensive.

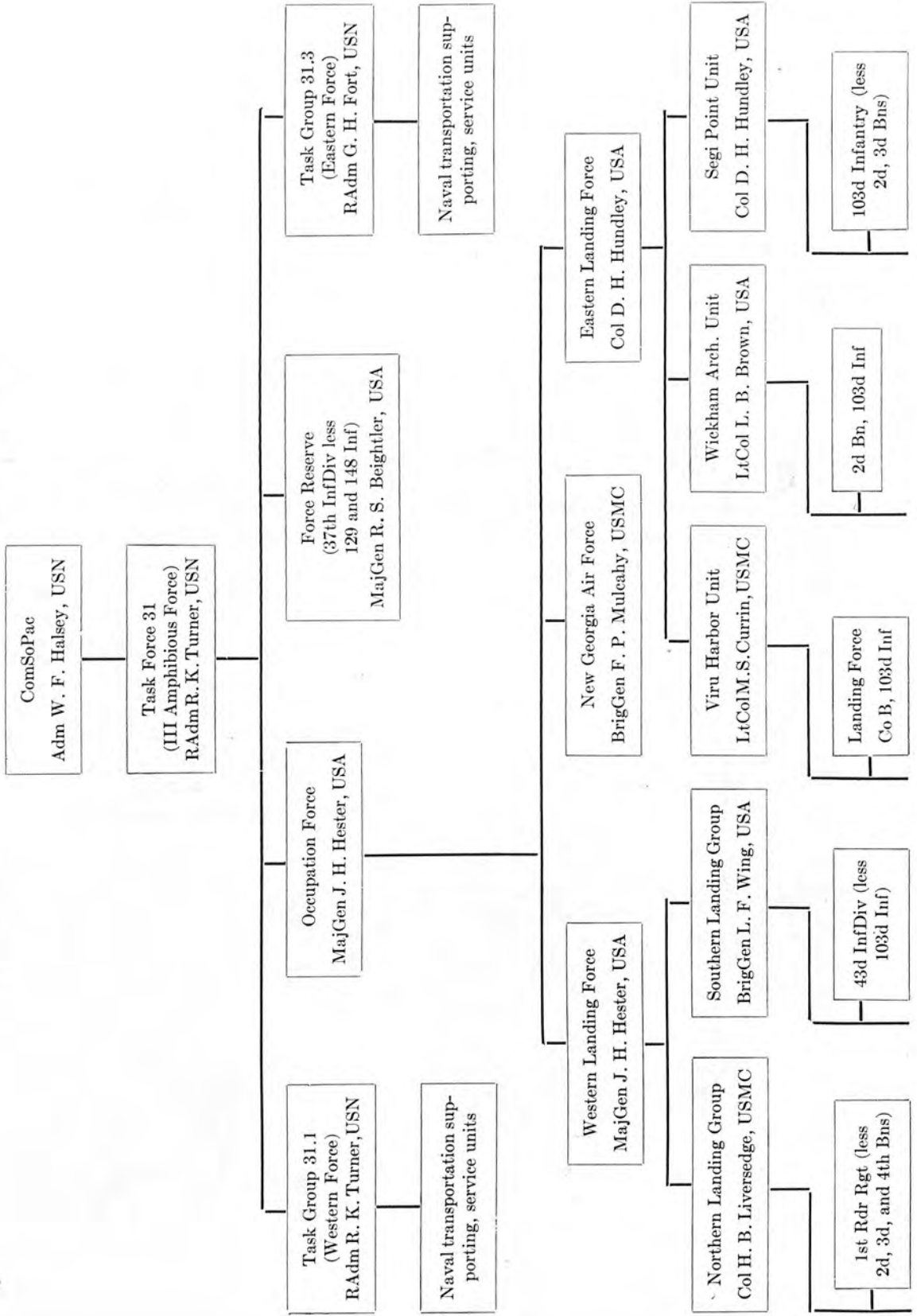
Agreement on 30 June as L-Day was later reached by mutual consent. Thus Admiral

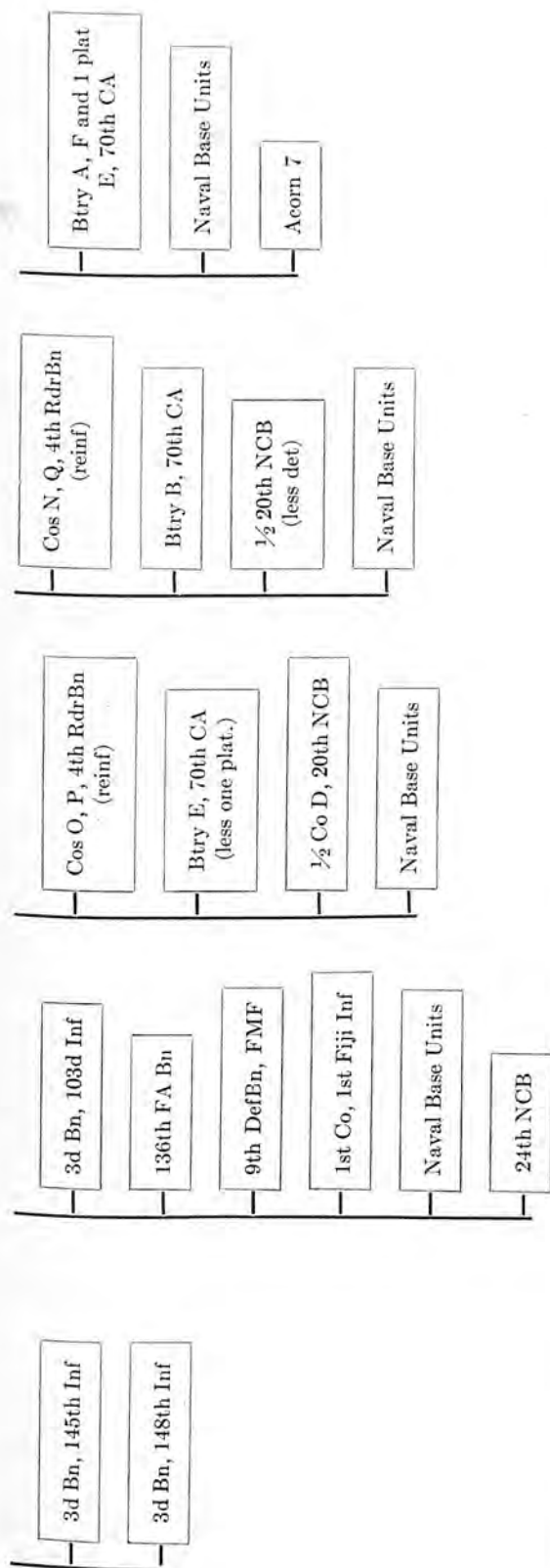
Halsey and General Harmon had nearly three months to perfect and publish their plans for the TOENAILS operation. The ComSoPac plan, dated and signed on 3 June, envisaged seizure of Wickham Anchorage (ARMCHAIR) and Viru Harbor (CATSMEAT) as staging points for small craft, plying between the Russells and Rendova with supplies and reinforcements. A reinforced regiment (less two battalions) would seize Segi Plantation (BLACKBOY) for construction of an airstrip that could handle fighter cover for the final attacks on Munda Point.

The main body of the attack force would seize Rendova Island (DOWSER) to construct a patrol-torpedo boat base and as an area on which a strong force could be organized for further operations against Munda (BINGHAMPTON), Kolombangara (PLUMBLINE) and other enemy garrisons



LANDING FORCE ORGANIZATION FOR THE TOENAILS OPERATION





in the New Georgia group. Wickham Anchorage, Viru Harbor and Segi Plantation had to be taken with a minimum expenditure of effort and troops, since the bulk of available ground forces would be committed to the capture of Rendova without delay. Then, after a shore-to-shore movement to New Georgia itself, the main attack would turn toward Munda airfield, while a subsidiary operation, designed to prevent movement between Munda and Kolombangara, would be undertaken in the vicinity of Bairoko Harbor (PYRITES).<sup>16</sup>

General Harmon determined that the 43d Division of Major General Oscar W. Griswold's XIV Corps would furnish the Army troops required. General air support for the operation became the responsibility of Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, who on 1 April had assumed command of ComAirSols (TG-33.1), the major subordinate unit of Vice Admiral Aubrey Fitch's South Pacific Air Command (TF-33). Mitscher, in turn, assigned the mission of direct tactical air support for the operation to Brigadier General Francis P. Mulcahy's Guadalcanal-based 2d Marine Air Wing. Mulcahy, as ComAir New Georgia, would control all Allied aircraft dispatched to the Munda area by ComAirSols.<sup>17</sup>

Halsey gave Admiral Turner, South Pacific Amphibious Force commander (TF-31), overall supervision of the operation. Turner would control the Landing, Occupation and Air (when flying in the New Georgia area) Forces. Under the principle of unity of command, Admiral Halsey directed Major General John H. Hester of the 43d Division, largest ground unit involved, to command all land, sea and air units assigned to the New Georgia Occupation Force after Turner's withdrawal. Similarly, Halsey's order provided that control of all services assigned to any given position within the operation area would be vested in the senior commander responsible for that position. No

<sup>16</sup> ComSoPac Opn Plan 14-43, 3Jun43. Operations directed at Bairoko Harbor were conducted on Dragons Peninsula (AMAGANSETT). Details are discussed in Chap IV, following.

<sup>17</sup> LtGen Francis P. Mulcahy ltr to CMC, 25Feb51; TF-33 OpnPlan 7-43, 18Jun43. For further details concerning air planning and operations see Chap VI, following.



**VICE ADMIRAL AUBREY W. FITCH**, ComAirSoPac, directed Admiral Halsey's air war against the Japanese. Under the principle of unity of command, Fitch supervised all aviation activities in the South Pacific Area. (Navy Photo.)

divided command or responsibility would plague the Allies during the Central Solomons campaign.

Units of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet (TF-36 and TF-72) would provide the necessary naval support. During the approach and debarkation phases of the operation, while cruisers bombarded enemy airfields in the Northern Solomons, destroyers would screen the transports. Submarines would conduct long-range search and interception missions and mine sweepers would perform their normal functions. Carriers were detailed to provide planes to intercept and destroy all enemy aircraft or ships approaching the target area.

Meanwhile, concomitant operations by Southwest Pacific forces at Nassau Bay in New Guinea and in the Woodlarks and Trobriands would protect the south flank of the Central

Solomons and force the enemy either to divide his defensive effort or surrender vitally important areas without a struggle. Southwest Pacific air was expected to attack and neutralize enemy airfields in the Bismarcks and Northern Solomons.

L-Day, the day of the planned simultaneous landings, would be known as D-Day in the Central Solomons. Further planning, coordination, and execution of details became the responsibility of Admiral Turner.<sup>18</sup>

## THE TURNER CONCEPT

During the last two weeks in May, Admiral Turner's staff had kept abreast of Halsey's planning; and on 4 June the admiral published his ideas (Operation Plan A8-43) about the operation.

Turner divided his allotted forces into two Task Groups: Western Force (TG-31.1) and Eastern Force (TG-31.3). To the Western Force, which he would personally direct, Turner assigned the mission of seizing Rendova, Munda, Bairoko and adjacent positions. The Eastern Force, commanded by Rear Admiral George H. Fort, would take Wickham Anchorage, Segi Point and Viru Harbor.

The New Georgia Occupation Force (Major General John H. Hester, USA) was likewise divided into segments for the operation. The Western Landing Force (General Hester) consisted of the 43d Infantry Division (less the 103d RCT), the 3d Battalion of the 103d Infantry, and the 136th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm howitzers) from the U. S. Army; most of the 24th and part of the 20th Naval Construction Battalions, U. S. Navy; the 1st Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Fiji Infantry; and the 9th Marine Defense Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel William J. Scheyer) and Company O<sup>19</sup> of the 4th Marine Raider Battalion (First Lieutenant Raymond L. Luckel), Fleet Marine Force.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> ComSoPac Opn Plan 14-43.

<sup>19</sup> This was later changed. Company B, 1st Raider Battalion, replaced Company O; Company B's mission, in turn was assigned to two companies of the 169th Infantry.

<sup>20</sup> The 9th Defense Battalion (see Chart) was later redesignated the 9th AAA Battalion. Its commitment in this campaign is the first instance of a Defense

The Eastern Landing Force (Colonel Daniel H. Hundley, USA) was composed of Hundley's own 103d Infantry (less the 3d Battalion), the 2d Battalion, 70th Coast Artillery (AA), specifically assigned service units (including parts of the 20th and 24th Naval Construction Battalions and Acorn 7<sup>21</sup>), and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Currin's 4th Raider Battalion (less Company O).

The ready reserve for the operation consisted solely of Colonel Harry B. Liversedge's 1st Marine Raider Regiment (less the 2d, 3d, and 4th Battalions). In general area reserve was the reinforced 37th Infantry Division (less the 129th and most of the 148th RCT's), commanded by Major General Robert S. Beightler, USA.

Destined to become part of the Occupation Force after Hester relieved Turner were the Naval Base Force (Captain Charles Eugene Olsen, USN) and General Mulcahy's New Georgia Air Force.<sup>22</sup>

Admiral Turner's concept of the operation was one of simple, direct and speedy action. On 30 June the Western Force would seize Rendova and its outlying islands while the Eastern Force would occupy the Viru Harbor, Segi Point and Wickham Anchorage areas with simultaneous landings under cover of darkness or at first light. Believing all positions lightly held and hoping to gain an element of surprise, Turner planned to omit the use of preparatory naval gunfire. He hedged this bet by arranging for called and counterbattery fire should it be needed. Then, on 1, 2 and 3 July small numbers of APD's and beaching craft, advancing in separate convoys designated "echelons," would move additional troops and supplies forward from the Russells and Guadalcanal. The threat of Japanese air counteraction would restrict such movements to the hours of darkness.

Battalion in a purely assault mission. The seacoast artillery group of the battalion had been equipped with 155mm (M-1) guns for this specific purpose, and this was the first time these weapons were used in South Pacific combat. (Col A. E. O'Neil ltr to CMC, 1Mar51.)

<sup>21</sup> Acorn 7 (50 officers and 1450 men) was a naval construction unit specially constituted for the purpose of building the Segi airfield.

<sup>22</sup> TF-31 OpnPlan AS-43, 4Jun43, as corrected by CTF-31 dispatch 20 June 1943.

Throughout daylight hours, therefore, these vessels would lay-to in newly seized, sheltered harbors (Wickham, Segi and Viru) protected by antiaircraft weapons. Thereafter, engineers of the naval construction battalions would construct a fighter strip at Segi Point, in order to provide a nearby strip from which fighter planes could cover the final drive on Munda. (See Map #4.)

The Western Force would emplace 105mm howitzers and 155mm guns and howitzers on Bau and Kokorana Islets, flanking Renard Entrance to Rendova Harbor, to begin a bombardment of Munda Point and support the infantry. Meanwhile, Sergeant Harry Wickham,<sup>23</sup> coastwatcher in the Roviana Lagoon area, would assemble about 20 natives with 18 canoes in the Onaiavisi Entrance area and, with Captain Clay A. Boyd's amphibious scouting patrol, meet the first units landing in the vicinity. Covered by a Marine Raider Company, the Wickham and Boyd units would combine, then reconnoiter and stake out a channel

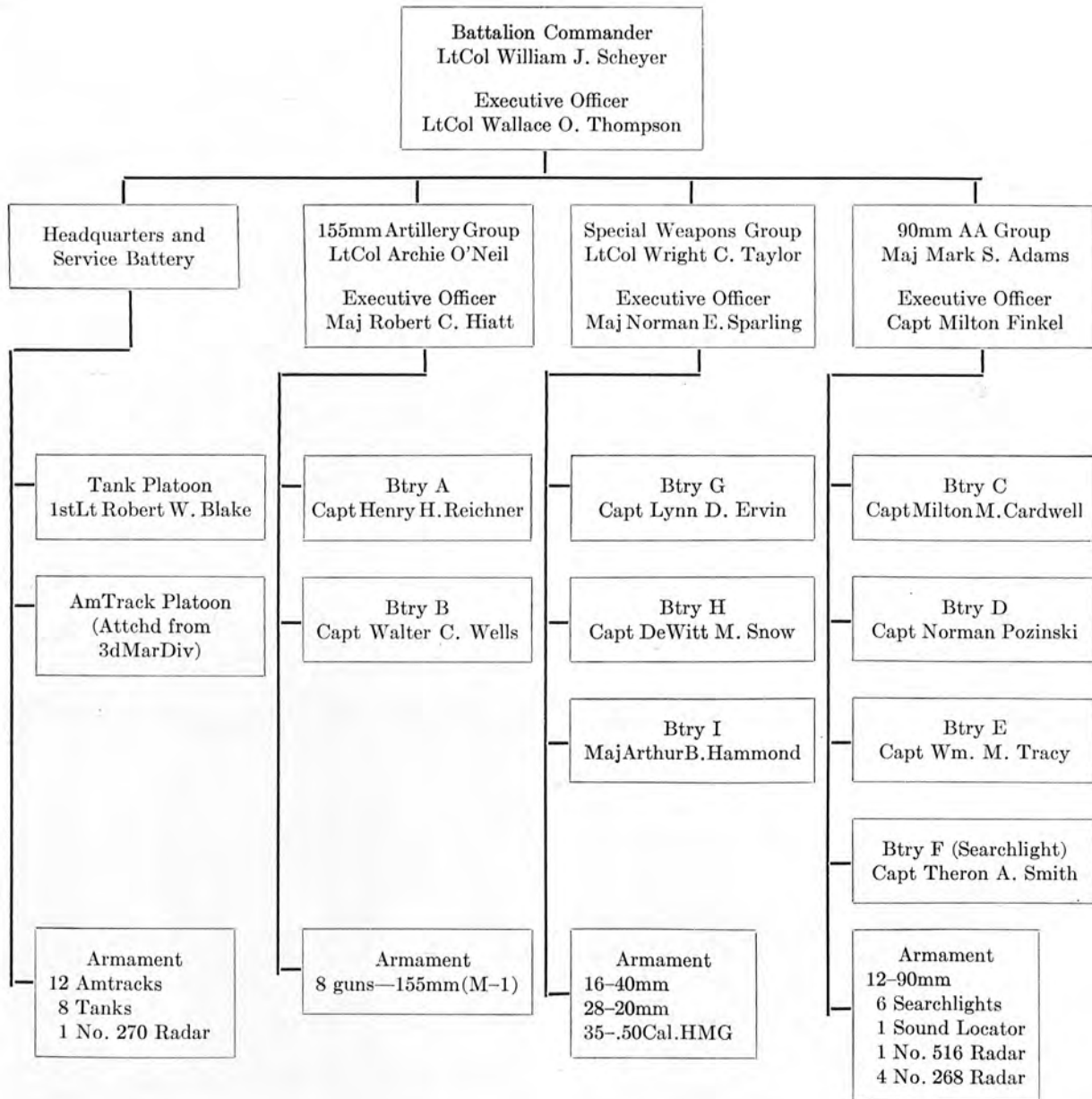
<sup>23</sup> Of the British Solomon Islands Defense Force.



REAR ADMIRAL GEORGE H. FORT; USN, commanded the Eastern Force (TG-31.3) during the invasion and occupation of Segi Point, Viru Harbor and Wickham Anchorage. (Navy Photo.)

ORGANIZATION AND ARMAMENT

9TH DEFENSE BATTALION



from Onaiavisi Entrance to Zanana Beach near Bana Island, some 1,400 yards northeast of Elolo on New Georgia's south coast. The scouts had reported that this was the only beach in the vicinity suitable for an assault landing.<sup>24</sup>

For the 1st Marine Raider Regiment Turner visualized either a direct assault on the Enogai-Bairoko area or on Roviana Lagoon beaches discovered by Lieutenant Colonel Currin's am-

<sup>24</sup> TF-31 OpnPlan AS-43, Annex A, 3-4, and Appendix 1 to Annex H; Turner ltr; Boyd interview.

phibious reconnaissance patrols in March and April. If the latter course were adopted, the Marines, after reaching shore, would move overland through the jungle to Bairoko, and there attack and destroy the enemy garrison. In either event Turner hoped to initiate the action about D-plus 4 days. In the interval between D-Day and 3 July, Liversedge would provide Hester with six 5-man patrols from the Raider Regiment. These patrols were expected to conduct vigorous reconnaissance along New Georgia's south coast, inland from the beaches, to find suitable avenues of approach from the Elolo area toward Munda. When the main body of their parent regiment came ashore, these Marines then would revert to Liversedge's control. To gain more specific information about the terrain inland from the beaches, Turner dispatched a party under Captain Boyd with instructions to reconnoiter the trails leading toward Bairoko and to determine time and space factors.<sup>25</sup>

The admiral believed that he would have assembled sufficient forces by 4 July to permit Hester to undertake a direct assault on Munda after a shore-to-shore movement from Rendova, across reef-filled Roviana Lagoon, to the designated beaches of Munda Point. This operation would be protected by small infantry units occupying key islets in the lagoon, by heavy artillery and naval gunfire laid on Munda Point, and by fighter aircraft. At the same time the Raider Regiment would occupy the Bairoko-Enogai area to prevent Japanese traffic in either direction between Munda and Kolombangara. When Munda and Bairoko had fallen, and the enemy's New Georgia garrison had been destroyed, the New Georgia Occupation Force—on Halsey's order—would then assault Kolombangara.<sup>26</sup>

Such was the plan on 4 June.

Although brilliantly conceived, Turner's concept underwent many changes before it became an order and the operation actually began. As the Americans laid plans and assembled troops, ships, and supplies for the coming invasion, Allied coastwatchers and aerial observers in

late May and early June noted Japanese movements toward the Central Solomons in implementation of General Imamura's 2 May directive. Evaluation of this information led South Pacific intelligence officers to make a revised estimate of enemy potentials. But the Allies were not prepared to employ additional forces to meet the increased enemy strength, for, as then envisaged, the complete TOENAILS operation included the capture of Kolombangara. Some combat units must be held back in order to be ready to execute that task. And the Joint Chiefs had approved TOENAILS with the proviso that no major forces would be committed.<sup>27</sup>

These considerations prompted Admiral Turner, on 12 June, to request two additional reinforced infantry divisions, three Marine Defense Battalions, four Marine Raider or Parachute Battalions, and 14,000 other troops (Seabees, medical, boat pools, service, supply, etc.). While this request was unsuccessful, subsequent events proved its submission well founded.<sup>28</sup>

A week after failing to obtain additional troops, Turner received further discouragement. Boyd's amphibious reconnaissance patrol returned and submitted a report indicating that it would take about a month for Liversedge's unit to move from Zanana to Bairoko. In addition, Boyd ventured the opinion that even the highly trained Raiders could not negotiate the treacherous Roviana Lagoon and make a rapid landing without undue difficulty. Turner therefore abandoned his earlier plans for the Marine Raiders and directed Liversedge to land at Rice Anchorage on New Georgia's western shore. Marine amphibious patrols, reconnaissance planes, and coastwatchers—ably assisted by friendly natives—continued the search for suitable landing beaches and the most practica-

<sup>27</sup> Turner ltr. The limited level terrain around Vila was capped by an extremely soft surface that eroded quickly under the prevalent, heavy, seasonal rains. Thus, construction of a suitable airfield would have been a tremendous undertaking. This factor—along with others—later led to abandonment of the Kolombangara phase of the TOENAILS plan. The airfield at Vila actually never proved of much value to the Japanese.

<sup>28</sup> CTF-32 memorandum to ComSoPac, 12Jun43.

<sup>25</sup> Boyd interview; interview with Col. S. B. Griffith, II, 21Feb51.

<sup>26</sup> TF-31 OpnPlan AS-43, 7 and Annex A, 4.



ble routes of approach to Bairoko Harbor.<sup>29</sup>

### HESTER'S ORDER<sup>30</sup>

Upon receiving Admiral Turner's plan, General Hester, as Commander of the New Georgia Occupation Force, set about drawing up his order. Because of the involvement of large numbers of units from all the services, and because of the wide area covered by the diverse operations, Hester decided to split his 43d Division staff into two segments: One, to supervise the activities of the Occupation Force as a whole, worked immediately under the general

<sup>29</sup> Boyd interview; Griffith ltr.

<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise cited, the information in this section was derived from one or more of the following sources: Gen Hester's ltrs of 9Feb51 and 15Mar52; interviews with BrigGens Harry B. Liversedge and William J. Scheyer on 10Sep51 and 5Jan52, respectively; 3dMarDiv Observers' reports; CNO, F-111 file for June 1943.

and his chief of staff; the other, responsible solely for the initial landing at Rendova, was directed by the 43d Division's assistant commander, Brigadier General Leonard F. Wing. Both staffs, of course, reported to Hester.<sup>31</sup>

By his order, issued first on 16 June but modified many times thereafter as circumstances warranted, Hester specified the details and assigned combat units in accordance with the broad outline laid down by Turner's plan.<sup>32</sup>

But a number of events foreshadowing innumerable last-minute revisions occurred before the eventual landings in the Central Solomons. As will be seen, only five days after Hester signed his Field Order #1, Admiral Turner found it expedient to commit a portion of the forces that the general had expected to

<sup>31</sup> McNenny report.

<sup>32</sup> NGOF Field Orders 1, 2 and 3; TF-31 Loading Orders; CTG-31 dispatch 262333.



**TOP COMMANDERS GATHER** on the bridge of the USS *McCawley* while en route to the D-Day landings at Rendova. Left to right: General Wing, Admiral Wilkinson, Admiral Turner, General Hester. (Army Photo.)



**A JUMBLED MESS** in the hold of a supply vessel awaits this 4th Base Depot working party. Situations such as this were not unusual, but the Marines nevertheless unloaded the ships quickly, repaired the damaged materiel and reestablished order out of chaos.

use in the TOENAILS operation. The occasion: Seizure of Segi Point by half of the 4th Marine Raider Battalion on 21 June.

This unexpectedly early employment of the Marines, who were followed the next day by additional elements of Hundley's force, dictated readjustment of the time-tables for the Eastern Landing Force and reallocation of troops designated for specific missions. Taking Segi before schedule had one favorable aspect, however; it eventually permitted completion of a fighter strip at that place a week to ten days before the previously expected date. Contrariwise, solution of resupply and reinforcement problems for that little occupation force tied up some of the all-too-few ships Turner then

had available. Also, it could have imposed an insurmountable burden on the Marine 4th Base Depot in the Russells—supply center for the entire Occupation Force—which was not normally geared to meet premature requirements. But this unit fortunately was staffed by men well trained and capable of “doubling in brass.” With the invaluable assistance of high-ranking “red tape cutters” on Admiral Turner's staff, the 4th Base Depot overcame all obstacles and gathered and issued the necessary gear with even less than normal confusion. Then too, Turner's arbitrary—but considered—removal of the Raiders' Company O from the Western Landing Force compelled Hester to use two of his own 43d Division companies in



the seizure of Zanana's several offshore islets.

Late reports of Allied amphibious patrols and coastwatchers, and intelligence estimates based on aerial photographs and intercepted enemy radio messages, indicated a continual increase in the strength available to General Sasaski and Admiral Ota. Thus, General Hester had to plan to commit his Reserve much earlier than previously anticipated. These reports also revealed that unseasonal rains had

flooded streams and had turned all low ground into morasses, inundating many projected roads and storage areas. The additional discouraging information that Zanana Beach could accommodate only four LCM's simultaneously, was somewhat alleviated by the revelation that additional troops could easily be landed on the banks of the Piraka River, which emptied into Roviana Lagoon some 1,000 yards northeast of Zanana.

The scouts had still another enigma to present to Hester's harried staff: They discovered that the channel across Roviana Lagoon from Onaiavisi Entrance to the two landing points was shallower than previously estimated. Therefore before undertaking the jump from Rendova to New Georgia, the Western Landing Force would have to conduct a more thorough investigation than originally believed necessary and stake out a suitable channel after the initial assault.

Admiral Turner's decision to land the 1st Marine Raider Regiment at Rice Anchorage rather than on the Roviana Lagoon shore meant abandonment of the prospective deployment of those small, temporarily attached Marine units that Hester had thought would be working with him from D-Day to D-plus 4 days. Other units perforce would have to conduct the necessary patrolling inland after the initial landings. To complicate matters, the artillery positions proposed for Kuru Kuru, Bau and Kokorana, were too far from prospective targets on New Georgia to permit the guns to give the infantry effective support during its advance westward or to bring heavy fires to bear on Munda Point. This factor dictated displacement of the light and medium artillery battalions across Blanche Channel to Roviana, Baraulu, and Sasavele as soon as possible.

General Hester had to solve all these new problems before the operation began. Basically, he made few changes in Turner's original plan, but in details that affected small units, he made quite a number.

First, he divided his Western Landing Force into two parts: The Northern Landing Group, consisting of Colonel Harry B. Liversedge's 1st Marine Raider Regiment (less the 2d, 3d and

4th Battalions) and the 3d Battalions of the 145th and 148th Infantry Regiments (both of the 37th Division); and the Southern Landing Group, comprising all the remaining elements of the Western Landing Force. Detailed schemes of maneuver were left to these subordinate commanders, but over-all supervisory responsibility remained with Hester.<sup>33</sup>

The Southern Landing Group, initially under the direction of General Wing, would seize beachheads on Rendova and its outlying islands on D-Day. When the 43d Division command post moved to shore from the flagship *McCawley* later in the day, General Hester would resume active control of this force. To prevent air interference at this stage of the game, Hester requested air strikes on enemy-held Northern Solomons bases, simultaneous bombing of the Vila (Kolombangara) and Munda areas, and continuous air cover for troops and shipping in the target area.<sup>34</sup>

The general expected that by D-plus 4 days his force would be established firmly in its first beachheads and that patrols would have discovered and staked out adequate channels through the barrier reefs to Zanana and Pirake beaches. At this time the 172d Infantry (Colonel David N. M. Ross) would execute the shore-to-shore movement to Zanana Beach in small increments and, on a 2,000-yard front, begin a westerly march along the coast, astride the coastal track, to the Barike River.

The following day the 169th Infantry (Colonel John D. Easen), to advance to Rendova in the fifth echelon of transports during the night of 3-4 July, could land behind the 172d, push inland through the jungle-swamp, and deploy along the Barike on the 172d's right flank, thus presenting a united, two-regiment front to the enemy, with the Barike designated the line of departure for the final drive on Munda.

To cut the flow of enemy traffic between Munda Point and Kolombangara, the Northern Landing Group would land from APD's and seize in turn Rice Anchorage, Enogai Inlet and

Bairoko Harbor. Indirect naval support in the form of bombardments of Kolombangara and Vella Lavella as well as the two successive objectives, and interception of Japanese surface craft (including barges) would assist the Liversedge force. This action—which will be described in detail later (see Chapter IV)—when coupled with the push along the south coast, would have the effect of a two-pronged drive on Munda airfield, one from the north and one from the east.

Under Hester's direction, General Wing made detailed plans for the D-Day landing of his Southern Group.<sup>35</sup> His order directed the Barracuda (43d Division troops specially trained for scouting, jungle patrolling and assault missions) units to establish a shallow beachhead on Rendova, into which the remainder of the force could move without opposition. To protect small boats and landing ships passing through Renard Entrance, the Barracudas would seize Bau and Kokorana Islands before H-Hour. Simultaneously, Companies A and B, 169th Infantry, the 128-man South Pacific Scout Company,<sup>36</sup> Boyd's amphibious scouts, and Wickham's coastwatcher unit would seize Baraulu and Sasavele Islands, to protect Onaia-Visi Entrance. Wing also instructed these troops to locate channels through the lagoon to the Zanana and Piraka beaches.

The 172d Infantry on board transports and cargo vessels would climb into small boats, be lowered into the water, make the dash for Rendova, complete the initial H-Hour assault and expand the Barracudas' beachhead. Into this Wing and Hester could feed portions of the 9th Defense Battalion, the 24th Naval Construction Battalion, and the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry.

After the infantry landings two 155mm howitzer battalions (136th and 192d) and the 103d FA Battalion (105mm howitzers) would land on Rendova, Bau and Kokorana Islands to support the 172d on Rendova, to secure Renard Entrance, or to fire on New Georgia.

The 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, designated

<sup>33</sup> Turner ltr; Boyd interview; LtCol William D. Stevenson ltr to CMC, 22Feb51.

<sup>34</sup> ComSoPac, Weekly Air Intelligence Combat Reports 18Apr43-25Dec43.

<sup>35</sup> 43dInfDiv Field Order #1, 17Jun43.

<sup>36</sup> A commando unit made up of Tongan and Fijian Islanders, trained and led by New Zealanders.



**SHIPS OF THE CONVOY** assembled off Koli Point, Guadalcanal, during the afternoon of 29 June. Shortly after this picture was snapped, the vessels weighed anchor and steamed up the Slot toward their Rendova target. (Army Photo.)

the Southern Landing Group's reserve, supported by the 9th Defense Battalion's Special Weapons Group (Lieutenant Colonel Wright C. Taylor) and other assorted units, would mop up and defend Rendova.

The remaining elements of the 9th Defense Battalion also received specific assignments.<sup>37</sup> The 90mm Antiaircraft Group (Major Mark S. Adams), responsible for the antiaircraft defense of the beachhead, would operate radars and searchlights as well as fire at high-flying planes. The 155mm Gun Group (Lieutenant Colonel Archie E. O'Neil), with 155mm M-1 guns (Long Toms), could undertake the interdiction and harassment of Munda Point from positions on Rendova's northern beaches, and repel attacks by hostile surface craft. The .50-calibre machine guns, and the 20mm and 40mm guns of the Special Weapons Group

<sup>37</sup> 9thDefBn, WD, Jun43; 9thDefBn, OpnO 5-43, 24Jun43.

would protect the force against low-flying planes as well as augment beach defenses on Rendova and its off-lying islands.

Inasmuch as General Harmon had no tanks available in the South Pacific area to provide for the 43d Division, General Hester decided to utilize the eight vehicles of the 9th Defense Battalion's Tank Platoon (First Lieutenant Robert W. Blake). Hester initially attached Blake's Platoon to the 172d Infantry and gave it instructions to prepare to move to New Georgia on order, to assist the 43d Division on its drive on Munda.

This was the plan for the operation to be initiated on 30 June.

### **SEIZURE OF SEGI AND VIRU**

A few days after General Hester issued his Field Order #1, certain events transpired that forced some of the modifications described above.

Captain Donald G. Kennedy, British District Officer of the Western Solomons, had begun operations in the New Georgia area even before invasion of Guadalcanal. From his hidden jungle post near Segi Point, Kennedy had performed almost miraculous feats as a coastwatcher, harrying the foe in every possible way at every opportunity. With a small but faithful band of native followers, he had kept Japanese outposts in Eastern New Georgia under continuous and close observation. Occasionally he launched sudden and audacious attacks against these positions, achieving such a degree of success that the enemy casualty toll exceeded the total strength of his own small force. Downed Allied aviators and shipwrecked sailors often found a haven in the Kennedy-controlled area. Kennedy's reports of enemy ship and plane movements proved of incalculable aid to the defenders of the Southern Solomons, who—thus alerted—could take immediate counteraction even before reached by the enemy attacks.<sup>38</sup>

Kennedy's immediate opponent in Eastern New Georgia was First Lieutenant Takagi, commander of the Viru Sector Unit. This 245-man command consisted of the 3d Company, 229th Infantry Regiment, IJA, a few assorted naval personnel from the Kure 6th and Yokosuka 7th SNLF's, one 3-inch coast defense gun, four 80mm guns, eight dual purpose (antiaircraft-antipersonnel) guns and a varying number of landing craft. Despite vigorous patrolling, both on foot and in boats, Takagi could not suppress Kennedy's activities, and over a period of several months his casualties mounted at an alarming rate.<sup>39</sup>

Wearied of Kennedy's incessant forays and the unarrested attrition suffered by Takagi's unit, General Sasaki decided to take positive action. Sasaki had moved the bulk of the 229th Infantry (Colonel Genjiro Hirata) of the 38th Division from Kolombangara to Munda on 2 June. Less than a week later—on 8 June—Sasaki ordered Hirata to push Kennedy out of Segi. For this task Hirata decided to use

<sup>38</sup> *Among Those Present*, 43; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 141-142.

<sup>39</sup> CIC Item #591, 9-10, 13; CIC Extract of Translations, serial 01244, 2Aug43.

Major Hara's 1st Battalion (parent unit of the 3d Company) and accordingly ordered Hara to move to Viru Harbor, reorganize and reinforce the defenses there and in the vicinity of Wickham Anchorage, and then initiate a program of intensive activity against Kennedy.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after Hara's arrival at Viru, strong enemy patrols began to probe the coast, villages, trails and jungle between Viru Harbor and Gatukai Island. Japanese barges, previously furtive when operating in Kennedy's bailiwick, became increasingly aggressive. When his native scouts reported the arrival of strong enemy reinforcements in the vicinity of Viru, Kennedy correctly estimated that Hara was preparing for an attack. Realizing that he could not hold Segi very long with the few native troops he had available, Kennedy therefore requested Admiral Turner to send reinforcements without delay.

This request reached Koli Point, Guadalcanal, during the night of 18-19 June. It did not take Turner long to make a decision. If he should land at Segi immediately, instead of 30 June as scheduled, he then could retain the beachhead so tenuously held by Kennedy. Moreover, he would be able to establish an advance base from which he could execute—with a reasonably strong force already ashore—the planned operations against Viru and Vangunu.

The next morning he issued the necessary orders.

Destroyer-transport *Dent*, *Waters*, *Schley* and *Crosby*, earmarked for the New Georgia landings by Turner's 4 June operation order, were already in the Guadalcanal area undergoing training and preparations for the forthcoming operation.<sup>41</sup> Turner could utilize these readily available ships for the emergency movement. As a landing force he would employ some of the units already assigned to Admiral Fort's Eastern Force (TG-31.3) plus First Lieutenant Raymond L. Luckel's Company O, 4th Raider Battalion, previously detached to temporary

<sup>40</sup> CIC Item #591, 10; CIC Item #43/153, 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Dent* and *Waters* previously had been designated "Rendova Advance Unit" (Cdr John D. Sweeney). *Schley* and *Crosby* were part of Transdiv 22 (LCdr Robert H. Wilkinson), temporarily assigned to TG-31.3 for the initial landing.

duty with Turner's own Western Force (TG-31.1), but immediately available for commitment. Currin's 4th Marine Raider Battalion (less Companies N and Q, scheduled to attack Vangunu) would move to Kennedy's aid immediately, followed shortly by Companies A and D (First Lieutenant Wendell L. Power and Captain Edgar F. Bishop, respectively), 103d Infantry, USA. These units could initially defend Segi and then carry out the planned attack on Viru.<sup>42</sup>

Currin embarked his troops on board the *Dent* and *Waters* in the evening of 20 June and sailed at high speed for Segi. Despite the

<sup>42</sup> TF-31 OpnPlan AS-43, 4; ONI, *Solomon Islands Campaign: X, "Operations in the New Georgia Area,"* 9; 4thRdrBn, SAR, 1 and Annex A; Chief, HistDiv, DeptArmy, ltr CSHIS 322, 26Aug49.

presence of native pilots and the benefit of bonfires ignited by Kennedy's men on the beach, both ships repeatedly scraped bottom on the shoals in the foul water surrounding Segi Point. Nevertheless, at 0530 the next morning the Marines climbed into Higgins boats and landed 20 minutes later. By 1030 the ships were completely unloaded and Currin had already established defenses against a Japanese attack. No enemy appeared. The following day at 0600 the *Schley* and *Crosby* hove to and by 0745 the two Army companies, plus a survey party from Acorn 7 were ashore.

For the next several days Currin's men, guided and reinforced by Kennedy's natives, conducted routine operations to seek out and destroy enemy units in the area, and reconnoitered to determine the most suitable means



**MARINES OF THE 4TH RAIDER BATTALION** man a machine-gun nest near Segi Point. Built and equipped by Captain Kennedy's "little army of natives," this position covered the seaward approaches to the Markham Planation, largest coconut grove in the area.

of attacking Viru Harbor. To protect Njai Passage, Currin set up a strong security outpost on Patutiva Point, Vangunu. No contact was made with the enemy, but the Marines discovered ample evidence of the presence of sizable numbers of Japanese, in the form of footprints, abandoned equipment, and trail blazes.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, Admiral Fort, elated over the success of the Segi venture sent out the previously completed plans for his Eastern Force (TG-31.3). These were delivered at Segi early in the morning of 25 June. As written on 21 June (and modified the next day), before complete reports of the situation at Segi had filtered through, this order directed Company P (Captain Anthony Walker), advance unit of the force scheduled to attack Viru Harbor (CATSMEAT), to proceed via rubber boat and canoe on 28 June to Nono (at the Choi River mouth, about three airline miles west of Segi). Walker was to land at Nono, advance overland toward Tetemara on the harbor's western shore and there—on 30 June—launch an attack at about 0700. As soon as Walker's attack had begun, Commander Stanley Leith would sail into the harbor with the *Kilty* and *Crosby*, carrying a 355-man landing force (Captain Raymond E. Kinch, USA).<sup>44</sup> Kinch would then land his troops and, in conjunction with Walker, capture Viru Harbor. The Americans then could develop Viru into a protected staging refuge for small craft and an operating base for motor torpedo boats. Succeeding echelons would move into Viru via APC's and small craft to reinforce the position and assist in the necessary construction work. Additional paragraphs of the order gave details concerning the proposed seizure of Wickham Anchorage (ARMCHAIR) and development of Segi Point (BLACKBOY), but no provision was made for Company O and that portion of 4th Raider Battalion headquarters already at Segi.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Consisting of Kinch's own Company B, 103d Infantry (reinforced), one-half of Company D, 20th Naval Construction Battalion, Battery E, 70th Coast Artillery (less one platoon), and a naval base unit.

<sup>45</sup> TG-31.3 OpnOrder AL 10-43, 21Jun43, 1-4; TF-31

Consternation reigned in the Marine camp when the order was read. Admiral Fort apparently had based his plan on the report of an early amphibious reconnaissance patrol which, with native guides, had gone from Segi to Nono in canoes and thence had hiked up a trail along the banks of the Choi River without encountering resistance. Moreover, early intelligence estimates had placed a maximum of 100 Japanese in the vicinity of Viru Harbor. Evidently Admiral Fort was not aware of the arrival of Major's Hara's battalion.

On the other hand Colonel Currin well knew, as a result of patrol reports, statements of natives and coastwatchers and personal observation, that numerous Japanese roamed the area through which Walker would have to pass.<sup>46</sup> Although Viru Harbor lay but 11 airline miles to the west of Segi, it could be reached only over tortuous trails passing around the heads of unfordable streams, thus necessitating a trip of many times that distance. Furthermore, a tiny reconnaissance patrol can travel over jungle paths much faster than a large combat unit equipped for an assault.<sup>47</sup>

Additional reconnaissance after reception of the order indicated that Regi Village, about one mile east of Nono, possessed the sole beach suitable for landing of sizable body of men. Happily it was undefended by the enemy. Moreover, native scouts reported that an enemy force of undetermined size and composition had just occupied Nono. A rubber boat and canoe landing against Japanese troops, no matter what their numbers, would make the boated Marines sitting ducks for defending riflemen. At 1600, therefore, Currin radioed Admiral Fort for permission to land at Regi rather than Nono, to utilize Company O as well as Company P, and to begin the operation on 27

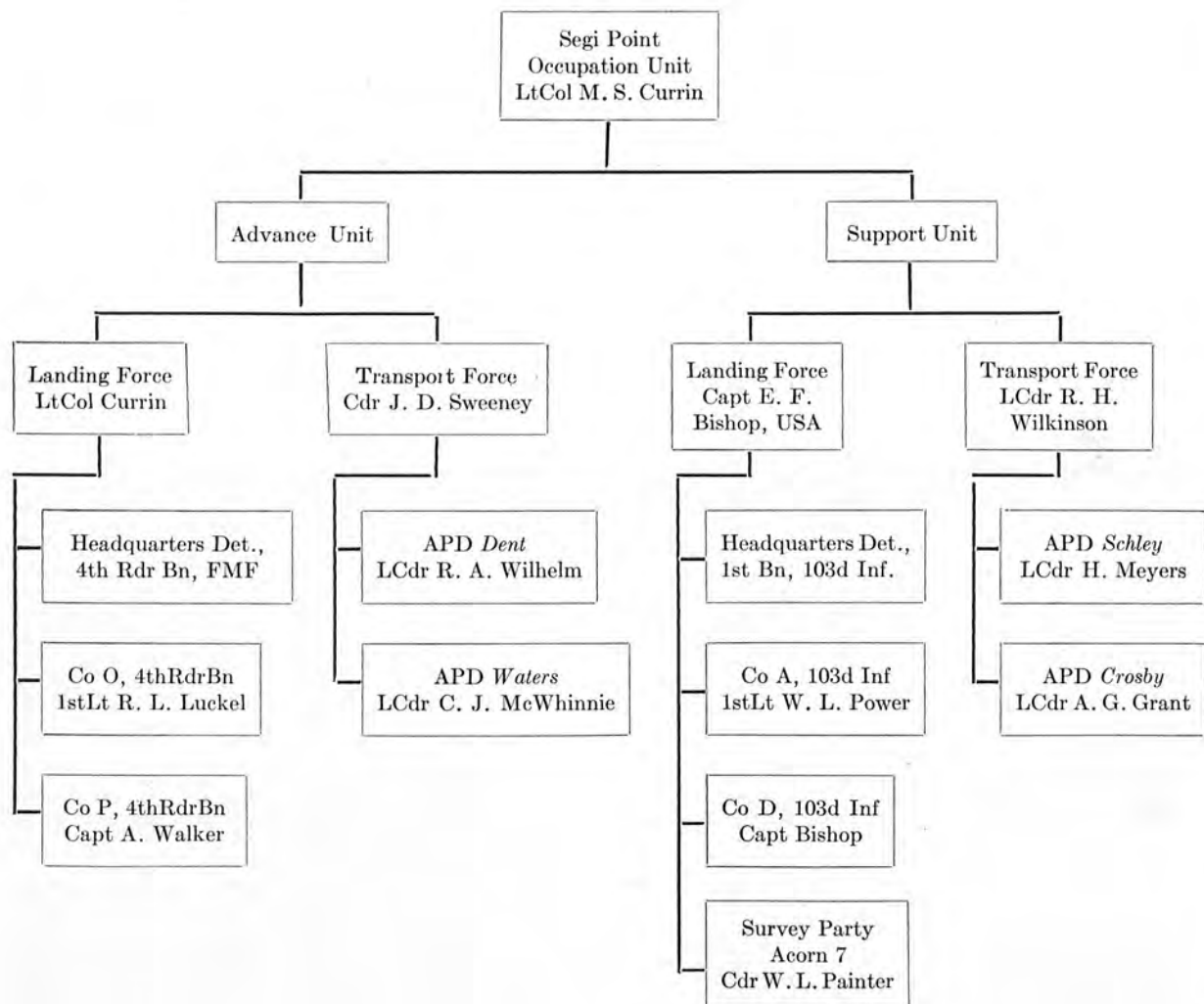
ltr FE25/L1 over 0013b, 22Jun43; TG-31.3 Loading Order 1-43, 16Jun43, encl 1, 9, 16-17, 22, 26. Under Turner's original plan Company O had been a part of the Western Landing Force.

<sup>46</sup> Currin was eminently well qualified to make an intelligence estimate. In March and April he had spent 20 days in this area with amphibious patrols; upon his return to Segi on 21 June he had personally reconnoitered for avenues of approach to Viru.

<sup>47</sup> Currin interview, 5Oct49.



THE LANDING AT SEGI POINT  
TASK ORGANIZATION



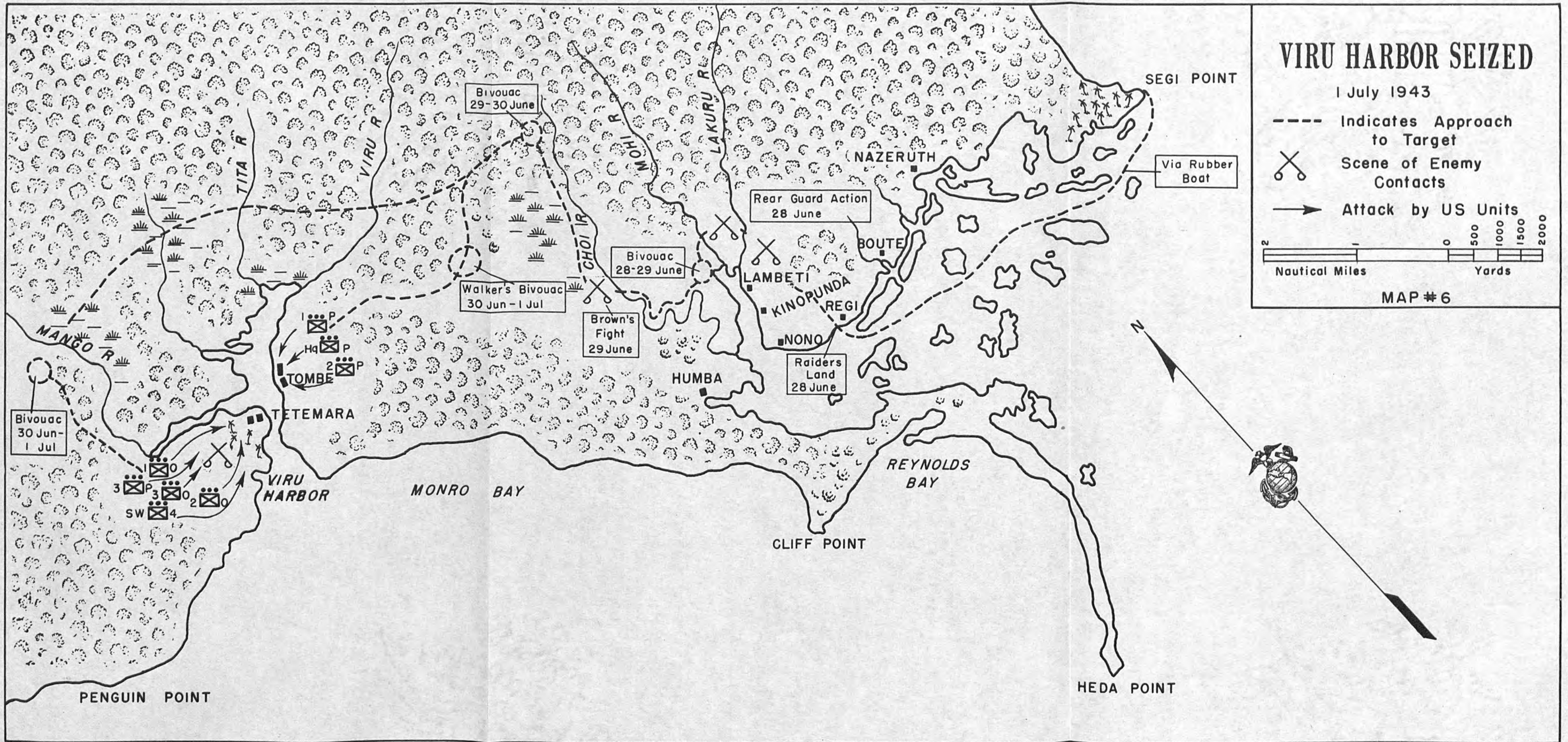
rather than 28 June. Within an hour and a half he had an answer granting his request.<sup>48</sup>

Accordingly, at nightfall, 27 June, the Marines embarked in rubber boats and paddled to Regi where, at 0015 the following morning, they landed and established a hasty perimeter defense. At 0630, with Company O in the van followed by Headquarters Company and Company P, Currin's Marines began the march toward Viru. Three hours later a five-man Japanese patrol, unknowingly dogging the

<sup>48</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 3-4.

footsteps of the slow-moving column,<sup>49</sup> stumbled into the rear party, Company P's 3d Platoon. Deploying rapidly, the Marines took the enemy under fire while the main body pushed on. During the short skirmish which ensued, four Japanese were killed. Again at

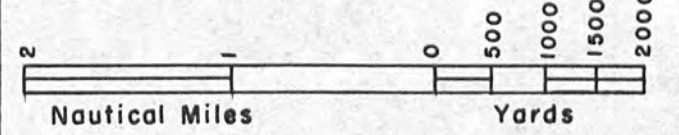
<sup>49</sup> Limited to a single narrow trail, the battalion necessarily advanced in column of files which, even in good terrain, obviates rapid movement. Currin knew of the presence of the enemy patrol, but since his mission required immediate movement toward his objective he instructed Walker to be alert but not to attack unless the Japanese should harass the battalion rear.



# VIRU HARBOR SEIZED

1 July 1943

- Indicates Approach to Target
- ✕ Scene of Enemy Contacts
- ➔ Attack by US Units



MAP #6

Bivouac 29-30 June

Rear Guard Action 28 June

Walker's Bivouac 30 Jun-1 Jul

Bivouac 28-29 June

Brown's Fight 29 June

Raiders Land 28 June

Bivouac 30 Jun-1 Jul

1115 another enemy group hit the rear guard. Walker's machine guns quickly went into action and within an hour the Japanese broke off contact and withdrew. Unfortunately, by the time the fight concluded, Sergeant Sudro and four men of the rear party inadvertently had fallen so far behind the main body that they found it expedient to return to Segi for a time and rejoin the battalion later.<sup>50</sup>

The delay imposed by this encounter, coupled with the steep hills, flooded streams, coral outcroppings, and tangled vines across the trail seriously impeded the advance. Currin, recognizing the impossibility of reaching his objective on schedule, dispatched a message to Admiral Turner stating that he would be a day late in reaching Viru.<sup>51</sup>

The next day the Marines resumed their advance and the morning passed without incident. At 1400, however, as Company P (still in the rear) crossed the Choi River, Captain Walker dispatched a 60-man force under 1st Lieutenant Devillo W. Brown to investigate a commanding piece of high ground some 300 yards to the right. In compliance with Walker's order Brown moved out rapidly but as his point advanced up the slope, an estimated 45 enemy, dug in on the crest, opened fire with rifles and three light machine guns. Brown's men deployed and returned fire. When sounds of this fire fight reached Colonel Currin, then some distance forward along the trail at the head of the main body, he ordered the column to halt and get off the trail. Efforts to raise Walker on the radio failed; no Company P runner appeared to acquaint Currin with the situation. Currin finally hurried back to Walker's position and there learned that the enemy had just disengaged and fled, carrying their wounded with them but leaving 18 dead behind. Brown's unit had suffered five killed and one wounded.

<sup>50</sup> Col M. S. Currin ltr to CMC, 8Feb51; LtCol Anthony Walker ltr to CMC, 23Feb51; 4thRdrBn, SAR, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with LtCol M. S. Currin, 22Apr49. Two native runners carried this message to Captain Kennedy at Segi, who unsuccessfully made repeated attempts to radio it to the Russells. The information, when it finally reached Admiral Fort, was promptly passed on to Leith, already underway. Admiral Turner did not learn of this situation until the forenoon of 30 June while on board ship off Rendova. (Turner ltr.)

Inasmuch as these enemy no longer presented a threat, and his mission demanded that he proceed without delay, and since he had already lost an inordinate amount of time as a result of this and the fight the preceding day, Currin directed Brown's group to rejoin the column; Company P would detach a squad to follow independently after the main body and carry the wounded man. Upon Brown's return, Currin pushed on to the Choi's headwaters where he set up a perimeter defense for the night. At 2100 the carrying party, bearing the wounded man, safely reached the battalion position.<sup>52</sup>

The rising sun looked down on a strange scene on 30 June. At that time the Marines were still a day's march from their objective. But there, standing off Viru Harbor was Commander Stanley Leith's Occupation Unit (*Hopkins, Kilty and Crosby*) carrying Captain R. E. Kinch's Landing Force. After repeated attempts to establish radio contact with Currin had failed, Leith edged cautiously toward shore.

Grim-eyed Japanese manned defensive positions and trained unfriendly weapons on the approaching vessels. When the APD's hove into range at 0703, bedlam broke loose; shells from a Japanese 3-inch gun on Tetemara Point began bursting close aboard the slow-moving American craft. According to original plans this gun should have been either knocked out or manned by Currin's men. Obviously something had gone awry. Leith, having been forwarned of the possible delay to Currin's force, but unwilling to leave the scene inasmuch as he had not established radio contact with the Marines who might be in trouble, withdrew beyond range and steamed back and forth off the harbor mouth to await developments.

Shortly after 1000 the situation ashore was still obscure. At that time Leith, having secured Admiral Turner's approval, very correctly decided to put Kinch's force ashore at Nono. Kinch could then proceed overland and go to the aid of the Marines, whom he suspected were experiencing difficulties in carrying out

<sup>52</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 6; Walker ltr; Currin ltr; Currin interview.

their mission.<sup>53</sup> A jubilant Major Hara reported to General Sasaki at Munda Point that the Viru Sector Unit had repulsed an attempted American landing.

Colonel Currin, meanwhile, was pushing down the trail toward Hara's positions at Viru. Although the day passed uneventfully, the dripping jungle, slimy trails and heavy loads slowed the Marines. Fortunately, Hara did not choose to contest their advance that day.

That night Currin found himself within striking distance of his objective, Viru Harbor. Late intelligence reports indicated the enemy main strength was concentrated in the vicinity of Tetemara, a collection of grass huts on the harbor's western shore. Natives and coast-watchers also told of a small Japanese outpost at Tombe, directly across the harbor from Tetemara. Several hundred yards ahead of the Marine bivouac lay the junction of the trails to

<sup>53</sup> ONI, *Combat Narratives, Solomon Islands Campaign*, X, 17-18. Roy J. Batterton, "You fight by the book," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, Jul49.

the two villages. The projected landing of Company B, 103d Infantry, at Tetemara after the Marine attack began, would not only have the effect of a two-pronged assault, but also would throw the preponderance of the American force against the main Japanese position.

To prevent the Tombe outpost from supporting the defense of Tetemara, and to deny his opponent the opportunity of withdrawing via Tombe after the American attack was launched, Currin had originally planned to dispatch one reinforced rifle platoon to reduce that position. In view of the repeated contacts on 28 and 29 June, however, Currin felt reasonably sure that the enemy, alerted for an impending attack, had probably taken steps to reinforce the outpost. He therefore ordered two platoons of Company P (approximately 100 men) to move independently down the Tombe Trail and on 1 July destroy the outpost and seize the village. The main body, meanwhile, would move along the Tetemara Trail, around the head of Viru Harbor, and strike the Tetemara-based Japa-



**SUPPLY-LADEN LCT's** landed at Tetemara in Viru Harbor only a few minutes after Marines had cleared the enemy from the area. These vessels entered the harbor's mouth as the Marines attacked from the jungle-swamp inland, thus giving the appearance of a coordinated land and amphibious assault.

nese in the rear. From the Marines' point of view the 1 July attack went generally as planned, although not without some unforeseen difficulties.

By 0845 Company P's two platoons had reached the edge of Tombe and had moved into position for an attack. Achieving complete surprise with a sudden heavy burst of fire, the Marines charged the village. Thirteen dead Japanese were all that remained of the enemy defenses. There were no Marine casualties.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, Currin's force, now consisting of Company O, Battalion Headquarters, and one platoon of Company P (1st Lieutenant Malcolm N. McCarthy), continued to advance. At 0900 six planes of VMSB-132 and VB-11 bombed and strafed the Tetemara area, driving the defenders from their beach positions to cover in the jungle. While the air attack progressed, LCT's, loaded with gasoline, oil, and ammunition for the proposed PT base moved into the harbor.<sup>55</sup> Shortly thereafter (at 1010) Japanese riflemen opened fire on Currin's point. The enemy commander (Major Hara) undoubtedly believed a coordinated attack underway.

The Japanese outpost which had fired on the point quickly fell back, and the tired Marines deployed for action. A few desultory shots rang out from both sides as the Marines pushed quickly forward toward Tetemara. At 1030 the attackers suffered their first casualty when the volume of enemy fire noticeably increased. The advance slowed somewhat as Marines methodically shot at flitting targets. An hour later, though hostile machine guns on both flanks chattered viciously, the attack still pressed forward. By 1305 Currin's troops reached high ground southwest of Tetemara, and dug in until demolition squads disposed of the enemy machine gun emplacements. At 1500 Currin resumed the attack and an hour later launched the final assault on the Japanese defensive positions. With Company O and headquarters personnel establishing a base of fire, McCarthy's Company P platoon swept around the right flank and enfiladed the opposing left. With fixed bayonets and wild yells, the Marines

carried the position, and a half-hour later entered Tetemara. Hara's defeated survivors scurried into the jungle. At 1700 the supply-filled LCT's dropped ramps and discharged their cargo.

Company O had overrun the enemy's position. Forty-eight Japanese were dead, at a cost to Currin's men of eight killed and 15 wounded. The Marine booty included 16 machine guns of assorted types and calibre, one 3-inch coast-defense gun, four 80mm guns and eight dual purpose guns, plus stores of food, clothing, ammunition and small-boat supplies.

Currin immediately organized the area for defense and consolidated his position. Three days later, Company B, 103d Infantry, completed its overland march and joined the Marine outpost that Currin had set up at Tombe. After establishing defenses the Americans guarded the area until relieved by a garrison force on 9 July. The following day the Raiders returned to their old camp on Guadalcanal and awaited further orders. Seizure of Viru Harbor had cost the 4th Raider Battalion 13 killed and 15 wounded. The enemy lost 61 killed and approximately 100 wounded in the two small actions at Tombe and Tetemara alone.<sup>56</sup>

Following this defeat General Sasaki ordered Colonel Hirata to abandon Eastern New Georgia and pull those Japanese garrisons stationed there back to assist in the defense of Munda airfield. The high command at Rabaul, hoping to delay Admiral Halsey's advance until such time as American forces would be exhausted and could be defeated in detail, or until Imperial General Headquarters would be willing to move additional forces into the Solomons-Bismareks area, had ordered Admiral Ota and General Sasaki to hold their New Georgia line at all costs.<sup>57</sup> About 170 survivors of Hara's force marched over the rugged jungle trails and reached the Munda area about 18 July, just in time to take part in the final defense of the airfield.

<sup>54</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 7.

<sup>55</sup> These LCT's were not to have landed until Viru Harbor had been secured.

<sup>56</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, Part II, 35.



**AIR VIEW OF SEGI POINT AIRSTRIP**, built by Seabees immediately after Marines occupied the area. In the background lies the labyrinth of islets and coral reefs through which Currin's men paddled their rubber boats to make the landing at Segi. Upon its completion, the Segi airstrip became a base for fighter planes operating in support of the eventual drive on Munda Point.

### **SECURING VANGUNU** <sup>58</sup>

Vangunu is separated from the southeast tip of New Georgia by the very narrow Njai Passage. Wickham Anchorage lies off the island's southeastern shore. It had figured prominently in early planning of the TOENAILS operation as an L-Day target.

Amphibious reconnaissance patrols and groups of Coastwatcher Kennedy's native scouts, sent to the island during the planning stages, had roamed the beaches at will. Their reports indicated few enemy troops present, but no suitable areas for airstrip construction.

<sup>58</sup> Unless otherwise cited, the source of information for this section was extracted from Col Lester E. Brown ltr to author, 19Mar52.

Further study of Vangunu as a major objective revealed that a great effort here would prove of dubious value. That the enemy had failed to defend the island in strength was not surprising: Vangunu, for the Japanese, had little strategic or tactical importance other than as an advanced and little-used barge base. Conversely, for the Allies, possession of the island would make available a sheltered harbor along the supply route between the Rendova-Munda target area and the bases in the Southern Solomons.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, Admiral Turner decided to seize Vangunu for this purpose. In mid-June he sent

<sup>59</sup> Turner ltr. The subsequent Japanese failure to attack the Allied resupply convoys could not be foreseen.

Lieutenant Schrier<sup>60</sup> back to the island to make a last-minute survey of the situation and gather information on which to base his operation order. Schrier, in the evening of 20 June, reported that the Japanese strength on Vangunu was negligible and that the beaches in the vicinity of Oloana Bay could handle the landing of a reinforced battalion. Accordingly, the next day, Turner directed Admiral Fort (TG-31.3) to occupy the island with a small force.

Admiral Fort, in turn, assigned the mission to Lieutenant Colonel Lester E. Brown, USA. Brown's own 2nd Battalion, 103d Infantry, Battery B, 70th Coast Artillery, and half of the 20th NCB would provide the bulk of the troops. Fort also gave Brown Companies N (Captain Earle O. Snell, Jr.) and Q (Captain William Flake), the Demolitions Platoon (Second Lieutenant Robert P. Smith) and a headquarters detachment of the 4th Marine Raider Battalion. The battalion's executive officer, Major James R. Clark, would command the Marines.<sup>61</sup>

Colonel Brown immediately set about making detailed plans for his operation. As his immediate objective, Brown selected Oloana Bay (see Map #6) where Admiral Turner desired to build a refuge for small ships and landing craft. He directed the Marines to land before dawn from the APD's *Schley* and *McKean*, contact the reconnaissance party under Lieutenants Schrier (the Marine scout) and Lamb (his own S-2) and a group of Kennedy's natives, and with them establish a beachhead. The Army battalion was formed into two echelons: One, embarked in seven LCI's, would land 30 minutes after the Marines; the other, in seven LCT's would land at 1000.

Brown's plan of action called for the 103d Infantry's Company E (Captain Edward I. Chappell), reinforced with 81mm mortars and six native carriers, to proceed to Vura Village and occupy the west bank of the Vura River. This move was designed to prevent the escape of an estimated 100 Japanese who, according to native reports, occupied the village. Meanwhile,

the remainder of the force would drive well inland and set up a force beachhead line behind which artillerymen would emplace their guns and Seabees would begin construction of a small naval base.

Final reconnaissance and planning were completed on 27 June. The following day at 1133 the *Schley* and *McKean*, with Marines and supplies embarked, weighed anchor at Tetera and sailed for a rendezvous with the remainder of the force at Purvis Bay, Florida Island. The entire convoy hove to at 0335<sup>62</sup> on 30 June some two miles off Oloana Bay in Wickham Anchorage.

Darkness and a heavy downpour obscured not only the markers emplaced by Schrier several days before, but also the signal light which Schrier showed that night. Choppy seas and high winds caused confusion. The best radar available, in Admiral Fort's flagship *Trever*, was an old model that could not accurately fix the position of the force in relation to the invisible beach. Nevertheless, in accordance with their original orders, the APD's began to debark their passengers.

At this time Admiral Fort decided to postpone the landing until dawn, and instructed the *Schley* and *McKean* not to unload their Marine troops until further orders. But the APD's either ignored or never received the admiral's order and continued to send Marines over the side. While in the midst of debarkation, the APD commanders discovered they had incorrectly positioned their vessels. Relocation of the ships 1,000 yards to the east followed, and debarkation resumed. As the 36-foot landing boats forming the first wave jockeyed into position to make the dash to shore, they inadvertently filtered between the soldier-filled LCI's, which correctly had been remaining in company with the flagship.<sup>63</sup> In the resultant confusion, coxswains lost the tenuous contact they had had; all attempts to regain it in the rain-filled darkness failed. The boats, therefore, proceeded shoreward individually or in pairs. But even from the small craft, the beach markers

<sup>60</sup> On this trip Schrier was accompanied by 2dLt Lamb of the 103d Infantry.

<sup>61</sup> The rest of the battalion was then operating under the battalion commander at Segi Point.

<sup>62</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, Vangunu; *Combat Narratives*, X, 16.

<sup>63</sup> RAdm Fort ltr to author, 30Jan52.

remained invisible and as a consequence the Marines in the first wave landed at widely separated points.<sup>64</sup>

By far the most harrowing experience that stormy night was undergone by Marines of the 1st and 2d Platoons of Company Q. The two boats carrying these units, although remaining together despite wind, waves and rain, headed in the wrong direction in the darkness and grounded on a reef some seven miles west of Oloana Bay beaches. The craft containing the 1st Platoon (Second Lieutenant James E. Brown) was soon refloated, but in the process lost its rudder. Thereafter, the Marines, coached by the coxswain, steered it by manipulating buckets tied to the ends of lines trailing in its wake. The boat of the 2d Platoon (Second Lieutenant Eric S. Holmgrain) broached in the pounding surf and had to be abandoned. Holmgrain and his men waded and swam some two miles from the reef to shore. There, after a quick conference with Brown, he set up a local defense until daylight; Brown, meanwhile kept his platoon boated and just off the beach.

At first light the two platoons pushed eastward toward Oloana Bay, one platoon hiking along the beach, the other riding its crippled boat. About 45 minutes later the *McKean* hove into view and, upon being hailed and informed of the situation, immediately provided a replacement boat in which the 1st Platoon proceeded to Oloana forthwith. Meanwhile, Holmgrain led his 2d Platoon along the coast to rejoin the main body as soon as possible.<sup>65</sup>

Back at Oloana Bay, while Brown and Holmgrain struggled with elements to the west, an angry sea and coral shoals claimed six boats in short order. The Marine assault units landed at widely separated points, with some platoons as far as four miles from the designated beaches. Fortunately the enemy had failed to put any outposts in this area so despite the turmoil, no casualties resulted. Quickly orienting themselves, the Marines pushed inland and the individual units began to work their way toward Oloana Bay.

The first waves of soldiers, with the benefit

of daylight and quieting seas, landed in good order at 0700. When Colonel Brown came ashore he found only 75 Marines holding the beachhead, awaiting the momentarily expected arrival of their missing comrades. Brown held a hasty conference with Lieutenants Schrier and Lamb, who informed him that the main body of a small enemy force was located at Kaeruka, some 1,000 yards northeast of Vura Village.

The colonel promptly made the necessary changes in his plan and designated Kaeruka as his objective. By 0705 all the Army infantry was ashore, and Brown issued his combat order on the spot. Company E would carry out its originally assigned mission, and be prepared to render mortar support to the main body. Company F (Captain Ray Brown), followed in turn by Company G (Captain Ollie A. Hood), eight natives and the Marines, would proceed down the Kennedy (Coastwatcher) Trail to a line of departure some seven miles to the northeast, which lay along high ground immediately east of the Kaeruka River and 700 yards inland from the objective.<sup>66</sup> The artillerymen and Seabees would protect the Oloana Bay landing point, while those Marines who had been landed out of position would be instructed to rejoin the attacking force when they reached the beachhead. The force set out upon this venture about 0745.

A driving rain, deep mud and thick growth interfered with forward progress. Within minutes all the radios had fallen victim to the downpour, and without these Colonel Brown could not call on mortar support from the projected positions near Vura Village or artillery support from the Oloana Bay beachhead. Between the attackers and their objective ran two streams, reported by natives as "easily fordable." But because of the rain both of these were shoulder-deep, raging torrents, flowing with such terrific force that wading men repeatedly were swept off their feet. In each instance Brown ordered ropes strung from bank to bank, and individuals worked their way, hand over hand, to the opposite side.

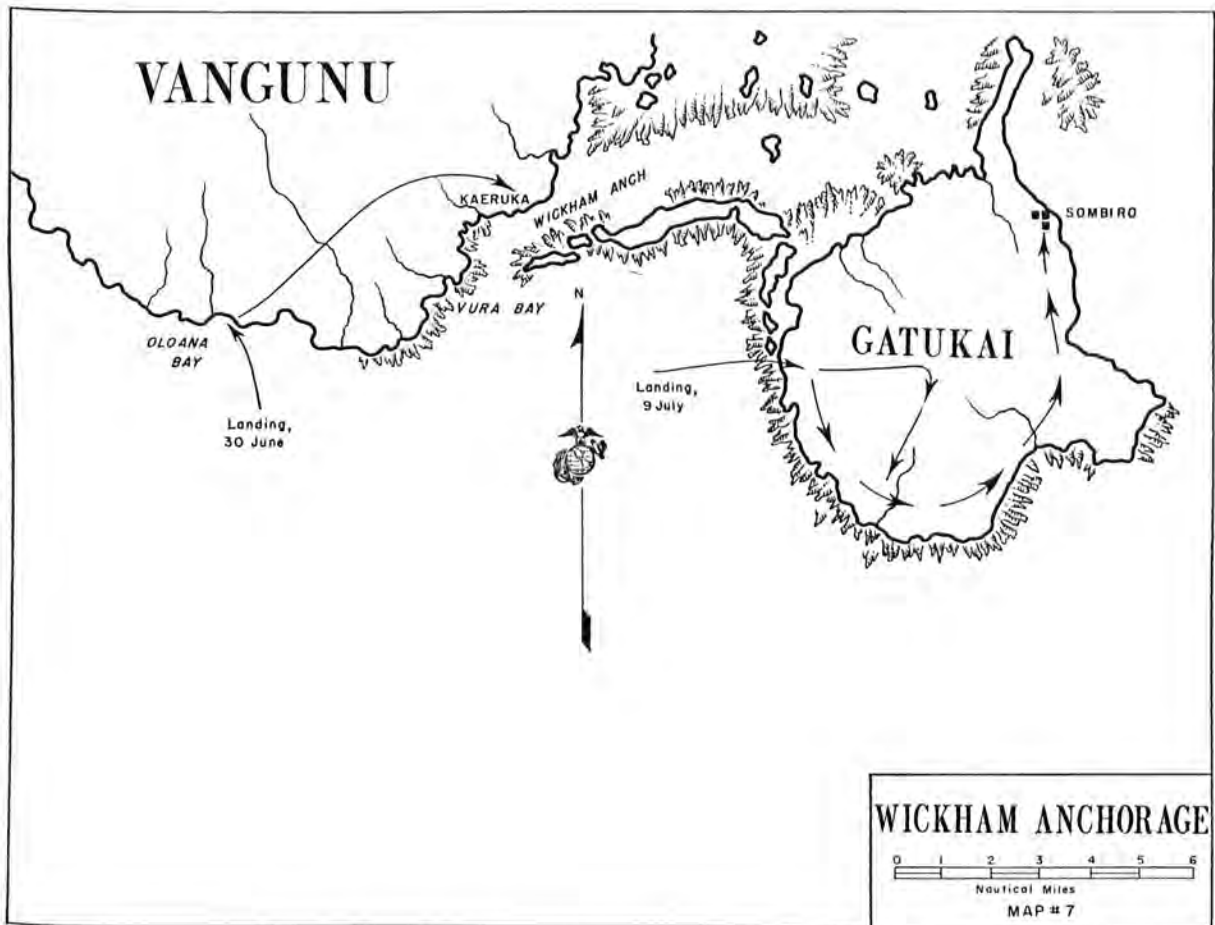
Despite these tremendous obstacles, the force finally reached its line of departure about 1320.

<sup>64</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 14Sep43, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Capt James E. Brown ltr to CMC, 6Mar51.

<sup>66</sup> Maj Earle O. Snell ltr to CMC, 16Feb51.





By this time, to Colonel Brown's amazement and gratification, most of the missing Marines, all heavily laden with arms and ammunition, had covered the great distances from their landing points and had caught up with the column. Even Lieutenant Brown's platoon had rejoined its parent company.

For the next half-hour the four companies jockeyed into positions from which they could launch their assault; then the colonel gave the attack order. The axis of advance would be generally south. Company Q, on the extreme right flank, would guide on the east bank of the meandering Kaeruka. Company N, to the left of Q, would drive straight ahead for the enemy bivouac area at the river mouth. Still farther to the left, Company F, 103d (Captain Ray Brown) would execute a partial envelopment, as soon as resistance was met, by swinging in a southwesterly direction and assaulting. Colonel Brown designated Company G as the

reserve, prepared to exploit any weakness discovered by the attackers and ready to protect the flanks.

The attack, launched at 1405, was such a surprise to the Japanese that their defenses were completely thrown off balance. Fifteen minutes passed before the Marines encountered the first resistance. Enemy riflemen hidden in trees or holed up in spider traps slowed the advance to a crawl. As the Marines deployed to exterminate these few Japanese, others on the west bank of the river opened fire. At 1445 Major Clark ordered his Marines to cross the stream, reduce the opposition, and continue their southward advance.

Captain Flake promptly turned to the right and began sending his men down the slippery banks, across the river, and up the other side. The first few men reached the west bank without undue difficulty but the enemy quickly divined the Marines' intention; bullets from



rifles and machine guns began to splatter in the vicinity of the fording point. By 1530 the fire had become so concentrated that Clark decided to discontinue the maneuver. By this time all of Company Q plus one squad of Company N had reached the western side. Unfortunately, the two companies had lost contact with each other, and, worse still, Major Clark was out of communication with Colonel Brown.

To the Americans' extreme left, Company F, shortly after crossing the line of departure, contacted some substantial enemy positions covered by machine guns. Captain Brown, in attempting to move farther left to outflank the enemy strong point, soon lost contact with the Marines' Company N, with the result that Colonel Brown committed Company G to fill the gap.

On the west bank of the river Captain Flake's men came under increasingly heavy fire from two well-protected bunkers, 300 yards inland from the beach. On the other bank Captain Snell, engaged to his front, had sent out patrols to reestablish contact with Major Clark and to locate the Japanese main line of resistance. Meanwhile, Company G, encountering little or

no resistance, advanced to the shore without difficulty.

About 1700 one of Snell's patrols met Clark. Almost simultaneously Snell's riflemen gained fire superiority and closed with the foe, who withdrew along the beach toward the southwest in disorder. By this time Flake and Snell re-established contact, and Clark ordered Flake to disengage from the few enemy opposing him and bring his men back to the east bank of the river. Fifteen minutes later, just as communications between Clark and Colonel Brown were restored, Flake executed this order and the Marines entered the old enemy bivouac area at Kaeruka. Meanwhile, Company F reduced the opposition on its flank and reached the beach.

As a result of this action 12 Marines were dead and 21 wounded, while the soldiers suffered 10 killed and 22 wounded. Counted Japanese dead numbered 120.<sup>67</sup>

While fighting was in progress at Kaeruka, Company E met 16 enemy with two light machine guns at Vura. Employing his mortars with great skill, Captain Chappell knocked out

<sup>67</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 1-4.

the enemy weapons and drove off the Japanese survivors.<sup>68</sup>

At the conclusion of the Kaeruka fight Colonel Brown moved his command post from its previous position on the line of departure to the newly won position, and Major Clark set up a defense perimeter for the fast-approaching night. He placed Company G, the Demolitions Platoon and Company Q on the beach, facing seaward; Company N deployed along the river bank facing the village; and Company F occupied positions along a line facing inland toward the jungle with its flanks tied in to Company N's right and Company G's left. Clark then sent out small patrols to kill or capture surviving enemy riflemen and reduce the last hostile strong points in the immediate

<sup>68</sup> The enemy force was a detachment of the Kure 6 SNLF. (ComSoPac (CIC), Interrogations and Translations.)

vicinity, including the bunkers that had stopped Company Q. Before the task was finished, pitch-black night settled, but considering the rain, mud, darkness and physical exhaustion of his men, Clark had erected a well-organized defense perimeter.

Spasmodically, during the early part of the night, mortar shells dropped on the beach and machine guns raked the inland line, from cleverly constructed enemy positions near Cheeke Point. Marines and soldiers alike fired at shadows, punctuating the night with sound. Shortly before 0200 the following morning, sharp-eared riflemen heard the unmistakable putt-putt of several landing barges, obviously approaching the Kaeruka's mouth. At once Major Clark ordered all Marine machine guns to assume positions on the beach "to repel boarders." At about 0205 three Japanese barges



**37MM ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN** manned by soldiers of Battery F, 70th Coast Artillery, is one of many such weapons emplaced for the protection of Wickham Anchorage and Viru Harbor. Friendly small craft pushing between Rendova and supply bases to the rear found sanctuary from enemy air attack under the protection of these and other anti-aircraft weapons. (Army Photo.)

pushed their ugly snouts out of the darkness and attempted a landing near the junction of the Demolitions Platoon and Company G, only to meet a sudden hail of American fire.<sup>69</sup>

The boated enemy, obviously believing that they had been taken under fire by friends, shouted lustily but did not shoot back. Their barges continued beachward, providing a field day for the Americans. Rifle grenades arched from Company Q's position; machine guns chattered angrily. The first bursts of fire probably killed the coxswains, for thereafter the boats seemed to drift out of control.

The Japanese soon realized their true situation and returned a few poorly aimed shots. A few jumped overboard and succeeded in reaching shore, only to meet a hand grenade barrage from the Demolitions Platoon. By 0235 the fight was over. One barge sank some 50 to 100 yards offshore; the other two broached in the surf; 109 of the 120 Japanese were dead. Five of the 11 enemy survivors met their ends on the beach several days later. Two Marines and one soldier, killed during the fight, were buried with other American dead on the Kaeruka's east bank after daylight.<sup>70</sup>

Translations of captured enemy documents and interrogations of prisoners of war subsequently revealed that this action had resulted from a routine Japanese effort to reinforce and resupply the Vangunu garrison, and not from a planned combat landing. In fact, the enemy barges carried provisions including live chickens and fresh vegetables, for the Kaeruka detachment. According to undocumented rumor, the chickens suffered total casualties. And the next morning the Americans feasted.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Snell ltr.

<sup>70</sup> Maj Robert P. Smith ltr to CMC, Feb51. In a coincidental sequel to this action, the six enemy who escaped made their way along the eastern coast of Vangunu and New Georgia's northern coast to the Rice Anchorage area. There, weeks later, these Japanese met the self-same Demolitions Platoon, then holding an outpost position; in this latter encounter five enemy were killed and one was captured. (ComSoPac, Interrogation Reports, "Prisoner captured by 4thMarRdrBn off Rice Anchorage," Jul43.)

<sup>71</sup> ComSoPac Interrogation Reports; ComSoPac ltr, Translations of captured enemy documents, Aug43; Smith ltr; interview with Capt James E. Brown, 12Dec51.

At dawn of 1 July, Colonel Brown re-surveyed the beach positions. In the darkness the night before, under fire, unfamiliar with the terrain, without an adequate map or the benefit of reconnaissance, Clark had had to determine where to set up his defenses. Realizing that the enemy must have had some reason for defending that particular locale, Clark had decided to put his own defenses there. How valid his reasoning was! The tiny beach at the Kaeruka's mouth offered the only possible landing point in that area. To the right a heavy mangrove swamp extended to the water's edge; to the left, numerous coral niggerheads and hidden reefs obstructed all beaches. Moreover, it was on that particular night that the unsuspecting enemy had chosen to resupply his garrison and had walked blindly into a hornet's nest. For the Marines it was like filling an inside straight.

While Colonel Brown reconnoitered the lines, aggressive combat patrols pushed out in all directions in an attempt to find and destroy the foe. But the 30-odd enemy survivors had pulled back and were reorganizing deep in the jungle. When his patrols reported no contacts, Brown decided to move his entire force to Vura Village, where he could set up a more efficient base of operations, one that could be supplied via water from Oloana Bay. Shortly after the Americans set out on their hike through the jungle and mangrove swamps toward Vura, the Japanese, now reorganized, harassed the column with long-range fires from machine guns and one 37mm gun, and inflicted several additional casualties. Fortunately, the enemy was in no condition to offer organized resistance. And none developed.

At Vura Colonel Brown set up a defense perimeter and conducted a campaign of attrition against the enemy. Bombardments from the 152d Field Artillery's Battery A, emplaced at Oloana Bay, and numerous air strikes hit suspected Japanese positions for three days; reconnaissance and combat patrols killed or captured Japanese survivors.

On 3 July Colonel Brown led his forces back to the original battlefield at Kaeruka. Enroute the Americans killed seven enemy, captured one, and destroyed several Japanese ammuni-

tion and supply dumps that had been overlooked on 1 July.

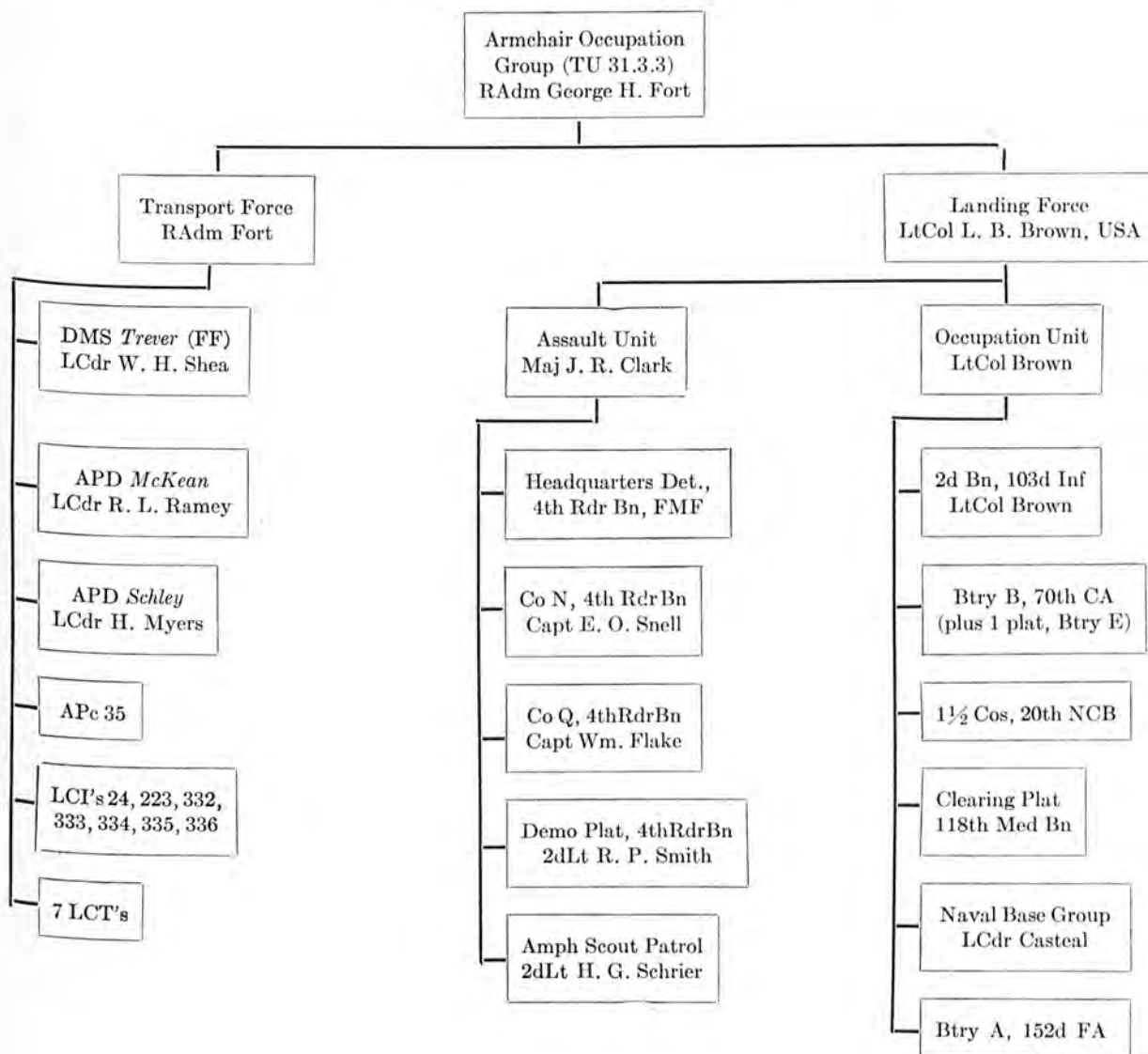
The following day LCI's transferred the Marines to Vangunu's base camp at Oloana Bay for rest and preparation for further action. Finally on 8 July Clark's men crowded into a single LCT and made a night landing on Gatukai Island, where natives reported 50 to 100 hostile troops. For the next two days the Marines searched the island but found no Japanese although traces of recent occupation cluttered the landscape. These enemy were later found and dispersed by an Army patrol.

After returning to Oloana Bay and spending the night the Marines boarded LCI's 331 and 332, which landed them on Guadalcanal at 0700, 12 July 1943, where they rejoined their parent battalion. Wickham Anchorage was secure. The cost to the 4th Marine Raider Battalion was 14 dead and 26 wounded.<sup>72</sup>

In the meantime a larger and more significant action raged to the northwest.

<sup>72</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 5-7.

### WICKHAM ANCHORAGE LANDING TASK ORGANIZATION





## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER III

# Marine Support in the Munda Drive<sup>1</sup>

The largest and most significant action of the Pacific War in the summer of 1943 was the TOENAILS operation. This included, in part, the XIV Corps seizure of Rendova, followed in turn by a shore-to-shore movement from Rendova to New Georgia and finally a coordinated drive along that island's south coast to the principal objective—Munda airfield. Marine participation in these actions, which began on D-Day (30 June), while not extensive as regards number of men involved, was vital and materially contributed to the final success achieved.

#### PRELIMINARIES TO THE LANDING

As May passed into June, troops assigned to the TOENAILS operations underwent final training and preparation in their staging bases in the Southern Solomons. Small unit tactics kept infantrymen in the field day after day; artillerymen test fired supporting arms; organizations responsible for the defense of Allied-held areas were replaced by other units not included in the plans. Supply agencies issued new equipment while Marines and soldiers fired

familiarization courses with small arms on the rifle range. Naval transports conducted amphibious exercises in nearby rear areas.

During this period the 1st Marine Raider Regiment learned coordination and cooperation, and shook off its sea legs. Although organized on a regimental basis since 15 March, the several battalions, located in Noumea, Espiritu Santo, and in the Russells, had had no chance to work together. The 4th and 1st Battalions arrived on Guadalcanal on 2 and 7 June, respectively, leaving little time for further training and equipping.<sup>2</sup>

The 9th Defense Battalion remained in position for the defense of Guadalcanal airfields until relieved by the 70th Coast Artillery Battalion, USA, on 17 June. On that date these units exchanged their 90mm AA guns, the Marines leaving their old guns emplaced in most cases. At the same time the old dual-mount 20mm guns, left on Guadalcanal by the 3d Defense Battalion on its departure from the Solomons, were taken over by Scheyer's men, cleaned up and remounted on a 40mm chassis, which eventually proved much more satisfactory than the normal, but cumbersome pedestal mount. After the 17th, these Marines undertook an intensive training program including displacement of equipment from ship to

<sup>1</sup> This account relates primarily to activities of Marine air and ground units that directly supported or were part of XIV Corps during the TOENAILS operation. Army and Navy activities are discussed only as a framework on which to affix the Marine story.

<sup>2</sup> 1stRdrRgt, WD, Mar-Sep43, 1.

beach in order to orient new personnel joining daily. In mid-May the Seacoast Artillery Group formed and began training a fire direction center. A month later it test fired its newly received 155mm guns (M-1), never before seen in the South Pacific area. Utilizing powder flown in from New Zealand for that specific purpose, the unit calibrated its guns and within nine days, under the direction of Major Robert C. Hiatt, had completed the final transition from seacoast to field artillery. It was now designated the 155mm Gun Group.<sup>3</sup>

The last days of June were full of strenuous activity for 9th Defense Battalion Marines. Ammunition and stores were drawn from the 4th Base Depot in the Russells (the Marine supply agency for the area) and packed for the impending movement. Men assigned to 20mm, 40mm and 90mm guns practiced their specialties, not only on ranges but also in combating the occasional Japanese planes that raided the Southern Solomons. Communicators tuned up radios and switchboards while Tank Platoon mechanics checked their vehicles. The Navy Base Defense Warning Group (Argus 11), destined to work hand in glove with the anti-aircraft gunners, daily attempted to increase the skill of its radar and sonar operators.

When, about 27 June, the battalion moved to Koli Point to load out for the operation, it was not wanting for experience, training or preparation.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Army and Navy units underwent similar preparations. A shortage of radio-equipped vehicles facing Task Force 31 was avoided when the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing provided these (and some trained communications men) to equip the air support and naval gunfire liaison parties.

The 172d Infantry and the 24th Naval Construction Battalion embarked on transports in mid-June for 10 days amphibious training in the Espiritu Santo and Efati areas. As a result of these exercises, Admiral Turner and General

Hester decided that the assault shipping could discharge all troops and gear within five hours. When the vessels concluded their training, all excess ammunition, rations and other impedimenta were left in cargo nets in the holds to facilitate unloading.

Turner ordered his ships to load cargo in such a manner that rations, ammunition and petroleum products would arrive at the beach in reasonably equal, realistic quantities at all times. To the amazement of Marine observers, provision was made for troops to carry their barracks bags as they went ashore.<sup>5</sup>

Final loading took place at Guadalcanal during the morning of 29 June, and the Task Force flagship (the AP *McCawley*) sailed from Koli Point at 1600 that afternoon. Although low-hanging clouds and mists limited aerial observation of the approach of Turner's convoy, the periscope of the Japanese submarine *RO-103* picked out the silhouettes of the American ships about midnight as they cruised south of Gatu-kai. Quickly surfacing after the convoy had passed, the commander alerted Munda Point and Rabaul.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Walden L. Ainsworth's Task Group 36.1 bombarded Kolombangara and Shortland Islands, and laid mines in Shortland Harbor. By these moves the Americans hoped to divert Japanese attention from Munda Point, to disrupt enemy air and surface operations, and interpose a strong naval force between the Japanese rearward bases and the target areas.<sup>7</sup>

## JAPANESE PREPARATIONS <sup>8</sup>

The Japanese strategists and tacticians at Rabaul had estimated correctly that a new American offensive would soon burst upon them. They were not without sound evidence. During

<sup>5</sup> McNemy report, 2. In mitigation, however, it must be remembered that the planners expected the beachhead would already be in the friendly hands of the Baracudas. (Hester 15Mar52 ltr.)

<sup>6</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Combat Narratives*, X, 6-9.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise cited all Japanese information contained in this chapter was extracted from ComSoPac (CIC), Translations of Enemy Documents and Interrogation Reports, or from *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Col A. E. O'Neil ltr to CMC, 1Mar51; LtCol Frank J. Wenban, Jr., ltr to CMC, 10Mar51; LtCol Wright C. Taylor ltr to CMC, 4Mar52; Capt W. S. Frank ltr to BrigGen W. J. Scheyer, 5Mar51; LtCol Robert C. Hiatt ltr to CMC, 26Feb52.

<sup>4</sup> 9thDefBn, WD, Jun43.

the spring and early summer several of their submarine commanders had spotted the movement of troop and cargo vessels into the Southern Solomons. Watchful Japanese sentries had observed amphibious reconnaissance patrols operating on Vangunu, Gatukai and Rendova and had reported this activity to higher authority. American air power had increased materially after seizure of the Russells, and by mid-June—in hostile eyes—had reached overwhelming proportions. When, about 15 June, intercepted American radio traffic reached a tremendous volume, General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka naturally assumed that the blow was imminent.

At this time Rabaul's air strength stood near its pinnacle, despite heavy losses suffered during the ineffectual air offensives of April and May. Replacement planes and pilots flown in from the homeland or from Truk had more than met shortages. Well trained, eager flyers of Kusaka's Eleventh Air Fleet and Imamura's Fourth Air Army were convinced that they could stop any Allied thrust. Toward the end of June, therefore, the enemy decided to send their Air Attack Force to forward bases at Buin and in the Shortlands to meet the Allied offensive.

But after 26 June interception of Allied radio traffic fell off noticeably. There was little need for radio messages; Admiral Turner's force was fully prepared for the operation. Japanese aerial reconnaissance noted fewer American ships in the Guadalcanal area; transports, cargo vessels and large landing craft were conducting final amphibious training exercises in the New Hebrides at this time. These factors led the Rabaul command to revise previous surmises and temporarily call off the deployment of the Air Attack Force. Thus, when Task Force 31 struck on 30 June, the adversary did not have sufficient planes immediately available in forward areas for an effective counter-blow.

### RENDOVA: THE LANDING

Ominous black clouds blotted out the stars early in the morning of D-Day (30 June). As Admiral Turner's Task Group 31.1, covered by high-flying Black Cats (PBY's especially ear-

marked for night patrolling), sailed up Blanche Channel through rain squalls, a heavy fog settled on the coast line, obscuring landmarks and reference points.

At 0230 the APD's *Dent* and *Waters* (of the Advance Unit) dove to and *Barracuda* units followed their guide, Lieutenant F. A. Rhoades, RAN, over the side. According to the plan these units were to land, meet the Rendova coast-watcher, Flight Lieutenant Dick Horton, RA-AF, and under his direction establish a beach-head into which the 172d Infantry could move with minimal opposition. But limited visibility that Stygian night prevented the soldiers from contacting Horton; wind and current carried the boats miles from their objective beaches, which they did not reach until 10 minutes after the first wave of boats from Turner's flagship hit shore.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Companies A and B of the 169th Infantry and the Commando unit of Fijian and Tongan natives, debarked from the destroyer-transport *Talbot* and the destroyer-mine sweeper *Zane*, to seize the key islets Sasavele, Dume and Baraulu and protect Onaiavisi Entrance. Dame Fortune smiled on this action, for here Wickham's coastwatchers and Boyd's amphibious scouts contacted the soldiers' boats and led them to their targets without incident. Upon reaching shore the soldiers swept the islands and, after a brief fire fight, cleared an undetermined number of defenders from the vicinity of the Entrance. Only one event marred the clockwork excellence of the execution of this particular landing: *Zane* grounded on an unchartered reef and there remained dangerously exposed to hostile attack until pulled off by the tug *Rail* later in the day.

As dawn crept over the horizon the weather cleared somewhat. Curious men of the main body, anxious to get their first look at Rendova's lush, green mountain, crowded the ships' rails. At 0656 Admiral Turner's guide, Major Martin Clemens, BSIDF, indicated that the transports had come opposite Renard Entrance. Troops of the first wave climbed into small

<sup>9</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 151-152; *Among Those Present*, 56; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 148; McNenny report, 2; *Combat Narratives*, X, 10; 9thDefBn, WD; Scheyer interview.





**FIRST WAVE OF BOATS** races toward Renard Entrance between Bau (right) and Kokorana Islands, carrying assault troops for the initial landing on Rendova. Heavy rain nearly obscures Rendova Mountain the background. (Navy Photo.)

boats at the rail and were lowered into the water. Ignoring a warning from the *McCawley* to expect opposition, overeager coxswains, each anxious that his craft should ground on the supposedly Barracuda-held beach first, raced shoreward. Thus, this initial ship-to-shore movement had all the appearance of a regatta rather than a coordinated landing. Fortunately for the passengers on this wild ride, only spasmodic rifle and machine-gun fire contested the assault.<sup>10</sup>

Succeeding waves, bearing men of 9th Defense Battalion and 24th NCB, followed in the wake of the first boats. Upon reaching the beach the Marines and Seabees found to their dismay that it had not yet been cleared of Japanese. Conditions were chaotic in the extreme. Inexperienced coxswains, disregarding orders from shore or advice from embarked officers, landed their craft at improper places. Indis-

criminate machine-gun fire from onrushing boats spattered through Rendova's coconut trees. Hysteria magnified a bad situation. Only when an American officer on the beach, annoyed by such an undisciplined display, threatened to shoot back did the boat crews still their fires. Meanwhile, the assaulting infantry had managed to push their forward skirmish line only 15 yards inland. Encumbered by barracks bags and embarrassed by the absence of the Barracudas, the soldiers milled about in confusion.

Finally one marksman killed an enemy sniper in a tree some 75 yards beyond of the southern extremity of the beachhead. And the general rush to the area which followed gave rise to a legend that the victim was stripped by souvenir hunters before he hit the ground. Colonel Ross, the 172d's commander, who despite wounds had been with his skirmishers valiantly trying to get them moving, came on the scene and soon restored order. Under Ross' direction, combat patrols of soldiers and Marines began to chase the foe from the beach; with

<sup>10</sup> Boyd interview; Army CofS ltr to CMC, 17Mar52; Col John B. Fowler ltr to CMC, 10Mar52; Zimmer, *op. cit.*, 26; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 148, 154; McNenny report, 3; Wright Taylor ltr.



**SUPPLIES OF ALL TYPES Poured ashore** faster than working parties could handle them. An Alligator (LVT), filled with bedding rolls, has just halted in the middle of the ComAir New Georgia supply dump on the beach.

snipers cleared from its rear, the line of skirmishers began to advance. Assisted by a Marine officer and an Army Transport Quartermaster, Ross impressed unwilling combat troops into service as working parties to assist in the herculean task of unloading small boats of cots, water cans, lumber, stoves, tentage, rations, fuel and ammunition. A sudden, heavy rain turned roads into quagmires, drenched troops and supplies. But the working parties, using tractors and Athey trailers, soon operated smoothly to move the mountains of materiel then accumulating at the water's edge.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after H-Hour a single BETTY

<sup>11</sup> McNenny report, 3-4; McHenry diary; Maj Donald V. Sandager ltr to CMC, 29Feb52; Hiatt ltr; Col John H. Cook ltr to CMC, 19Feb52; Wright Taylor ltr.

(Japanese two-engine bomber), apparently on reconnaissance, sighted Task Force 31. The Americans sounded an air raid alarm; ships got under way and prepared to engage the intruder; troops on shore scattered to take cover. But the enemy plane did not attack. Although Turner's combat air patrol quickly drove it off, the turmoil it precipitated materially delayed the landing phases of the operation.<sup>12</sup>

Following this "air raid," all units resumed their normal functions. Major Robert C. Hiatt, executive officer of the 9th Defense Battalion's 155mm Artillery Group, led an advance party

<sup>12</sup> TF-31 OpnPlan and Turner ltr. According to the unloading plans, the transports should have been emptied and withdrawing by 1200. This, and succeeding air raid alerts, forced postponement of the ships' retirement until midafternoon.

along Rendova's coast toward prospective gun positions selected from aerial photographs before the operation. He soon found the areas pronounced them suitable, and promptly began blasting trees, building an observation post, and clearing fields of fire. While this work progressed, reconnaissance parties of the 24th NCB and the 43d Division's medical clearing station started to set up their installations in the same area, thereby crowding it to an unfortunate extent.

Marines of the Special Weapons Group prepared positions for their 20mm and 40mm guns and tied in their .30-calibre and .50-calibre machine guns with the beach defenses as protection against either low-level air attack or counter-landing.

Rain and mud had their effect. Even the ubiquitous jeep bogged down in the slimy gumbo; culverts collapsed. Heavily laden trucks churned the morass, made no headway at all. Only by pressing into service the few wide-treaded prime movers (provided for the 155mm guns) to tow heavy combat equipment, and by hand carrying lighter gear, could the men move the guns, generators and radars into position.

Beachhead establishment continued almost without interruption. A few minutes after 1700, 105mm howitzers of the 103d FA Battalion began firing a series of registration shots. Late the following afternoon New Georgia itself felt the impact of American land-based artillery when shells from the 155mm howitzers of the 192d FA Battalion fell near Lambeti Plantation.<sup>13</sup>

## ENEMY REACTION

Rendova's defenses on 30 June consisted of portions of Lieutenant (jg) Funada's 2d Company, Kure 6th SNLF, and detachments from First Lieutenant's Suzuki's 7th Company, 229th Infantry. With approximately 200 men, occupying a large number of small outposts at widely separated points, the optimistic Japanese hoped to protect this strategic island. When the first American boats crunched upon

Rendova's sand and coral beaches, most of the enemy withdrew to the hinterland. Many escaped from Rendova to New Georgia that night and rejoined their comrades for the defense of Munda airfield. Others, however, remained behind to continue the hopeless fight.<sup>14</sup>

Major General Sasaki at Munda, alerted by the *RO-103*, was ready for Turner's approach. In his estimate of the situation, Sasaki expressed the conviction that his adversary would storm either Lambeti Plantation (see Map #7) or Munda Point. Nor did he alter his opinion when the transports hove to off Renard Entrance, for he believed this halt only the beginning of a diversionary effort. Therefore, during the Americans' initial ship-to-shore movement he held his fire so as to conceal his positions, and only a few scattered shots from 4.7-inch guns emplaced near Munda Point offered opposition. These shots, apparently, were directed against Turner's destroyer screen

<sup>14</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 148; ComSoPac ltr, serial 01244, 2Aug43; CIA document #1248-73A.



**RAIN AND HEAVY TRAFFIC TURNED ROADS INTO QUAGMIRES** but indefatigable Seabees worked tirelessly and soon had stalled vehicles moving again. Here a group corduroys a road that appears to be an impassable mud hole.

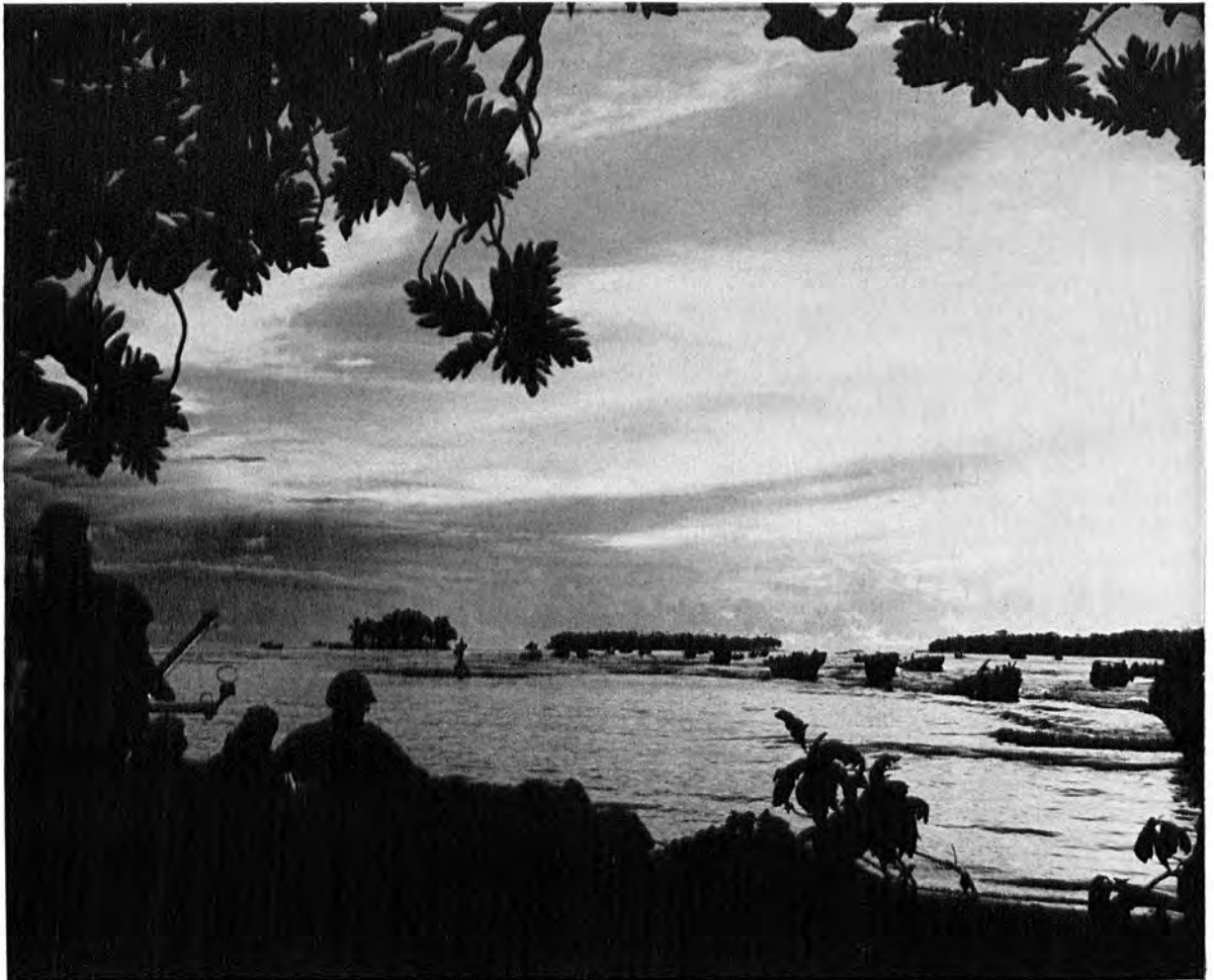
<sup>13</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 154; Army CofS 17Mar52 ltr to CMC; Col E. A. Craig report, 28Aug43; ltrs from Wenban, Hiatt, Turner and Wright Taylor.

westward of the transport area. The destroyers promptly returned fire and effectively silenced the enemy, but not before the destroyer *Gwin* received one hit. By the time Sasaki recognized the Rendova assault as the main effort, it was much too late to retaliate in strength.

At Rabaul, in accordance with a previous agreement, Admiral Kusaka took charge of the counterattack to the American landing. Upon receiving the submarine's report, the admiral decided immediately to put into operation the postponed air-interception-deployment plan. Morning reports the previous day had shown a count of 53 land-based attack planes, 83 fighters, 13 light bombers and 20 float planes in his Eleventh Air Fleet, deployed at Rabaul,

Buka, and in the Shortlands (only a 20-minute flight distant from Rendova). These could launch vicious attacks against the American Task Force. Then, he would send in elements of his Southeast Area Fleet, consisting of one cruiser, eight destroyers and eight submarines. Meanwhile, Admiral Koga (the Japanese Combined Fleet commander) detached one cruiser and four destroyers from the Second Fleet at Truk, and these were on their way to Rabaul as reinforcements.

Early in the morning of 30 June Kusaka dispatched the previously mentioned BETTY on reconnaissance and issued his order. Aircraft would attack Turner's force at once; all available destroyers would sortie from the



**REINFORCEMENTS LAND AS STORM CLOUDS GATHER.** A few minutes after this picture was taken, sheets of rain concealed even the silhouettes of the landing craft. In the left foreground note the 9th Defense Battalion 40mm gun, prepared to engage enemy planes or small craft.

Shortlands and obliterate the Allied shipping during the night of 30 June-1 July.

Just one hour before noon, therefore, 30 enemy fighters roared out of the west to pounce upon TF-31 and its beachhead positions. As the hostile planes orbited to make strafing runs on the violently maneuvering ships and now crowded beaches, Mulcahy's Marine and Navy fighter umbrella of 16 Corsairs (F4U's)<sup>15</sup> went into action. Vectored by the fighter-direction center in the *Jenkins*, the American pilots soon clashed with the enemy. At 1102 Fighter Command on Guadalcanal scrambled an additional 28 interceptors, which within 10 minutes were winging toward Munda to join in the scrap. Less than 20 minutes later, numerous piles of junk, once formidable Japanese ZEKES, littered the land and sea around Rendova<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the ground forces expanded their Rendova beachhead. Islands offshore were occupied and organized for defense. Men and materiel continued to pour ashore, so that by 1450 all the troops and all but 50 tons of supplies of the first echelon had been delivered to the beach.<sup>17</sup>

Shrugging off the pasting he had taken that morning, Kusaka committed a strike of 50 mixed-type aircraft at 1515, shortly after the *McCawley*, now unloaded, had weighed anchor to depart from the area. Disregarding Mulcahy's alert fighter umbrella, now consisting of 32 F4U's and 16 F4F's, and extremely heavy antiaircraft fire from the ships and the beach, the enemy launched an effective torpedo attack. While their fighters and dive-bombers held the attention of the American flyers, about 20 BETTYS, skimming above the surface of the water, dropped their torpedoes at close range in the path of Turner's ships. One, which

fortunately proved a dud, struck the *Farenholt* on the port beam. Another, however, smashed into the 7,700-ton *McCawley* dead amidships, blasting her out of action and forcing Admiral Turner to transfer his flag to the *Farenholt*.

American pilots engaged the opposing fighters and dive bombers at high altitudes. Violent dogfights carried the planes miles from Munda Point. Low gasoline levels prevented pursuit of the enemy survivors who scurried back to the Shortlands. When, at about 1600, the Americans returned to their bases in Guadalcanal and the Russells, they found four of their comrades missing. Fighter Command (Colonel E. L. Pugh) credited its men with shooting down 30 hostile aircraft.<sup>18</sup>

Undaunted, the Japanese late in the afternoon struck a third time, now with an aggregation of 14 Aichi dive-bombers (VALS) supported by approximately 18 ZEKES. These intruders found U. S. fighter opposition as impenetrable as in earlier attacks, and several more planes fell in flames.

Box scores for the D-Day air battles are most difficult to determine, and may best be set forth in tabular form as follows:

*Allied and Enemy Losses, 30 June 1943*

	Allied Losses	Japanese Losses
American figures	21 planes . . . . . 1 Transport sunk 1 Destroyer damaged	106 planes
Japanese figures	50 planes . . . . . 1 Cruiser sunk 2 Destroyers sunk 8 Transports damaged 2 Destroyers damaged	30 planes

By 1630 90mm Battery E (Captain William E. Tracy) of the 9th Defense Battalion was in place on Kokorana Island. Several "gun teams"

<sup>15</sup> Furnished by ComAirSols Fighter Command; planes and pilots represented VMF's 121, 122, 221 and 213; VF's 11 and 21.

<sup>16</sup> American pilots claimed 16 killed in this fight. However, Japanese records indicate that only 30 fighters were lost in the three air battles fought that day. In treating aviation statistics, this monograph, insofar as possible, will cite both American and Japanese claims. Pilot reports are difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate or substantiate.

<sup>17</sup> JCS, TOENAILS, Running Account, Rendova Section, 30Jun and 1Jul.

<sup>18</sup> RAdm F. W. Benson ltr to CMC, 4Mar51; Fighter Command, WD and Action Report, 30Jun, 4; Fighter Command Record of Events, 30Jun; ComSoPac, Weekly Air Combat Intelligence Report, 27Jun-3Jul.

of the Special Weapons Group had already fired at the enemy. But until the Marines and Argus 11 could get their radars operating, preliminary warnings of enemy air attack would have to emanate from the destroyer screen or from coastwatchers on islands farther north. Ignoring the adverse conditions, the Marines, with the help of Seabees, had unloaded two cargo ships, had reduced an enemy machine-gun nest, and while reconnoitering for gun positions had killed several Japanese.<sup>19</sup>

For all his efforts on D-Day, Kusaka could show only minor success. The BETTY sighted early that morning, and the heavy air attacks later in the day served to delay the unloading of the ships, forced to take evasive measures. The midafternoon strike, directed against the shipping, damaged the *McCawley* to such an extent that she lay dead in the water. That night a friendly PT boat mistook her for an enemy transport and sank her. Luckily, Admiral Turner had sent most of his staff and all of his records to Camp Crocodile on Guadalcanal before the operation. Therefore, when forced to transfer his flag at sea, he accomplished this rapidly and with little loss of life. He thus continued in active command almost without interruption and witnessed the firm establishment of the Rendova beachhead before nightfall.<sup>20</sup>

The outcome of the D-Day landings elated all echelons of command. To Admiral Halsey the Japanese failure to attack Turner in strength while he lay to off Renard Sound, nearly immobile and particularly vulnerable, indicated that the foe was in no position to take vigorous retaliatory measures to an advance. Halsey's air commander, Admiral Fitch, attributed the tardiness with which the enemy struck Turner first to their system of staging aircraft from Rabaul to other bases in the south before making a strike, and secondly to the lack of experience on the part of their pilots. Having received little or no training in night operations, they had to await daylight before taking off. General Harmon, commanding all Army forces in the South Pacific for Admiral Halsey, reported to his

<sup>19</sup> 9th DefBn, WD, 1; McHenry diary.

<sup>20</sup> Turner ltr; *Combat Narratives*, X, 13.

superiors in Washington that the situation on shore was excellent.<sup>21</sup>

The Japanese on the other hand, having surmised correctly that Halsey's next target lay in the Central Solomons, were not nearly so surprised by the fact of the landing as by the speed of its accomplishment. But as they had never believed Turner capable of unloading and departing in less than 12 hours, they overestimated the amount of time available to them for launching a counterattack. Sasaki and Ota, moreover, had expected the Allies to land directly on New Georgia and had deployed their forces to meet such an attack.

Admiral Halsey, usually right in his estimate of enemy capabilities, was partly wrong this time. Indeed, Kusaka had demonstrated that he was in no position to retaliate to Halsey's move. But Halsey's antagonist had not yet shown his hand; some of his destroyers already were steaming out of the Shortlands to blast Turner's shipping and the new beachhead. Postponement of Air Attack Force deployment to the Shortlands had forced most of the Japanese "eagles" to fly from Rabaul and Buka and then assemble in Southern Bougainville and the Shortlands for their attacks. Once they reached those forward fields, they would launch a violent counteroffensive from the air that would continue unabated for days.

Having overestimated the effect of the "I" Operation in April and influenced by his pilot's exaggerated reports of success on D-Day, Kusaka believed that he had struck the Allies a serious blow in the Central Solomons. He did, however, pay tribute to the tenacious air interference of Marine and Navy fighter planes, which prevented him from delivering a knockout punch at that time. This would have to come later.<sup>22</sup>

Very early on D-Day morning Rear Admiral Aaron S. Merrill's 12th Cruiser Division had plastered the Buin-Shortlands area for 15 minutes in the hope of neutralizing enemy airfields there. This bombardment was to have been followed by strikes by MacArthur's heavy

<sup>21</sup> JCS, TOENAILS, Running Account, 30Jun; *Combat Narratives*, X, 13; ComSoPac, Weekly Air Combat Intelligence Reports.

<sup>22</sup> *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 51-52, 54-55.



**A 90MM GUN** of the 9th Defense Battalion rolls down the ramp of an LST beached on Rendova. The TD-9 towing this weapon could not negotiate the mud inland and was in turn towed by a TD-18 nearly twice its size.

bombers on Rabaul's airdromes and dawn raids by ComAirSols Strike Command (Colonel Christian F. Schilt) on Kahili, Munda and Vila. But, during the night of 29-30 June, a solid weather front closed in on the Solomons and Bismarcks, denying Merrill adequate observation of his effort and preventing the scheduled air attacks from taking off. Thus, despite the shelling, the Japanese had their Southern Bougainville bases in full operation shortly after daylight, and were able to launch the air raids described above.

The night of D-Day was relatively quiet. No hostile aircraft interfered with beachhead development. "Snipers,"<sup>22</sup> who had harassed

<sup>22</sup> As used here, the term "sniper" was that employed by Americans throughout the Pacific War to indicate an enemy rifleman, hidden within or in proximity to friend-

ly lines. Firing only at targets of opportunity, these riflemen, left behind in a sort of suicide mission, sometimes escaped liquidation for several days. Few, if any of them, had ever received the specialized sniper training familiar to Americans.

the Landing Force throughout the day, withdrew to Rendova's interior after dark. The abominable weather that hindered movements on Rendova during the day, allied itself with the Americans that night for it interfered with Kusaka's planned naval counterattack. Kusaka had directed all of the Southeast Area Fleet destroyers to assemble in the Shortlands during the evening of 30 June, and then move out to Rendova that night and deliver a crushing blow to the Americans. Only five destroyers reached the rendezvous area in time to join in the expected attack. These ships arrived off

ly lines. Firing only at targets of opportunity, these riflemen, left behind in a sort of suicide mission, sometimes escaped liquidation for several days. Few, if any of them, had ever received the specialized sniper training familiar to Americans.

the west coast of Rendova at 0130 on 1 July, but an extremely heavy squall prevented them from making a landfall. They therefore had to withdraw without accomplishing anything.

### RENDOVA: THE SECOND DAY

D-plus 1 (1 July) found the Landing Force feverishly working in the jungle heat, rain and mud to expand the Rendova beachhead. On this day the second echelon of the Landing Force arrived in LST's, bringing with it the 9th Defense Battalion's 155mm Batteries A and B and additional 90mm and Special Weapons Group units. Assisted by the ever helpful, cooperative Seabees, the Marines rapidly unloaded their ships.

Adverse conditions hampered all activities, but by dint of nearly superhuman effort and exercise of considerable ingenuity Captain Henry H. Reichner had Battery A in position at 1800, prepared to register the following morning. Lieutenant Colonel Edward H. Forney, then attached to the 9th Defense as an observer, had already set up an observation post in a 130-foot tree on a small knoll behind the Battery positions. A fire direction center, in communication with Hester's command post (some 1500 yards eastward down the beach), was established. Battery B (Captain Walter C. Wells) had cleared fields of fire, and constructed emplacements into which to move the next day. O'Neil's Group now came under the operational control of Brigadier General Harold R. Barker, the 43d Division artillery commander.

Because of a high water table and the oozing mud that filled below-surface foxholes as quickly as they were dug, the Marines hit upon the expedient of building above-surface personnel shelters with coconut logs and sand-filled containers of all types. Gun emplacements were protected in similar fashion. Although backbreaking and time-consuming, these labors paid dividends, for during the frequent air raids that followed, nearly all the Marines enjoyed some measure of protection.

During the course of the day patrols from the 169th Field Artillery Battalion, protected by 43d Division Infantrymen and South Pacific Scouts, landed on Roviana Island. There they

sought sites, to be occupied when the main body of that artillery unit arrived on 4 July.<sup>23</sup>

The only enemy interference on 1 July was an air attack by an undetermined number of VALS and ZEKES at 1015. Allied fighter cover intercepted these before they reached the beachhead and turned them back. American losses included nine fighters, but five of the pilots soon reached friendly lines.<sup>24</sup> This effective protection enabled troops on the ground to continue their labors without undue interruption.

### RENDOVA: D-PLUS 2

Still another heavy storm drenched the Southern and Central Solomons the morning of 2 July. ComAirSols at Guadalcanal, reluctant to expend aircraft in such weather, recalled the fighter umbrella about 1010. About 1335, as the weather began to clear in the vicinity of Rendova, a flight of 24 enemy two-engine bombers (BETTYS), covered by 44 fighters (ZEKES), approached to attack Rendova's crowded beaches. At this moment Battery A's 155mm guns were completing a series of registration shots on Munda airfield; two guns of Battery B had just moved into position. In the 90mm Group, Battery C (Captain Milton M. Cardwell) was preparing emplacements for its weapons; operators of Battery E's water-soaked 602 radar were leisurely draining useless Diesel fuel from its gasoline tank.<sup>25</sup> The 24th Seabees continued their seemingly endless task of road construction, felling trees, and other duties considered routine. Everywhere soldiers, sailors and Marines pro-

<sup>23</sup> 155mm Gun Group, Work Sheets, 1Jul43; 9thDefBn, WD, Jul43; LtCol Henry H. Reichner ltr to CMC, 27Feb51. NGOF Field Order #3, 28Jun43; Hester ltr; *Among Those Present*, 56; Wright Taylor ltr.

<sup>24</sup> Actual statistics relative to this fight are difficult to determine. No extant Japanese records concern this particular action. Morison, *Bismarcks*, 154n, states that six VALS and 35 ZEKES were in the fight, and of these 50 percent were destroyed. Fighter Command, Record of Events, 5, states only that the Japanese force was large and that nine dive bombers and 15 fighters were shot down. Various squadron War Diaries for this date all give equally inconclusive evidence.

<sup>25</sup> The Diesel fuel had been poured into the gasoline tank from a drum incorrectly marked gasoline. (Capt Michael Taylor ltr to CMC, 9Feb51.)



ceeded with their normal functions, many too busy to construct personal foxholes or slit trenches.

Winging in from the south, the foe skirted Rendova Mountain and came over the beachhead before anyone knew planes were in the vicinity. Inexperienced ground troops, lacking sufficient training in aircraft identification, stood in open-mouthed admiration of the "friendly B-25's." Those few Marines with antiaircraft experience at Guadalcanal and in the Russells took one glance, screamed a warning, and dived for the nearest shelter. There was no time to put the heavy antiaircraft guns into action. Ground troops fired rifles, machine guns and 20mm and 40mm guns at the planes. Although the Americans observed no hits and made no claims, they actually inflicted considerable minor damage on the BETTYS. Nevertheless, the Japanese airmen dropped some 50 to 60 small 110 or 132-pound bombs, with unusual accuracy upon American positions.

Although a later survey showed that the enemy had laid a good pattern, with craters about 25 yards apart, material damage was not great, considering the crowded condition of the beachhead and the smallness of the target area. Fragmentation bombs hit the 43d Division's medical clearing station and damaged many craft in the Naval Boat Pool. Two fires flared in the 9th Defense Battalion supply and gasoline dump. The bombs also slightly damaged two of Battery A's 155mm guns, knocked out the inoperable 602 radar, demolished one TD-18 prime mover, hit three amphibious tractors, and put two 40mm guns out of action (one permanently). To add to Captain Reichner's woes in the Battery A area, the majority of the gunpowder on the Battery position was ablaze, while a burning truck loaded with small arms ammunition spewed popping bullets with abandon. Compounding the difficulties, one enemy bomb—a dud—landed squarely between the trails of a 155mm, effectively putting it out of action until the battalion bomb disposal officer removed the danger.

In the 24th Construction Battalion sector, a small finger of land jutting into Renard Sound, a gelignite dump exploded causing more casualties and damage than the bombs

themselves. In this area, then inexcessably crowded with soldiers, sailors and Marines, 64 men were killed and about 89 suffered wounds. Medical officers' reports indicate that the Allies sustained well over 200 casualties on 2 July. Seabees promptly nicknamed their tiny peninsula "Suicide Point."<sup>26</sup>

This air raid revealed a number of deficiencies in American planning and actual conduct of operations. Some were obvious.

First, the Allies could not maintain a continuous fighter cover over Rendova from fields at Guadalcanal and in the Russells, particularly when weather closed in home facilities. The air warning system failed because of extreme dampness and a stupid mistake made weeks before at a rear area supply base. The Americans had become too dependent on coastwatchers, who could not report on-coming Japanese planes flying outside the range of ear or eye. Sometimes the coastwatchers could not transmit information they had gathered because enemy ground forces were operating close to coastwatcher hide-outs.

Second, the Americans had permitted a concentration of ground troops with insufficient foxholes or slit trenches. To several observers this indicated either poor training or lack of combat experience, but it is more probable that the cause was the torrential downpour that made underground shelters veritable swimming holes, filled to the brim with water. A man had a choice: Either stay on the surface and take a chance with bomb fragments, or dive into a foxhole or crater and drown. Moreover, troops had been working round the clock to move the huge piles of supplies dumped on the beach to dispersal areas inland. They just did not have the time to construct aboveground shelters.

Finally, there was inadequate protection against high-flying planes during the first 72 hours. The ineffectiveness of small antiaircraft weapons, such as those put into action by the

<sup>26</sup> 9thDefBn, WD, Jul43, 2; Michael Taylor ltr; Reichner ltr; Wenban ltr; 9thDefBn, Informal Combat Report, 9Sep43, 1; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 154. The last-named source derives its casualty figures from Com-AirNew Georgia, Daily Intelligence Summary, 2Jul43. This document based its statistics on an incomplete telephone report, and later additions and corrections are not shown.

9th Defense Battalion's Special Weapons Group, especially pointed up this deficiency.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the necessity of training troops in plane identification and establishing local anti-aircraft watches was manifest.

After the damage was done, ComAirSols returned the fighter umbrella to Rendova, where seven planes of VF-11 and eight of VMF-213 went on combat air patrol. At about 1730 the Japanese tried to follow up their earlier success when two waves of 25 ZEKES each bored in toward the island. Corsairs and Wildcats, diving from a great altitude, broke up the enemy formations before they reached the beachhead or shipping of the third echelon, then in the harbor. Six hostile and three friendly planes fell in this battle.<sup>28</sup>

That night (2-3 July) General Hester began ferrying small elements of the 172d Infantry across Blanche Channel into New Georgia to build up his force for the Munda drive. Inasmuch as the handful of defenders in this area had already been cleared out, only coral nigger-heads and pounding surf caused difficulties for these first and succeeding increments.<sup>29</sup>

Before dawn the Japanese cruiser *Yubari*, accompanied by nine destroyers attempted a bombardment of the Rendova beachhead and the harbor. Now the bad weather and the smallness of the beachhead aided the Allies, for all hostile shells fell harmlessly in the jungle, none hitting the target area. On their retirement, the Japanese force tangled with three of Lieutenant Commander Kelly's MTB's, but both sides escaped without damage.<sup>30</sup>

## PREPARING FOR THE PUSH

Daybreak found the New Georgia Occupation Force carrying out Hester's plan. Small

<sup>27</sup> JCS, TOENAILS, 2Jul; 9thDefBn, WD, Jul43, 2; LtCol John T. L. D. Gabbert report, 3; McHenry diary; Fighter Command, Record of Events, Log.

<sup>28</sup> ComSoPac, Air Combat Intelligence Report, 27Jun-3Jul; VMF-221, WD; VMF-213, WD.

<sup>29</sup> Hester ltr; Maj John R. Wismer ltr to CMC, 28Feb-51; Zimmer, *op. cit.*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 155; McHenry diary; Turner ltr. Indicative of exaggerated Japanese claims is their report of inflicting great damage on the American beachhead and sinking one PT boat in this foray.

infantry units, embarked in LCM's, moved to New Georgia's offshore islands; artillery emplaced on Roviana Island began lobbing shells in the direction of Munda and Lambeti Plantation. On Rendova ground units began cleaning up the debris left by yesterday's air raid, caring for the wounded and, because of the lack of a suitable cemetery site, preparing to bury the dead at sea. The large numbers of trucks, tractors and heavy weapons still stuck in axle-deep mud in the middle of "roads" attested to the excessive cost of transporting huge amounts of "luxury equipment"<sup>31</sup> on D-Day. And the foul weather did not clear.

Battery B, 9th Defense Battalion, put all of its 155mm guns in action and, joined by three guns of Battery A, registered on Munda airfield and Kokengolo Hill (a prominent terrain feature in the airfield area). Battery C, 90mm Group, with all of its weapons emplaced, prepared to assist Battery E in the antiaircraft defense of the beachhead. Additional supplies and troops of the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry moved into the Rendova area with the fourth echelon of shipping.

One Red air alert disrupted the routine at about 1330, but no enemy appeared. A little over an hour later a mixed force of approximately 35 ZEKES and SALLYs attempted an attack, but the 23-plane combat air patrol, augmented by 10 Army P-38's, drove the enemy off, claiming the destruction of six ZEKES and five SALLYs and admitting the loss of three planes.<sup>32</sup> At 1555, 43 TBF's from Strike Command, escorted by Marine, Navy, Army and New Zealand pilots of Fighter Command, hit Munda Point heavily. Ignoring intense antiaircraft fire, the Allied flyers pushed their attack home, returned to their base without loss, and reported that they had inflicted terrific damage on the enemy.

<sup>31</sup> That equipment not absolutely essential to basic living and fighting. See Cook ltr; McHenry diary.

<sup>32</sup> ComAirNew Georgia, Intelligence Summary, 3Jul; 9thDefBn, WD, 3Jul; ComSoPac Weekly Air Combat Intelligence Report, 27Jun-3Jul; Fighter Command, Record of Events, log. It is interesting to note that enemy sources do not indicate any plane losses in this fight.



**HUMAN CONVEYER BELTS UNLOADED LCI's** of the second and third echelons landing at Rendova. Here one group of "zoot-suited" soldiers passes equipment and supplies from ship to beach. Unloading accomplished in this fashion proved efficacious and rapid. (Navy Photo.)

#### **FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION**

By Independence Day Rendova could be considered "secure." Those few defenders who had survived the initial assault either escaped to New Georgia or fell victim to Hester's "anti-sniper" patrols. Although hostile planes harassed the Americans at night, large-scale, daylight air attacks generally failed, thanks to the excellent fighter umbrella. Two Japanese surface raids had proved abortive. American losses thus far consisted only of the *McCawley* sunk on D-Day and damage of varying degrees and natures, suffered mostly on D-plus 2, to guns, vehicles, installations and supplies. The 9th Defense Battalion had suffered seven killed and 22 wounded. Wickham Anchorage, Segi

Point, and Viru Harbor were now in friendly hands. Tonight the Northern Landing Group would move against the Enogai-Bairoko area. (See Chapter IV.)

Today, in accordance with his plan, Hester intended to move across Blanche Channel and Roviana Lagoon to mass his troops east of Zanana Beach for the advance on Munda. First Lieutenant John R. Wismer's 3d Platoon, Battery G, 9th Defense Battalion received the anti-aircraft and beach defense mission for Zanana.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> In actuality this unit was a composite force, consisting basically of the 3d Platoon, but augmented by personnel and weapons from other platoons. Before the operation LtCol Taylor had formed his entire Group into "gun teams," ignoring the integrity of the battery or



**MARINES CELEBRATE THEIR VICTORY** in the 4 July engagement with enemy aircraft by stenciling Japanese flags on the barrel of a 90mm gun. Lieutenant Colonel William J. Scheyer, 9th Defense Battalion commander, is at the extreme right.

The situation was such as to make even the most grumpy combat leader smile. On Rendova the radar sets operated satisfactorily; 90mm guns, now emplaced, were ready for action; both the Marine 155mm batteries delivered harassing fire on supply dumps north of Munda airfield. On New Georgia the Allies already held a shallow beachhead; patrols pushed into the jungle, found no enemy. On islands of the reef along New Georgia's south coast, Army artillery had occupied positions

platoon. These "teams", composed of 20mm's, 40mm's and .50-cal's, were assigned identifying numbers and given specific missions. It was one of these that Wismer led to Zanana. (Wright Taylor ltr.)

from which to support the planned infantry advance. Some LCM's had already carried troops of the 172d Infantry to Zanana Beach. Transports in Rendova Harbor were unloading the 37th Division's 136th FA Battalion on Kokorana's beaches. A 40-plane umbrella droned over Blanche Channel; eight B-25's of Strike Command were attacking Munda Point without opposition.<sup>34</sup>

At 1350 radar screens picked up pips indicating over 80 "bandits" (enemy planes) ap-

<sup>34</sup> 155mm Group Work Sheets, 4Jul43; Strike Command, WD; Stanley A. Frankel, *The 37th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington, 1948), 79; Wright Taylor ltr.

proaching from the northwest. Swinging in over Munda the enemy formation, consisting of 17 BETTYS at 8,000 feet covered by 66 ZEKES at 14,800 feet, reversed course over Blanche Channel and began its bomb run from the east. At this point the ZEKES broke off to jump the Strike Command planes over Munda, a flight of 24 F4U's some ten miles south of Rendova, and a flight of 16 P-40's just west of the island.

Vapor trails of dog fights crisscrossed the sky as the BETTYS, in close formation, held course over the beachhead. Battery E's 268-B fire control radar plotted the course and transmitted the information to the Marines. At 1410 the cacophonous chatter of a 40mm gun heralded the opening of the holiday celebration. Within a few seconds the enemy planes became the target for every antiaircraft weapon on the island, joined in happy futility by a number of weapons with insufficient range or destructive power for such employment. Men of the 90mm Battery E reported 12 BETTYS and one fighter downed; the Special Weapons Group claimed six aircraft; the umbrella was credited with an additional nine. On the other hand, the Japanese while admitting loss of 11 planes, exaggeratedly and incorrectly announced the destruction of 23 Allied fighters, the sinking of five transports and many smaller craft. In any event two facts stand out above all others: First, the Marine antiaircraft work that day was effective; second, after this abortive raid the Japanese Army abandoned air assault operations against Rendova.<sup>35</sup>

Although ending favorably for the Allies, this battle was not won without loss. Four bombers dropped their loads to kill six (includ-

<sup>35</sup> There is wide disparity in records concerning this incident. It is reasonable to assume that the 9thDefBn shot down about 13 planes, but it is uncertain which Group should receive credit. The majority of records and eye witnesses give credit to the 90mm Group which in 13 minutes expended 88 shells. The Wright Taylor ltr and the Special Weapons Group action report for this day claim six of the planes shot down. *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 30, admits loss of only 11 planes. ComSoPac Weekly Intelligence Reports, Fighter Command War Diary and Strike Command Record of Events are all in disagreement concerning numbers of planes involved and total losses on both sides.

ing one Marine officer) and wound thirteen (including three Marine enlisted men), holed two LCI's (which had to be run on the beach), destroyed a fuel dump, and damaged some supplies.

Shortly afterward Strike Command, covered by fighters of the Rendova air patrol, again hit Munda. This time a 37-plane force of SBD's and TBF's released 28 tons of bombs on Lambeti Plantation and the enemy bivouac area to the east. Despite a fairly heavy anti-aircraft barrage, the American planes suffered no damage.<sup>36</sup>

Delays caused by terrain, weather and air attacks, forced General Hester, late that afternoon, to set back his scheduled offensive by two days. Nevertheless, the 9th Defense Battalion unit designated as the defense force for Zanana Beach was dispatched to its objective.

Just before dark Wismer led his force, embarked in LCM's, across Blanche Channel, through Onaiavisi Entrance and on to Zanana Beach. Because of low tide and coral niggerheads, the men did not land until after dusk. The lateness of the hour, and the approach of night—that in the jungle falls with the suddenness of an unexpected explosion and blinds even the most light-sensitive eye—prevented the Marines from setting up their four .50-calibre and four 40mm guns. Instead, they extended and reinforced a perimeter, already occupied by a platoon of the 169th Infantry, and dug in to await daylight.<sup>37</sup> The night passed without incident.

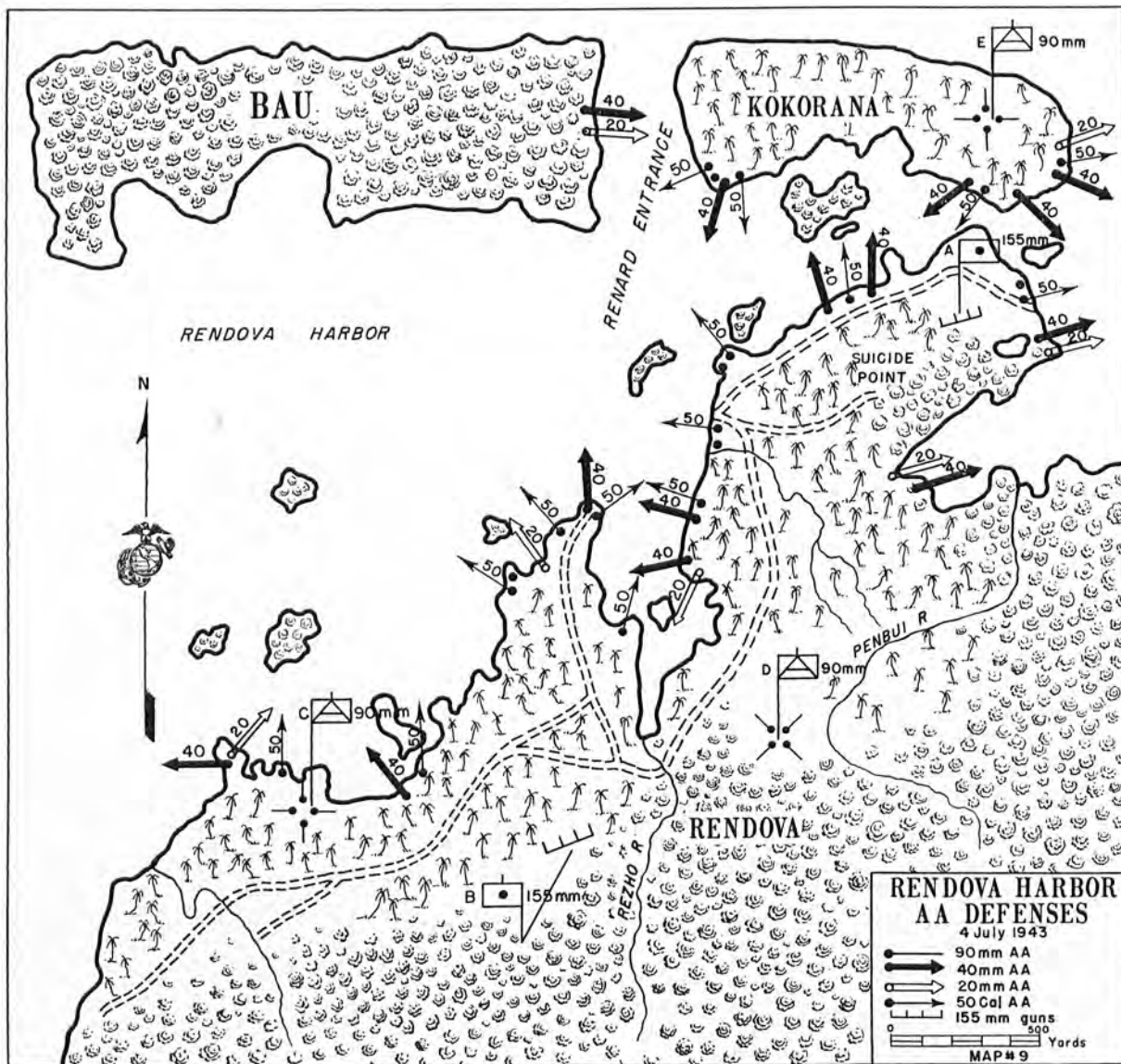
## BUILD-UP ON NEW GEORGIA

At daybreak 5 July Hester gave the signal to resume the shore-to-shore movement. As small boats shuttled back and forth, troops and supplies poured into the landing points, and the New Georgia perimeter expanded. Here, as on Rendova, heavily loaded trucks churned the sticky mud; before long all roads became streams of slime, impassable to vehicles, and supplies had to be manhandled from the shoreline to the dumps.

About 1230, while troops on the ground

<sup>36</sup> Strike Command, WD.

<sup>37</sup> Wismer ltr.



struggled to prepare for the Munda drive, a coastwatcher on Vella Lavella gave an air raid alarm. He had just sighted an undetermined number of VALS flying down the Slot. At this time Fighter Command had deployed its combat air patrol in the vicinity of Rice Anchorage to protect the beachhead established there during the night. A force of 16 P-39's and P-40's was on station to the east over Wickham Anchorage. There was no umbrella immediately over the Rendova area.

Upon receiving the coastwatcher's report, Allied fighters moved to intercept. But the enemy did not approach Rendova. Instead, 25

ZEKES peeled off to engage the Army and New Zealand aircraft over Wickham Anchorage, while the remainder of the flight attempted unsuccessfully to fight its way through to the Russells. After this action Fighter Command claimed destruction of six ZEKES and ten bombers. One P-39 and one P-40 were lost.<sup>38</sup>

That afternoon Strike Command sent 20 SBD's and 18 TBF's to attack Munda with 1,000- and 2,000-pound bombs. Hoping to con-

<sup>38</sup> Fighter Command, Record of Events, 5Jul43; McHenry diary; Strike Command, WD, 5Jul43; ComAir New Georgia, Daily Intelligence Summary, 5Jul43; VMF-221, WD; VMF-213, WD.

ceal their antiaircraft positions, the foe did not shoot until the American planes were irrevocably committed. When opened, the enemy fire was sporadic and ineffectual, and all the light bombers returned to Guadalcanal safely.

Another Red alert sounded at 1825, but no hostile planes appeared. Despite the interruptions occasioned by these air raid alarms, Hester had moved the bulk of his force to New Georgia by dark. The horrible terrain—dark and nearly impenetrable jungle interspersed with spiny coral ridges—and the mud gumbo would delay his operation even further. Accordingly he directed the 155mm Group to continue firing harassing missions on Munda airfield, and to take under fire all enemy activity on islands off Munda Point, while Army artillery placed screening fires between the enemy and the small perimeters on New Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> NGOF Field Messages, 5Jul43; ComAirNew Georgia, Daily Intelligence Summary, 5Jul43; McHenry Diary.

Early the next morning Hester would place an advance command post on Sasavele Island, the better to coordinate his projected attack.

### QUEEN'S GAMBIT REFUSED

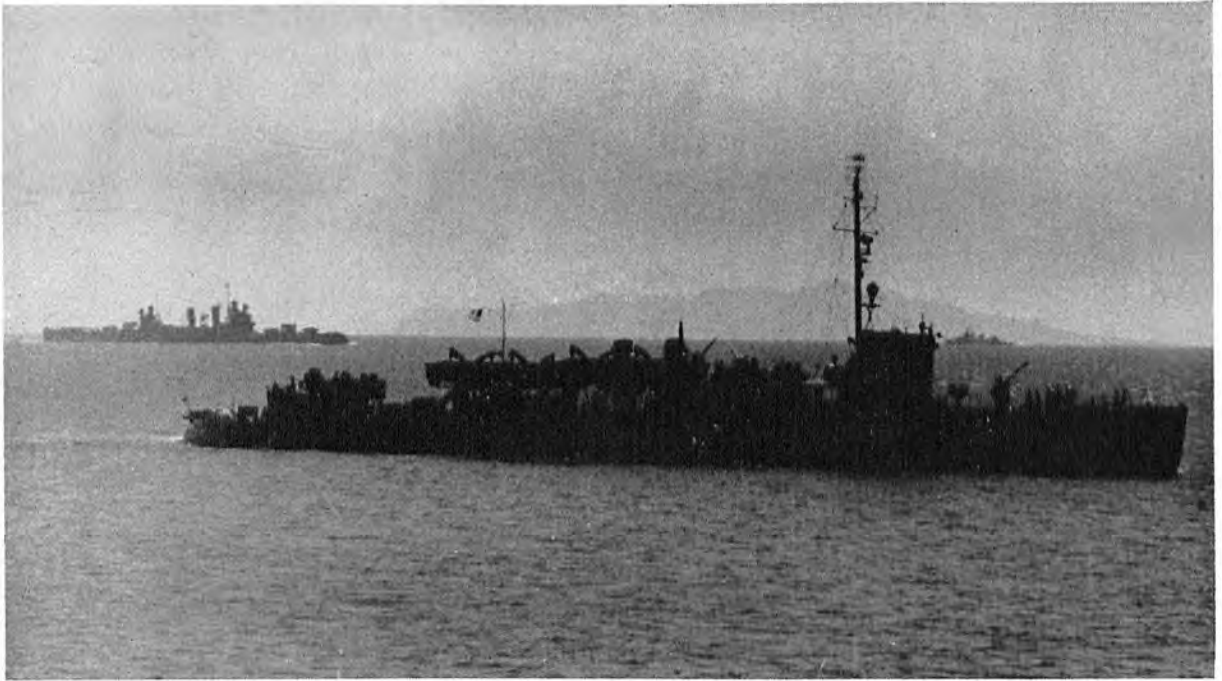
Like an expert chess player in a championship match, Admiral Halsey had now made the opening moves. His pawns at Wickham, Segi, and Viru<sup>40</sup> guarded avenues of approach for his naval bishops and rooks. His knights, exemplified by ComAirSols, had staved off the first enemy riposte in the big air battles that opened the Central Solomons campaign. And his queen, the reinforced infantry, was in a position from which it could bear on the enemy's king—Munda airfield.

Admiral Kusaka, playing the pieces on the Japanese side of the board, met this opening gambit with uncoordinated air and surface attacks. His outposts, like a thin line of un-

<sup>40</sup> Also at Rice Anchorage. See Chap IV ff.



**ZANANA BEACH DEFENSES** were emplaced before a backdrop of black jungle. This 40mm gun team, having just received a "Red alert," anxiously scans the sky for signs of enemy planes. Note how the barrel of the gun blends in with the background.



APD "DENT" STEAMS INTO TULAGI HARBOR after participating in Central Solomons landings. In the background is CL Honolulu. (Navy Photo.)

supported pawns, fell one by one. They would not be in position to protect his queen and guard his king position when Halsey made an inevitable, coordinated advance. Kusaka realized he would need lots of help and need it fast if he were to checkmate Halsey or play him to a stalemate.

On 4 July the Japanese commanders at Rabaul held a conference. American air supremacy was complete in an area that Tokyo felt was vital; Allied bombing of their Central Solomons positions was intense. Their feeler counterattacks, with the exception of the 2 July air raid, had failed miserably. What to do?

Bearing in mind the Imperial General Headquarters directive to hold the Central Solomons at all costs, Kusaka and Imamura finally reached a joint agreement. They would direct their main effort against New Georgia, and hold New Guinea with local forces already deployed there. Imamura would reinforce the Southeast Detached Force with 4,000 men from the Eighth Area Army.

That night (4-5 July) the first echelon of Imamura's reinforcing unit sailed toward Kolombangara in four destroyers. But a chance encounter with Admiral Ainsworth's Task

Group 36.1, then supporting the Northern Landing Group, forced it to turn back.<sup>41</sup>

The enemy tried again the following evening. During the day Hester had moved the bulk of his infantry across Blanche Channel; Kusaka therefore must succeed tonight if he were to counteract this maneuver. That afternoon, wearing his flag in the *Chokai*, the Eighth Fleet Commander (Vice Admiral Tomoshige Samejima) moved to the Shortlands to give the operation his personal supervision.

Just after dark, under cover of a heavy weather front, Rear Admiral Teruo Akiyama, IJN, steamed from the Shortlands with 10 destroyers, for a fast Tokyo Express run to Kolombangara. Three ships of the convoy served as a screen for two transport echelons, one of three destroyers, a second of four. The decks of the transporting destroyers, crowded with troops, had all the appearance of Times Square on New Year's Eve. Meanwhile, Admiral Halsey, alerted at midafternoon by coastwatchers and air spot of this impending move, had ordered Admiral Ainsworth with

<sup>41</sup> In this battle the Americans lost DD *Strong* to the new, long range Japanese torpedo. The enemy suffered no loss.



three cruisers and four destroyers to return to Kula Gulf and intercept the enemy.<sup>42</sup>

Shortly after midnight (5-6 July) the first Japanese transport echelon made its landfall near Vila and began to debark its troops. But when the second unit, covered by the screening destroyers, rounded the northeast tip of Kolombangara, Ainsworth made contact. The battle was joined. Gun flashes lighted the night; the sounds of shell bursts, exploding ships and torpedos rent the air. By 0330 the American cruiser *Helena* and the hostile destroyers *Niizuki* and *Nagatsuki* were out of the battle, either sunk or beached. The Japanese survivors retired, having succeeded in landing only 850 troops.

The next day Admiral Kusaka himself, with sublime courage, transferred his flag from Rabaul to Buka, in order to get closer to the scene of action and to supervise the reinforcement of the Central Solomons. Meanwhile he acquainted Tokyo with his plan. Adequate defense of the area was possible only if Imperial Headquarters would allocate an additional Army division to the Southeast Area as a reinforcing element for New Georgia. The admiral believed that 2,000 new troops could hold the Rice Anchorage area, 3,000 the Munda airfield area, and 2,000 a line between the Americans and the airfield itself. Then, as a counterattacking force to sweep the Allies from New Georgia, he would use 4,000 men.

These elaborate plans met one insurmountable barrier: The Japanese Army central authorities would not allot the Southeast Area the one additional division deemed essential. In fact, even General Imamura harbored doubts that so important an island as Bougainville could be held; furthermore he had lost confidence in his ability to defend New Guinea.

Admiral Koga, the Combined Fleet commander, believed that the Solomons as a whole should be held. But he felt that the best way to do this job was at sea, not on land. He hoped to entice Admiral Nimitz into permitting Halsey to commit a large part of the Pacific Fleet in the Solomons area. Then the Combined Fleet could sortie and destroy the Ameri-

<sup>42</sup> Ainsworth's force (TG-36.1): *Honolulu, Helena, St. Louis, and Nicholas, O'Bannon, Radford, and Jenkins.*

cans in piecemeal fashion. Ergo, he—Koga—would hold the main body of his fleet, intact at Truk, and give Kusaka a few additional ships and some planes to serve as bait for the South Pacific Force.

Because his superiors could not reach agreement, Kusaka had to decline Halsey's gambit. He had to defend the area that "must be held at all costs" with the forces at hand.<sup>43</sup>

## ATTACK OUT OF THE BEACHHEAD

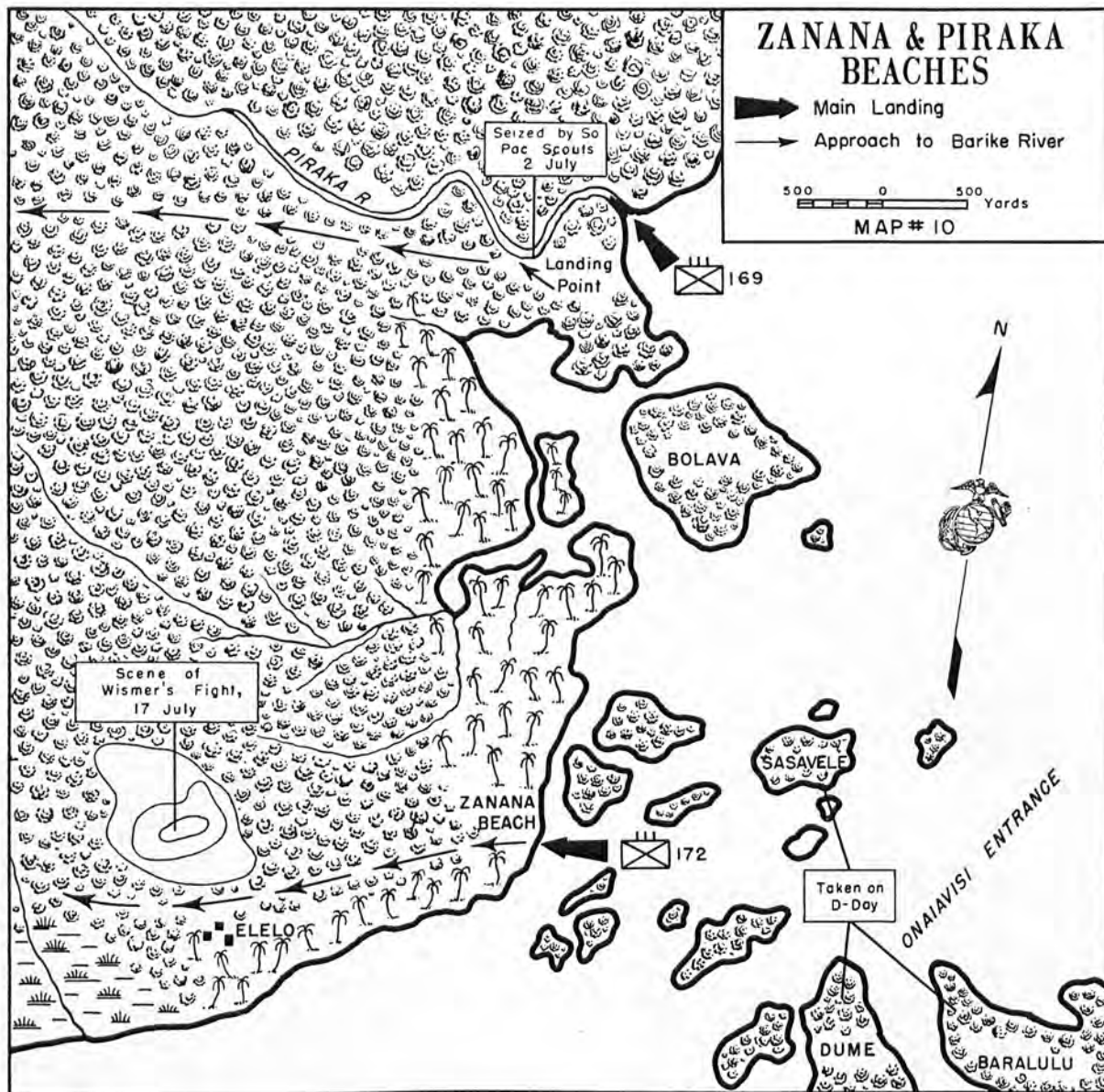
Only slight skirmishes interrupted developments on New Georgia during the first seven days of July. Torrential rain, unyielding jungle and viscid mud proved much more formidable adversaries than General Sasaki's Southeast Detached Force. The Japanese, evidently preferring to sit in their prepared emplacements and await attack, failed to launch any serious effort against the American positions. Harassment by enemy float planes at night caused little more than loss of sleep. On the other hand, Marine 155mm fire interdicted the Munda airfield, while Army artillery placed close in fires in front of the two separate perimeters from dusk to dawn.

General Hester's westward advance proceeded with agonizing slowness.<sup>44</sup> The infantry experienced untoward difficulties in moving to the Barike River line of departure. Naturally there was confusion, but the very nature of the terrain compounded the problem. As the two regiments crept forward, the 169th Infantry on the right, operating far inland in extremely heavy growth, fell behind the 172d advancing down the coast. Thus, even before the Americans had reached the Barike, a gap was created through which small hostile patrols filtered to Hester's rear.

By 7 July forward elements of both regiments had closed the river, but only the 172d was ready to begin the attack. Overly imaginative soldiers reported that the previous night

<sup>43</sup> *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 46, 84-86, 92; *Campaigns*, 142-143; *Interrogations*, II, 409, 471, 512.

<sup>44</sup> Gen Sasaki testifies: "The rate of speed of the infantry advance was extremely slow. They [the Americans] awaited the results of several days of bombardment before about a squad advanced." (Sasaki ltr to CofS, 17th Army, August 1943.)



several enemy patrols had infiltrated the 3d Battalion, 169th's lines, and that fanatic Japanese soldiers, armed with knives and grenades, had jumped right into American foxholes. Early the next morning, shortly after Colonel Eason had resumed his advance, a small Japanese outpost of Colonel Hirata's 229th Infantry engaged the soldiers and held them up until about noon.<sup>45</sup> As the Barike was only about 3,000 yards west of Zanana Beach, the front lines were dangerously close to the command

<sup>45</sup> Statement of Col John D. Eason, 9Jul43; McHenry diary.

post and supply dump area at the landing point. General Hester, understandably anxious to get his attack rolling, ordered Lieutenant Blake to bring his Marine tanks to Zanana the next day.

Accordingly, Blake made another reconnaissance to locate the most suitable routes of approach to the front and rendezvous areas from which tanks could sortie to assault the foe. Meanwhile, the 169th Infantry chopped its way toward the Barike while engineers, following behind, painfully laid corduroy and coral roads.

Over on Rendova, as succeeding echelons of TF-31 brought in the first major reinforcing elements, including the 37th Division's 145th Infantry (less the 3d Battalion), Americans dredged a camp-site out of the mud. Living in pyramidal tents, men were now sleeping on cots, thus attesting to the lack of enemy ground activity. Despite three air raids throughout the day, the 155mm Batteries registered and fired for effect on Munda's beach defenses and air strip. Battery A engaged targets on Baanga Island, where lookouts had noted hostile gunfire on 5 July; Battery B fired on Nususongo Island, where enemy boat activity had been sighted.<sup>46</sup>

In the air the opposing forces had another of their daily encounters. On 7 July, however, radar picked up the "bandits" long before they reached Rendova. Those few that filtered through the air screen met 90mm and small-arms fire; thus they inflicted but little damage when they bombed and strafed the Allied positions. By the day's end ComAirSols claimed destruction of ten ZEKES and six BETTYS at the cost of one F4U.<sup>47</sup> Strike Command dispatched 17 SBD's and 18 TBF's to Enogai Inlet, to attack known enemy installations with 1,000 and 2,000 pound bombs in support of the approach of the Northern Landing Group.

Early the following day (8 July), Marine lookouts spotted an unidentified dinghy on the edge of a mangrove swamp near Zanana Beach. Higher headquarters, busy moving Blake's tanks to Zanana, building roads in the beach-head area, and expediting the movement of the 169th to the line of departure, took little note of this unsubstantiated report.

The day passed quietly enough, with routine preparations for launching the drive on Munda on 9 July. Although enemy planes again raided the American positions, Fighter Command, for the first day since D-Day, reported no contacts. But antiaircraft batteries engaged the intruders without success.

<sup>46</sup> 155mm Group Work Sheets; ComAirNew Georgia, Daily Intelligence Summary, 7Jul43; 9thDefBn Tank Platoon, Action Report; 9thDefBn, WD, 7Jul43; McHenry diary; Frankel, *op. cit.*, 81.

<sup>47</sup> VMF-221, Action Report, 7Jul43; Strike Command, WD, 7Jul43; Fighter Command, Record of Events, 7Jul43.

At about 1700, sentries observed a single enemy soldier at the edge of the Zanana Beach mangrove swamp, within 100 feet of a 3d Platoon, Special Weapons Group, gun position. The Marines promptly fired upon and wounded the Japanese who, upon interrogation after capture, revealed that he was one of six men who landed that morning from the previously mentioned dinghy to reconnoiter and harass the American lines of communication. Lieutenant Wismer immediately organized a small combat patrol, entered the swamp, killed two and captured the other three enemy. Wismer's action this day provided the first prisoners captured on New Georgia.<sup>48</sup>

Next morning (9 July) at 0300 one of the heaviest artillery preparations thus far in the Pacific war signaled the beginning of Hester's assault. All artillery battalions joined in laying prearranged fires on targets facing the 43d Division. At 0500 destroyers joined in, conducting a naval gunfire bombardment of Lambeti Plantation and Munda Point. The assault regiments, out of contact and lacking direct communication with one another, crossed the line of departure at 0800. A half-hour later Strike Command heavily hit Munda Point with dive and torpedo bombers. Speaking of this preparation, General Sasaki said:<sup>49</sup>

The 43d Division jumped off on schedule but moved forward most slowly. Infantrymen, artillerymen, engineers and supporting elements, exhausted by the effort expended in advancing to the line of departure, lacked aggressiveness and only half-heartedly patrolled to the front and flanks. This prevented the acquisition of vital intelligence information and permitted the foe to close in on the American lines where they escaped artillery preparations and prepared to meet Hester's attacks.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Wismer ltr; Fighter Command, Record of Events, 8Jul43; Reichner ltr; Taylor ltr; O'Neil interview, 1Mar51.

<sup>49</sup> In a letter to the CofS, 17th Army.

The enemy, with complete material superiority, shelled and bombed us heavily day and night, and at times added naval fire to this. Enemy laid waste the battlefield and then ordered an infantry advance.

<sup>50</sup> MajGen O. W. Griswold ltr to LtGen L. J. McNair, 20Aug43; Humphreys report; Frankel, *op. cit.*, 79-81.



**NAVAL GUNFIRE AT NIGHT**, while an impressive sight, proved relatively ineffectual against the well-entrenched enemy. On 12 July, when this photograph was shot, the impact area was far in advance of the front lines. The Japanese simply moved close to the American positions, however, and escaped the pounding our naval forces had intended to give. (Army Photo.)

## THE LAIANA BEACHHEAD

General Hester visited New Georgia's front lines on 12 July to acquaint himself with the situation and to take personal charge of the assault planned for the next day. On the 11th he had attached Blake's Platoon to the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry (Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wells). Hester intended to send this reinforced unit in an assault landing on Laiana Beach, some 5,500 yards southwest of Zanana on 13 July. (See Map #11.) Meanwhile, the 172d would turn left and attack Laiana from its inland side. Seizure of Laiana would shorten the supply line between the Rendova base and the front, already over-extended and nearly impassable because of weather; and permit employment of the Marine tanks, as yet uncommitted to action.<sup>51</sup>

Hester took a quick look at the situation and decided to postpone the landing phases of the operation by one day. The badly shaken 169th

<sup>51</sup> Three tanks had covered engineers building a supply road out of Zanana Beach to the front on 10Jul, but these had not been engaged in combat. (9thDefBn, TkPlat rpt, 2.)

Infantry, but 3,000 yards from its landing point, had fallen far behind the 172d to the left. Hester's most advanced elements were still two miles short of his goal. The 172d, despite easier going along the coastal track was held up near a trail junction just east of Lambeti Plantation. These assault regiments still were out of contact with one another; communications could be conducted only through higher headquarters to the rear; small, infiltrating hostile groups continually harassed the flanks, lines of communications and rearward installations.<sup>52</sup>

Enemy patrol activity and snoopers planes had kept the exhausted soldiers sleepless; the night before, a heavy but ineffectual<sup>53</sup> naval gunfire bombardment of Munda Point had compounded the wakefulness. General Sasaki's

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Col G.W. McHenry, 12Apr48; Turner ltr; Humphreys report, 25Jul43; 155 mm Gun Group Work Sheets, 9-13 July 1943.

<sup>53</sup> The Japanese simply moved close to the American lines and stayed within the "safety zone" to Hester's front. Naval guns were not permitted to fire on targets in this area. (CinCPac, "Monthly Report of Operations," Jul43.)

effective use of his 90mm mortars not only disrupted Hester's advance but also made the Americans distrustful of their own artillery. Sasaki habitually fired his mortars into the 43d Division lines whenever he himself was undergoing a shelling. Frequently this led troops on the front to believe that their own rounds were falling short.

By nightfall, 12 July, the 172d was still too far from Laiana to launch an assault the next morning. It was not until dusk the next day that the tired, dispirited regiment reached the vicinity of Laiana, and then the soldiers were too fatigued to do more than dig in for the night. General Sasaki took advantage of this situation. The 3d Battalion of the Japanese 13th Infantry Regiment (Major Takabayashi), which had arrived on New Georgia two nights before, moved into the gap in the American lines.<sup>54</sup>

At 0800 on 14 July, as the 172d Infantry pushed on toward Ilangana (see Map #11), landing boats bearing the 3d Battalion, 103d, and Marine tanks chugged from Rendova to Laiana. The infantry stormed ashore without incident, but a previously unobserved enemy 75mm gun to the left (west) of the beach brought the tank lighters under ineffective fire. Blake's tanks waddled ashore and proceeded to a protected rendezvous area where they remained until the next morning. Meanwhile, First Lieutenant Colin J. Reeves deployed his "gun team" of the 9th Defense Battalion's Special Weapons Group for anti-aircraft defense of the new beachhead. Laiana would soon become New Georgia's principal debarkation point for troops and supplies.

Throughout the day the 172d, then inching westward toward Munda, met increasing re-

<sup>54</sup> Hester ltr; Turner ltr; McHenry diary.



**LOOKING EASTWARD OVER LAIANA BEACH** a month after the battle ended. This is the "relatively clear" Ilangana Peninsula area, where the 43d Division was supposed to have had "easy going." Now all traces of the hot fight have been removed and an all-weather road follows the coast. (Navy Photo.)

sistance on its right (inland) flank, now manned by the 3d Battalion. Immediately ahead of this unit lay a steep hill, whose sparsely wooded, nearly brushless sides afforded the defenders ample fields of fire. Well concealed, mutually supporting bunkers, connected by trenches transversing the hill's crest, successfully thwarted every frontal assault or flanking movement. Artillery or naval gunfire concentrations proved ineffectual in dislodging the Japanese, safely ensconced in sturdily constructed personnel shelters. Only the direct hit of a heavy shell would knock out a position.

Likewise, on the left (beach) flank, the 2d Battalion faced severe opposition in extremely heavy growth from an undetermined number of enemy in strong points both on the beach

and inland. On both flanks the advance had now halted.<sup>55</sup>

Admiral Halsey, understandably anxious to get the campaign rolling, directed General Harmon to determine the cause of the delay in the seizure of Munda and take any remedial action he deemed necessary. After a thorough investigation, therefore, Harmon ordered Major General Oscar W. Griswold, the XIV Corps commander, to assume control of the New Georgia Occupation Force.

Several factors influenced this decision. By this time the greater part of two divisions of Griswold's corps—the 43d and 37th (some elements of which even then were already engaged on the front lines)—were irrevocably

<sup>55</sup> McHenry diary; Hester diary (as quoted in Hester ltr); *Combat Narratives*, X, 54-55.



**TANK LIGHTERS UNDER FIRE** from a Japanese 75mm gun west of Laiana Beach. These craft were bringing Blake's 9th Defense Battalion Tank Platoon to the support of the 103d Infantry, then on shore. The Marines suffered no losses in this incident.

committed to the TOENAILS operation, while a third, the 25th, was scheduled to move in shortly. With the vast majority of his troops involved in combat, it was only natural that Griswold should command them. Moreover, the moment he was relieved of responsibility for the Occupation Force, General Hester would be able to devote his full, undivided attention to the needs of his own 43d Division.

According to a plan of long standing, Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson would replace Admiral Turner as CTF-31 on 15 July. Harmon felt that this was the logical time to install a new ground commander. Both reliefs, therefore, were accomplished on that date. Henceforward the ground aspects of the campaign would be conducted under Griswold's direction.

### MARINE TANKS IN THE ATTACK <sup>56</sup>

At 0730, 15 July, Blake (now a captain) ordered his men into their tanks. He directed Gunnery Sergeant Charles L. Spurlock to take charge of three vehicles, proceed inland with Army guides to the 3d Battalion command post, and support that unit in its attack. Blake himself led the other three tanks toward the command post of the 2d Battalion.

Captain Blake followed a narrow, muddy jeep trail along the coast for several hundred yards, but this ended suddenly in thick jungle growth. The tanks broke their own path through the unending thickets, occasionally bellying up on unseen logs, or reversing to bypass stumps. After a tortuous trip, he arrived at his destination and reported to Lieutenant Colonel James T. Walsh, the 2d Battalion's commanding officer. Walsh briefed the captain on the dispositions of friendly and enemy troops, assigned six infantrymen to each tank as close-in protection, and designated scouts as guides. Approximately 75 yards forward of the front lines near the banks of a small, shallow jungle stream, the leading vehicle emerged into an area partly cleared by shell fire. An alert crewman spotted the fire



**MARINE TANKMEN INSPECT DAMAGE** suffered by their machine during action in mid-July on Ilangana Peninsula. This superficial damage was soon repaired and the tank back in action the following day.

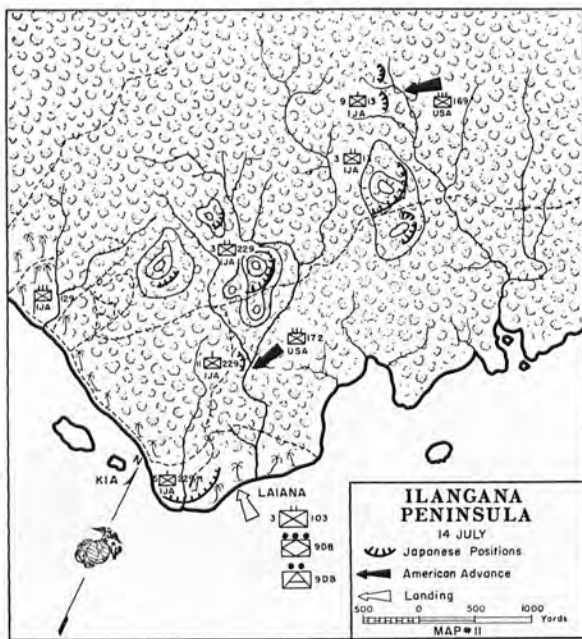
port of a bunker, almost hidden by brush, on the other side of the stream.

At once the tanks fanned to wedge formation and commenced hurling 37mm high explosive and canister ammunition at the target. Shell bursts mowed the underbrush to reveal additional bunkers and grass shacks; these too were taken under fire. When several Japanese were sighted scurrying through the jungle, the protecting infantrymen spread out and took up firing positions. But because of matted vegetation they could see neither their tanks nor their targets.

Although slow to develop, enemy retaliation came in the form of machine-gun fire. The first burst hit the open turret hatch of the lead vehicle, spattered the crew with lead fragments. The tanks "buttoned up" as shots pounded protective armor. Miraculously no damage or casualties resulted.

To determine the source of this fire, Blake ordered his tanks to move slowly forward. After they had proceeded 50 feet, the driver of the rearmost vehicle reported an enemy automatic weapon to the extreme left near the shore. When the Marines began to shoot in that direction, the Japanese held their fire, only to resume when the turrets swung away to seek

<sup>56</sup> The following information is a synthesis of 9thDefBn WD, and TkPlat rpt; 10thDefBn TkPlat rpt; McHenry diary; Maj Robert W. Blake ltr to CMC, 18Dec51.



another target. At length, after careful scrutiny of the shore area, Blake detected the muzzle flash of a hostile machine gun in a clump of heavy brush. Efforts to hit this weapon directly were impeded first by parallax between the tank periscope and its gun bore at such close range, and second by the smoke from the 37mm gun blasts, which prevented observation of the impact area when the rounds hit. Machine guns and 37mm canister finally stripped the foliage to disclose not one, but two weapons, shooting from the rear entrances of a pair of log and coral bunkers. On these, coconuts had sprouted, thus providing excellent camouflage. Ignoring the three tanks, then not over 50 feet away, the Japanese continued to man the two guns. As soon as the Americans killed one gunner another would creep out to take his place, only to be killed in turn. Closely planted palm trees and an intervening stream (the bottom of which Blake feared too soft for fording) prevented the Marines from over-running the opposing position.

Numerous Japanese continued to appear out of the brush and dash into the lee of the beleaguered bunkers. Later examination revealed that these were members of a tank-killer unit sent forward to engage the American vehicles with magnetic mines and flame throwers.

When Blake's men found they could not

maneuver to bring their antagonists under fire, they hurled armor piercing projectiles at the bankers, and followed these with high explosive shells, fired through the resultant aperture. By this means survivors were flushed like quail from one shelter after another, to run the gamut of the tanks' bow guns. Additional defense works were handled in like manner until the Marines discerned no further hostile fire or movement.

After a last general raking of the area a supporting rifleman was hailed and told all was clear. Soldiers then occupied the sector without further incident.

On dismounting the Marines discovered many enemy dead and an amazing number of abandoned automatic weapons, not only in the vicinity of those strong points on the beach, but from others inland from which no shot was known to have been fired. Evidently the Japanese had planned to permit the tanks to penetrate as far as the tank-killer squads, and then from positions inland open up on the supporting American infantry. Fortunately Blake, knowing that inland fortifications had held up the foot troops the preceding day, had machine-gunned the entire area, killing or pinning down these enemy. When they could stand it no longer, those who survived, withdrew. Thus fell the extreme left (east) flank of the beach defenses for the Munda area.<sup>57</sup> But many potent, enemy-held positions still remained in the Ilangana area, to be discovered later by the 103d Infantry when XIV Corps began its 25 July offensive.

Meanwhile, Gunnery Sergeant Spurlock had reached the foot of the hill facing the 3d Battalion (Major James W. Devine). Peering through his periscope, Spurlock observed five bunkers nearly concealed on the forward slope; trenches crossing the crest appeared to connect with dugouts on the reverse slope. The tanks, closely followed by soldiers, attacked at once. Cruising back and forth across the side and top of the hill, the Marines fired into all visible targets pointed out by Spurlock or by accompanying soldiers' tracer fire.

<sup>57</sup> MajGen N. Sasaki ltr to CofS 17th Army, August 1943.



Operations on the hill became extremely difficult. At times the tankmen could not depress the muzzles of their guns sufficiently to bring fire to bear on the targets. At one point, a magnetic antitank mine, tossed at Spurlock's machine fell short and burst upon the ground. Grenades from launchers ("Knee-Mortars") or thrown by hand rattled off the sides, one exploding on the front armor and cracking the glass in the driver's vision slot. The resistance soon melted, however, and the infantry moved in to hold the newly won position.

Late that afternoon as the lead tank returned to the base, one of the most fantastic accidents of the campaign occurred when a log entered the driver's open door, deflected upward into the turret, and broke Sergeant Spurlock's leg. This was the only severe Marine casualty resulting from the day's activity. No vehicles were damaged.

On 16 July the 9th Defense Battalion tanks rejoined the units they had supported the preceding day. On the right, three jumped off from the rear of the previously seized hill, maneuvered around its base through heavy underbrush, and climbed up into a 200-yard long saddle between the American positions and an enemy-held knoll to the west. The attack began shortly after 1000 and continued with various interruptions caused by rugged terrain and visual difficulties until about 1430. Four or five pillboxes along with their occupants fell to the Marines, and closely following infantry quickly seized the high ground. The slight volume of small-arms fire received by the tanks succeeded only in battering the paint on the hulls and damaging vision devices. As a result of excellent tank-infantry coordination the 2d Battalion gained this important ground with little loss.

On the coast, meanwhile, Captain Blake made two sorties. Six riflemen covered each tank as the Marines plowed through brush and palm trees some 200 yards along the crest of a coastal embankment. From this spot five bunkers, a grass shack, and a number of dug-outs were destroyed. It soon became apparent that the dazed enemy would not or could not fight; the sector, therefore, could be occupied immediately. Suddenly Blake discovered that

the supporting infantry had failed to follow him.

The dangers and difficulties experienced by the soldiers in that dense growth were tremendous. Early in the sortie, for example, one machine attempted to fire at a bunker with high explosive shells. But because of parallax, the first round severed a tree causing it to fall across the turret and crash upon the head of a nearby rifleman. Another soldier was injured when he dove behind a tank for protection, just as it began to back up to maneuver between some trees. To protect the tanks, the troops had to stay close, but in staying close they were endangered not only by the vehicles themselves, but also by ricocheting projectiles. Tank-infantry operations in deep jungle at this stage of the war were far from perfect; but the Marine tankmen and the 43d division soldiers were proving that such operations were possible.

After a long wait on the newly won ground, Blake led his machines back to the line of departure, informed the battalion commander of the lack of opposition and received assurance



**CAPTAIN BLAKE EXAMINES A JAPANESE FLAMETHROWER** used against him on 17 July. This weapon had sprayed Blake's vehicle with fluid, but failed to ignite. Accompanying infantrymen killed the enemy soldier and presented his weapon to the grateful Marines.



**LOG AND CORAL BUNKERS** opposed the American advance. More than 70 of these well-camouflaged works formed strong points on the main enemy defense line between Kia Village and Munda Airfield. Until artillery and naval gunfire cleared the thick growth, the bunkers were difficult to locate.

that the foot troops would move out at once. Blake sortied again. This time, upon reaching a position 50 to 100 yards beyond their previous point of farthest advance, the attackers came under heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. The first bursts wounded several accompanying soldiers; the rest of the foot troops abandoned the tanks, from which bullets and fragments ricocheted in all directions. Now the unprotected machines were standing in a thicket so heavy that their occupants could not see more than 20 feet in any direction.

After raking the area with machine-gun and canister fire to silence the enemy, the Marines tried to reestablish contact with the soldiers. When movement was detected all about them, and thinking it to be friendly, they resumed the advance. At this point a Japanese soldier stepped out from behind a nearby tree and planted a magnetic mine in the path of the lead tank. It backed away; simultaneously, heavy explosions to front and rear rocked the machine.

The other two vehicles endured similar close

attack. On one an opponent clapped a magnetic mine, which carried away the tool box, air cleaner and fender. Another adversary placed a mine or grenade between the yokes of the rear idler of the third, bulging the yoke and denting the idler. Here heavy brush enabled the foe to accomplish all this without giving the tankmen a clear view of more than a single man at a time. Despite this swift, well executed attack, the Marines responded with a deluge of machine-gun, canister, and high-explosive fire. At 1600, since no friendly troops appeared, the tanks rumbled back to their own lines. The track of the lead vehicle finally broke before reaching sanctuary, but it was eventually repaired without incident.

That evening the 145th Infantry began to relieve the 169th and the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry (Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wells) replaced the 2d Battalion, 172d on the lines. The new units would renew the attack the next morning. At 1000, 17 July, therefore, Blake with the remaining five tanks, returned to the front line command post and there received

orders a few minutes after arrival,<sup>58</sup> to support Company I, then encountering stiff resistance in a large thicket, a short distance behind the beach.

No sooner had the Marines entered the thicket than Japanese bullets began bouncing off the armor like hail from a tin roof. Again the infantry had to retire. One tank fired canister at a flimsy hut to the right front, where movement had been spotted. Shortly thereafter the Marines sighted what they believed to be Army aidmen hurrying toward the target. While speculating on this singular circumstance and attempting to contact a friendly soldier to learn if Americans indeed had occupied that particular hut, several men ran out of it. After slight hesitation these were identified as foe, armed with grenades and flame throwers. Both adversaries fired simultaneously, but the Marine fire was fatal. Suddenly a terrific explosion rocked the third tank in the column. An enemy soldier had slapped a magnetic mine atop the hull at the base of the turret, staving in the hull and wounding two men. As the captain swung his turret aft to view the damage, he spotted enemy lurking in the brush on both sides of the trail where, only a few minutes before, friendly troops had been deployed. Under cover of heavy fire a cable was attached to the disabled machine permitting the entire column to back out and finally, at 1400, reach American lines. Blake then reported to the battalion command post to obtain a more accurate picture of friendly and enemy dispositions and to recommend better coordination. Upon arrival, however, he was informed that the attack was to be discontinued for that day. In this sector two Marines had become casualties, one tank was permanently disabled, and no ground had been gained.

### JAPANESE COUNTERATTACK

Early in July, as the Allies increased their strength on Rendova, began the advance on Munda, and effected a lodgement on Dragons Peninsula, Admiral Kusaka and General Imamura argued about the methods by which they would defend the Central Solomons. Bitter experience had taught them that piecemeal commitment of troops would not regain the initiative for Japan in the New Georgia area. Yet no other means was open, thanks to the effective naval and air barrier that Admiral Halsey had erected between the American beachheads and the Japanese bases in the Northern Solomons.

Because of Imperial Army Headquarters intransigence, the only reinforcements to come to Rabaul consisted of a few units from Admiral Koga's Combined Fleet. The landbased 21st Air Flotilla (20 fighters, 12 attack planes, 2 reconnaissance planes) and the carrier *Ryūhō's* air group (25 fighters and 28 light bombers) moved in to augment the Eleventh Air Fleet on 2 July. About five days later Koga sent three cruisers and three destroyers to Rabaul to support Vice Admiral Samejima's Eighth Fleet. Admiral Kusaka had already expended much of his air strength in abortive attacks against American positions and shipping. Now he had to make repeated attempts to reinforce Admiral Ota and General Sasaka in the Central Solomons.

During the night of 9 July Admiral Samejima successfully carried 1,200 of Imamura's troops to Kolombangara. That same night 1,300 men of the 13th Infantry moved by small boat from Kolombangara to Bairoko thence overland to Munda and reported to General Sasaki. The 13th was followed the next night by the 1,200-man reinforcing unit mentioned above. At the same time one battalion of the 13th reinforced the Kure 6th SNLF for the defense of Dragons Peninsula. During the night of 12-13 July another 1,200 enemy troops landed on Kolombangara.<sup>59</sup>

General Sasaki felt that he had accumulated sufficient strength by 14 July to launch a counteroffensive along New Georgia's south coast. The night previous, he had interposed Takabayashi's battalion of the 13th Infantry be-

<sup>58</sup> Scheduled to arrive at 0900, Blake was delayed until 1000 by the necessity of having to wait on Zanana Beach for lubricating oil. One engine became too overheated and that tank had to be left behind.

<sup>59</sup> After unloading, this Japanese convoy (RAdm Shunji Izaki) met RAdm Ainsworth's Task Force 18 in the Battle of Kolombangara and lost its flagship *Jintsu* in exchange for the destroyer *Gwin* sunk and the cruisers *Honolulu*, *St. Louis* and HMNZS *Leander*, damaged.

tween the American 172d and 169th Regiments. He had observed the landing of the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, and the Marine tanks at Laiana that morning, and realized that to attain a reasonable degree of success, he must strike at once. In the vicinity of Munda airfield Sasaki held the main body of Hirata's 229th Infantry and Colonel Satoshi Tomonari's 13th; here too were parts of Commander Takeda's Yokosuka 7th SNLF, and a few troops of the 230th.<sup>60</sup> Ignoring the heavy artillery and naval shelling and constant air bombardment, the Japanese prepared to attack when the order came.

<sup>60</sup> The Yokosuka 7th was part of Adm Ota's Eighth Combined SNLF. The 230th had served on Guadalcanal.

Like many high-level concepts Sasaki's plan, while appearing simple on paper, was most difficult to execute. The same problems of rugged terrain and lack of contact that plagued the American commanders now beset the enemy. Sasaki ordered Tomonari to swing wide to the left, encircle the Allied right, cut the Munda Trail between the front and Zanana Beach, then destroy the 169th (now commanded by Colonel Temple Holland). Simultaneously Captain Kojima's 3d Battalion, 229th Infantry, would launch a frontal assault on the 2d Battalion, 172d Infantry. Admiral Ota's men could execute a series of infiltration landings west of Laiana Beach, destroy Hester's beach defenses and cut lines of supply and communication along the shores. Meanwhile,



**ARTILLERY AND NAVAL GUNFIRE CONCENTRATIONS** stripped foliage from the trees and laid waste the jungle. Within a few months, however, the jungle had reclaimed this particular clearing.

Hirata would hold the remainder of his 229th<sup>61</sup> in the vicinity of Lambeti Plantation, prepared to exploit any advantage gained or defend against any unforeseen American countermeasures.

Late in the afternoon of 14 July, Tomonari set out at the head of his 13th Infantry on a long 3-day trek through mud and jungle around the right flank of the 169th. Meanwhile, Hirata's patrols became more active, some even going to the extent of making minor attacks during daylight hours. Kojima's men in the Ilangana sector clung even more tenaciously than before to their bunkers.

By 17 July Sasaki was in position to launch his assault, but lack of communications prevented adequate coordination. Because of heavy American attacks on his forward positions at 1130 that morning, Captain Kojima could not regain his balance for a jump-off; the incessant American artillery shelling and air strikes had completely disorganized Commander Takeda's boat pool, thus making impossible an organized amphibious assault behind American lines.

Colonel Tomonari's 13th Infantry, however, managed to encircle the right flank of the 43d Division and by 1600 organized in a mangrove swamp on the banks of the Barike River for a thrust against the Zanana Beach supply dumps and the 43d Division command post. About sundown Tomonari attacked. Within a few minutes he had surrounded the 43d Division's command post, then located on the shore about 400 yards west of Zanana Beach, and severed the supply lines leading to front and rear. Fortunately, the foe overlooked and failed to cut one telephone wire over which the Americans gave the alarm and called in artillery support from Roviana and Sasavele Islands.

General Barker's 43d Division guns responded magnificently. With the general himself acting as one of the forward observers, the artillerymen planted heavy shells 100 to 500 yards from the edge of the camp. Barker called in box barrages at irregular intervals for the remainder of the night to prevent the enemy from organizing a *banzai*. Of the great number of

<sup>61</sup> The survivors of Maj Hara's 1st Battalion, defeated at Viru Harbor two weeks before, were just beginning to drift into the Munda positions.



**BRIGADIER GENERAL HAROLD R. BARKER, USA**, 43d Division artillery commander, who coordinated all artillery activities during the XIV Corps advance. (Army Photo.)

rounds fired that night only one fell short, and that a single shot fired during registration.<sup>62</sup>

## ZANANA BEACH DEFENSE

When the sounds of the first shots reached the 3d Platoon, Special Weapons Group back on Zanana Beach, Lieutenant Wismer promptly sent out a small patrol to investigate. Within ten minutes the Marines returned to report that a hostile force approaching battalion strength occupied the trail between the 43d Division command post and Zanana Beach. Making a quick estimate of the situation, Wismer decided that the handful of combat troops could not hold the gun positions sited to give Zanana beach antiaircraft and antiboat pro-

<sup>62</sup> The senior Marine observers present in the command post that night are unstinting in their praise of Barker and the work of his men. It became quite evident that Fort Sill doctrines, accurately applied by well-trained battery and gun commanders, were valid. Had any doubt previously existed, artillerymen this night effectively dissipated it. (McHenry diary; Wismer ltr; McAllister report; Report of Marine Observer with XIV Corps; 9thDefBn, Informal Combat Report.)

tection. Defense of the beach against infantry attack was of paramount importance; should Zanana fall, the enemy would capture a large portion of the American supplies on New Georgia. Moreover, at that time Zanana was the primary landing point for XIV Corps personnel and materiel, and its loss might be fatal to American plans.

With the approval of Major Charles C. Cox, USA, senior officer in the area,<sup>63</sup> Wismer arrived at an effective solution of his problem. About 150 yards inland from the beach was a prominent knoll overlooking an open draw through which ran a trail leading to the division command post. Wismer elected to half-man his 20mm and 40mm guns and with the remainder of his platoon occupy the high ground. From the XIV Corps salvage dump nearby the Marines obtained two light .30-calibre machine guns, and by cannibalizing other damaged weapons made these operative. Hastily the platoon dug in on its knoll. To the right was the 172d Infantry Antitank Platoon; to the left approximately 50 Army service troops and artillerymen. Wismer set up a perimeter defense and laid his newly acquired machine guns, manned by Corporal Maier J. Rothschild and Private John J. Wantuck, respectively, to fire down the critical trail.

The sounds of the fire around General Hester's position made a cacophony that spurred on Marine preparations. The shrill whistle of American artillery shells ending in ear-splitting explosions served to keep every man alert and ready. Some time passed without incident, but (and now Wismer tells the story):

At about nine o'clock at night approximately 100 Japanese came into the draw and started to set up mortars. We held our fire until the last moment before they started firing in order that the greatest concentration of enemy troops would be present. Upon opening fire, we drove back the Japanese into the jungle. They regrouped and made a banzai charge. The forward positions were overrun and individually we made our way back to the gun positions on the beach, where we prepared to defend against the next charge. To our surprise, it did not materialize.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Maj Cox was a member of the Judge Advocate General's Department. Wisely he entrusted the active defense of the sector to trained combat troops.

<sup>64</sup> Wismer ltr.

Why that charge had failed to materialize became evident the following morning when Wismer led his men back to the hill where Wantuck and Rothschild had been cut off while still manning their guns. More than 100 enemy dead, littering the blood-soaked forward slope, gave mute evidence of the effectiveness with which these two Marines had covered their comrades' withdrawal. The patrol found Wantuck's body beside his now ammunitionless gun, surrounded by Japanese he had killed with knife and grenade. Rothschild, slightly wounded, lay hidden under some brush in a nearby gully, similarly surrounded.

These two men alone may well have saved Zanana Beach for the XIV Corps. General Hester, properly appreciative, recommended both for the Medal of Honor.<sup>65</sup>

## REORGANIZATION HIATUS

For the next week the front lines east of Munda remained static. Having executed the initial phases of the operation with alacrity and cleverness, the 43d Division now found itself faced by a stubborn, tenacious adversary who, from well-organized, hidden positions, parried every American thrust. The energy expended on its wide swing into position had utterly exhausted the 169th Regiment. The 172d had come to a halt with its effective strength at 50 percent of normal. Lack of either communications or physical contact and the old ally of a defending force, sticky, oozing mud, frustrated all efforts at cooperation between the two regiments.

During the first 20 days of the operation, enemy aircraft had attacked the American holdings no less than 80 times. Although the combat air patrol and the 9th Defense Battalion's antiaircraft fire prevented these attacks from causing more than superficial damage, the adverse effect on the ground troops' nerves and physical endurance was tremendous. Sleepless and enervated, once eager troops no longer possessed the will to fight.

On the morning of 18 July the 148th Infantry (less its 3d Battalion) of Major General Robert S. Beightler's 37th Division landed at Zanana Beach, and immediately moved for-

<sup>65</sup> Eventually they were awarded the Navy Cross.



ward to begin relief of the 172d. Two days later its sister regiment, the 145th (less the 3d Battalion), completed the relief of the 169th. The two 43d Division regiments now shifted to the left to shore up that front. On the 21st, the 161st Combat Team of the 25th Division (Major General J. Lawton Collins) landed on Baraulu Island and began to move to positions between the 145th and 148th. (See Map #16.) The 2d Battalion, 103d, landed at Laiana Beach on the 22d and was immediately guided to a bivouac. Its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Lester E. Brown, was relieved (by Major Raymond M. Dunning) and placed in command of the regiment, replacing Colonel Hundley, the new Chief of Staff, 43d Division. By 23 July General Griswold had two divisions on a 4,000-yard front, some 4,500 yards short of the XIV Corps objective.<sup>66</sup>

While the 9th Defense Battalion tanks remained at Zanana Beach without a plan of action, Blake returned to Rendova and conferred with General Griswold. The latter directed him to conduct a thorough reconnaissance along the front to determine just how and where tanks could be best employed in the immediate future. Accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel James M. Smith, the 3d Marine Division observer attached to XIV Corps,<sup>67</sup> Blake returned to New Georgia, and after viewing each sector reported that the center of the left zone of action (now occupied by the 2d Battalion, 172d) presented the most favorable terrain for tank maneuvers. Griswold thereupon ordered the 43d Division to attack the following day.

At 0700 the morning of 24 July during a heavy artillery preparation, five Marine tanks moved forward and waited for attack orders under cover of the high ground—now named Coolidge Hill—seized by Spurlock the week before. For three hours, artillery churned enemy rearward positions into a chaos of dust and kindling. Finally, the infantry moved only to find the opposing front-line positions largely

untouched by the barrage and as strong as ever. Hostile troops on a large hill, dominating the whole coastal area, and not over 100 yards west of Coolidge Hill, thwarted every attempt to advance.

By 1030 the attack slowed down and, under Smith's direction, the Marine tanks crossed the crest. A few minutes later Smith was out of action, wounded by a machine-gun slug. The tanks, although bereft of infantry support, continued rolling down the steep, bullet-swept forward slope. As the lead vehicle nosed into the saddle between Coolidge and the enemy-held hill, machine-gun fire mercilessly pounded its hull. All five tanks responded by shooting into every observed Japanese position. The attack crept ahead, even as the enemy brought additional automatic weapons into play.

By 1400 mechanical failures and some minor damage inflicted by their antagonists' fire had forced three of the five Marine tanks to withdraw before the hostile hill was overrun. However, in face of the undeterred assault, those defenders who remained alive elected to retire in the direction of their airstrip. While the two undamaged machines continued to engage the fleeing enemy, the soldiers advanced and occupied the recently evacuated positions.

### THE 25 JULY ASSAULT <sup>68</sup>

That evening staff officers gathered in conference around the XIV Corps operations map to hear General Griswold outline his intentions for the next day. Pointing out that the 43d Division's right flank was now advanced some 500 yards beyond the left, Griswold observed that his troops were now to the rear of the Ilangana Peninsula and held high ground dominating that locale. The general desired to continue the westward advance, with the 37th Division making the main effort along a ridge system inland.

The 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry (commanded by Captain Lloyd E. Barron, who relieved Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wells on the 24th) which had been operating near

<sup>66</sup> Hester 15Mar52 ltr; Maj Wilson F. Humphrey's ltr to CO, 14thDefBn, 25Jul43; 25thDiv History; Frankel, *op. cit.*, 81, 83.

<sup>67</sup> Griswold assigned Smith the responsibility for conducting liaison between tanks and infantry during the next attack. (McHenry diary.)

<sup>68</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the following information was extracted from 9thDefBn TkPlat, OpnRpt; Zimmer, *op. cit.*; Frankel, *op. cit.*; 43dInfDiv and NCOF Field Orders; Blake ltr.





**BETWEEN LAMBETI PLANTATION AND MUNDA POINT** lay flat ground which, less than a month after the fall of the airstrip, became a desolate camp site. From the "quarries" near the center of this picture came the coral with which Seabees and engineers paved roads and landing strip. (Navy Photo.)

Laiana Beach since 17 July would launch an attack, coordinated with artillery and tank support, by noon the following day. The mission: Drive the enemy from Ilangana Peninsula and move the Corps left wing westward to shorten the front line.

Miraculously no rain fell the morning of 25 July. Dry weather would help.

Griswold's plan called for naval gunfire, air bombing, and a general advance by ground forces. At 0605, therefore, seven destroyers began lobbing 5-inch shells toward the southern coast; later 171 planes of various types dropped 145 tons of bombs into the Munda area.<sup>69</sup> The XIV Corps attack had begun.

On the left (Roviana Lagoon) flank, a Japanese strong point close to the beach soon held up the advance of the 3d Battalion, 103d. To outflank the position the 172d's 2d Battalion passed far to the north then swung south to face the Lagoon shore. The resultant gap be-

<sup>69</sup> MajGen Nathan F. Twining, USAAF, relieved Adm Mitscher as ComAirSols on 25Jul.

tween the two battalions was filled by the 1st Battalion, 169th (Major Joseph E. Zimmer), previously the 43d Division's reserve. This was the situation when 9th Defense Battalion tanks finally moved forward.<sup>70</sup>

A fresh and experienced infantry company met Blake's five Marine tanks when they reported to the command post behind Coolidge Hill. Just before noon front line companies pulled approximately 100 yards to the rear. For an hour Army artillery relentlessly pounded all known or suspected enemy positions. At 1300 the guns lifted their fire and tanks, closely followed by protecting riflemen, advanced from Coolidge Hill directly toward the shore to cut off the enemy on Ilangana Peninsula. Hearing the tanks operating so far behind them, the Japanese abandoned their emplacements and raced to escape. Two deadly 47mm antitank guns, located in bunkers and sighted along the beach, were taken from their blind side. Marine machine guns and 37mm's

<sup>70</sup> JCS, TOENAILS, 27 July.

quickly reduced the inconsequential smattering of answering small-arms fire, while the soldiers mopped up the dazed Japanese stragglers.

As soon as the report of this fight reached the rear, troops of the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, advanced without opposition and occupied Hangan. Coordination of infantry with tanks and artillery, which usually assures success, had finally been accomplished with resultant easy seizure of the day's objective.

### GATHERING' MOMENTUM: 26-27 JULY <sup>71</sup>

The 10th Defense Battalion Tank Platoon (First Lieutenant Albert E. Bailey) had arrived on Rendova on 23 July and had reported to the 1st Battalion, 161st Infantry, then attached to the 37th Division. On the 26th, in accordance with General Griswold's decision to support his right wing, Bailey would move to New Georgia and lead six of his tanks in an assault on an 800-yard-long hill mass, named Bartley Ridge, immediately in front of the XIV Corps right. Meanwhile, the 103d Infantry on the left would advance to shorten and straighten the 43d Division front line, which then slanted from southeast to northwest.

Before jumping off, Bailey deployed his vehicles in two lines of three each: the leading element as the striking force, that following as the support. Eighteen soldiers armed with flame throwers, automatic weapons, rifles and grenades were provided for close protection.

Steep slopes, cloaked by heavy underbrush, closely spaced trees, and fallen logs made tank operations extremely difficult. Almost immediately after the attackers crossed the line of departure, enemy enfilade fire rapidly eliminated all vestiges of infantry support, which left Bailey's rear unprotected. As a result, one adventurous Japanese marine <sup>72</sup> clambered up the back of a Marine tank and attached a magnetic mine to the hull. Machine guns in companion vehicles promptly cut down this antagonist, but the mine's explosion knocked out one vehicle even before the main action was joined.

A rather large clearing surrounded by tall

<sup>71</sup> Extracted from 9th and 10th Def Bn Tk Plat Opn Rpt; Frankel and Zimmer, *op. cit.*; 25th Inf Div History; Blake ltr.

<sup>72</sup> SNLF personnel—especially trained landing troops.

trees and dense vegetation became the battleground. Around the edges of this clearing Japanese engineers had constructed ground-level pillboxes and bunkers, covered by riflemen in trees or in surrounding thickets, and well-emplaced mortars and machine guns.

Here the fight lasted approximately five hours, as the Marines picked targets, and maneuvered for position. One unfortunate tank wedged itself against a large stump; crewmen left the comparative shelter of the other vehicles to attach tow chains and cables. But withering automatic weapons fire drove them back, two with comparatively severe wounds. Getting nowhere, his ammunition and fuel supply depleted below the minimum essential to continue combat, his infantry support vanished, Bailey ordered a general withdrawal.

Enemy fire lashed the retiring Marines. Among the trees and scrub growth the several tanks soon lost contact, and one driver completely lost his way. Two men dismounted and sought a route to friendly lines, but before they returned, the Japanese closed in on the machine, blew off its track, and killed or wounded its occupants. A second became widely separated but eventually reentered American lines only after following a circuitous route through hostile territory.

The three remaining tanks returned to their park to refuel and rearm prior to resuming the fight and recovering the disabled and lost vehicles. Upon reentering the battle ground, however, they came under such heavy fire that Bailey soon realized that his gamble could result only in sending good money after bad and ordered the two badly damaged machines abandoned. That night artillery and mortars laid continuous concentrations in that vicinity. Next morning Bailey plodded back to the scene on foot and finding one vehicle beyond field repair, destroyed it with an incendiary grenade; the other was later towed back to safety.

Elsewhere the attack of 26 July achieved only limited success. Both the 37th and 43d Divisions gained some ground, the 103d Infantry (less its 1st Battalion) of the latter cracking through a line of some 74 bunkers to reach Kia Village. But the ultimate objective—Munda—remained in enemy hands. For the

Marines, elation over the Japanese withdrawal from the Ilangana area was tempered by the sobering realization that Bailey had now lost half of his machines, and several of his tankmen were dead or wounded. More than 30 hours would pass before 10th Defense Battalion tanks could again operate.<sup>73</sup>

The inconsequential achievement on the right wing, already well advanced and slightly over extended, was not as serious as the lack of appreciable progress on the left. The main effort, Griswold insisted, must be made along the coast where advance units lagged far behind those on the right. He need only contain the foe to the north while continuing the attack along the shore. Griswold perforce ordered the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, supported by 9th Defense Battalion tanks, to strike Lambeti Plantation the next day.

<sup>73</sup> Ward ltr.

Accordingly at 0800, 27 July, Blake led his five machines out of their bivouac. A few minutes later inadequate servicing after constant employment forced one to turn back. The other four continued onward and reported to the 3d Battalion command post, where they received instructions to cover the advance of the entire battalion by moving out in a double column, about 50 feet apart.

Again the thick growth made contact difficult to maintain and extensive deployment impossible. Seventy-five yards beyond the front the Marines halted to machine gun the ground ahead. Almost immediately a heavy projectile slapped into the side of the leader, jarring it from stem to stern. In rapid succession two additional high velocity 47mm shells jolted the stricken vehicle. Before the source of fire could be located a fourth shot smashed into the



**MAJOR GENERAL ROBERT S. BEIGHTLER** (left), commander of the 37th Infantry Division, with a group of his officers in early August. Beightler's division, the right wing of XIV Corps, had just cut through the jungle and had reached the coast north of Munda airfield when this picture was snapped. (Army Photo.)

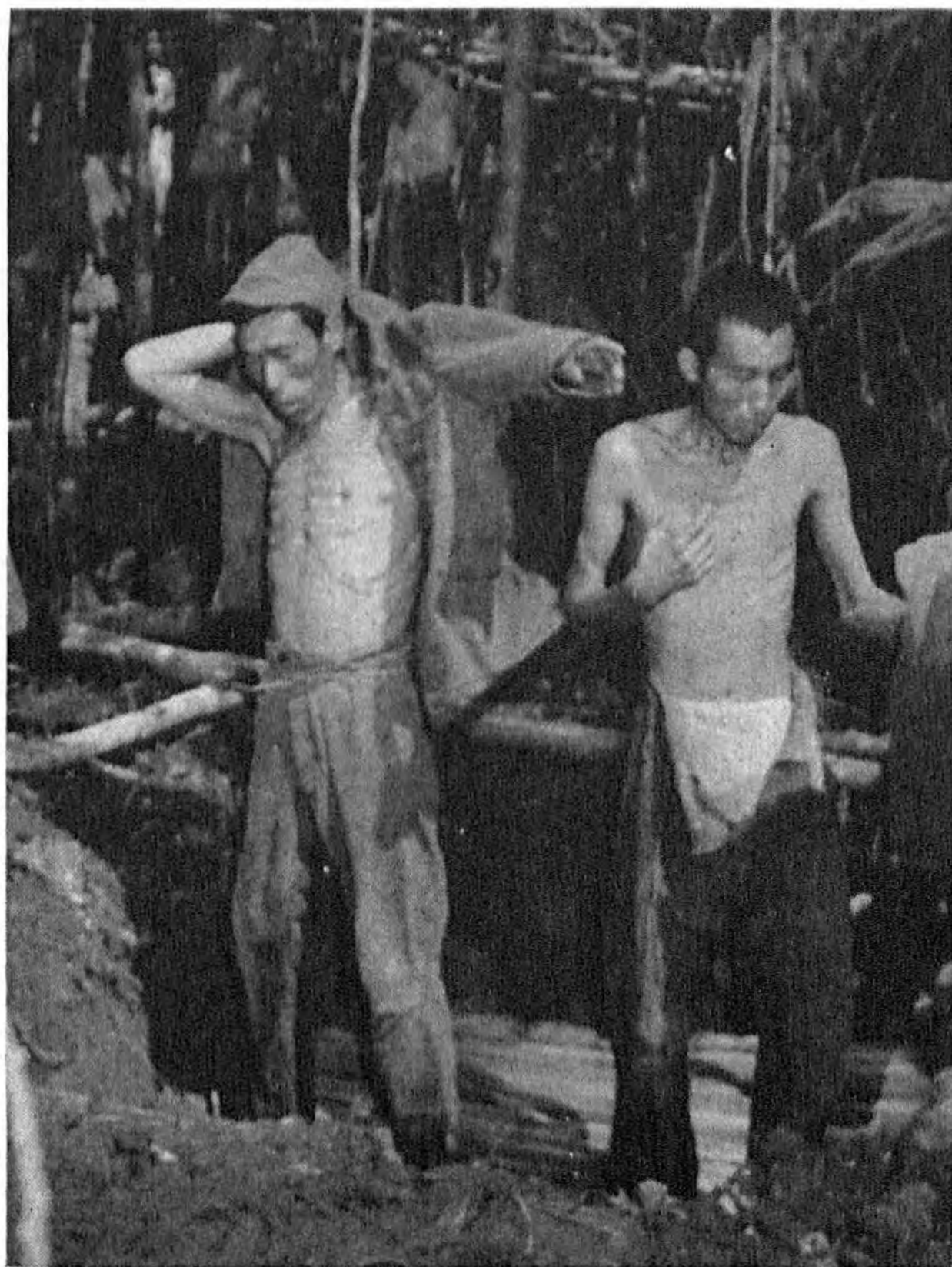
hull with such violence that sparks and bits of metal sprayed about the interior, severely injuring the driver.

In hasty confusion the wounded driver backed his tank and collided with the one following, causing its turret to jam. With great difficulty he finally succeeded in getting into forward gear, turning around and retiring from the area. A third, meanwhile, received damage from the same gun that had hit the leader when a shell blasted the forward door seams, splattered the driver's face with small fragments, and forced it also from the action. The fourth tank covered the withdrawal of its damaged comrades, but could not locate the enemy weapon and had to retire without shooting at a sighted target.

With feverish haste the Marines labored to put their vehicles back in action. By noon, with a new fuel and ammunition supply aboard, the undamaged machine and a spare brought forward from the beach bivouac renewed the attack, now supported by two infantry companies. The plan envisaged a movement around the hostile left (inland) flank, followed by a drive to the sea, to bring the friendly forces in the rear of the main Japanese defenses.

The assault began as planned. Tanks and infantry climbed the low coastal escarpment and moved along it to a point calculated to be behind the hostile gun. Just then a hail of machine-gun bullets and mortar shells raked the escarpment, wounding numerous troops and scattering the rest. The Marines, after spraying the coastal thicket, plunged into it. At this point mechanical failure temporarily immobilized one vehicle. The other then probed a grass shack from which the opposition seemed to come. Just as this tank nudged against the hut, an enemy soldier jumped from shelter and planted a magnetic mine against the left side of the tank's engine compartment. The detonations of the mine and a 37mm high explosive shell hitting the Japanese were simultaneous.

A second adversary, undeterred by his comrade's sudden demise, dashed forward, ducked under the bustle of the same vehicle, and affixed another mine to the doors of the engine compartment. He, too, was killed. But an instant



**NOT ALL JAPANESE FOUGHT TO THE DEATH**, for a few were taken prisoner. These two were captured by native scouts on Ilangana Peninsula. (Army Photo.)

later the mine exploded, enshrouding the tank in a cloud of thick, white smoke. Although its occupants were unhurt, the resultant damage obliged the vehicle to withdraw.

The other tank, now back in action, continued the engagement. Every time it fired, "knee mortar" grenades arched toward it and the supporting troops pinned on the escarpment. Suddenly a blast of flame erupted in the brush, a resounding jolt shook the machine from stem to stern, and a shower of sparks and fragments filled the interior. Although the driver was injured, the tenacious Marines nursed their vehicle back to the embankment, and there continued to engage the hostile gun until it was silenced. The tank then limped back toward friendly lines. On the way it located its companion, now stalled, and stood by to give protection until a bulldozer could come out to drag the cripples to safety.

Although five tanks had been knocked out and the infantry had not advanced, the enemy had received such a terrific beating from Amer-



**FLAMETHROWERS SUPPORTED THE TANKS** during the advance on Munda Point. Here an operator fires a burst on a Japanese position while two of his comrades warily watch for enemy riflemen nearby. (Army Photo.)

ican fire, that they withdrew leaving their dead, two well-emplaced machine guns and a damaged 47mm antitank gun. The following day soldiers marched through the position without opposition.

Blake now had eight vehicles out of action, four permanently. Several days would pass before his mechanics could ready the others for combat.

### **BREAKTHROUGH**

By 28 July XIV Corps had made some progress along its entire front except on that infinitely important portion to the extreme south. Strong points made even local advances difficult in all sectors, while American insistence on consolidation of position obviated employment of bypassing tactics, greatly retarding forward movement. Although Allied air-

craft struck heavily against located Japanese rearward guns, they could not directly aid the slogging ground troops, struggling to overcome the ubiquitous bunker defenses.

Infantry commanders, highly commending Marine tank operations in jungle warfare, demanded armored support. General Hester, realizing that his left would not advance without adequate coordination between tanks and infantry, sent his assistant, Brigadier General Leonard F. Wing, forward to the command post of the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, with instructions to plan and conduct the 28 July attack of that battalion.<sup>74</sup> Wing accordingly ordered the battalion commander, Captain Bar-ron, to assign one flame thrower, two automatic rifles, and six riflemen armed with incendiary

<sup>74</sup> Marine Observers Report, 20; Hester ltr.

and fragmentation grenades to each of the four machines in Lieutenant Bailey's 10th Defense Battalion tank platoon. He then demanded that a rifle company and a heavy weapons company closely follow the armored attack to hold the ground won. The tank protectors would stay close to their assigned vehicle, and the supporting companies would move out immediately behind the assault wave. All hands received a detailed account of the general's plan.

Beginning at 0900 artillery shells roared overhead to drop within 150 yards of the front lines. After a 30-minute preparation, mortar shells blanketed the objective area, while men and machines advanced together. At first the enemy offered the heaviest resistance of the campaign, but close liaison and cooperation

between infantry and armor, coupled with suitable terrain,<sup>75</sup> paid off. Opposing forces, demoralized by heavy shelling and the coordinated advance, fled.

In the initial drive hostile 37mm antitank guns scored three hits on Bailey's machine, but failed to strike any vulnerable points. Retaliatory fire soon smothered this opposition, while the accompanying troops quickly disposed of the few antagonists who attempted to slap magnetic mines on the advancing vehicles. About 40 two-story, log and coral personnel shelters, well camouflaged and heavily constructed, lay athwart the axis of advance, but these quickly fell. Tanks and infantrymen also demolished

<sup>75</sup> The ground, covered by fewer trees and less dense undergrowth than previously encountered, was level and firm.



**LOOKING NORTH TOWARD BIBILO HILL** from the ruins of a mission atop Kokengolo Hill. XIV Corps soldiers, supported by Marine tanks, artillery, naval gunfire and aviation, fought for several days to seize these commanding terrain features.

innumerable automatic weapons as well as two antitank guns.

The momentum of the assault carried the Americans 500 yards into Japanese territory. Riflemen rapidly occupied each evacuated enemy strong point while Marines continued to engage those ahead. Although the tanks penetrated 400 yards farther, two companies of soldiers proved insufficient to mop up and occupy the additional ground. The Marines, therefore, completed their assignment by blasting every real or suspected hostile position and withdrew for the day.

During the retirement, one machine, the last in the column, bogged down momentarily in a shell hole on the beach. Seven shells fired from long range by an antitank gun struck it in rapid succession. One of these, presumably of the high explosive, armor-piercing variety, smashed through the turret and burst inside killing two men and wounding three. Nonetheless, the tank managed to reach friendly lines where the casualties were promptly evacuated and the damage repaired. Accompanying foot troops spotted the enemy weapon and quickly subdued it.

Thus, the last and strongest point on the enemy main line of resistance fell to Wing's well-planned thrust. A mutual admiration of Marines and soldiers, built up as a result of the general's insistence on cooperation, would last long after the campaign. Wing proved that direct command and mass action would insure success on even the most difficult front; that 43d Division soldiers, though exhausted after weeks of constant campaigning, were as good as any others when aggressively led. For a change, XIV Corps had scored a decisive victory, achieved by its previously lethargic 43d Division.<sup>76</sup>

Wing's success insured final victory. The following day, 29 July, Major General John R. Hodge, replaced Hester in command of the

<sup>76</sup> Innumerable sources attest to the previous lethargy of the 43d Division. Among others are included: Boyd interview; Halsey, *op. cit.*; Griswold remarks; McHenry Comments; Shaw ltr; Humphreys report; ONI, *Combat Narratives*, X; Morison, *Bismarcks*.

<sup>77</sup> LtGen Millard Harmon, CG, USAFISPA, at Adm Halsey's direction, had ordered the change. This was one of a number of command shifts made by Halsey in an effort to pep-up his subordinate units.

43d Division.<sup>77</sup> One week later Munda field was in American hands.

## OBJECTIVE ATTAINED

After Wing's victory on 28 July, XIV Corps made daily successive advances of 500 to 1200 yards directly westward. By 4 August it had reached the Lulu Lagoon shore, 600 yards north of Gurasai in the Kindu Area thus encircling Munda's last-ditch defenders, compressing them into an area measuring 1000 by 1400 yards.<sup>78</sup> Obviously the Japanese could no longer reinforce their units in the airfield area and would probably attempt to withdraw key personnel by small boat at night.

The 27th Infantry (Lieutenant Colonel George E. Bush), of Major General J. Lawton Collins' 25th Division, then covering the supply and evacuation route for the 148th Infantry on the Corps' right flank, was now released to prepare for the push toward Bairoko. General Griswold decided to seize the airstrip itself the next day. However, the foe stubbornly continued to occupy Bibilo and Kokengolo Hills, from which they delivered withering fire on the lines of 161st (Colonel James L. Dalton, II), then committed to the reduction of these strong points. On 4 August, therefore, 10th Defense Battalion tanks went back into action.

Four vehicles deployed in column and moved forward to shell Kokengolo Hill, honey-combed with caves and deep entrenchments impervious to artillery, naval gunfire, and airbombing. Immediately upon debouching on the airstrip at Kokongolo's base, the Marines came under fire from an antitank gun, sited beneath a wrecked Japanese bomber, and from several machine guns emplaced on the hillside. After a short exchange, Bailey's guns subdued the antitank weapon and then turned their attention to the hill itself. Concentrating on targets of opportunity, the tanks probed one side of the hill and, when opposition slackened, momentarily withdrew to refuel and reload with ammunition.

<sup>78</sup> It was during a limited, temporary retirement from an overly advanced position on 31 July 1943, that Private Rodger Young, Company B, 148th Infantry, was killed in a skirmish and made famous by a war-time ballad.

That completed, they returned to the attack on the opposite side, where another antitank gun, after firing a few ineffectual shots, met the fate of its companion. Continuing around the hill, Bailey's men blasted every possible position. Completion of the encirclement resulted in the rout of all antagonists. Other Army units, meanwhile, took Bibilo Hill.

Because of severe enfilade fire, infantry support for the Kokengolo operation was impossible, and all attempts to occupy the hill mass failed. During the night the enemy reoccupied their previously abandoned positions; Griswold, perforce, again called on the Marines.

Five 11th Defense Battalion tanks, commanded by Captain Irving P. Carlson, recently arrived at New Georgia, reinforced by six from the 9th and 10th Defense Battalions, spearheaded the final assault. On 5 August, Carlson led four sorties, all under cover of mortar fire, against the enemy positions. The first, directed along the south base of Kokengolo, neutralized all defenses in that sector; this enabled soldiers to occupy the high ground immediately. The second, made along the taxi-way skirting the hill's north slopes, silenced all resistance. The third moved through the brush to the north and toward the beach to eliminate any lurking opposing riflemen or machine guns. The fourth and last sortie completely encircled the hill. Enemy survivors retreated into storage caves under Kokengolo; Americans, whose demands that the Japanese surrender were met with rifle fire, dynamited the openings.

At 1500 on 5 August, General Griswold reported to Admiral Halsey, who in turn informed the Joint Chiefs that organized resistance in the Munda airfield area had terminated, that mopping up operations were in progress, and that reconstruction of the landing strip had already started. In his report Griswold expressed his gratification that all units involved had demonstrated such a high degree of cooperation in the final drive. His original message to Admiral Halsey stated:

Culminating 12 days of bitter offensive fighting, our ground troops today wrested Munda from the Japs. . . . This operation to date has seen the integrated use of naval bombardment, all forms of air bombardment, the use of tanks, flame throwers and superb



**MAJOR GENERAL J. LAWTON COLLINS, USA**, whose 25th Infantry Division landed in early August and participated extensively in the mop-up phases of the campaign, confers with the commander of the 3d Battalion, 27th Infantry, Major Charles Davis (kneeling). (Army Photo.)

artillery—all used in direct support of the Infantry, which still has to close and physically wrest the ground from a determined foe. Thus our Munda operation is the finest example in my experience of an all-service, all-American team.<sup>79</sup>

By this time General Griswold had more than 30,000 troops available. These were divided into seven regimental combat teams, each of which had contributed to the success of the TOENAILS venture. Against this force General Sasaki had committed in excess of 8 000 men. But of these 2,483 were buried by the Americans and an additional 28 took up residence in prisoner of war compounds. Of course these figures do not include the 2,200 enemy buried by their comrades nor the uncounted thousands who suffered wounds of varying degree. American Army casualties numbered approximately 4,994 killed and wounded.

For nearly three weeks after the fall of

<sup>79</sup> LtGen O. W. Griswold ltr to CMC, quoting msg to Adm Halsey, 12Mar52.





**SEABEES BEGAN REPAIRING MUNDA STRIP** while infantry units continued the mortal struggle north and west of Bibilo Hill and enemy artillery on Baanga interdicted the runway. On 13 August, just eight days after Munda's capture, this strip was sufficiently repaired to receive its first plane, an Army P-40.

Munda, the 25th Division slogged northwestward through dark and dank jungle-swamp toward Bairoko. The purpose: Cut the retreat and supply route for any foe remaining on New Georgia, and mop up all strong points that continued to resist. On 9 August the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry (Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Ryneska) contacted patrols of the Northern Landing Group and the two forces were joined. Finally on 24 August, in a coordinated drive, units of the 25th Division, reinforced by a battalion of the 37th Division entered Bairoko. The campaign on New Georgia Island had ended.

### **END OF A PHASE**

To this point in the TOENAILS campaign, major parts of the 9th Defense Battalion (with attached elements of the 10th and 11th Defense Battalions) had performed offensive as well

as their customary defensive missions. At the time of the Rendova landing the 90mm Anti-aircraft Group provided patrols to seek out and destroy hostile troops in those areas the Group was destined to occupy. Platoons of the Special Weapons Group actively participated in the establishment and defense of the Zanana and Laiana beachheads. The Tank Platoon, augmented by tanks of the 10th and 11th Defense Battalions, ably supported the drive on Munda.

The Seacoast Artillery Group, which had changed its name with the acquisition of 155mm guns (M-1), had given long-range field artillery support to the XIV Corps advance. Under the 43d Division artillery commander, Brigadier General Harold R. Barker, Colonel O'Neil's group almost daily interdicted Baanga, Nususongo and Kilivaria Islands, and engaged Japanese antiaircraft guns and field artillery

on New Georgia itself. Initially observers stationed in trees near battery positions adjusted all firing missions, but after 9 July specially trained Army artillery observers in spotter planes, assisted in the performance of this function with commendable thoroughness and professional competence.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, bad weather or enemy air interference sometimes limited the use of aerial spotters. Experience at Munda proved, however, that when spotter planes adjusted fires, the 155mm guns' effectiveness was greatly increased.

About mid-July an ammunition shortage beset O'Neil's men. On 10 July premature muzzle bursts revealed faulty M-51 fuses, and the entire lot had to be destroyed, thus limiting the available supply. To complicate matters, approximately one-tenth of the powder charges delivered to the 155mm Group was unserviceable. Frequent rough handlings required to move these from arsenals in the United States to battery positions on Rendova had broken or punctured containers. Rain soaked through cracks in the ends of cardboard tubes and made the powder useless.

Because of this shortage, rapidly changing weather conditions that would have required registration firing every few hours, and an inaccurate map (made from uncontrolled mosaics), General Barker limited O'Neil's men to firing nothing but observed missions. Although this limitation made battery officers unhappy, it was most realistic. At the conclusion of the operation all hands agreed that Barker's reasoning was valid.<sup>81</sup>

In the final assault on Munda the 155mm Group joined with the Army artillery battalions in rendering close support to the advancing infantry. And the work of the Marine artillerymen added materially to the weight of shells thrown against the Japanese defenses, particularly on Kokengolo Hill.

During the early stages of the campaign, coordination of the combat air patrol and anti-aircraft units on the ground was attained only

<sup>80</sup> 9thDefBn, WD and Informal Combat Report, and 155mm Group Work Sheets are unstinting in their praise of the work of these Army observers.

<sup>81</sup> 9thDefBn, Informal Combat Report; O'Neil ltr; Wenban ltr; Reichner ltr.

with considerable difficulty. Communicators set up a conference line that tied together the long-range radar units, ComAir New Georgia's fighter control center and the anti-aircraft guns. Each unit thereby was informed of the course of action of each other unit. Moreover, General Mulcahy received the benefit of the 90mm Anti-aircraft Group's fire control radar for the direction of friendly-plane interception of enemy "bandits."

Unfortunately, in the first days on Rendova, the Americans' inability to differentiate between hostile and friendly aircraft had caused no little headache. On several occasions mistaken recognition on the part of units newly arrived in the combat zone led to firing on friend as well as foe, three times with disastrous consequences; at least twice identification errors had permitted Admiral Kusaka's "eagles" to raid American positions without retaliation. To surmount this difficulty, General Hester ordered Marines experienced at aircraft recognition to board each ship entering the area and identify planes for the vessel's gun control officer.

Whenever raiders actually penetrated the screen of the combat air patrol, guns of the 90mm Group kept them at ineffectively high altitudes, and, on a number of occasions, shot down the intruders. Using radar to get "on target," the gunners fired by visual means when weather or distance did not interfere. The 40mm guns of the Special Weapons Group engaged dive bombers, strafers and medium level bombers with excellent results. The 40mm also proved to be an excellent antiboat gun, capable of destroying Japanese barges at long range with one short burst.

Although Munda airfield had fallen, the 9th Defense Battalion's participation in the TOE-NAILS campaign had not ended. General Griswold ordered Colonel Scheyer to move his anti-aircraft units to the vicinity of the airfield, to Lambeti Plantation, and to Laiana Beach for the protection of those valuable pieces of real estate. Other battalion units, meanwhile, took up positions to protect New Georgia from enemy counterlandings and to support subsequent operations against Arundel and Kolombangara Islands. (See Chapter V.)



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER IV

# From Rice to Bairoko<sup>1</sup>

#### SEIZURE OF RICE ANCHORAGE

As darkness settled on the Slot, 4 July 1943, a large, high-speed APD convoy sped northward at 23 knots from Guadalcanal. Its destination: Rice Anchorage, a jungle-surrounded, swampy cove on the northwest shore of New Georgia. In the fast moving ships 2,200 troops of the Northern Landing Group, New Georgia Occupation Force, quietly awaited H-Hour (5 July at 0130). (See accompanying chart for organization and composition of force.)

Under the general direction of Admiral Turner, planning for this particular operation had begun in June. The mission was clear: Prevent Munda's defenders from receiving supplies and reinforcements from their barge bases on Dragons Peninsula. But planning and execution had to grope their way through a fog of uncertainty. Native reconnaissance patrols led by Marines had been unable to bring back any meaningful information regarding Japanese strength or installations on Dragons Peninsula. Luxuriant vegetation hid its secrets from the finest aerial camera lenses. From the scanty intelligence available, however, it appeared that possibly some 500 men occupied Bairoko.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise cited the principal sources used in preparation of this chapter include: 1stRdr Rgt, Messages and R-2 Journal; USSBS, *Campaigns and Interrogations*; *Southeast Area Naval Operations, II*; ComSo-Pac CIC File. The latter two sources especially valuable for obtaining the enemy viewpoint.

After thorough study, Admiral Turner directed Colonel Liversedge, commanding the 1st Marine Raider Regiment, to land secretly at the Pundakona (Wharton) River mouth during the night of 4-5 July, just five days after the main landings on Rendova.<sup>2</sup>

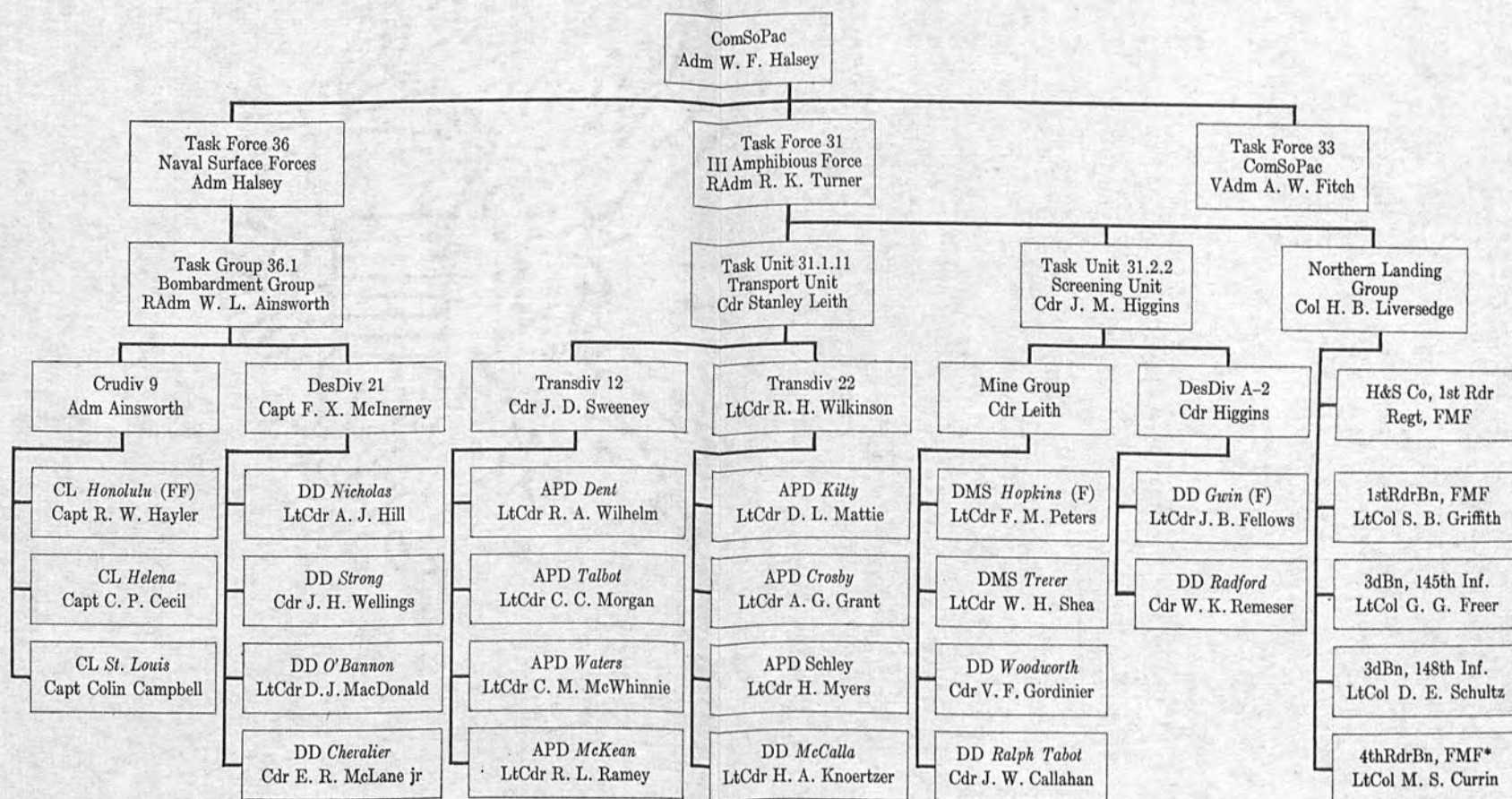
Three considerations dictated Turner's decision. The Pundakona River, whose banks appeared suitable for landing troops and supplies, emptied into Rice Anchorage, where resupply and evacuation ships could anchor with a reasonable degree of safety from the elements or from Japanese observers on Kolombangara. Aerial observers had reported absence of hostile activity in that vicinity and Allied amphibious patrols had operated there without interference. By 4 July, Turner hoped, the main body of the enemy would be so fully occupied defending Munda that it would be unable to launch a full-scale effort against the Northern Landing Group.

Liversedge planned to land on the south bank of the Pundakona about 600 yards from its mouth, establish a supply center, then move southwesterly some eight crow-flight miles overland to seize the Dragons Peninsula bases at Enogai and Bairoko on 6 July. One Battalion (3d, 148th) would separate from the main body before reaching Enogai, push directly southward, and block the Munda-Bairoko Trail to prevent hostile movement between Munda and Dragons Peninsula. The second

<sup>2</sup> Col S. B. Griffith ltr to CMC, 3Mar52.

LANDING AT RICE ANCHORAGE

TASK ORGANIZATION



(\*) Landed on 18 July 1943.

attached Army battalion (3d, 145th) Liversedge divided into two parts. One of these, under the battalion commander, would guard the Rice Anchorage supply base. The other, under the battalion executive officer, would form the Group's reserve and accompany the main body on its approach.

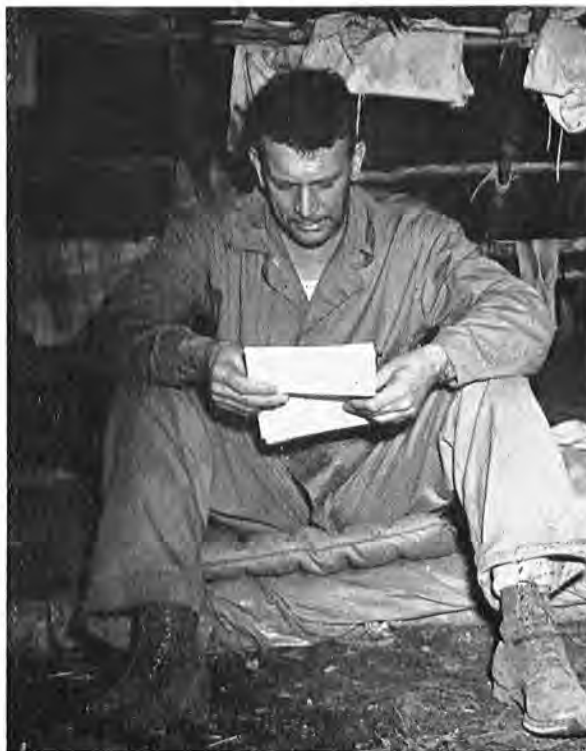
While the transports sailed toward the objective, Rear Admiral Walden L. Ainsworth's cruiser force (Task Group 36.1) bombarded Japanese installations in the Vila-Stannore (Kolombangara) and the Enogai and Bairoko (New Georgia) areas. At 0115 enemy lookouts at Enogai peered through a pouring rain and sighted the troop-laden destroyers as they hove-to off Rice Anchorage. At least two of four 140mm guns concealed in the vicinity of Enogai Inlet, previously dueling with Ainsworth's force, now turned their attention to the destroyers, but failed to cause any significant damage or casualties.<sup>3</sup>

Amid the confusion caused by the opposing counter-battery fire, none of the naval officers responsible for putting the troops ashore knew the precise location of Rice Anchorage. Rain and darkness cloaked the beaches. Finally, one destroyer, equipped with a surface sweep radar, moved close to shore, spotted the mouth of the Pundakona, and radioed the position to the other ships.<sup>4</sup>

Marines and soldiers now clambered down into boats for the trip to shore. There they were met by Captain Clay A. Boyd's amphibious patrol, which had recently arrived after an overland march from Roviana Lagoon. Guided by Boyd's men plus native scouts led by the local coastwatcher (Flight Lieutenant J. A. Corrigan, RAAF), the landing force negotiated the difficult passage between the two shallow sand bars partly blocking the Pundakona's

<sup>3</sup> Although Boyd had reported the location of these batteries in early June, aerial photograph interpretation had led the planners to believe that the enemy had concentrated his heavy guns in the Bairoko area. Bairoko therefore received all of Ainsworth's attention while Enogai was ignored. Cloaked by heavy rain, gun flashes at Enogai escaped the observation of shipboard spotters. Incidentally the only hit was suffered by the *Waters*, which had her main truck shot away. Karig, *op. cit.*, 213; Boyd interview.

<sup>4</sup> *Combat Narratives*, X, 19-21; LtCol William D. Stevenson ltr to CMC, 22Feb51.



**COLONEL HARRY B. LIVERSEGE**, fondly known by his men as "Harry the Horse," commanded the Northern Landing Group, which operated on Dragons Peninsula. Colonel Liversedge is pictured here under the poncho lean-to serving as his Enogai command post.

mouth, then pushed up the winding stream to a 200-yard "beach" on the river's south bank. But the Higgins boats grounded on every trip over the sand bars, necessitating a reduction in their loads.

With the first faint traces of dawn, commanders of the supporting vessels became restive. Even before the operation began, intelligence estimates had visualized the possibility of enemy submarine counteraction; the approach of light brought with it the added danger of enemy air attacks. The delay in locating Rice Anchorage and the counterbattery fire had used up more time than originally planned for the landing. Now enemy long-range guns, presumably on Kolombangara, began to engage the shipping. The *Strong*—hit at 0046 by a torpedo fired by a Japanese destroyer division then running along Kolombangara's northeast shore—had already gone down; the transport group sat dead in the water during the ship-to-shore movement.



**FRIENDLY NATIVES CAME SMILING OUT OF THE BUSH** to assist their liberators. These four reported to Lieutenant Colonel Freer at Rice Anchorage and gave the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, invaluable aid as scouts, guides and carriers. (Army Photo.)

Finally at 0559, with all troops and 90 percent of supplies, equipment and ammunition ashore, Colonel Liversedge decided that the ships had supported him as long as any reasonable man could expect. He radioed the single code word—Scram—in the clear by key to the anxious sailors. Within a few minutes the APD's got under way and churned at high speed out of Kula Gulf.

Unfortunately, among the ten percent of gear remaining on board was a high-powered TCS radio which, although not organic equipment, Admiral Turner had provided as the Northern Landing Group station for Enogai. Failure to embark communications personnel—who recognized its importance—with this fine piece of equipment can be attributed only to the fact that last-minute adjustments in the tight loading plan were unfeasible.<sup>5</sup> Absence of this

<sup>5</sup> The TCS had arrived at Guadalcanal only 48 hours before embarkation. An attempt to load it on one of the ships in which communicators were embarked was frustrated by those ships' captains, who feared their deck-loads were already too great.

radio would have repercussions later.<sup>6</sup>

On shore the troops found the situation extremely adverse. Rain, mud, and tangled jungle impeded beachhead establishment, as the Marines followed their guides to assembly areas previously prepared under Boyd's supervision in the jungle. Shells from the Japanese Bairoko batteries whined overhead toward an inlet to the north. Sheltered by high cliffs, and using flashlights, the Americans guided boats to the landing area, stacked their blanket-rolls, packs and all excess equipment; and at 0600, operating under tight radio silence, commenced execution of the march plans. Meanwhile, because of an error on the part of the chief coxswain, Company I, 148th Infantry (Captain Denton C. Roundtree) landed at Kubo Kubo Inlet, some seven miles to the north. At this moment Roundtree was leading his men toward Rice.

Supervised by Colonel Freer, Companies I (Captain David N. Marshall) and M (Captain Arthur H. Walton), 145th Infantry, set up the supply and evacuation base. Roundtree's company would catch up with the main body as soon as possible.

A driving rain drenched the force as it started its approach along three parallel trails (previously cut by natives) extending southward from the Pundakona to the Giza Giza River. At this time Captain Boyd resumed command of Company D and, in accordance with the order given by Colonel Griffith, moved five miles down the center trail, crossed the Giza Giza at 1530, and established a bridgehead on the opposite bank. By 1700, 5 July, the remainder of the force had closed on the river and, as friendly planes bombed and strafed Enogai, set up a perimeter defense for the night.

The dripping jungle and the distant thud of gunfire from the battle of Kula Gulf permitted only snatches of sleep for the tired Marines and soldiers during the night of 5-6 July.<sup>7</sup> But at daybreak, with Company D again in the vanguard, the column forded the stream and resumed the plodding advance toward Enogai.

<sup>6</sup> 1stRdrRgt, SAR, 2; Stevenson ltr; Boyd interview; 1stRdrRgt, Combat Report, 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Accounts of this battle may be found in: Morison, *Bismarcks*; *Combat Narratives*, X; Karig, *op. cit.*

Progress was painfully slow. Owing to lack of time, Corrigan's few natives had cut trails only as far as the Giza Giza. Now the troops had to hack their way through the tangled growth. Torrential rains drowned out radios, grounded telephone wires. Communications with the temporary base on the south bank of the Pundakona could be maintained only by runners.

At 0800 Liversedge directed Lieutenant Colonel Delbert E. Schultz to take his 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, directly south along an inland track to the Munda-Bairoko Trail, and there establish a trail block. Late that evening

Schultz reached a trail junction that he thought was his objective. The remainder of the force, consisting of the 1st Raider Battalion, the 1st Raider Regiment's Headquarters and Service Company, and Companies K (Captain Donald W. Fouse) and L (Captain Clifford W. Morrow), 145th Infantry, now headed west and north through a swamp toward the mouth of Enogai Inlet.<sup>8</sup>

By 1100 the 1st Raider Battalion had reached the banks of the muddy Tamoko River, which emptied into Enogai Inlet, six miles east of

<sup>8</sup> 1stRdrRgt, WD and SAR.



**CROSSING STREAMS ON FALLEN LOGS** was all part of the day's work for the rain-soaked Raiders during the advance to Enogai. Ropes strung from bank to bank provided hand holds on the slippery footing. The continual drizzle varied with downpours made the jungle so dark that photographs like this could be taken only at infrequent intervals.

Maranusa Village I.<sup>9</sup> Here another obstacle faced Liversedge. When Boyd and Corrigan had patrolled this area some weeks perviously, they found the river fordable, but the recent heavy rains had turned the normally quiet stream into a raging torrent nine feet deep. Luckily, scouts shortly discovered that a large tree had fallen in such a way as to form a passable but treacherous footbridge. Over this natural span, Colonel Liversedge moved his attacking force, one man at a time. Most of the day passed before the Marines were safely on the other side. Before Major M. D. Girardeau's<sup>10</sup> two companies of soldiers, then covering the rear, could start across, black night closed on the jungle. Darkness forced Liversedge to halt in the middle of the swamp in which he found himself. The column had advanced only about 800 map yards that day.<sup>11</sup>

As the force settled down for the night communicators intercepted signals from a powerful Army station on Rendova. Although Liversedge had set up listening watches on Army command nets at each halt in the march, he had operated under strict radio silence. As a consequence, higher echelons knew nothing of the whereabouts of the Northern Landing Group. The colonel decided accordingly to break silence and reveal his position, but because of some unexplained interference, his signals could not reach Rendova. A monitoring watch on the Raiders' crystal frequency, maintained at Admiral Turner's headquarters by Major Robert A. Nicholson, copied all of the Northern Landing Group's messages from this time on and forwarded them to General Hester. Sometimes, when radio traffic became too heavy, Admiral Turner had the intercepted messages dropped by plane.

Such was jungle communication during the first stages of the New Georgia campaign. Only in this roundabout way could the commanding

<sup>9</sup> First of two villages of the same name, distinguished from one another by the Roman numerals I and II. See Map #12.

<sup>10</sup> Girardeau was executive officer of the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel B. Griffith, II, "Action at Enogai," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Mar44; Griffith and Boyd interviews; 1stRdrRgt, WD and SAR; Liversedge interview, 10-Sep51.

general of the Occupation Force learn of the activity and location of one of his principal units.<sup>12</sup>

## THE FIGHT FOR TRIRI

The wet, tired Marines and soldiers climbed to their feet at dawn on 7 July and pushed on over terrain that impressed the men as the worst of the entire march. This was the target date for the assault on Enogai, but jagged coral outcroppings, hip-deep mangrove swamps and swollen streams so slowed the advance as to necessitate a one-day postponment. At 0800 the men heard the sounds of an air strike, designed to support the Marine attack. Soon the force broke out of the swamp near the head of Enogai Inlet. Ahead the villages of Maranusa I, Triri and Enogai could be reached only by a narrow, tortuous trail clinging to the base of a precipitous coral ridge running generally parallel to the trace of the Tamoko. The 1st Raiders' Company D (with native scouts attached) hastened over this trail, without reference to the speed of the main body, to cover Liversedge's approach.<sup>13</sup>

At about 1130 the advance unit entered Maranusa I, where it occupied the first really high ground encountered since the original landing. Leaving one platoon to organize the defense of the village, Captain Boyd sent patrols to the southwest and began a thorough survey of his new position. He found that his antagonists had failed to prepare defenses for Maranusa I, apparently believing their Enogai base to be unassailable from the swamps and jungle to their rear (despite the fact that they had done that very thing to the British at Singapore). Indeed, there were neither bunkers nor gun emplacements in the area, although the Marines found many evidences of recent enemy occupation, including an extensive charcoal dump.<sup>14</sup>

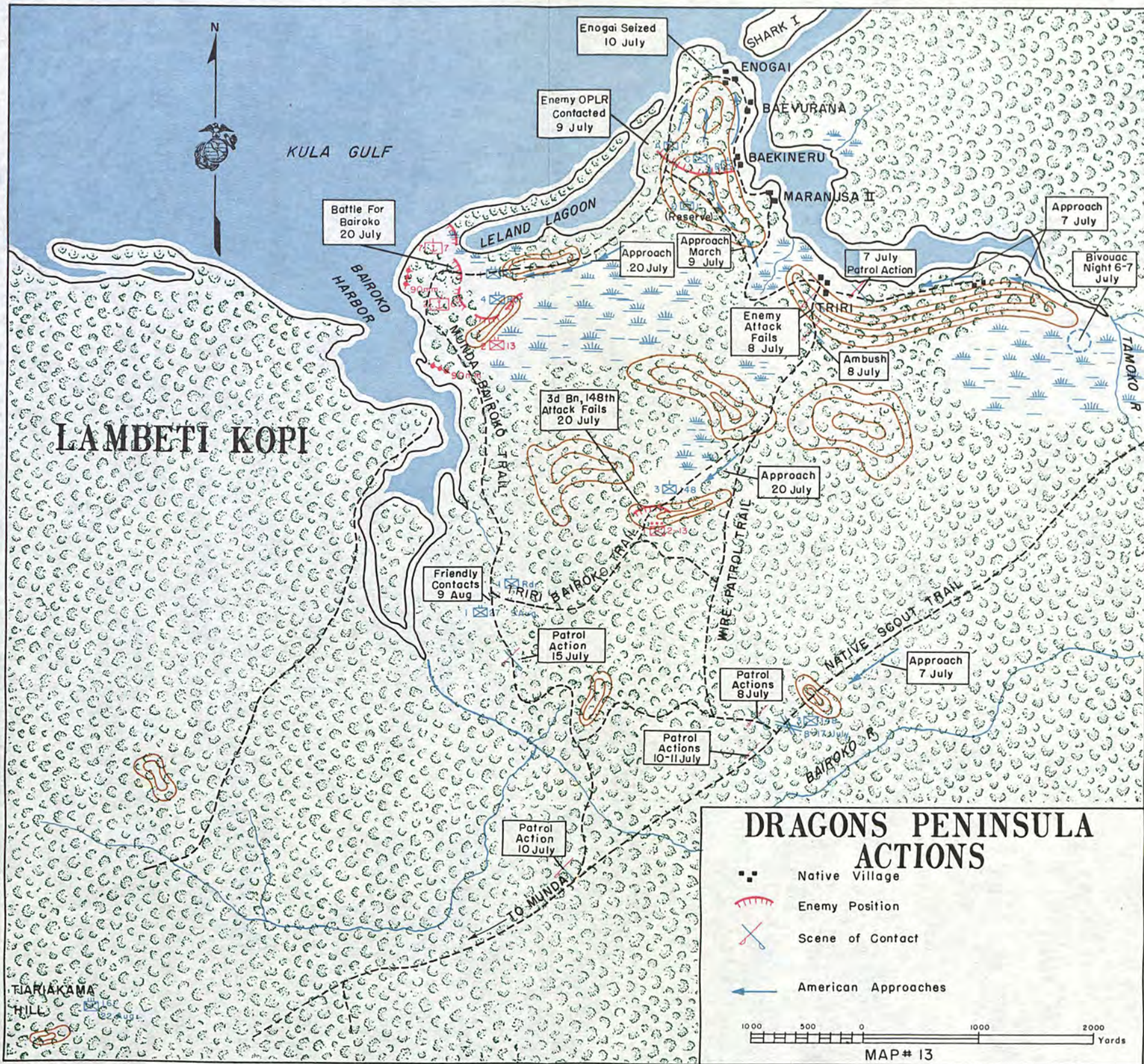
Twenty minutes after leaving Maranusa I, one Company D patrol contacted a seven-man hostile unit. Unarmed and evidently unaware

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson ltr; interview with LtCol R. A. Nicholson, 6Mar52. Further to insure communications security, the Northern Landing Group employed Marines of Navajo birth, who transmitted voice messages in their native tongue.

<sup>13</sup> "Action at Enogai;" 1stRdrRgt, SAR, 6Oct43; 1stRdrRgt, WD, July 1943; Boyd interview.

<sup>14</sup> Lt Robert B. Pape ltr of 22Feb51; Boyd interview.





of the Americans' presence this column was plodding listlessly up the trail from Triri, apparently bound for Maranusa I. A flurry of shots rang out; when the sounds of firing faded away, two dead Japanese lay in the field. Five wounded enemy were captured. No Marine casualties resulted. A hasty examination of dead and wounded revealed that they were members of Commander Okumura's 782-man Kure 6th SNLF, responsible for the protection of the Enogai Inlet barge base.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly afterwards the more slowly moving main body reached Maranusa I. Well knowing that Okumura must now be apprised of his presence and believing his enemy capable of striking an immediate blow, Liversedge directed Griffith to push forward at once with his 1st Raider Battalion and meet the attack when it came. With the Demolitions Platoon forming the advance guard, the Raiders rapidly marched toward Triri.

At 1230, just as the leading elements crossed a small creek within 100 yards of the village, native scouts spotted a company-size hostile patrol approaching along the trail. After a brief exchange of shots the demolitions men retired to the stream's southeast bank to take up hasty defensive positions. At Griffith's direction Companies B (Captain Edwin B. Wheeler) and C (Captain John Salmon) advanced to support the Demolitions Platoon. By 1300 the Raiders had established superiority of fire, thus pinning the enemy down and making him ripe for assault.<sup>16</sup>

At the first sound of shots Company D had reassembled just southwest of Maranusa I and was available for further commitment. Griffith directed this unit to maneuver to the left, cross the creek upstream to the west of the Demolitions Platoon, and attack the opposing right flank. Boyd's men moved out with dispatch and within two hours had accomplished their mission; upon receiving fire the foe withdrew toward Enogai, leaving behind ten dead (including one officer) and one wounded. Marine

<sup>15</sup> 1stRdrRgt, WD and SAR; CIC Item #598, 8; CIC Item #621; SoPac Translation, 01324, 10Aug43; Boyd interview.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel B. Griffith, II, "Correy's Boys." *Marine Corps Gazette*, May49.

casualties totaled three killed and four wounded. All wounded were returned to the regimental command post at Maranusa I along with captured materiel and documents, including a map of Enogai's defenses, showing such detail as the emplacements for the 140mm guns.<sup>17</sup>

Promptly Liversedge drafted a dispatch to Guadalcanal requesting a heavy air strike on Enogai by SBD's and TBF's, armed with 1,000 and 2,000-pound "daisy cutters," at this point in the war considered the most effective aerial weapon for use against personnel in the jungle. After fruitless attempts to send this message through normal channels, the Marine radio operators finally raised an Army station in Eastern New Georgia, which relayed it to Guadalcanal.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile Griffith marched into Triri and established hasty defensive positions. Marines investigating the interiors of grass shacks discovered a small quantity of wormy rice and some stocks of rusty small-arms ammunition. Nothing of value rewarded their search.

While the 1st Raiders were digging in, Liversedge moved his reserve (Companies K and L, 145th) and his command post into Maranusa I, and prepared to resume the advance the next morning. By 1600, the Americans had thrown tight perimeters around each of the villages; medical officers worked over the wounded and chaplains conducted appropriate ceremonies for the dead.

To the south that same day, as the battle raged around Triri, the 3d Battalion, 148th, discovered that it was improperly positioned and took action to remedy this error. At 0915 that morning Schultz's scouts reported that the real Japanese trail between Munda and Bairoko lay several miles farther down the track over which he had advanced. Moreover, fresh footprints in the mud indicated that enemy troops had used it recently. Schultz's mistake was understandable. Grossly inaccurate maps had placed principal topographic features miles from their exact location. Thick vegetation blanketed the undulating hills, all of which looked alike under that growth, and prevented

<sup>17</sup> 1stRdrRgt, Combat Report, 18; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51.

<sup>18</sup> Stevenson ltr.



**BATTALION COMMANDERS ASSEMBLE** to plan the abortive Bairoko attack. This photograph, taken in the Northern Landing Group command post at Enogai, shows (from left to right) Lieutenant Colonels Griffith, Currin, Freer and Schultz.

precise orientation. To execute his mission in accordance with his original directive, Schultz displaced forward. At 1725 he informed Liversedge that he was now at his objective and would have the trail-block installed early the next morning. His supplies being exhausted, he requested that a native carrying party be sent to him with rations.

Before Liversedge secured for the night, he directed Corrigan (the coastwatcher) to undertake this resupply mission. Ordinarily the Marines would have placed reliance on an airdrop in such an instance. Only a few natives were available as carriers, and this handful could not be expected to carry sufficient food for an entire battalion. But an airdrop was out of the question: Schultz could not give his exact coordinates because of the inaccurate map, and front-line panels spread beneath the jungle's green canopy were invisible from the air. Against Corrigan's wishes, therefore, his last remaining natives hiked to Rice Anchorage, picked up cases of rations, and began the long trek to Schultz's position.

The Northern Landing Group now occupied

four separate perimeters: At Rice, at Triri, at Maranusa I, and at the trail-block. Native bearers were on the trail, taking supplies to Schultz. Although the Americans expected to receive probing attacks against one or more of their positions, the night of 7-8 July passed without contacts; fire discipline was excellent.<sup>19</sup>

During the night Griffith calmly plotted his moves for the next day. In his battalion he had several veterans of the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua whose experience in jungle warfare made them especially skilled at laying ambushes. The colonel decided to capitalize on this asset and set a trap for the enemy.

At first light, one old Nicaragua hand, First Lieutenant Bennie N. Bunn, then the executive officer of Company B, led the 1st Platoon of that company about 800 yards down the path toward Bairoko. Another veteran, First Lieutenant Joseph M. Broderick, took a platoon of Company D a similar distance along a track leading to Enogai. At 0630 both officers re-

<sup>19</sup> 1stRdrRgt, WD and SAR; "Action at Enogai;" Liversedge interview 10Sept51.

ported via runner that they had assumed positions from which to intercept any antagonists approaching Triri. Within 30 minutes Broderick sighted a company of Japanese, with rifles slung as they chattered unconcernedly, following a sword-wearing officer down the trail toward the Marine-held village. Trigger-happy Marines spoiled the surprise. Although caught off guard by the first scattered shots, the enemy fell back in good order and within a few minutes launched an organized attack. The first hostile shots wounded Broderick.

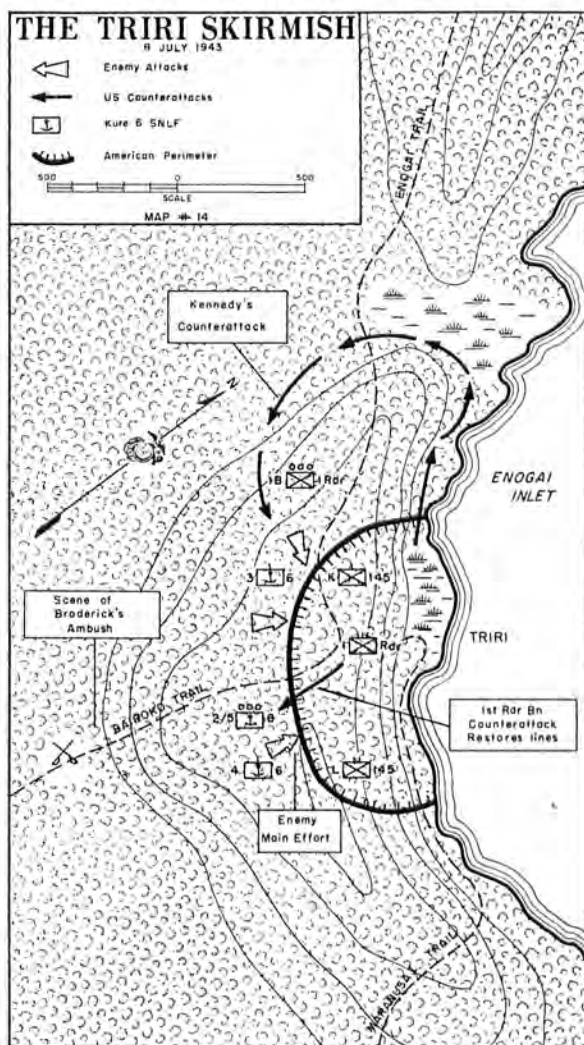
As soon as this information filtered to the rear, Colonel Liversedge hurried to Triri with his command post and the two reserve companies under Major Girardeau. Griffith ordered Company D to go to Broderick's support, and, as Bunn was not in contact, withdrew the other ambush. The volume of shooting steadily increased. Extremely rugged terrain, coupled with heavy fire, made maneuver difficult and tiring. By 1000 Company D became disorganized; Griffith ordered it relieved under fire by Company C (Captain John Salmon). Salmon turned the trick with alacrity and at 1100 assaulted with mortar and machine-gun support to drive back the foe more than 200 yards. His opponent broke contact and retired in the direction of Bairoko, leaving approximately 50 dead. The Marines, whose objective was the Enogai base, decided not to pursue.<sup>20</sup>

By 1200 the front had quieted, and Liversedge ordered the 145th's Companies K and L to hold Triri while Griffith's Battalion probed through the jungle for a path to Enogai.<sup>21</sup> The myriad native tracks, all ending in impassable swamps soon confused the Marine scouts who spent hours in fruitless search. Confronted by continued failure, Griffith withdrew his battalion to Triri (1500 yards to the rear), with the intention of cutting his way toward his objective along high ground the following day (9 July). This decision proved a wise one.

Since Captain Salmon's successful thrusts in the late morning hours, the enemy had regrouped and was sending small reconnaissance parties to locate the American positions. By

1600 Commander Okumura had built up a force of approximately 400 men southwest of the Triri perimeter. As Griffith was moving back to the village, Okumura struck in full force at the thinly stretched lines near the junction of Companies K and L. Company K's commander, Captain Donald W. Fouse, USA, quickly became a casualty. The executive officer, First Lieutenant Alfred A. Potteiger experienced some difficulty rallying his men. Company L fell back slightly as Okumura built up pressure on its front. Major Girardeau, hoping to restore the original lines, requested Liversedge to send assistance.

At this moment the leading elements of the 1st Raider Battalion were returning to the tiny village. Liversedge directed Griffith to counterattack. Griffith, in turn ordered Company B's



<sup>20</sup> Boyd interview; Griffith ltr.

<sup>21</sup> Liversedge interview, 10Sep51.

1st Platoon (First Lieutenant Robert B. Kennedy) to encircle and reduce the enemy left.

Pushing out from the village along the shores of Enogai Inlet for a distance of some 300 yards, Kennedy deployed his unit and assaulted the Okumura's left flank and rear, causing him to break off the action and retreat toward Bairoko, leaving 20 uncollected dead in front of the American lines. This engagement, in which the Marines suffered no casualties, marked the last Japanese attempt to break the Allied grip on Triri.

Meanwhile Colonel Schultz's battalion had occupied positions astride the Munda-Bairoko Trail early that morning and at 1105 had cut the enemy telephone line. Just two hours later a hostile wire-repair party stumbled into Schultz's outposts. Scattered firing resulted and the enemy immediately dove into the bush. At 1500 the foe returned, this time with 97 men,<sup>22</sup> who lashed out furiously at the American lines but succeeded only in driving in the soldier's right flank outposts, killing one and wounding six (three seriously). Although Japanese reports of this battle fail to indicate any casualties, the Americans counted seven dead antagonists in front of their lines.

Daybreak, 9 July, found the 1st Raider Battalion marching over a well-defined path on high ground parallel to Enogai Inlet. Natives reported that the Japanese had organized strong points at Maranusa II, Baekineru, and Baevurana. Colonel Griffith perforce bypassed these villages, reached Leland Lagoon by 1100, then turned right and proceeded northward. Soon Griffith's men contacted the first enemy Enogai outposts. The Raiders continued forward some 1800 yards against rifle and machine-gun fire until 1730, when the colonel ordered them to dig in and hold their gains.<sup>23</sup>

As night settled on the jungle, Liversedge showed signs of real worry. Schultz's battalion, dangling at the end of a tenuous track over

<sup>22</sup> This was the advance unit of a reinforcing element consisting of the 5th and 9th Companies, 13th Infantry; the 2d Machine Gun Company, 13th; one platoon, 10th Company, 229th; and a communications section. This force, commanded by Maj Takeo Ohashi, CO, 2dBn, 13th, moved to Bairoko at 1800 on 6 July, and passed to the control of Comdr Okumura.

<sup>23</sup> 1stRdrRgt, SAR, 3.

which it was supplied by native carriers, was exposed to attack either from Bairoko or Munda. Freer's battalion, of necessity split into two parts, could not be counted on for offensive work under the circumstances. Rice Anchorage must be held until Enogai was seized. The only reserve available was the 2-company unit that could be spared from Rice. And to this reserve would fall the thankless but essential task of logistic support as well as operational reinforcement of the two advance units. Griffith's battalion occupied vulnerable positions between two hostile garrisons of unknown strength and capability. His troops had packed three days rations, but rain, jungle muck, and the jutting roots of giant trees had so slowed the advances as to make the expired time greater. As their rations neared the vanishing point, exhausted men foraged for rice and canned fish in abandoned shacks and foxholes. Many of the 28 wounded needed the treatment and care possible only in a base hospital.

Despite almost insurmountable communication difficulties, arrangements were finally made via radio for a food drop the next day. Furthermore, Liversedge considered his position—on high ground south of Enogai—undefensible against a *banzai* attack from Bairoko coordinated with an attack by the Enogai garrison. But the enemy failed inexplicably to take advantage of his opportunity.

Throughout a dripping night the enemy remained quiet enough. But nature took a hand in opposing the American advance. A giant tree limb, partly severed by shell fragments and weighted by excess moisture, fell with a deafening crash upon a part of the communications section, to kill one man, injure six others, and wreck several precious radios.<sup>24</sup>

Primitive conditions did not stop the doctors and corpsmen who worked feverishly in the make-shift jungle hospital prepared by the natives at Triri. While operations were being performed, life-giving plasma was fed into the veins of the most seriously wounded. Care of such highly professional competence was given that all but five patients survived to be evacuated later by air.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Griffith ltr; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51; Stevenson ltr.

<sup>25</sup> Stevenson ltr.



**NATIVE SCOUTS AND COASTWATCHER CORRIGAN**, facing camera, confer at Enogai with the 1st Marine Raider Regiment intelligence officer, Captain Plumley. Corrigan and his natives did a magnificent job in keeping the Americans informed of the enemy situation.

## **ATTACK ON ENOGAI**

Very early the next morning, 10 July, Colonel Griffith planned a coordinated assault to be executed by all elements of the 1st Raider Battalion. Before dawn he instructed Captain Wheeler to send a patrol along the banks of Enogai Inlet to ascertain if an axis of advance existed to the tip of the peninsula. Led by Lieutenant Bunn, the patrol executed its mission and returned to the Marine positions about 0600 to report that there was a fairly good route crossing relatively level terrain along the shore.

At 0630 Griffith gave his order, based partly on the information that Bunn had furnished. The battalion would attack with three companies abreast—A, C, and B, from left to right—and Company D in reserve. Following a heavy 60mm mortar preparation, data for which was prepared entirely from aerial photo-

graphs, the battalion jumped off at 0700 under long-range, overhead, machine-gun fire. In the Company B zone of attack, however, the jungle was much too thick to permit the machine-gun support. Wheeler therefore deployed his company's mortar section along the edge of a clearing, blasted previously in the dense growth by a large bomb that had fallen wide of its Enogai target. From this position the 60mm's fired a short, unobserved preparation which enabled Company B, with two platoons forward and one in support, to advance rapidly against flickering resistance. A small detachment of the support platoon, covering the company's right rear, fired upon an undetermined number of enemy stragglers near Baekineru. Within two hours Company B had pushed the foe out of that place, and pressed aggressively northward along the banks of the inlet toward Enogai village. Wheeler's men had killed approx-

imately 12 Japanese and had captured one heavy and five light machine guns.<sup>26</sup>

While Company B advanced over the relatively level ground on the right, Companies C and A faced heavier going on the center and left. Opposed by rifles, machine guns and mortars, these two companies had slugged their way slowly forward to positions within 600 yards of Enogai Point by 1300. To exploit the advantage gained by Company B, Griffith ordered one platoon of Company D, under First Lieutenant Thomas D. Pollard, to pass through Company C's zone of attack and assault Enogai Village. The Battalion Demolitions Platoon (Marine Gunner Goss) meanwhile moved to assist Wheeler in keeping up his momentum.

The rattle of machine guns and the cough of Company B's supporting mortars heralded Pollard's assault. As shells burst in the camp area, the Marines advanced down the slopes under cover of the unrelenting fire. A sand-bagged heavy machine gun, emplaced to protect a key trail junction, quickly fell before the onslaught. The coral camp street leading to the beach became a scene of mad confusion. The foe, stunned and beaten, put up no resistance. Unwounded enemy raced for the inlet in a futile effort to swim to a small mangrove islet off shore while Marine machine guns mowed them down as they floundered in the water. This assault divided the Japanese into two completely surrounded groups and broke the back of the hostile defenses. By 1500 nearly all active resistance in the area, except for a small pocket immediately in front of Company A, had collapsed.<sup>27</sup>

At 0900 that morning, in response to the request made by Colonel Liversedge the preceding day, the Northern Landing Group received an airdrop of much needed supplies. When the cargo planes (R4D's) were reported on station, troops in the vicinity of Triri tossed purple smoke grenades along the perimeter to mark the position of the force command post. After the pilots spotted the purple bursts, the force air liaison officer contacted the planes via radio

<sup>26</sup> LtCol Edwin B. Wheeler ltrs to CMC, 20Mar52 and 24Mar51; Griffith 3Mar52 ltr.

<sup>27</sup> Boyd and Griffith interviews; Wheeler and Pape ltrs; 1stRdrRgt WD; "Action at Enogai."

and "talked" them in over the drop area. Several dry-run passes led to the dropping of parachutes from tree-top level. The first recovered batch of supplies proved to be mortar ammunition; groans of anguish were wrung from the hungry men. However, packages of rations (some of which were spoiled) and ammunition soon drifted down. Although a few parachutes attached to cases of ammunition failed to open, thus putting the ground troops through the ordeal of being "bombed" by their own planes, practically all of the drops were recovered. The planes then flew over the trail-block being occupied by Shultz's battalion and dropped supplies to that unit. The aerial reconnaissance conducted during this latter flight revealed the gross inadequacies and inaccuracies of the map with which the Northern Landing Group was then working.<sup>28</sup>

Upon recovering the newly dropped supplies, Liversedge formed a carrying party of the regimental headquarters, the 1st Raiders Demolitions Platoon and Company L of the 145th Infantry to take food, water and ammunition to the Marines engaged at Enogai. This column reached Enogai about 1600 and was hailed with enthusiasm by men who had not tasted food for more than 30 hours. After they had eaten, Colonel Liversedge ordered that beach defenses be established in the area. While moving into position, Company D contacted another pocket of Japanese reinforced by one heavy and two light machine guns. A short hard fight ensued which left 20 Marines wounded. As it was now after 1700 and darkness was approaching rapidly, Liversedge directed that this pocket, and one in front of Company A, be surrounded and contained until morning. Companies B and C meanwhile organized an all around defense of Enogai.<sup>29</sup>

Before dark the Northern Landing Group and the 1st Raider Battalion command posts combined and opened near Enogai Point. Colonel Liversedge immediately established radio contact with Army's New Georgia net control station to inform General Hester of the capture of Enogai and request that several planes be sent to Enogai Inlet to evacuate the

<sup>28</sup> Stevenson ltr.

<sup>29</sup> 1stRdrRgt, WD and SAR; "Action at Enogai."

wounded. Unfortunately the net control station stubbornly refused to accept even an "Urgent" message and requested Liversedge to postpone all radio traffic until 0700 the next day. As continued pleas met with stony silence, Liversedge directed his communicators to send the message without the authorization generally required, and it eventually reached the proper persons.

These difficulties attest to the lack of cooperation and coordination that existed at certain levels during this stage of the war. Procedures not being standardized sufficiently for inter-service work, communication between Army and Navy and Marines was beset with difficulties. Fortunately, however, there were in the area some far-seeing Americans whose solutions became the foundation upon which later procedures were based.

With the seizure of Enogai, the pressure on Liversedge eased, particularly in regard to his logistics situation. Although two hostile groups still resisted on the peninsula, he could foresee early reduction of that opposition. The Rice Anchorage base, while still an important position, was no longer vital as a physical contact with rear echelon supply and evacuation activities. For the last five days the enemy had spasmodically but ineffectually bombed and shelled that area. It now was important only as an outpost to be protected by a relatively small detachment. Then too, the enemy had hit the trail-block twice on 10 July, and had succeeded in occupying high ground formerly held by the soldiers. Colonel Schultz was requesting reinforcements in order to retake this important hill.

To Liversedge the solution was simple. He directed Colonel Freer to send Company I, 145th, to reinforce Schultz; the remainder of the Rice Anchorage force, with the exception of a small machine-gun detachment, would move to Enogai. Liversedge issued the necessary orders and retired for the night.

Just before dawn on 11 July Company D outposts on the beach heard the roar of landing craft motors close by Enogai Point. Colonel Griffith immediately prepared to repel a landing, but just near the shore the hostile boats turned about in Kula Gulf. Apparently the Japanese had thought they were approaching Bairoko and had recognized their error only at

the last minute. This was the extent of activity that night.

After daybreak Company D attacked and reduced the two remaining pockets of resistance. No Japanese remained on Enogai Point.

At 1000 the enemy launched the first of their daily air attacks against Enogai, when 16 Mitsubishi 97's, striking in two waves, bombed and strafed the American positions. A second visit at 1130 caught many men in the open, killing three and wounding fifteen.

That afternoon at 1600 three Tulagi-based PBY's landed at Rice Anchorage in response to Colonel Liversedge's request of the night before. The pilots, who had not been adequately briefed, were not aware that Enogai was in friendly hands. Using all means of communication, the Marines finally contacted the planes and induced them to taxi down to Enogai Inlet. Then began the tedious process of ferrying the wounded in rubber boats to the aircraft. Meanwhile, Liversedge decided to send representatives to Admiral Turner's headquarters on Guadalcanal to describe the situation on Dragons Peninsula and request that the admiral send forward Lieutenant Colonel Michael Currin's 4th Marine Raider Battalion. This decision was dictated by the fact that Liversedge was already several days behind schedule in his attack on Bairoko. The necessity of maintaining Schultz's force in its blocking position, coupled with casualties, sickness and exhaustion, had depleted his effective strength by nearly 50 percent.

The Group's communication and air liaison officers (Major William D. Stevenson and Lieutenant George Rounds, USN) boarded one of the PBY's with the wounded to carry this information to Admiral Turner. At this moment two enemy float biplanes, probably snooping from Rekata Bay sighted the PBY's and attacked with machine guns and bombs. The Marines on the beach replied with every available weapon and shortly drove off the Japanese. Although each of the PBY's had received some damage, they all took off in the dusk carrying more than 100 sick and wounded men to sanctuary at Tulagi.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Stevenson ltr.





**FOUR 140MM NAVAL GUNS AT ENOGAI** were captured intact by the Marines. Neat stacks of ammunition near the guns indicated that the Japanese had evacuated the position hurriedly. As shown here, the undamaged weapons were still in operating condition.

With the departure of the planes, the Marines added up the score. They had killed an estimated 350 Japanese. Balanced against this figure Marine statistics showed: 50 dead, 91 wounded, and four missing (later declared dead); four 140mm naval guns, three anti-aircraft guns, four heavy and 14 light machine guns, as well as numerous rifles, small mortars, ammunition, food, clothing, two tractors, artillery scopes, and a searchlight captured. The enemy dead were positively indentified as members of the Kure 6th Naval Landing Force, the Takemura heavy artillery unit, and the 4th Company of the 13th Infantry.

Liversedge had now reached the coast. He had knocked out his first objective and estab-

lished a "port" to facilitate supply and evacuation for further planned attacks on Bairoko to the south. In accordance with orders issued the night before, those elements of Freer's battalion (less detachments), which had been protecting the Rice Anchorage supply and evacuation base, now displaced forward in ten Higgins boats to join the main force at Enogai. The soldiers brought with them the rations, ammunition and equipment formerly held at Rice, thus enabling Liversedge to reorganize and resupply his force for the Bairoko attack. Simultaneously, Company I, 145th Infantry, reinforced Schultz's trail-block.

During the afternoon of 12 July, Admiral Halsey sent three light cruisers and ten de-

stroyers, commanded by Rear Admiral Waldon L. Ainsworth, into Kula Gulf to meet an enemy force (one cruiser and nine destroyers) which had left Rabaul with reinforcements for Kolombangara early that morning. For the second time in a week the American Navy intercepted the "Tokyo Express" before it could do any major damage or land the bulk of its troop-passengers.<sup>31</sup>

This battle, although costly to the Allies, marked the end of Tokyo Express operations between Kolombangara and New Georgia. Afterwards the Japanese resorted to long, roundabout barge movements along the west coast of Vella Lavella to Gizo and Arundel Islands when they wished to send troops and supplies to their New Georgia forces. On the other hand, Allied ships could now steam freely in the waters surrounding New Georgia without fear of surface interference.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, Colonel Liversedge's officer-messenger, Major Stevenson, had reached Guadalcanal where he conferred with Admiral Turner. After a two-hour interview, during which Turner closely questioned Stevenson concerning the tactical situation, troop morale and the status of supplies and equipment, the admiral promised to send a Navy communications team, equipped with a powerful TBW radio, to Enogai. He also directed his staff to correct the deficiencies in those supplies airdropped several days before, and tentatively agreed to send forward Colonel Currin's battalion at an early date.<sup>33</sup>

## BATTLE FOR BAIROKO

Back on Dragons Peninsula, during the period 11-18 July, the Northern Landing Group made preliminary moves in anticipation of the coming assault on Bairoko when reinforcements should arrive. The transfer of troops and supplies from Rice Anchorage permitted the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, for the first time since 5 July landing to resume tactical

<sup>31</sup> Allied losses: DD *Gwin*, sunk; CL's *Honolulu*, *St. Louis* and *Leander* (New Zealand), damaged. Japanese losses: CL *Jintsu*, sunk.

<sup>32</sup> For a more complete account of naval operations in the Solomons, accurately presented in a colorful and lucid manner, see Morison, *Bismarcks*.

<sup>33</sup> Stevenson ltr.

unity. But this optimum condition was short-lived. Intermittent enemy attacks forced Schultz to withdraw from advantageous positions and created the necessity of launching counterattacks. Even the addition of Company I, 145th, was insufficient to assure success, and Schultz feared that he would be unable to hold without reinforcement.

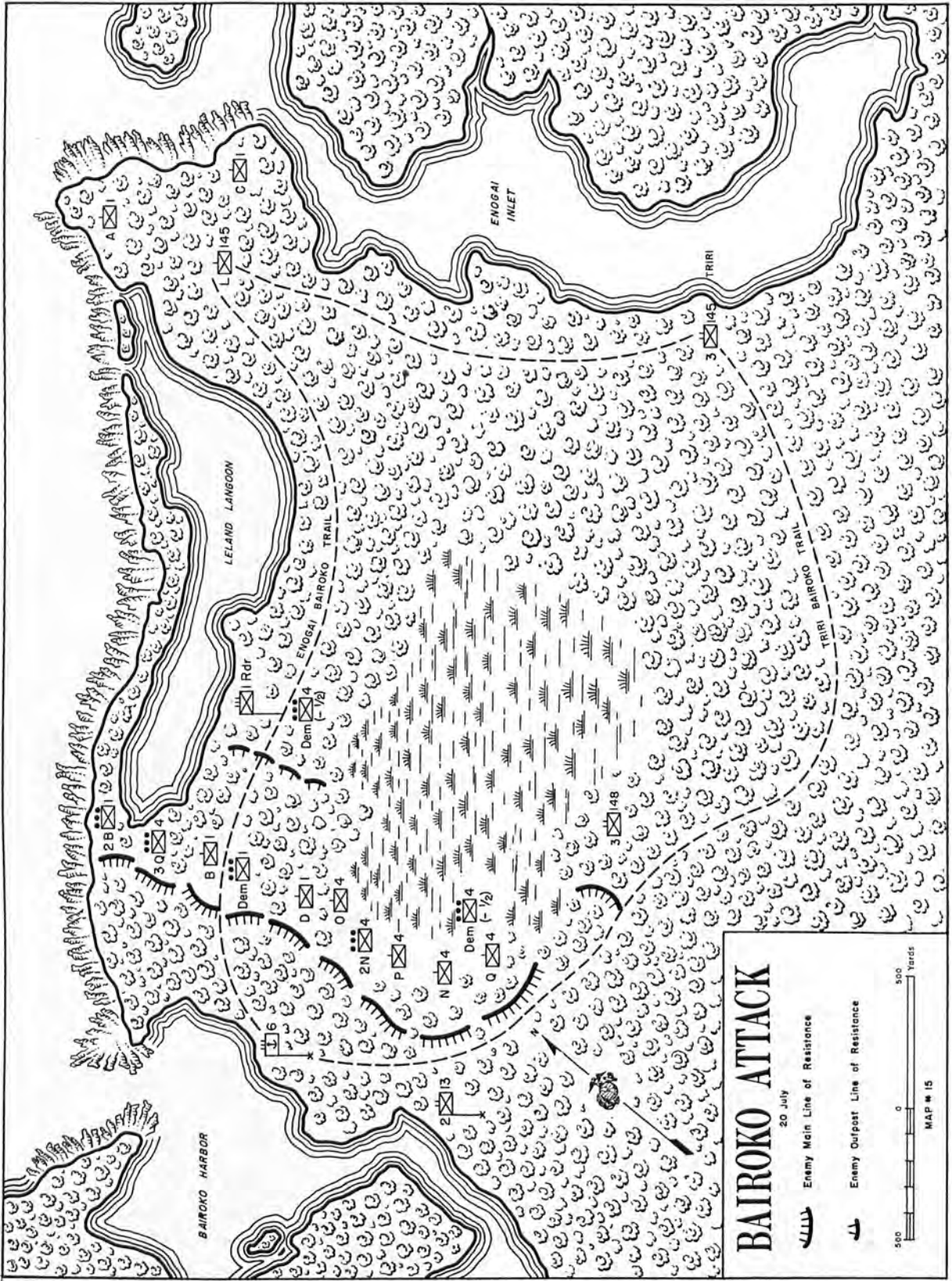
On 12 July Freer had moved his battalion (less Company I and the Rice Anchorage detachment) to Triri, in order to be in a centralized location and to conduct active combat patrolling down the Triri-Bairoko Trail. The very next day, however, he was called upon to furnish a rifle company to help Schultz.

Freer designated Company K. At 0800 on the 13th, this unit followed Colonel Liversedge, who desired to make a personal reconnaissance, on a long hike over the slippery paths to the trail-block sector, where it joined Schultz's battalion.

Upon arrival Liversedge surveyed the situation with disappointment.<sup>34</sup> Although on paper Schultz now commanded six companies, his strength had been so sapped by casualties, lack of food, extended marches, and continual skirmishes that he could consider only half of his 738 men as effectives. Against him the enemy could commit well over 1,000 troops. They held high ground dominating his positions and had unimpeded use of the Munda-Bairoko Trail. To make matters worse, only a small portion of the rations airdropped in that area had been recovered; the soldiers were hungry and morale was low.

Liversedge decided accordingly to abandon the trail block, since it served no useful purpose. Before undertaking any movement, he directed Schultz to dispatch a carrying party to bring up rations. This onerous detail fell to Company K, 145th, the freshest unit present. By 0800 on the 17th the company had made the round trip, and all of Schultz's men had eaten. At that time they moved to Triri, to rest and prepare for the coming attack on Bairoko. Temporarily, at least, Schultz would conduct daily patrols down the Triri-Bairoko Trail to obtain enemy information and to attempt to contact units of the Southern Landing Group,

<sup>34</sup> Liversedge interview 10Sep51.



# BAIROKO ATTACK

20 July

Enemy Main Line of Resistance

Enemy Outpost Line of Resistance



MAP # 15

then believed to be operating somewhere along the Munda-Bairoko Trail. At the same time units of the 1st Raider Regiment sent reconnaissance and combat patrols down the Enogai-Bairoko Trail.

The depleted 1st Raider Battalion was reorganized into two full strength companies (B and D) and two understrength companies (A and C). These latter units were to remain in defensive positions protecting Enogai throughout succeeding actions.

On 17 July, in accordance with a directive from Admiral Turner, Colonel Currin loaded 35 officers and 666 enlisted men of his 4th Battalion on board the destroyer-transport *Ward*, *Kilty*, *McKean* and *Waters* for the seven-hour run to Enogai. Arriving at 0100 the next day, the troops disembarked quickly and unloaded the five units of fire, 15 days' rations, and 40 tons of other supplies they had brought with them. With the 1st and 4th Raider Battalions located at Enogai and the Army battalions holding Triri, Liversedge felt prepared, by 19 July, to attack Bairoko.<sup>35</sup>

That afternoon he issued his order. This entailed a column advance of the 1st and 4th Raider Battalions (1st leading) along the Enogai-Bairoko Trail, paralleling the shores of Leland Lagoon. Simultaneously, the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, would move out from the Triri position with its axis of attack the Triri-Bairoko Trail. The plan thus envisaged a converging assault on the northeast shore of Bairoko Harbor, designed to crush the enemy between the Marines attacking from the north and the soldiers closing in from the east. Freer's battalion would protect the vital base at Triri and provide the Rice Anchorage detachment.

Continued close air support in jungle conditions with poor communications would have been difficult if not impossible, so that Colonel Liversedge had to do without this weapon. However, in the absence of artillery and heavy mortars (save for the few 81mm mortars carried by the attached Army units) Liversedge needed some heavy fire preparation before attacking his final objective. Hence, at 1700, he dispatched a message to Guadalcanal requesting

<sup>35</sup> 4thRdrBn, SAR, 14Sep43; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51.



**CAPTURED ENEMY DOCUMENTS**, translated in the field, greatly facilitated operations on Dragons Peninsula. The Raiders' interpreter, Captain Nicholas Radford, had lived in Japan for 13 years preceding the war. Lieutenant Commander John P. Murphy, the Raiders' Catholic Chaplain, watches as Radford works.

a heavy air strike on Bairoko prior to 0900 the next day.<sup>36</sup>

The approach began at 0800, 20 July. Schultz pushed off from Triri, and started down the inland trail to Bairoko. Just 30 minutes later the 1st Raider Battalion, followed by the 4th Raider Battalion, cleared Enogai. Both advanced with companies in column of file. The 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Raider Battalion (Second Lieutenant William J. Christie), covered the extreme right (north) flank of the

<sup>36</sup> Liversedge had decided as early as 1600 to request this strike, which he considered essential to the success of the operation. He therefore composed a message making this request for delivery to ComAirSols. It was sent out via the Navy TBW radio station, but adverse atmospheric conditions prevented prompt transmission and it was not until 1700 that the message was finally cleared. Although acknowledgment was requested, none came through until late that night, and this was nothing more than a staff officer's confirmation of the receipt of a message. Evidently this officer had invoked a directive of his commander which stated that all requests for air support had to be received by the air operations office before 1600. In any event, no action was taken on the Liversedge request. See: 1stRdrRgt, WD and SAR; 4thRdrBn, SAR; ComSoPac 6, "Employment of Air-Ground Liaison Officers in the New Georgia Campaign;" Stevenson ltr.

advance by moving down the Leland Lagoon sandspit.<sup>37</sup>

The long file made slow progress over trails that crossed extremely rugged hills and mucky mangrove swamps. Huge trees with sprawling roots, hanging vines, thick underbrush and volcanic rock formations added to the difficulty of the march. At 0955 native scouts with the point of the advance (from Company B, 1st Raider Battalion) sighted four enemy in an outpost approximately 800 yards northeast of the objective. Within 15 minutes, the 1st Battalion, having reduced the outpost, deployed facing southwest with Company B (Captain Edwin B. Wheeler) on the right and Company D (now commanded by First Lieutenant Frank A. Kemp, Jr.) on the left. Riflemen on Wheeler's right flank, then resting some 300 yards east of Leland Lagoon's western tip, glimpsed Marines of Christie's platoon moving down the sandspit.<sup>38</sup>

The advance continued against ever increasing resistance from outposts. By 1045 the Marines reached the enemy outpost line of resistance where heavy and continuous firing broke out on both sides. At this juncture Colonel Griffith decided to refuse his exposed left and moved his Demolitions Platoon to that flank to prevent any envelopment.

The Marines pushed ahead, more slowly but still aggressively, on a narrow front with two companies forward and one platoon echeloned to the left rear. But hostile riflemen still sniped from trees and light Nambu machine guns in outpost foxholes continued to chatter. Finally at 1200 the Japanese retired to a series of positions in four successive lines located on parallel coral ridges running north and south some 300 to 500 yards east of the harbor. This was their main line of resistance.

At this point Marines felt the effects of the failure of aviation to hit the Bairoko Harbor area that morning, and the Raiders' lack of any heavy supporting weapon became an added handicap. The 60mm mortar afforded the greatest striking power available to the Raiders;

<sup>37</sup> Christie's Platoon had moved into position on the spit at 1900 the preceding evening.

<sup>38</sup> This contact was one-way only. Christie's men did not see the remainder of the battalion until 0800 the next day. (Christie ltr.)

they had no flame throwers for an assault on the mutually-supporting coconut log and coral bunkers, which were covered by Japanese riflemen in trees. Enemy 90mm mortars, sited near the camp on the east bank of Bairoko Harbor, soon began to register with devastating accuracy.<sup>39</sup> Heavier Marine weapons were obviously needed for the necessary counterbattery fire. Colonel Liversedge attempted to contact Schultz to ascertain his situation and direct him to support Griffith's attack with 81mm mortars.

During the approach, communications men of both attack forces had strung rubber-covered assault wire (W-130) from Enogai and Triri. Navajo code talkers had used these lines intermittently throughout the morning, but when it became necessary to employ them for tactical traffic they were found to be grounded—skinned by the old habit of infantrymen who clutched the fragile wire for support while moving down a slippery trail.<sup>40</sup> Exasperated, Liversedge turned to the low-powered radios that accompanied him, and attempted to get a message through. But the peculiarities of radio communication in the jungle thwarted him; he could not even raise the base at Enogai.

The rattle of small-arms fire spread along the breadth of the front; interlocking machine-gun fire blanketed Company B's left. The center and right platoons of Company D, finding some relatively high ground, made small gains, but the 1st Platoon on the left was pinned down by a Japanese strong point consisting of seven well camouflaged bunkers. Similarly, on the extreme right on the sandspit, severe opposition held up Christie's platoon. And by 1230, as the tempo of firing increased, the entire advance bogged down. To complicate matters, a dangerous gap now existed between Wheeler and Kemp. No reports were forthcoming from Schultz—out of communication and, unknown to Liversedge, embroiled in a fight far to the southeast across impassable swamp and jungle. Immediate action was indicated. Accordingly Liversedge

<sup>39</sup> Boyd interview; Maj Earle O. Snell ltr to CMC. 16Feb51.

<sup>40</sup> Stevenson ltr. Reels of regular wire (W-110) were much too bulky for use on trails during a rapidly moving situation.



**MUTUALLY SUPPORTING BUNKERS** such as this formed strong points on the enemy main line of resistance at Bairoko. In the absence of heavy supporting weapons and flamethrowers, the Marines found it nearly impossible to reduce these positions.

decided to commit Currin's 4th Raider Battalion to the south in an effort to turn the enemy right.

Currin had no more success in his sector than Griffith had achieved.

Captain Walker's Company P had led the 4th Raiders' approach and thus was immediately available. To this company, therefore, fell the task of passing through the 1st Raiders' Demolitions Platoon, then engaged on Griffith's refused left. Colonel Currin directed Walker to push to the southwest and, when he had reached the shore line, turn right and assault generally northward. Carrying out these orders, Walker drove back those enemy previously opposing Company D. The Demolitions Platoon

shifted into reserve positions to the 1st Raiders' rear and then into the gap between Companies B and D. Company N (Captain Snell) followed close behind Walker to protect the open flank.

Company P clawed its way to within approximately 500 yards of the harbor, but a few minutes later enemy machine-gun fire became intense from high ground to the left. Quickly Walker trotted back to Snell to report that he needed support on both flanks. In response Snell dispatched two rifle platoons, led by First Lieutenant Thomas J. Connor, to Walker's right, while he himself hastened with the remainder of Company N (including most of his machine guns) to the left in an effort to neutral-

ize the withering cross fire coming from that flank.

The resulting action was costly. Second Lieutenant Curtis A. Tatum pushed forward with his platoon of Company N, but a machine gun soon cut him down. Not long afterward Captain Snell was hit and put out of action. Captain Walker, although badly wounded, not only retained command of his own company but also assumed control of the two platoons of Company N immediately on his flanks. Despite heavy fire the 4th Raiders continued their attack and seized a small ridge overlooking the regiment's left front and within 200 yards of the extreme right of the hostile main line of resistance.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, the 1st Raiders experienced equally heavy going. The well-entrenched foe soon stopped the two platoons of Company B still under Captain Wheeler's control, but Lieutenant Kemp's Company D continued a slow, steady advance. Griffith had already committed his Demolitions Platoon, his only reserve.

Colonel Liversedge realized that to attain victory he would have to increase pressure on the opposing right and lay effective counterbattery fire on those annoying and extremely accurate 90mm mortars. Still unable to contact Schultz and worried about the soldiers' situation, he sent his operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph McCaffrey, with a five-man patrol to investigate. This group faced a trying ordeal: a hike back to Enogai over a rough path, then up the inlet by boat to Triri, followed by another hike over the Triri-Bairoko Trail to Schultz's position.<sup>42</sup>

En route McCaffrey would pick up Company K, 145th Infantry, in garrison at Triri, and lead it to reinforce Schultz. In the meantime Company L of the 145th would move from Triri to Enogai and, together with skeletonized Companies A and C of the 1st Raiders, form the Northern Landing Group reserve.

McCaffrey left at 1345. Shortly afterwards Company D smashed through the first two of the four enemy defense lines and seized high ground within 300 yards of Bairoko Harbor. Here the company's left platoon came under

searing fire from strong points of the third line, which in that sector mounted at least seven machine guns covered by riflemen in trees. No sooner did the Marines disperse the defenders of one bunker, than they came under the fire of another.

Shells from 90mm mortars burst on the hill. When troops attempted to advance down the forward slope, they stumbled into cunningly constructed fire lanes. The number of casualties mounted alarmingly. Company D soon lost contact with Company P to its left. Accordingly, Colonel Currin committed Company O (First Lieutenant Raymond L. Luckel) to fill this gap. By 1430 Companies B, D and O, from right to left with the 1st Raiders' Demolitions Platoon between B and D, held a solid line ready to assault as soon as Companies P and N came abreast on the left or when Schultz should launch his attack on Bairoko from the Munda Trail.

At 1450 Currin moved his Company Q (Captain Lincoln N. Holdzkom) and half of his Demolitions Platoon into the left of his line to reinforce Company O and assist Companies N and P, then meeting stubborn resistance. Thus, only one-half of the 4th Raiders' Demolitions Platoon and Regimental Headquarters personnel remained to protect the Northern Landing Group command post and aid station, now far to the rear.

At 1500 communicators reestablished telephone connections between Liversedge and the base camp at Enogai. The first conversation revealed that McCaffrey had already hit the trail but had not yet contacted Schultz, and that Company L of the 145th was still at Triri. At this point Company D, having suffered many casualties as a result of a sharp enemy counterattack, was forced to withdraw to the vicinity of the first Japanese defense line. Lieutenant Kemp immediately organized a riposte and by 1547 had his adversary on the run.

On the left, Lieutenant Connor's Company N (Connor had assumed command of the company when Captain Snell was wounded) also gained the upper hand. When he saw these two companies advancing and the enemy (many without weapons) fleeing, Colonel Griffith—then with Walker on a ridge between Com-

<sup>41</sup> Walker ltr; Snell ltr; Boyd interview.

<sup>42</sup> Liversedge interview, 10Sep51.

panies D and N—sent a runner to Liversedge to request immediate commitment of all available reserves for a final knock-out punch. Meanwhile he directed Walker to hold Company P on the ridge as a base of fire. Meanwhile, Company B also managed to get fire superiority and the left flank platoon began to move forward. Wheeler likewise requested reinforcement in order to launch a decisive assault through the resultant gap between his 1st and 3d Platoons.

Unfortunately no reserves were available. The enemy, now pinned in an area measuring from 200 to 300 yards from east to west and approximately 600 yards from north to south, fought furiously. Deadly 90mm concentrations, unrestrained by effective counterbattery fire, fell in the vicinity of the Northern Landing Group command post as well as on the front lines. Thus, the Marines had to continue their assault without reinforcement or fire support.

McCaffrey's party had repaired the wire as it went, and at 1600 the telephone rang in the command post. Colonel Schultz reported that his battalion had proceeded slowly over the rough, jungle trail for nearly three and one-half miles (less than a mile and one-half as the crow flies) and at approximately 1400 had contacted a Japanese outpost less than 1,000 yards east of Bairoko Harbor. He had deployed immediately and attempted to probe the defenses, but the efforts of his riflemen to knock out the position proved unsuccessful. His scouts reported, moreover, that the enemy strong point bristled with four machine guns which could be approached only with difficulty.

With the foe entrenched on high ground to his front, a deep lagoon on his left (west) flank, and impassable jungle-swamp on his right, Schultz was stopped cold. His troops, enervated by a difficult 6-hour march, could not maneuver in such a restricted area, and hostile machine guns kept his forward elements pinned down. Schultz, with McCaffrey's approval, therefore had pulled back and even now was laying heavy mortar concentrations on the Japanese. Not knowing the actual extent or depth of the enemy position, he felt that he could not establish contact with the Marines before dark. He was unable to determine when



**COMMANDER SABURO OKUMURA**, opposed Colonel Liversedge on Dragon Peninsula. (Photograph courtesy of the Morison History Project.)

he could advance farther. Liversedge could expect no help from this quarter.<sup>43</sup>

Upon completing this conversation, Colonel Liversedge sent a runner to Griffith with instructions to reconnoiter the front and determine what action the force could take. Griffith conferred with Currin, visited each company position and talked with company commanders. All officers consulted held the opinion that they could make progress only if they were to receive reinforcements and strong fire support. All companies had suffered grievous casualties, the troops were tired, the ammunition was running low, and most of the canteens were dry.

Even while Colonel Griffith was making his tour of the battle line, the attack of all units had come to a standstill. Automatic weapons fire punctuated by mortar bursts throttled every Marine attempt to advance. Casualties accumulated at such an alarming rate that more able-bodied men appeared to be caring for the

<sup>43</sup> The foregoing is a synthesis of 1stRdrRgt, SAR and WD; 1st and 4thRdrBns, SAR's; Stevenson ltr; Griffith interview; Ward ltr; 3d Bn, 148th, Daily Situation Report, 20-21 July.





**AIR ATTACKS ON BAIROKO** came one day too late. Aerial bombardment during the Raiders' withdrawal on 21 July kept the enemy pinned down and prevented them from following. Approximately 133 tons of bombs hit the Japanese that day.

wounded than were attending to firing-line duties.

At 1630 Griffith stood with Lieutenant Kemp on a ridge in Company D's position and looked down on Bairoko Harbor, less than 500 yards away. No reserves were available to push forward even that short remaining distance now that Schultz's force was pinned down. The widely dispersed companies of the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, then at Rice, Triri and Enogai, could never assemble and move to the front in time to be of assistance, even if sound tactics permitted leaving those vital bases unguarded. Of less than 1,000 Marines who that morning had pushed down the trail paralleling Leland Lagoon, over 200 were casualties, and all had been fighting for six hours under most unfavor-

able conditions. By contrast, Griffith knew also that the well situated Japanese could move reinforcements into Bairoko by barge that night. Reluctantly, he concluded that the only course of action was withdrawal.

At 1710 Griffith returned to the regimental command post and made his unavoidable recommendation. Although he had not yet successfully accomplished his assigned mission and understandably was loath to abandon it, Colonel Liversedge concurred in Griffith's opinion and issued the necessary retirement orders.

Initially, corpsmen and litter bearers would gather all wounded in the aid station and prepare them for movement back to Enogai. Then all companies would disengage in turn and, covered by Companies O and P, holding dominat-

ing terrain overlooking Bairoko Harbor, pull back by easy stages to a tight perimeter on high ground 500 yards east of Bairoko Harbor near Leland Lagoon's south shore. One company of the 145th would move forward to reinforce the defenses that night. Runners were dispatched to direct Christie's platoon to hold until morning and then retire. At 1715 Liversedge advised Schultz of the plan by telephone and directed him to dig in for the night and withdraw to Triri in the morning. At daylight both the Marine and the Army companies would leapfrog rearward while supporting planes struck at the enemy's Bairoko positions.<sup>44</sup>

This directive surprised Schultz. He had no knowledge of the extent of Marine casualties, his own being relatively light. Apparently he was unaware of the enemy capabilities. Since Schultz's previous conversation with Liversedge, Lieutenant Colonel McCaffrey had arrived and after a personal reconnaissance—accompanied by natives and highly trained Marine intelligence scouts—had determined that only two, not four, machine guns were holding up the battalion. At McCaffrey's urging, Schultz at that moment was attempting to organize an assault on the stubborn Japanese. He hoped to crack the hostile position shortly. However, Schultz acceded to the directive of higher authority.<sup>45</sup>

The 1st Raider Regiment established its perimeter without incident. At 1745 First Lieutenant George E. Leppig, the R-1, led 80 ambulatory wounded back over the long trail to Enogai. At 1830 Company L of the 145th (Captain Clifford W. Morrow, USA) reached the perimeter with medical supplies, water and ammunition; just before nightfall this unit went into the lines to reinforce the Marines.

As the Marines and soldiers settled down in their new positions to await developments, Colonel Liversedge at 1900 requested (via phone to Enogai, thence to Guadalcanal by radio) a series of heavy air strikes on Bairoko hourly until nightfall the following day. At 0200 a small hostile group probed the 1st Raider Battalion lines, but Companies B and D repulsed the Japanese at the cost of one man killed and

nine wounded. After daylight these Marines counted five dead Japanese immediately in front of their foxholes. At 0300 an enemy plane dropped two ineffectual bombs between the perimeter and the camp at Enogai. Otherwise the night passed uneventfully while sleepless doctors and corpsmen worked to succor the many wounded. Just before dawn Colonel Liversedge phoned the following message to Enogai to be relayed to Guadalcanal by the powerful Navy radio: "Request all available planes strike both sides Bairoko Harbor beginning 0900. You are covering our withdrawal."<sup>46</sup>

The withdrawal began at 0600. First the ambulatory wounded set out for Enogai. Then the rifle companies, carrying all salvagable materiel, retired by easy stages to four successive defensive positions or "staging areas." The enemy failure to attack at this time made these maneuvers easy to perform. The force reached the first position by 0700 and prepared to defend it if necessary. Here Liversedge decided to halt for a short time to permit litter bearers to rest and the wounded to regain some strength. About 90 minutes later 70 natives arrived with water and supplies and bore 15 stretcher cases back to Enogai.

At 1000, as the force was retiring from the second to the third "staging area," Liversedge's air strike request bore fruit. Apparently the last sentence of the message—"You are covering our withdrawal"—had worked like magic. Practically everything in the South Pacific Area that could fly (including OS2U's, land-based patrol planes) began a series of sorties over Bairoko and continued their attacks until dusk. Over 133 tons of bombs were dropped that day, to record the heaviest air strike—over 250 sorties—thus far in the New Georgia campaign.<sup>47</sup>

Company I of the 145th Infantry (Captain David N. Marshall) arrived at the third "staging area" at 1100 to cover the remainder of the withdrawal. Forty-five minutes later, while the force was at the fourth "staging area," 30 natives returned to make a second trip with litter cases; simultaneously Marines from Com-

<sup>44</sup> Griffith ltrs and interview; Liversedge interview.

<sup>45</sup> Ward ltr.

<sup>46</sup> Slightly paraphrased.

<sup>47</sup> Stevenson ltr; ComAirNew Georgia, AR Phase I.

panies A and C, 1st Raiders, in Higgins boats towing rubber boats, beached in Leland Lagoon to pick up the remaining wounded. By 1300 all of the wounded had been returned to Enogai. About the same time, elements of Freer's and Schultz's battalions arrived from Triri; moments later the Raider Regiment also entered the village. By 1430 Captain Marshall had returned with his company. With the exception of Christie's platoon, then making its way back along the sandspit, the retirement was complete. Liversedge set up defense lines to protect Enogai against attack from any direction.

At 1500 three PBY's landed to evacuate the wounded to Guadalcanal. When the first of these departed, it had on board Colonel Griffith, bound for Koli Point to make a personal report to Admiral Wilkinson (who had relieved Admiral Turner as CTF-31 on 15 July).<sup>48</sup>

The second plane left without incident at 1600, but 30 minutes later, just as the last was preparing to take off, the communications men received a report of 25 enemy planes heading for Enogai. No sooner had the PBY become air-borne than it was attacked by two ZEROES and received many hits that damaged its port oil line and wounded two crewmen and one passenger, himself previously wounded. The plane was forced to return and spend the night under protection of the guns the Marines had captured at Enogai.

Christie led his platoon into Enogai at 1700. The Northern Landing Group now settled down for the night, its fighting over for a few days.<sup>49</sup>

## BAIROKO EVALUATED

While the Marines and soldiers reorganized on 22 July, Liversedge took stock. He was forced to admit failure, since he had not accomplished his assigned mission. However, responsibility for that failure did not rest en-

<sup>48</sup> Liversedge directed Griffith to ask Wilkinson to furnish a battery of 75mm pack howitzers and to point out the need for additional troops. The lack of heavy weapons in an extended land campaign was keenly felt throughout this operation. (Griffith ltr; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51.)

<sup>49</sup> Stevenson ltr; Christie ltr; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51; Boyd interview; Griffith ltr.

tirely on the Northern Landing Group. Liversedge had based his estimates and had laid his plans on intelligence that proved faulty. Maps of western New Georgia were in grievous error; aerial photographs were insufficient in quantity and inadequate in quality. Amphibious reconnaissance patrols had conducted their missions during the dry season when streams were fordable and swamps passable, but the operation was executed when the converse was true. Liversedge had planned to reach Enogai in three days or less, and had carried rations only for that period. Instead, unforeseen difficulties caused the advance to take six days, with the result that his troops arrived hungry as well as weary, with many sick and injured.

When communications inadequacies were finally overcome, Liversedge had counted on an air attack on Bairoko, timed to his final assault, to make up for his own lack of heavy support weapons. No such strike materialized, evidently for no better reason than that the request arrived an hour later than the air coordination people thought appropriate—though many hours in advance of the time for which the strike was requested. Without it, the lack of heavy mortars or artillery became a critical factor.<sup>50</sup> The Marines had neither, and the inability of the 3d Battalion, 148th, to reach the scene with its 81's may well have decided between success and failure.<sup>51</sup>

The withdrawal was exceptionally well executed. The Marines fell back with their morale unimpaired, convinced that they had conducted themselves with outstanding courage and skill in what may have been the bloodiest combat and hottest fire fight of the war up to that time. Failure to take Bairoko could never be charged to any lapse on the part of any Marine or Marine unit. Although they could count only 33 Japanese dead, the retiring Marines and soldiers knew that they had hurt the enemy sorely.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, when appraising this operation, reached a conclusion more critical of the mission than of Liversedge's execu-

<sup>50</sup> Liversedge interview, 10Sep51; Griffith ltr; Stevenson ltr. JCS, TOENAILS, Running Account.

<sup>51</sup> 1stRdrRgt, Combat Report, 3, 6, 12, 20; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51.



**PBY'S EVACUATED WOUNDED** from Enogai after the Bairoko withdrawal. Raiders ferried casualties to the planes in rubber boats, and nearly 200 sick and wounded men returned to base hospitals in rearward areas. Less than five minutes after this picture was snapped, enemy aircraft attacked and damaged this plane.

tion. Their daily report for 22 July 1943, noted that Liversedge failed to take Bairoko with the forces he had at hand, and that the Japanese apparently continued to send reinforcements into Western New Georgia. The report, however, continued:

The Marine Raiders are equipped for surprise operations. Their heaviest weapon is the 60mm mortar.

*Tabulation of Casualties, Bairoko Attack*

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
1st Raider Bn. . . .	17	63	0
4th Raider Bn. . . .	29	127	0
3d Bn, 148th Inf. . .	3	10	2
3d Bn, 145th Inf. . .	0	0	0
Totals . . . .	49	200	2

Such lightly armed troops cannot be expected to attack fixed positions defended by heavy automatic weapons, mortars, and heavy artillery. In this instance, the Japanese have been permitted to turn the tables on our forces, in that heavily armed Japanese Forces are opposite [sic] to our lightly armed forces.

The Raider Battalions are offensive units and are not intended to establish a fixed defense. . . . Failure to relieve the Marine Raiders by regular infantry units supported with artillery after the Marines had accomplished the task of seizing the beachhead is on a parallel with the failure to relieve the first [sic] Marine Division at Guadalcanal.<sup>52</sup>

A disenchanting historical view taken nine years later, places the Bairoko operation in a clearer perspective. Liversedge, although failing to occupy Bairoko, had prevented substantial numbers of that garrison from reinforcing their hard-pressed comrades at Munda. The Northern Landing Group had attracted

<sup>52</sup> JCS, Daily Digest, TOENAILS, 22Jul43, 2.

and held Admiral Kusaka's attention for more than two weeks. It had caused General Sasaki to commit one reinforced battalion of the 13th Japanese Infantry, the greater portion of the Kure 6th SNLF and parts of Yokosuka 7th SNLF to the containment of Liversedge's advance. By doing this, the group had achieved at least a portion of its mission.

Only slightly superior in numbers, the attackers found themselves inferior in fire-power and mobility, their strength sapped by exertions during the 15-day trek from Rice Anchorage to Bairoko Harbor. Although Admiral Turner might be criticized for neglecting to send reinforcements—well equipped Army troops—to bolster Liversedge when the force reached Enogai, the critic must remember several factors. Turner's main objective was Munda, and the operation in that area was in jeopardy. Actually, as we have already seen, Turner had requested additional units for the Central Solomons campaign as early as 12 June, but these had not been made available to him or his successor by the time of the Bairoko attack.<sup>53</sup>

Admiral Turner, and many other senior officers connected with the campaign, had vastly underestimated enemy strength and capabilities in the Bairoko area. Early reconnaissance parties had been handicapped by antagonisms and distrust existing between the natives of the Roviana and Bairoko regions, a situation that caused them to refuse to cooperate outside their own bailiwicks. And the amphibious scouts could not work without native aid. Of course, the dense jungle and rain forests made photo-intelligence practically valueless.<sup>54</sup>

## CAMPAIGN CONCLUDED

Following its retirement from Bairoko, the Northern Landing Group operated out of its Enogai base. Making only local adjustments designed to strengthen Enogai, Liversedge ordered daily patrols out to reconnoiter Dragons Peninsula trails and enemy positions. Occasional light clashes arising from contacts with

<sup>53</sup> RAdm Theodore S. Wilkinson relieved Adm Turner as CTF-31 on 15 July. Turner ltr; Ward ltr.

<sup>54</sup> Turner ltr; Liversedge interview, 10Sep51; 1stRdr-Rgt, Combat Report, 18-20.

small hostile units resulted in some casualties on each side, but otherwise the situation on the ground became static.

In the air, however, action continued unabated. Each night one or more Japanese "snoopers" bombed the American positions to inflict casualties and rob the troops of sleep. From time to time the enemy planes attempted daylight raids, but these generally ended in dog fights with American Corsairs and Wildcats.

On 2 August one of the most curious coincidences of the campaign occurred. The previous day the 4th Raider Battalion had occupied defensive positions at Rice Anchorage. At this time Colonel Currin had placed a combat outpost on Ndukonduka (Rice) Point at the mouth of the Pundakona River. Just after dawn on the morning of 2 August alert sentries spotted six Japanese paddling a native canoe toward the position. The Marines held their fire until the enemy came within easy range, then delivered a volley that killed five and wounded one whom they captured.

When a Marine interpreter, Captain Nicholas Radford, interviewed the wounded man, he discovered that these six Japanese were survivors of the 1 July fight on Vangunu and had made their way tediously through the reefs along the northern coast of New Georgia only to meet disaster at the hands of the selfsame Marines who had destroyed the rest of their unit a month previously.<sup>55</sup>

At 1530, 3 August, in compliance with orders from General Griswold, the 3d Battalion, 138th Infantry, established a trail block on the Munda-Bairoko Trail, similar to the one they had set up during the initial advance on Enogai nearly a month before. Two days later Colonel Liversedge leading Companies I and K, 145th Infantry, Company D, 1st Raiders, and a platoon of Company Q, 4th Raiders, arrived at the trail block and relieved Schultz. The Army battalion then displaced forward to Mount Tiariakiamba, a dominant elevation southwest of Bairoko Harbor, which not only commanded the main trails in the area but also overlooked Sunday Inlet.

<sup>55</sup> Maj Robert P. Smith ltr to CMC, 16Feb51. (See Chapter II, *supra*.)

At 0200, 8 August, an APc and two LCT's pulled into Enogai Inlet with supplies and reinforcements. The latter consisted of a 50-man detachment of Battery K, 11th Defense Battalion (Captain Joseph W. Mehring, Jr.), which brought with it four 40mm antiaircraft guns, four .50-calibre machine guns, and two bulldozers. After Mehring's detachment went into position on Sand Island at Enogai Inlet's mouth, Japanese air raiders at last kept at a respectful altitude. Liversedge now instituted a regular system of surface and air supply and evacuation to keep his men in food and send out his sick and wounded without delay.<sup>56</sup>

Colonel Liversedge, with a composite company made up of personnel from both the 1st and 4th Raider Battalion, cleared the trail block at 0830, 9 August, to reinforce Schultz. Just before noon his scouts sighted unfamiliar American soldiers. They were members of a large patrol from the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, led by their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Ryneska. The Northern and Southern Groups had finally made physical contact.

<sup>56</sup> 11thDefBn, WD and SAR; 1stRdrRgt, Combat Report, 19.

The following day the Northern Landing Group passed to the control of the 25th Infantry Division (Major General J. Lawton Collins), and Collins placed Ryneska's battalion under Liversedge in place of Schultz's battalion.

Spearheaded by the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, attacking along the Munda-Bairoko Trail and the 3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, attacking down the Enogai-Bairoko Trail, American forces began to close in on Bairoko. Slowly but irresistibly pressing forward, the soldiers reduced one lightly-held outpost after another until finally on 24 August at 1700, they entered Bairoko itself against no opposition. Leaving only a few last-ditch defenders to hold the Bairoko outpost, the enemy main body had withdrawn.

With the fall of Bairoko the Marines job ended. General Collins visited Enogai on 28 August and released the 1st Marine Raider Regiment. The following day, therefore, Liversedge embarked his sadly depleted unit in Transport Division 22 (Lieutenant Commander Robert H. Wilkinson) and returned to Guadalcanal.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix III for casualties.



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER V

# Central Solomons Mop-Up

#### NEW GEORGIA FIGHTING ENDS

Munda airfield fell on 5 August. This date, therefore, marked the end of the first phase of Admiral Halsey's TOENAILS operation. But more bitter fighting lay ahead for the air, sea and land forces before phase two was over and the campaign finally concluded.

Because of the heavy pressure and overwhelming strength that the Allies had thrown into New Georgia, General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka, on 27 July, sent a staff officer to Munda with instruction to order Sasaki to withdraw from those positions he had held since the middle of the month. Battered by the mauling he had taken in the Ilangana Peninsula area, Sasaki gladly complied and pulled back to the hills in the vicinity of the airfield. But General Griswold gave the Japanese no respite. On 3 August, therefore, General Sasaki and Admiral Ota agreed to abandon Munda the following afternoon and establish a holding line to the north astride the Bairoko-Munda Trail with the 13th Infantry and the Eighth Combined SNLF. The remnants of the 229th Infantry would retreat to Baanga Island and prevent American access to Diamond Narrows.

The 230th Infantry would hold Arundel Island to protect Blackett Strait and cover the southern approaches to Vila on Kolombangara. General Imamura had promised substantial reinforcements, and Admiral Kusaka was already preparing to send them to Sasaki's relief.

When these arrived, Sasaki could counter-attack and drive the Americans from New Georgia soil.<sup>1</sup> Artillery properly emplaced on Arundel and Baanga meanwhile could prevent effective American utilization of Munda airfield. Accordingly, Colonel Shiroto moved portions of the 10th Mountain Artillery Battalion and the 15th Field Defense Unit from New Georgia to the offshore islands. The next day the infantry units completed their moves, while a few suicidal Japanese of the 229th and 230th Infantry remained behind to perform a covering mission.

But Griswold had little trouble with these when he made his final move, and the airfield fell without untoward incident.

Upon seizing Munda, Griswold tried to slam the door on the Japanese escape route. Leaving the 43d Division to organize the airfield defenses, he sent the 37th Division pushing along the coast and the 25th Division up the trail toward Bairoko, in the hope that he could ensnare and destroy Sasaki's retreating force. But the enemy was ready.

Covered only by small detachments or individual riflemen, Sasaki withdrew to his main defense line then extending from Bairoko Harbor to Sunday Inlet. This line he determined to hold. From it he would attack.

<sup>1</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 36-37. At this point Adm Ota disappears from the record.

## BATTLE OF VELLA GULF

General Sasaki's plan to maintain a foothold on New Georgia and there launch a counter-offensive collapsed like a child's card castle during the night of 6-7 August. In accordance with General Imamura's program of reinforcement of the Southeast Detached Force, Admiral Kusaka had been shipping men and materiel to Sasaki via Tokyo Express. Ordinarily, despite Allied air and sea interference, these were landed on Kolombangara and deployed as Sasaki saw fit. But Admiral Halsey's sailors and airmen became more and more persistent, until the Japanese "transport program"—as they called it—greatly increased in difficulty.

Just after dark on 6 August, four Japanese destroyers set out from the Shortlands. On board three of the ships 940 soldiers and approximately 700 naval personnel crowded the decks from rail to rail; the fourth destroyer, acting as escort, had only a normal ship's complement on board. Shortly before midnight the convoy turned into Vella Gulf toward Kolombangara to discharge its human cargo. Then disaster struck.<sup>2</sup>

Just at this time Commander Frederick Moosbrugger's Task Group 31.2 (DD's *Dunlap*, *Craven*, *Maury*, *Lang*, *Sterett* and *Stack*) was steaming north in a sweep along the west coast of Kolombangara. Moosbrugger was not there by chance; the day before Admiral Wilkinson had guessed that the enemy would attempt a Tokyo Express run that night.

As the Japanese ships neared their objective, Moosbrugger's radar made contact. The Americans, catching the enemy completely by surprise, fired torpedoes. Within a few minutes the three Japanese transport-destroyers were in flames and sinking. Only one ineffectual torpedo attack plus a bit of ragged gunfire answered Moosbrugger's challenge. The surviving Japanese destroyer turned to run from the scene like a frightened deer. The Americans suffered no loss.

For this, their final attempt to reinforce Sasaki, the Japanese paid dearly, losing 1,520 men in addition to the three destroyers. Henceforth, the Southeast Detached Force Com-

mander would have "to make do" with the troops immediately available.<sup>3</sup>

When news of this defeat reached Sasaki at his command post in New Georgia's dripping jungle, he must have realized that all hope of victory was lost. Shortly after dark the night of 8-9 August he moved to Kolombangara, where he remained until the close of the campaign, leaving further action on New Georgia itself to the supervision of small-unit commanders.

## AMERICANS SWEEP NEW GEORGIA

Unaware of his adversary's move, General Griswold's two columns pushed from the airfield toward Diamond Narrows in an effort to entrap Sasaki's force, opposed mainly by gloomy jungle and oozing mud. Heavy daily rains turned roads and trails into quagmires, impassable to wheeled vehicles. To solve this problem Grosword borrowed tractors (TD-18) and Athey trailers from the 9th Defense Battalion. These vehicles, guarded by Marine riflemen, worked around the clock to carry vital supplies and ammunition to the front. And sometimes even the tractors bogged down in the sticky mud. Then the most advanced elements had to be supplied by airdrop.<sup>4</sup>

At 1300 on 9 August a patrol of the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, then far in advance of the lines up the Munda-Bairoko Trail, met a patrol led by Colonel Liversedge. The Northern and Southern Landing Groups had finally established contact. Meanwhile the 37th Division advanced along the coast, under annoying small-arms and artillery fire from Japanese positions on Baanga and Arundel Islands and several smaller islets offshore. On 10 August, after one amphibious assault was repulsed, the debilitated 43d Division landed on Baanga to take that matter in hand.

Five days later the 27th Infantry (again under the command of Colonel Douglas Sugg), which had swung southward and taken positions in the vicinity of Zieta (see Map #16.), ambushed and annihilated 200 Japanese re-

<sup>3</sup> *Combat Narratives*, XI, 2-11; Karig, *op. cit.*, 230-233. By far the most complete and readable account of this action is found in Morison, *Bismarcks*, 212-220.

<sup>4</sup> Hiatt 28Mar52 ltr.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.





**XIV CORPS TROOPS SWEEP BAANGA ISLAND** after the fall of Munda airfield. Well-camouflaged bunkers near the south end of the island delayed completion of the operation for several days. Here a Marine points to one of the two gun ports of a bunker.

treating before the advancing 37th Division. On the 11th General Collins' troops joined with the Northern Landing Group, thus pocketing all enemy survivors in the Bairoko area. To the southwest the 37th Division established a main line of resistance some five miles west and northwest of the airfield. Two battalions of the 25th Division, preparing to join the final attack on Bairoko Harbor, outran their tenuous supply lines and had to be supplied by airdrop. By 20 August, the 43d Division, after a 10-day fight in which it had committed four understrength infantry battalions plus a number of supporting troops under General Barker, secured Baanga Island. The surviving Japanese (from the 229th and 230th Regiments) retired to Arundel and Kolombangara.

On the 23d, the 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry, which had been pushing southward from Sunday Inlet, met patrols of the 37th Division on the shores of Hathorn Sound. That night 19 barge loads of General Sasaki's troops (mostly

13th Infantry and Kure 6th SNLF) withdrew from Bairoko Harbor to Kolombangara. The next morning General Collins' men entered the old Japanese encampment. Ground fighting on New Georgia had ceased.<sup>5</sup>

The main body of Sasaki's force was now on Kolombangara, but small detachments still occupied Arundel and Gizo Islands, firing artillery at the American lines. A slightly larger unit held Vella Lavella. In accordance with the Japanese Imperial Headquarters Navy Staff Directive No. 267, issued on 13 August, General Sasaki now prepared to hold out as long as possible to permit Admiral Kusaka and General Imamura to strengthen defenses in the Northern Solomons. Then in late September or

<sup>5</sup> Col E. A. Craig, report of observation of operations on New Georgia, 18-23 August, 28Aug43; Col E. O. Ames, notes on visit to Munda area, 18-23 August, undated but written about 24Aug43; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 222-223.



early October, he would withdraw his entire force on order from the Central Solomons area.<sup>6</sup>

### LONG TOMS IN THE FINAL PHASES

The 9th Defense Battalion's 155mm batteries had supported the XIV Corps drive from the opening of the campaign until 3 August. At this time General Barker suspended firing because of the shortage of ammunition for the M-1 gun, and the possible requirement of heavy expenditures for seacoast defense. Because of the Japanese capability of conducting a counterlanding in the Munda area, Battery B displaced forward on 8 August to Kindu Point on New Georgia with the mission of protecting the western sea approaches to Blanche Channel. Several days later Battery A moved across Rendova Harbor to Tambu Solo Island with a like mission.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the month, after the arrival of adequate stocks of powder and shells, Colonel Scheyer recommended reemployment of the Long Toms as field artillery—this time against Kolombangara—to take advantage of their range and hitting power. Accordingly, Marine officers reconnoitered the shores of New Georgia north and west of the airfield. But a meticulous search found no suitable gun positions. On the advice of a coastwatcher who knew this area thoroughly, a party of 155mm Group officers embarked in small boats, sneaked through Diamond Narrows and landed at a pier at Piru Plantation, about 7,000 yards northwest of Munda Point. Here they were greeted by elements of the 25th Division, gaily attired in remnants of the colorful parachutes used for an airdrop of supplies several days earlier. This area was now secure and the soldiers were amusing themselves by exchanging pot shots with hostile troops still entrenched on Baanga Island. Here, amid swaying palms, the Marines found ideal locations for their guns.

Battery A moved to its new site in two echelons. The first, consisting of a large detail of men with engineer equipment, displaced by boat on 29 August and prepared gun emplacements. The second, which included all remaining per-

sonnel and weapons of the battery, embarked in two LCT's and sailed through Diamond Narrows into Hathorn Sound the next day. This echelon unloaded in full view of antagonistic eyes on Kolombangara, some 12,000 yards away. Marine amphibian tractors, following the LCT's, laid underwater cable from the Defense Battalion command post near Munda Point to Piru Plantation, thus insuring adequate telephonic communications throughout the days to come. On 1 September Battery B accomplished a similar maneuver.

Almost immediately after occupying their new emplacements, Captains Reichner and Wells fired harassing missions across Kula Gulf against Japanese installations. Observers in a tall tree on the beach spotted the initial bursts and signalled corrections for gunners on the ground. Five hostile shells, exploding in uncomfortable proximity to this position, welcomed the Marines aboard. But fortunately the Marines had "read the book." Both batteries were in defilade behind hills and few rounds landed in their positions.

For the men of the 155mm Group, the war soon took on the semblance of a personal fight. Each night the Americans heard the starting sputter and ensuing drone of a Vila-based seaplane that circled overhead to drop a small load of bombs. Several projectiles, fired at irregular intervals by cleverly concealed enemy coast defense guns, usually followed this raid. These nuisance tactics robbed men of sleep but inflicted little damage and no personnel casualties. By day the Japanese had a most annoying habit of shelling the Americans while at mess, resulting in spilled food and ruffled tempers. Whenever boats landed near the Marines' best observation post (the tree near the beach), their opponents would lay in a couple of rounds to make that area untenable.

Naturally a battle of wits ensued. Since the enemy could not hide their gun flashes, the Marines returned the fire to silence the hostile pieces. The foe met this gambit by setting off powder charges at different points every time they discharged their weapons. But cool-headed Americans detected this ruse when they noticed that they were receiving only one shell for every three or four flashes plotted. The

<sup>6</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 45, 47.

<sup>7</sup> Reichner 17Mar52 ltr; O'Neil interview; 9thDefBn, Informal Combat Report.

solution to this problem is best given in the words of one of the observers:<sup>8</sup>

To overcome this unsportsmanlike conduct, we put an aerial observer in a TBM who caught the Japanese in their distardy [sic] trick, accurately located the weapon that was doing the dirty work and promptly put him out of business.

The Marines decided to repay in kind this interference with their chow call. Early each morning artillerymen, fighting-mad over good, hot food spilled from mess gear in a frantic dive for shelter the previous night, lined the beach to watch for evidences of cook fires on Kolombangara. When they perceived smoke curling lazily up through the trees, they dashed back to their guns and shot a salvo or two of

<sup>8</sup> Hiatt 28Mar52 ltr.

super-quick high explosive rounds in an effort to quench the enemy fires with a rain of steel.

Early in this game of give and take, the Marines had to abandon their only effective observation post, now a bull's-eye target of hostile projectiles. Obviously the answer was air spotting. Lieutenant Donald V. Sandager and Staff Sergeant Herschel J. Cooper went aloft as volunteers each day in SBD's or TBF's. At first the planes drew heavy antiaircraft fire, but when the 155mm guns responded with great accuracy, the Japanese soon lost all desire to reveal their locations.<sup>9</sup>

By means of air spot, plus observation from heavily armed Higgins boats cruising off Ko-

<sup>9</sup> Capt Donald V. Sandager ltr to CMC, c. 23Feb51; Reichner 17Mar52 ltr.



**LOG AND CORAL BUNKERS** studded the coast of Kolombangara. After the Japanese withdrawal from the island in early October, Marine artillerymen landed to study the effects of their fires. This particular bunker had received a direct hit from a 155mm shell.

lombangara's coast just beyond small-arms range, the Marines detected and reported signs of activity in the vicinity of Vila airfield and along the shores to the north. Aerial photographs and reports of coastwatchers revealed the location of tracks and trails through Kolombangara's jungles. The 155's acted on all data thus obtained. But the Japanese continued to shoot back.

The Marines next hit upon the expedient of coordinating air strikes with Long Tom bombardments. Whenever enemy guns attempted counterbattery work, SBD's and TBF's would dive upon them with screaming bombs and stuttering machine guns. In answer the foe threw up clouds of flak and, at first, succeeded too well in knocking down nine of the attackers. After several such instances, the artillerymen arranged with ComAirSols to lay barrages on all known or suspected antiaircraft emplacements until a few moments before the planes were ready to strike. But the Japanese caught on quickly: Soon the barrages only served to alert them for the coming raid, and as soon as the fires lifted they scuttled back to their anti-aircraft weapons.

The Americans countered by firing a preparation intended to warn the enemy that an air strike was coming, lifting it as planes appeared high overhead. Three minutes later, after their opponents had time to man their guns, the 155's again would pour it on, catching the Japanese in their open emplacements. Then, upon completion of this second bombardment, the planes would attack.

After several repeat performances of this tactic, pilots reported antiaircraft fires from Kolombangara as most ineffective.<sup>10</sup>

In late September other Allied units joined in the artillery duel when Army 105's and 4.2 mortars moved in and emplaced on Arundel's northern shore. And when a battalion of the 25th Infantry Division walked ashore near Vila in mid-October, wrecked ordnance, smashed emplacements and scattered supplies gave mute evidence of the effectiveness of this combination of shelling and bombing.<sup>11</sup>

## ARUNDEL

On 27 August the 172d Infantry crossed the waters of Hathorn Sound and landed unopposed on Arundel Island to seize the artillery that had been harassing Munda Point. The soldiers quickly established a beachhead and sent out small local patrols in an effort to establish contact with the enemy. But the handful of Japanese on the island refused to offer organized resistance. Instead, they preferred to take pot shots from afar or conduct hit-and-run raids on command posts and lines of communication after dark.

General Sasaki on Kolombangara reacted promptly to this new thrust. Early in September, before the 172d had an opportunity to sweep Arundel from tip to tip, he sent his 13th Infantry to contain the American advance. He charged this regiment with delaying the 172d long enough to permit the remainder of the Southeast Detached Force and the Eighth Combined Special Naval Landing Force then on Kolombangara to withdraw from the Central Solomons.

The 13th acquitted itself with distinction. Although committed piecemeal to the fighting front, the regiment struck the 172d time and time again. The Americans, who had hoped to clear Arundel of Japanese in only a few days, were forced to send in reinforcements. Even with these, the soldiers found it difficult to withstand a particularly vicious counterattack early in the morning of 15 September. The drive had come to a standstill.

That afternoon General Griswold directed Colonel Douglas Sugg, USA, to take the 27th Infantry and the Marine tanks to Arundel, assume command of all American units there, and push the foe off the island. Accordingly, Sugg began to send a fresh battalion to the Arundel front. During the night of 16-17 September, under cover of a lashing rain that muffled all noise other than its own, Sugg moved the tanks into an assembly area just behind the 27th's lines. At first light the next morning, five machines of the 11th Defense Battalion, with excellent close support by Company C, 27th Infantry, attacked a hostile strong point that had held up the soldiers the preceding day. As the foot troops laid down a

<sup>10</sup> Hiatt 28Mar52 ltr.

<sup>11</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 49.



**LANDING CRAFT CARRIED THE 2D BATTALION, 172D INFANTRY**, to this jungle-covered beachhead on Arundel. Although the soldiers met no opposition initially, fanatic enemy defenders soon engaged the invaders and fought on for nearly a month. (Army Photo.)

heavy volume of small-arms fire, the tanks advanced in two waves, took the enemy completely by surprise, penetrated the position, and then proceeded to mop up. At first the accompanying infantry could not advance because of vicious counterfire, but the Japanese, thrown off balance by the initial assault, could not recover in time to counterattack, so there were no tank losses. That day the front lines on Arundel advanced some 500 yards.<sup>12</sup>

On 18 September Colonel Sugg tried a repeat performance, this time with four tanks. With unbridled confidence motivated by the success achieved the day before, the Americans attacked with their armor echeloned to the right

<sup>12</sup> Col Douglas Sugg ltr to CMC, 12Mar52; Col Benjamin F. Evans, jr. ltr to CMC, 19Mar52.

rear, although such a formation prevented mutual support between vehicles and foot troops. To the Americans' astonishment, the foe during the course of the night had cleverly positioned two 37mm antitank guns in the midst of the extremely thick forest, which denied adequate observation and made maneuver difficult. Caught by surprise when the Japanese opened fire with weapons of greater range than those carried in the machines, the Marines lost two tanks before they had advanced 50 yards.

Here the absolute necessity of close infantry support for armor in jungle operations was amply demonstrated. Accompanying soldiers placed a veritable blanket of BAR and rifle fire on the Japanese positions, thus enabling the Marines to escape from their crippled ve-



hicles. Born as a result of this action was a high degree of comradeship and mutual confidence between the tankmen and their friends of the 27th Infantry.<sup>13</sup>

The following morning eleven tanks with infantry support resumed the attack. Advancing in two waves, the second covering the first, the armor pushed forward rapidly toward Arundel's northern tip. Alert soldiers, giving close protection to each vehicle, immediately shot down any enemy attempting to approach the machines with magnetic mines. Accurate long-range rifle fire discouraged Japanese anti-tank gunners from manning their weapons, and

<sup>13</sup> Sugg ltr; Evans ltr; Blake ltr; LtCol Joseph F. Ryneska ltr to CMC, 20Mar52.

this coordinated attack achieved complete success.<sup>14</sup>

During the night of 20–21 September, General Sasaki withdrew his last survivors from Arundel, Gizo, and the surrounding islands. The next day at 1445 General Griswold announced the cessation of organized resistance. Only the task of mopping up a few Japanese stragglers—the inevitable few who never get the word—remained. Griswold had now freed Munda airfield from the threat of enemy artillery. The Japanese could attack that hard-won piece of real estate only from the air.

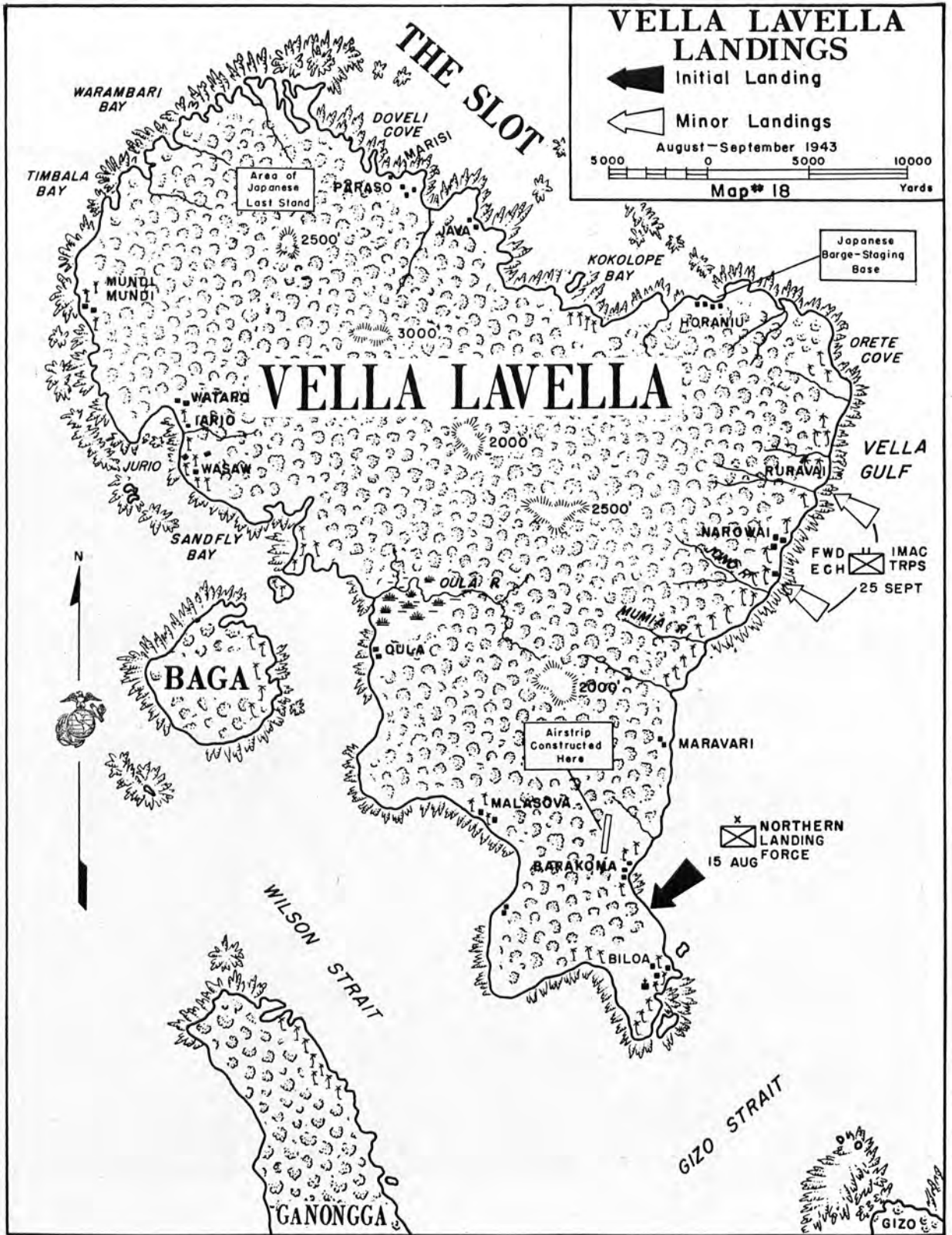
About 345 Japanese died in the bitter defense

<sup>14</sup> 43dInfDiv, G-3, Report of Tank Employment in Arundel Operation, 23Sep43; Blake ltr.



**ENGINEER ASSAULT BOATS** moved 27th Infantry troops from beachhead to beachhead on Arundel. Here one group rides through Bomboe Lagoon to establish a new supply base behind the front lines. Colonel Douglas Sugg, the regimental commander, is second from the left. (Navy Photo.)





of Arundel; an estimated 500 were wounded. But Sasaki had successfully executed the mission assigned him by the Imperial Headquarters Navy Staff Directive No. 267: Hold out in the Central Solomons as long as possible, thus enabling General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka to strengthen their strategic line to the rear. He could now withdraw from the Central Solomons, having saved the bulk of his force for future commitment.

Fortunately, the American victory was far from Pyrrhic. It had cost only 44 dead and 256 wounded, and it had placed Admiral Halsey's foot firmly on another rung of the Solomons ladder.<sup>15</sup>

### VELLA LAVELLA: HALSEY'S BY-PASS <sup>16</sup>

As early as 11 July, Admiral Nimitz suggested that heavily defended Kolombangara be by-passed in favor of seizing lightly held Vella Lavella, a densely wooded, volcanic island some 14 miles to the northwest. Such an operation would serve two purposes: First, it would establish an additional base for future operations against the Japanese in the Northern Solomons; second, occupation of Vella Lavella would place the Allies squarely astride the enemy line of supply. This would compel the Japanese on Kolombangara either to withdraw or, like overripe fruit, fall of their own weight.<sup>17</sup>

During the night of 21-22 July, a 6-man patrol of Army, Navy and Marine officers landed near Barakoma at Vella Lavella's southeast tip to obtain specific information concerning hydrographic and beach conditions, possible airfield sites and dispersal areas, and the exact location of any hostile defenses. Despite the presence of some 300 Japanese, the patrol contacted the local coastwatcher, Henry Jos-

<sup>15</sup> Morison, *Bismarcks*, 223-224; *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 46 *et seq*; *Combat Narratives*, XI, 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Many officers and men who participated in this operation believe it was the first application of the by-pass tactic on a large scale in World War II. For this honor, however, due credit must be given to the Northern Pacific operations in the Aleutians. (LtCol Carl M. Johnson ltr to CMC, 21Mar52; *Combat Narratives*, XI, 60.)

<sup>17</sup> *Combat Narratives*, XI, 60; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 227.

selyn, and for the following week scouted the island thoroughly. On 31 July the patrol, having returned to Guadalcanal without incident, submitted its report to Admiral Wilkinson, stating that a landing in the vicinity of Barakoma was entirely feasible.<sup>18</sup>

When this information reached Admiral Halsey on 7 August, he directed Brigadier General Robert B. McClure, the 25th Division's Assistant Commander, to take command of a 6,505-man unit called the Northern Landing Force, and attack Vella Lavella on 15 August. A part of McClure's command was the 4th Defense Battalion, FMF (Colonel Harold S. Fassett), responsible for the installation and operation of antiaircraft and seacoast defenses, and for organization and occupation of a sector of the beach defenses. Other elements of the Northern Landing Force included the U. S. Army's 35th Regimental Combat Team,<sup>19</sup> the 58th Naval Construction Battalion, the 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, plus additional Army and Navy detachments.

McClure began embarkation of his command in ships of Task Force 31 at Guadalcanal during the morning of 12 August. That night a 25-man Army-Marine advance party from units at Rendova went ashore at Barakoma to mark channels and beaches for use by landing craft on D-Day. On 14 August this party was reinforced by an Army infantry company because of the presence of large numbers of Japanese survivors of the Battle of Vella Gulf, who roamed the island armed with grenades, small arms and clubs.<sup>20</sup>

A brilliant moon lighted the cloudless sky the night of 14-15 August as the convoy sailed up the Slot toward Vella Lavella. Nothing ruffled the calm sea. Although enemy planes attacked positions on Guadalcanal, the Russells and New Georgia that night, the American ships apparently were not sighted. Shortly after 0600 the following morning as the convoy

<sup>18</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 156; TF-31, AR, 20Sep43, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Formed from the 35th Infantry, the 64th Field Artillery Battalion, Company C of the 65th Engineer Battalion, Collecting Company B of the 25th Medical Battalion, and other 25th Division service units.

<sup>20</sup> NLF, FO #1, 11Aug43; CTF-31 OpnOrder A12-43, 11Aug43; III AmphFor, AR, 20Sep43; MajGen Robert B. McClure ltr to CMC, 13Mar52.



**LANDING FORCE COMMANDER** during the amphibious phases of the Vella Lavella operation, Robert B. McClure, was promoted to Major General shortly after his relief by Colonel E. E. Brown. (Army Photo.)

hove to off Barakoma, planes from the Munda airfield (VMF-124 and VMF-123) appeared overhead. Debarkation commenced immediately.

Generally, unloading and initial beachhead establishment proceeded according to plan. Major difficulties arose because the three beaches selected could accommodate only eight instead of twelve LCI's as expected. Moreover, pre-operation patrol reports and photo reconnaissance had failed to reveal a submerged coral reef some 30 yards offshore from the beach where the 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry was to execute the initial landing. Consequently LCI's bearing this unit grounded with deep water between them and the shore. The 35th's commander, Colonel Everett E. Brown, therefore directed the 1st Battalion (with which he was boated) to continue directly in to its beach and make the initial landing, disregarding the attack order that provided for the 1st to land on the right of the 2d, and some five minutes later. Eventually the 2d Battalion's crews managed to free their craft, back off the reef, and after changing direction to the north come

in on the 1st Battalion's beach. The resultant congestion caused confusion in getting the assault battalions and their equipment properly disposed ashore. This situation, coupled with an improperly transmitted visual message from the beach party, delayed completion of LCI unloading until 0900.<sup>21</sup>

Three LST's beached shortly after the LCI's had retracted, but once again the unloading was delayed when it was found that these large landing craft had grounded in relatively deep water. While irretrievable minutes ticked off, a Seabee lieutenant with a bulldozer scraped up coral ramps from shore to bow doors, after which service troops augmented by all available combatant personnel raced to get rations, ammunition and equipment from the ships to dispersal areas inland. When the LST's finally departed about 1800, they still had on board a small amount of 4th Defense Battalion gear.<sup>22</sup>

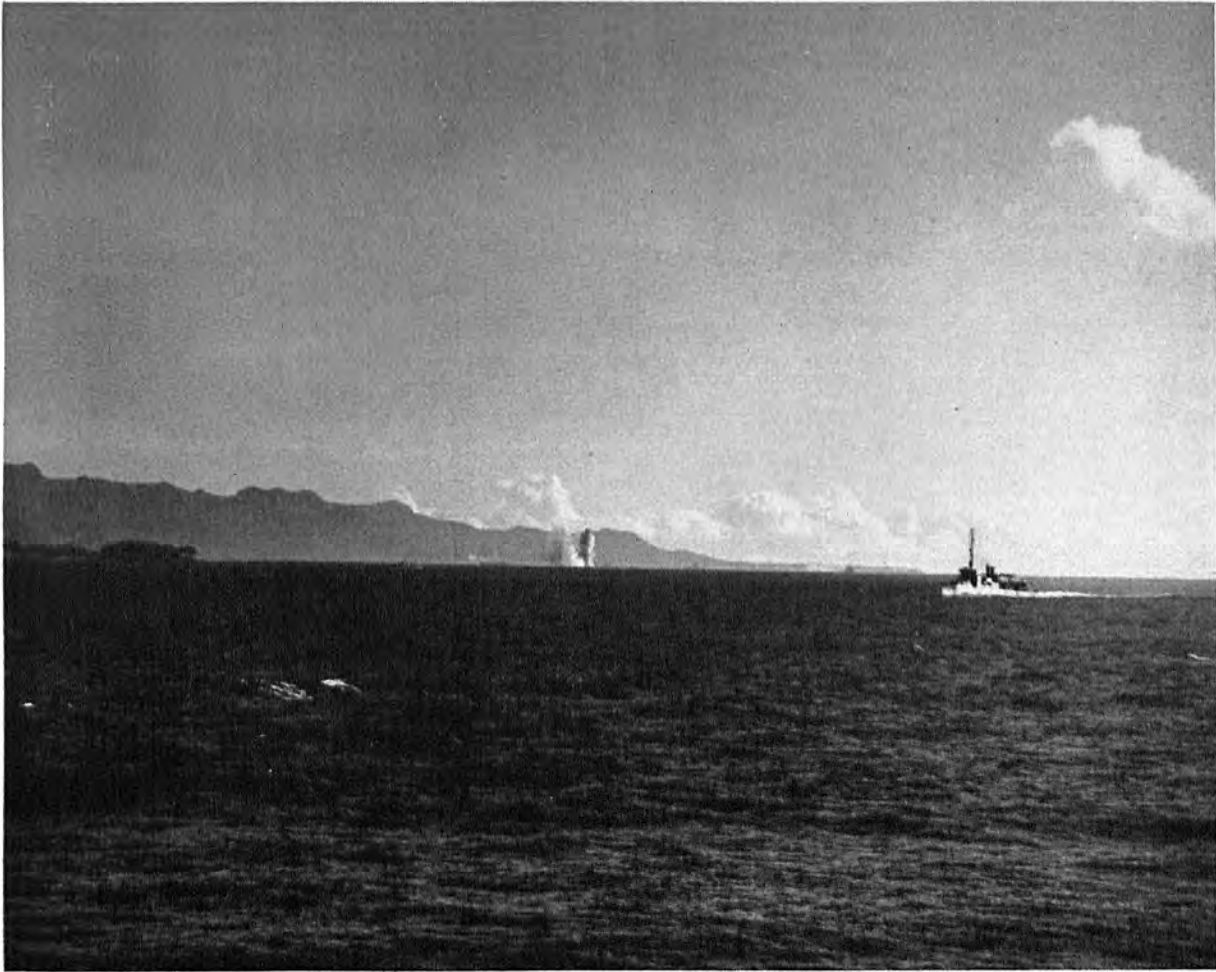
Enemy retaliation on D-Day was limited to repeated dive bombing and strafing attacks, causing some materiel damage. The first occurred at 0759, with the Japanese using six bombers and eleven fighters. Some two hours later, approximately 14 enemy planes slipped through the American combat air patrol. Shortly after noon 11 bombers and 48 fighters struck the beachhead and the LCI's, then retiring from the area. At 1730, just before the LST's were ready to retract, eight bombers and 45 fighters made an attack on the ships. Throughout the day the Japanese lost 17 planes, the Americans 12 killed (3 Marines) and 40 wounded (12 Marines).<sup>23</sup>

By nightfall General McClure had ashore 4,600 troops and 2,300 tons of supplies of all classes, sufficient to maintain the force for 15 days. Three units of fire had been landed for all weapons except the Marine 90mm anti-aircraft guns, which had one Marine Corps unit (300 rounds per gun). The soldiers had set up a strong perimeter defense behind which

<sup>21</sup> III AmphFor, AR, 4-5; BrigGen E. E. Brown ltr to CMC, 15Mar52; LtCol Howard H. Bengel ltr to CMC, Mar52.

<sup>22</sup> Bengel ltr; 4thDefBn, Operations, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 47-48; Brown ltr; Bengel ltr. Five of the enemy planes were claimed by Special Weapons Group guns mounted on the decks of the LST's. (LtCol C. T. Hodges ltr to CMC 21Mar42).



**NUMEROUS AIR RAIDS** opposed the Allied landing on Vella Lavella on 15 August. Ships of the destroyer screen watched helplessly as enemy bombs dropped dangerously close to landing craft on the beach. Fortunately, these raids resulted in little materiel damage and few casualties. (Navy Photo.)

the 4th Defense Battalion, with the assistance of the Seabees, had rapidly emplaced sixteen .50-calibre and sixteen .30-calibre machine guns, eight 20mm, eight 40mm and four 90mm guns for antiaircraft and beach protection. The 58th Seabees, although in their first combat operation, had already begun work clearing the jungle in preparation for construction of an airstrip. McClure was ready—come what may.<sup>24</sup>

That night, at a conference in Rabaul, Admiral Kusaka proposed that General Imamura send a battalion to Barakoma to effect a counterlanding. Imamura, a realist, demurred; commitment of only one battalion against Mc-

Clure's 4,600 men would be "like pouring water on a hot stone." Moreover, only two days previously Imperial Headquarters had directed that Japanese forces in the Central Solomons should fall back slowly, reduce Allied strength as much as possible, and finally defend Rabaul to the last. Thus, General McClure faced no serious opposition during his seizure and defense of the beachhead,<sup>25</sup> although convoys bringing in additional troops or supplies underwent air attack.

By 1 September, just two days before the amphibious phase of the operation ended, the 4th Defense Battalion's 90mm antiaircraft guns were credited with destroying 20 enemy planes since D-Day. The Battalion's Special

<sup>24</sup> III AmphFor, AR, 6; 4thDefBn, AR, 2-3; McClure ltr; LtCol D. E. Munson ltr to CMC, 11Mar52; Col M. I. Shuford ltr to CMC, 4Mar52.

<sup>25</sup> *Southcast Area Naval Operations*, II, 48.

Weapons Group claimed 11 more in the same period. The Marines also had installed two 155mm gun batteries, thus assuring defense against surface attack.<sup>26</sup>

In the first 15 days of September Japanese aircraft made 42 separate raids—mostly after dark—on the beachhead, thus giving the Marines plenty of activity. The teamwork evinced by the searchlight battery, with the Special Weapons Group and the 90mm batteries, resulted in the positive destruction at night alone of three of the intruders, while the Marines suffered only 16 men wounded plus some slight damage to searchlights, radars, guns and vehicles.<sup>27</sup>

On 18 September the 3d New Zealand Division (Major General H. E. Barrowclough)

<sup>26</sup> III AmphFor, AR, 12; 4thDefBn, AR, 1-4; 4thDefBn ltr of 18Sep43, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Benge ltr.

landed at Barakoma to relieve the 35th Infantry, and on the 21st began a two-pronged drive designed to force the enemy into a pocket on the extreme northwest peninsula of the island. But unexpectedly stubborn resistance slowed the New Zealanders' progress to 200 or 600 yards per day. Not until the night of 5-6 October was the pocketing actually accomplished. The fire of mortars, machine guns and two field batteries registered in the enemy area.

By this time the Japanese, having evacuated Kolombangara, had no further reason to maintain an outpost on Vella Lavella. At midafternoon of the 6th, therefore, a convoy of nine destroyers, five subchasers and three MTB's sailed from the Northern Solomons to pick up the survivors there. Just before midnight this force contacted an American 3-destroyer group under Captain F. B. Walker. In the ensuing naval battle the Japanese lost the *Yugumo*



**CLOUDS OBSCURED VELLA LAVELLA'S PEAKS** as succeeding echelons brought in men and supplies. On 30 August the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry, landed under severe air attack, and joined the 35th Regimental Combat Team, with which it served until the end of the campaign. (Navy Photo.)



**3D NEW ZEALAND DIVISION TROOPS** pour ashore on Vella Lavella to relieve the 35th Regimental Combat Team and the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry. (Army Photo.)

while the Americans lost the *Chevalier*. However, the Japanese succeeded in accomplishing their evacuation mission.

Meanwhile, the 58th NCB had completed its assignment. On 27 September ComAirSols planes landed on the new field at Barakoma to begin operations from that base. Fighters could now protect bombers nearly all the way to Rabaul; bomber crews would give grateful praise to the ground forces for making this protection possible.<sup>28</sup>

After the enemy withdrawal from Vella Lavella, air raids were infrequent and ineffectual. But before this, the Japanese had been over the 4th Defense Battalion positions some 121 times with an undetermined number of planes.

<sup>28</sup> *Combat Narratives*, XI, 47-57; 4thDefBn, AR; Karig, *op. cit.*, 240-243; Morison, *Bismarcks*, 243-252; *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II, 54-56.

The relatively little damage wrought attests to the effectiveness of the Marines' shooting. The 90mm Group claimed 20 kills, while the Special Weapons Group was credited with 19; another three fell victim to the .50-calibres of the Seacoast Artillery Group.

Speaking of the work of the 4th Defense Battalion, General McClure said:

This operation was my first experience with the Marine defense battalions, a very superior organization indeed, with AA, tank AWs and 155 guns. Col Fassett and his command did a superior job. AA Guns were ready in an incredibly brief time and shot down many Jap planes. . . . The two 155mm gun batteries gave essential security to our small and congested beachhead.

That McClure believed that the Vella Lavella operation could have been much shortened and the defenders wiped out is evident, when he says: "Had sufficient landing craft been avail-



**GENERAL BARROWCLOUGH AND COLONEL BROWN** conferring just before the New Zealanders relieved Brown's troops on Vella Lavella. (Army Photo.)

able I could have cut off Jap Forces on Vella with small local amphibious operations." But this is in the realm of speculation. Sufficient landing craft were not available. And the Northern Landing Force had successfully accomplished its mission nonetheless.<sup>29</sup>

### **A BASE OF OPERATIONS** <sup>30</sup>

Even before fighting ceased on Vella Lavella, Admiral Halsey decided to establish a forward Marine Staging Base there. On 17 September

<sup>29</sup> McClure ltr; Shuford ltr; Bengé ltr; 4thDefBn, Operations, 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise cited information for this section was derived from "Report of CO, Corps Troops and Staging Area . . . 17Sep43-8Oct43," 30Jan44.

he ordered the commanding general, I Marine Amphibious Corps (Major General Charles D. Barrett) to take the necessary action. Accordingly Barrett formed a task force (Forward Echelon, Corps Troops) of 27 officers and 850 men under the command of Major Donald M. Schmuck from the following units:<sup>31</sup>

Elements, 77th Naval Construction Battalion  
2d Platoon, Btry A, 3d Special Weapons Battalion

Company A, I Corps Motor Transport Battalion

Companies A and B, Branch 3, 4th Base Depot

Communications Team, III Amphibious Force

Specially detailed officers and troops (from the 3d Mar Div).

Schmuck organized his command, gave it some elementary training and issued orders for the forthcoming operation on 23 September. For the landing, he divided his force into two assault units plus one support unit. One assault unit, embarked in two APD's, would land at H-Hour of D-Day on east coast beaches near Ruravai; the other, embarked in one APD, would land near the mouth of the Juno River. (See Map #17.) At H-plus 1 hour an LST would beach at each landing point to bring in additional troops, supplies, heavy equipment and rolling stock.

The order directed further that the assault troops would provide immediate beachhead security from land or air attack while Seabees unloaded the LST's and cleared roads and dispersal areas inland. The communicators would immediately establish contact via radio with the base at Barakoma and set up a local air-warning system. All individuals were directed to dig foxholes or slit trenches at the first opportunity. The order indicated that ComAir Sols would provide a continuous combat air patrol over the twin beachheads, while destroyers would protect the landing to seaward. After the two landings were completed, all personnel and equipment at the Juno would move northward to Ruravai, where the projected IMAC base would be constructed. H-

<sup>31</sup> CG, IMAC ltr to Maj Schmuck, 17Sep43.

Hour was set at 0700; D-Day would be 25 September.<sup>32</sup>

Escorted by six destroyers, the small convoy sailed from Guadalcanal at noon, 23 September, and conducted a practice landing at Tetere Beach. That night it pushed northward without incident.

Early in the morning of 25 September Schmuck received information that led to some necessary last-minute changes in his plan. Reports of reconnaissance patrols operating out of General McClure's beachhead on Vella Lavella disclosed that the target beaches at Ruravai were unsuitable for Higgins boats. All troops and equipment embarked in the APD's, therefore, would have to land at the Juno

River mouth. The LST's, however, could beach without difficulty. At H-minus 1 hour, then, Schmuck made the required change. Fortunately, this word was passed in ample time and so no serious consequences resulted.

As channels and beaches in northern Vella Lavella were unmarked, the ships found the designated landing points only with great difficulty. But despite this obstacle the troops began landing at 0700 as scheduled.

By 0720 all assault troops were ashore and the APD's were unloaded. At this time, Schmuck turned over command of the Juno area to his executive, Captain R. E. Patterson, then, at the head of one company, set out along the coast for Ruravai to secure it for the LST scheduled to land there. He arrived just before

<sup>32</sup> IMAC Warning Order 18-43, 22Sep43.



**4TH DEFENSE BATTALION 155MM GUN**, emplaced near Barakoma, is prepared to give General McClure's Northern Landing Force seacoast protection. The Marines' eight Long Toms never had a chance to fire at a live target, but were ready to do so if necessary. (Air Force Photo.)





**90MM ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS** such as this played a vital role in the Central Solomons campaign. After these guns were installed, troops on the ground enjoyed a sense of security against highflying enemy planes, particularly at night, or at times when foul weather grounded friendly aircraft.

the vessel beached, and all operations continued as planned. By 1115 most of the vehicles were ashore, anti-aircraft and truck-mounted guns in position and manned, and unloading and dispersal of bulk cargo was well under way. The destroyer screen, hull down on the horizon, bobbed up and down in the gentle swell.

Suddenly aircraft spotters at points of vantage near Ruravai, shouted a warning. Fifteen enemy dive bombers, covered by 20 ZEKES, were attacking the destroyer screen. All hands immediately manned guns and stood by to watch the show. And then the Japanese planes winged over to head directly out of the sun for the beaches.

Gun crews opened with heavy fire. Soon one dive bomber burst into flame and plunged into the sea. But the other planes continued to bore in and dropped 500-pound bombs on the beach and on LST 167 at Ruravai. Two other dive bombers crashed into the jungle, while a fourth, trailing smoke, wheeled out of sight. Now every man was firing a weapon or assisting with crew-served guns. One bomb destroyed a 40mm gun; another wiped out the crew of a second. Without delay the Marines formed a composite crew and put the second gun back into action.

By this time the ZEKES were sweeping in low to strafe the beaches or the now burning LST. Despite flaming oil, exploding ammunition and the strafing, the Marines continued to fight with every weapon until the last plane disappeared. At this moment the combat air

patrol arrived to engage the enemy in a running fight which cleared the skies.

Schmuck's force suffered heavy damage and casualties at Ruravai. Exploding ammunition made evacuation and salvage difficult. Lack of roads plus the narrowness of the beach forced trucks carrying wounded to pass directly in front of the flaming ship. Nevertheless, an aid station was soon set up and a deep trench dug to shelter the wounded in the event the Japanese should attack again.

Small boats began to transport the 58 wounded southward along the shore to a New Zealand field hospital. Later that night the 32 dead were taken to the cemetery at Barakoma. That casualties were not greater on the crowded beaches attests to Schmuck's foresight in insisting that foxholes be dug as soon as the troops reached shore. As he developed his beachheads, he had directed wide dispersion of troops and supplies. The attack of some 35 planes against less than 900 troops therefore achieved much less success than the enemy might have hoped.<sup>33</sup>

After this raid Schmuck made a quick survey of the damage and directed that work proceed as before. The Seabees went ahead with road and LST landing-point construction. Marine guards rode the heavy equipment to protect the operators because of the presence of Japanese stragglers in the area. Patrols moved out to keep the enemy at a distance from the beachhead, one of these capturing three prisoners without any difficulty.

As hostile planes attacked his position each day, and as he never received adequate warning of these attacks, Schmuck requested additional anti-aircraft support. Accordingly at 0700, 28 September, LCT's bearing Battery A, 70th Coast Artillery (90mm AA), arrived at the Juno beaches and reported to Schmuck for duty. To make use of this unit's radar and in order that the soldiers could give heavy anti-aircraft protection to both his beachheads, the major moved the newly arrived battery to Narowai Plantation, midway between Ruravai and Juno. The battery went into position and began operations the next morning.

<sup>33</sup> Casualty statistics furnished by HQMC Statistical Section, 14Apr50.

At 0930 on 1 October, as LST's disgorged additional troops and supplies (including Lieutenant Colonel Victor H. Krulak's 2d Parachute Battalion, FMF), a large formation of enemy fighters and dive bombers again raided the American beaches. This time the Narowai beach area suffered heavily. Here two 500-pound bombs hit the LST 448 and set it afire. Others, dropping in dispersal areas and on defenses, caused many casualties among gun crews and working parties. Although the burning ship made the beach useless, and wounded men, wreckage and bursting bombs caused confusion, the well-led soldiers succeeded in shooting down one plane.

At 1000 the Japanese tried again. This time one bomb hit LST 334, still on the beach at Ruravai, causing light damage. At 1435 they struck a third time, now with 60 planes. But the combat air patrol was on station and only a few dive bombers penetrated the screen to lay another egg on the still burning LST 448. Finally at 1900 the fourth and last attack of the day destroyed five heavy trucks and three jeeps.

Following the destruction of LST 448 at Ruravai, Admiral Wilkinson directed Colonel Fassett to confer with III Amphibious Force Marine and Navy liaison officers to determine ways and means of avoiding further such losses. The officers made a thorough investigation and finally agreed that all resupply ships for Vella Lavella should unload at Barakoma under the protection of the 4th Defense Battalions' anti-aircraft guns. That materiel destined for delivery to Schmuck, who obviously had insufficient weapons to protect nearly immobile ships on the beach, could be carried

northward by truck. Accordingly, the officers so recommended and Admiral Wilkinson promptly approved.

To cover the unloading of future resupply convoys, Fassett decided to employ every anti-aircraft weapon available to him, including all his spares and eight 40mm guns borrowed from the New Zealanders. Corpsmen, cooks, communicators and clerks turned to, building emplacements, setting up guns, establishing communications, happily getting ready to meet a continuing air assault on Barakoma. They expected to have fun when it came, but they were doomed to disappointment.

Although the Japanese resumed their attacks on Ruravai, striking on the 3d and again on the 6th of October, they assiduously avoided Barakoma, evidently remembering the hot receptions they had received there in September. Thenceforward, LST's landed and unloaded cargo at Barakoma without mishap, while at Ruravai wide dispersal, heavy anti-aircraft fire from the Army battery, and an effective combat air patrol kept damage and casualties from hostile air attacks at a minimum.<sup>34</sup>

By 8 October the Corps Staging Area could be considered secure. On that date, therefore, Schmuck's command was dissolved and his troops either returned to their parent organization or incorporated into the permanent organization designed to operate the base. During its two weeks in the area, the force had lost 149 men in dead, wounded or missing. Half of these had occurred on the first day, before the 90mm guns were installed and when the combat air patrol had not been on station.

<sup>34</sup> Shuford ltr.



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER VI

# The Role of Aviation<sup>1</sup>

From the Allied aviator's viewpoint, the Central Solomons campaign was only an incidental phase in the over-all effort to reduce Rabaul to impotency. Nor does the Solomons air war in 1943 follow a clearly defined pattern and fall into distinct phases inaugurated by a D-Day and concluded by a date of securing a bit of terrain, as does the ground war.

For Marine, Army, Navy and New Zealand pilots, the Central Solomons campaign began long before JCS approval of the TOENAILS operation, and as far as pilots themselves were concerned the directive simply told them to do what they were already doing. Selection of a starting place for our story of the role of aviation in this campaign therefore must be necessarily arbitrary. L-Day (30 June 1943) is as good a place to begin as any other.

#### DELINEATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

On the Allied side, the air war during the TOENAILS operation was conducted by Com AirSols (Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher), a truly unified force formed as early as 15 February and staffed by representatives of each air service based on Guadalcanal. Under the general direction of ComAirSoPac (Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch), Admiral Mitscher on 30

June controlled some 12 fighting squadrons (290 planes), 20 mixed-typed bombing squadrons (294 planes) plus a miscellaneous force of about 42 planes for search, rescue and service missions.<sup>2</sup> Mitscher's organization was divided into three subordinate commands: Bomber, Fighter and Strike.

Bomber Command, primarily the Thirteenth Air Force, less its fighters but augmented by Navy, Marine Corps and New Zealand bombers, conducted long-range day or night bombing missions against enemy surface forces, ground installations and troop concentrations. For its work, this command employed B-17's (Fortresses), B-24's (Liberators), B-25's (Mitchells), B-26's (Marauders), PBO's (Hudsons) and PBY's (Catalinas).

Fighter Command, made up of all fighting squadrons based on Guadalcanal and in the Russells, on 30 June included VMF's 121, 122, 213 and 221, one New Zealand, five Navy and two Army squadrons. Flying F4F's (Wildcats), P-38's (Lightnings), P-39's (Airacobras), P-40's (Warhawks), the new F4U's (Corsairs) and F6F's (Hellcats), this command was responsible for maintenance of combat air patrols, interception of enemy planes, and protection of bombers on sorties over the Central and Northern Solomons.

Nine squadrons, including VMSB's 132 and 144, usually flying TBF's (Avengers) or SBD's

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all information on which this chapter is based was extracted from ComSoPac, Weekly Air Combat Intelligence reports, or from war diaries of the various squadrons participating in the actions described.

<sup>2</sup> TF-33 OpnPlan 7-43, Annex A.

(Dauntlesses), comprised Strike Command, responsible for attacking nearby enemy bases or shipping and giving what then was considered close support to front-line units. Generally reinforced by planes of Fighter or Bomber Command, this force carried the burden of the Allied air effort against the enemy.

Some 40-odd additional squadrons<sup>3</sup> to the rear at bases such as Espiritu Santo, Efati, New Caledonia, and Samoa were prepared to provide approximately 669 planes for commitment in the Central Solomons on 30 June.

To provide for an efficient and workable air Command organization ashore after the seizure of a beachhead in the New Georgia area, Admiral Turner set up ComAir New Georgia, a subcommand of the New Georgia Occupation Force. This new command, entrusted to Brigadier General Francis P. Mulcahy, Commanding General of the 2d Marine Air Wing, would exercise operational control over all aircraft in flight assigned to air cover and support missions in the immediate vicinity of the assault. Using personnel of his Wing's headquarters, Mulcahy formed a skeletal staff to assist him in his operations.

Thus, ComAirSols was the organization that conducted the Solomons air war during the TOENAILS operation, while ComAir New Georgia was the organization responsible for the control of direct support missions.<sup>4</sup>

### PREPARATION FOR THE OFFENSIVE

When, in early December 1942, the Japanese revealed that they were building new forward airstrips at Munda and Vila, Guadalcanal-based aircraft began making almost daily raids there to impede construction and prevent enemy utilization of the new fields.

By April the incessant attacks by Bomber and Strike Command had reached such a crescendo that Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto decided to take violent countermeasures. But

<sup>3</sup> Including the following Marine units, which either in whole or in part at one time or another served in the TOENAILS operation: VMF's 111, 112, 123, 124, 214, 215, 441; VMSB's 131, 141, 142, 143, 233, 234, 241; VMTB-143; VMO-251; VMD-154; MAG's 13 and 25.

<sup>4</sup> 2dMAW, SAR; 2dMAW, WD, June 1943; TF-31, OpnPlan AS-43; Fighter Command, RE; Strike Command, RE.



**MAJOR GENERAL RALPH J. MITCHELL**, senior Marine aviator in the Solomons, furnished many of the planes and pilots for the various Central Solomons operations. General Mitchell later relieved General Twining as ComAirSols. (Navy Photo.)

his all-out air offensive, dubbed the "I" Operation, collapsed when Fighter Command intercepted each strike and inflicted tremendous losses.<sup>5</sup>

Yamamoto himself fell victim to ComAirSols on the 18th. The previous day ComSoPac had learned of an intercepted message revealing that the Japanese commander would be flying to Buin on an inspection trip. Fighter Command prepared a welcoming committee of 16 Lightnings, which greeted Yamamoto's entourage of two BETTYS and nine ZEROS, shot down the bombers and splashed three of the fighters, at the cost of one Lightning and its pilot.

After this the tempo of American aerial activity increased still more while, with the exception of heavy attacks on 25 April, 13 May, 7 and 16 June, the enemy's sorties were weak and sporadic.

<sup>5</sup> Fighter Command, Interception of Enemy Dive Bombing Attack Against Shipping, Tulagi Harbor and Vicinity; Craven and Cate, *op. cit.*



**COLONEL CHRISTIAN F. SCHILT** commanded Strike Command for ComAirSols throughout the TOENAILS operation.

Admiral Fitch issued his directive for the employment of aircraft in the TOENAILS operation on 18 June. Developed at a series of conferences in Noumea, Auckland and Espiritu Santo between Fitch, Turner and Mulcahy, this plan provided that ComAirSols would destroy all enemy units threatening the South Pacific Force and conduct the usual search, escort, reconnaissance and photographic missions. In addition to covering Task Force 31 during the approach and withdrawal stages of the operation, ComAirSols would maintain a minimum of 18 dive bombers on ground alert in the Russells for immediate employment by Turner.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the South Pacific's combat air transport command, composed principally of MAG-25, not only moved troops and supplies into Guadalcanal for the coming invasion, but also made plans to participate actively. Throughout the TOENAILS operation, SCAT—as it was fondly known—dropped supplies to isolated ground units, or moved men and materiel in to newly captured airstrips. On re-

<sup>6</sup> ComAir New Georgia, AR; Sherrod *ms.*; TF-33 OpnPlan 7-43.

turn trips, the planes would be loaded with evacuees. So effective was SCAT's eventual contribution that it became known in the Solomons as the "Burma Road of the Air."<sup>7</sup>

Despite the mounting effort on the part of Strike and Bomber Commands, and regardless of the heavy enemy losses in their forays into the Southern Solomons, Admiral Kusaka and General Imamura built up their air strength in the Northern Solomons. In June the Eleventh Air Fleet and Fourth Air Army reached a combined strength of approximately 212 effective planes from a figure of about 150 the previous January.<sup>8</sup> As we have seen in Chapter III, the Japanese airmen were ready to meet the American amphibious assault when it came.

## THE INVASION

In New Georgia, aircraft participated on a much larger scale than in any previous operation, and the problems faced were correspondingly more difficult of solution. But these air forces had better training and more experience than the force that assaulted Guadalcanal. Fitch's staff had made good use of the spring-time to plan and prepare. From its inception in mid-February until the landings on Rendova, ComAirSols had profited from almost daily contact with the enemy.

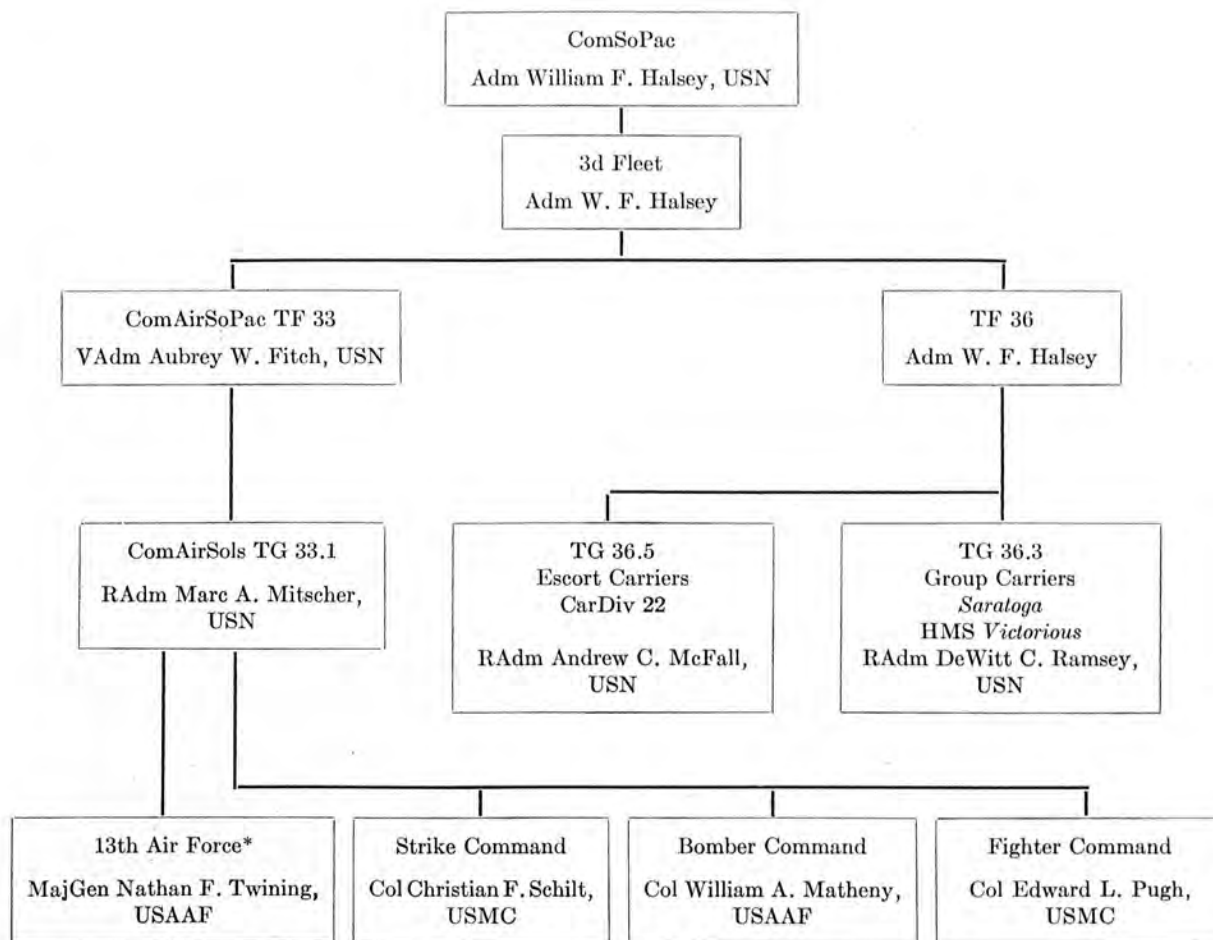
As Turner sailed into Blanche Channel and began pouring troops ashore, ComAirSols planes from Guadalcanal and Russells fields were aloft to assure the force of adequate air cover. The night before ComAir New Georgia and staff had embarked at Koli Point in the flagship *McCawley* and the transport *Adams*. Today at 0830 they followed the infantry ashore and, as but few Japanese had been encountered by the landing force, soon had a headquarters operating. Overhead the combat air patrol began the first of its many busy days of interception of enemy attacks. Only on 14 and 29 July did the days pass without a Condition Red.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Maj W. K. Snyder ltr to CMC, 13Mar52.

<sup>8</sup> *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul, passim*. The pinnacle was reached in March when about 250 Japanese planes were available. The 212 figure is doubly amazing when one considers the tremendous losses of March, April and May. (*Campaigns*, 162.)

<sup>9</sup> ComAir New Georgia, AR.

SOUTH PACIFIC AVIATION ORGANIZATION FOR THE  
TOENAILS OPERATION



(\*) In the Solomons, 13th Air Force flew under the operational control of ComAirSols; 13th Air Force contributed aircraft to ComAirSols' Fighter and Bomber Commands.

Fighter Command claimed destruction of 101 enemy planes (52 ZEROS, 30 BETTYS, 18 RUFES and 1 SALLY) on 30 June alone, with the loss of but 14 Allied fighters, seven light bombers and six pilots. On the other hand, enemy contemporary and postwar records acknowledge the loss of only 17 bombers and 13 fighters, while claiming destruction of 50 Allied planes. Whereas Turner's force lost only one transport sunk and two destroyers damaged, the enemy claimed the sinking of

one cruiser and two destroyers, plus damage to eight transports and two destroyers.

This enemy defensive action failed to halt the Allied landing on Rendova. Japanese aerial casualties for June (including L-Day), as estimated by ComSoPac's air intelligence, soared to 254 planes. In the same period the Allies had lost only 36 planes and 13 pilots, with the heaviest losses suffered on L-Day. At the end of July Allied interceptors added 170 fighters, 25 bombers, and 20 other types to their claims,



**THIS GRUMMAN "DUCK"** carried General Mulcahy from Rendova to Munda shortly after the airfield was captured. After Mulcahy's arrival, all air operations in the area were conducted from his command post in a cave in Kokengolo Hill.

while admitting the loss of 56 planes.<sup>10</sup> But despite the enemy effort to run the gantlet of Allied fighters and antiaircraft fire, the various New Georgia landings succeeded and at the end of July XIV Corps was poised on the edge of Munda airstrip, ready to seize it and make it an additional base for ComAirSols.

While troops ashore pressed the attack from Rice Anchorage to Bairoko and from Zanana Beach to Munda Point, Strike and Bomber Commands continued to hammer Japanese bases in the Central and Northern Solomons with profitable results. ComAir New Georgia directed those aircraft supporting the infantrymen trying to dislodge the enemy from Munda Point and other Japanese-held areas in the Central Solomons. During the period 30 June through 5 August, General Mulcahy requested 44 close support strikes, only seven of which were not executed in the immediate vicinity of advancing troops. In addition, Mulcahy directed over 1,800 pre-briefed sorties by SBD's, TBF's, B-17's, B-24's and B-25's at targets in the Munda, Bairoko, Enogai, Viru, Wickham and Webster Cove areas.

<sup>10</sup> Fighter Command, RE.

These attacks reached a climax on 25 July, the day Major General Nathan F. Twining, USAAF, succeeded Admiral Mitscher as ComAirSols. After destroyers hurled some 4,500 5- and 6-inch shells into the Lambeti Plantation area, a force of 175 light, medium and heavy bombers dropped approximately 392,000 pounds of explosives and metal in the same general locale. That afternoon 82 bombers put some finishing touches on hostile antiaircraft guns emplaced on Bibilo Hill.<sup>11</sup>

## SHIPPING STRIKES

Reports of increased Japanese shipping in the Northern Solomons inspired a series of daylight raids by Allied planes. On 17 July, for example, 114 fighters covered 78 bombers on a strike at Kihili. When enemy ZEROS intercepted this force over the target area a series of dogfights ensued but nevertheless TBF's and SBD's slipped in fast and low to blast shipping in the harbor. Discrepancies mark the claims of both forces. ComAirSols reported 52 enemy planes downed, four destroyers and an oiler sunk, at a cost of five planes. Japanese postwar records, otherwise unsubstantiated and possibly subject to error, reveal that the enemy suffered 10 planes lost, the destroyer *Hatsuyuki* sunk, and three destroyers damaged. The aircraft destruction claims of Japanese pilots, however, are even more fantastic than those of the Allies: 87 planes shot down!<sup>12</sup>

For its undenied success in night prowls up the Slot, Strike Command could thank its "Black Cats." This plane was a modified version of the versatile Catalina (PBY), painted black and equipped with radar, used for search and antishipping strikes. Because of its long range (round trips of 1400 miles) and low-altitude night flights, it sought and attacked enemy ships not otherwise exposed to the Allies. Whenever the "Black Cat" could not press home an attack itself, it could call on other planes, standing by at friendly fields for just such an exigency. On 19 July, in answer to a Black Cat's call, a flight of six Avengers (TBF's) sank the destroyer *Yugure* and dam-

<sup>11</sup> Strike Command, WD and RE.

<sup>12</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II.

aged the heavy cruiser *Kumano*. The next day B-25's, following up the previous night's raid, skip-bombed the destroyer *Kiyonami*, and sent her to the bottom.

Another shipping strike found the seaplane tender *Nisshin* entering Bougainville Strait, loaded with troops and tanks, and sank her on 22 July. Coordinated strikes by long-range Army bombers worked over enemy installations around Bougainville. Escorted by fighters, including Marine Corsairs, B-17's and B-24's hit the strips at Ballale and Kahili again and again during July and August. Although enemy fields on southern Bougainville lay over 300 miles from Guadalcanal, ComAirSols kept them nearly inoperable.

In cooperation with naval surface units, ComAirSols slowed the flow of Japanese reinforcements to garrisons in the Central Solomons. When the continued strikes effectively reduced the number of enemy high-speed transports that dared venture south, the Japanese

resorted to small, armored barges.<sup>13</sup> If weather did not interfere, coordinated strikes and search patrols sought out and attacked this southward-bound traffic.

Bomber and Strike Command aircraft ranged far to the north to bomb and strafe Ballale, Buin, Kahili and the Shortlands at every opportunity. Concurrent strikes by General Kenny's Fifth Air Force on the Rabaul area materially aided the TOENAILS operation. And while ComAirSols and ComSoWes-Pac aircraft hammered enemy bases, ComAir New Georgia prepared for the coming invasion of Vella Lavella.

### AIR-SURFACE COORDINATION

Throughout the campaign ComAirSols made every effort to give continuing and effective

<sup>13</sup> The most common of which was the Type A, *Daihatsu*, metal-hulled, diesel-powered, 41 to 49 feet long, capable of carrying 100 to 120 men at eight knots.



**UNARMED TRANSPORTS** carried cargo and mail in, and casualties and messengers out, of New Georgia. They set such records for volume and regularity that their route became known as the "Burma Road of the Air." Here a SCAT plane pauses at the Segi Point airfield to discharge a small cargo of mail. Note how the jungle rises from the very edge of the strip.



aerial support to fleet units operating in the Solomons area. Combat air patrols, flying high above surface vessels, performed offensive as well as defensive missions, attacking targets of opportunity with bombs, bullets or torpedos or intercepting strikes by enemy planes. And when friendly and enemy ships joined battle, the American commander generally could call on his supporting planes to strike those foes out of range of naval guns or torpedos, confident that his fighter cover would prevent enemy planes from doing the same thing to him.

Allied naval bombardments were so planned as to take advantage of the availability of air cover. At the beginning of the operation American planners had gone into considerable detail to arrange for air support for Admiral Merrill's bombardment of the Shortlands. Black Cats would serve as eyes for the fleet; a combat air patrol would cover the approach and withdrawal; Strike Command would provide dive and torpedo bombers to augment the ships' fires. Unfortunately weather interfered with this plan, and the combat air patrol had to be withdrawn. However, the Black Cats were out on the night of 29-30 June, and when



LIEUTENANT COLONEL P. O. PARMELEE, air commander, Vella Lavella, confers with Major General Nathan F. Twining, USAAF (left) and Brigadier General Dean C. Strothers, USAAF (right). These three officers continued the air onslaught against the Northern Solomons after capture of Vella Lavella. (Air Force Photo.)

Merrill retired to the south the next morning he charted his course so as to come within range of the fighters covering Turner at Rendova, and take advantage of the protection they could offer.

The combat air patrol engaged in a number of defensive actions also. One instance cited as an example typifies them all, that being the battle of Kula Gulf on 5-6 July. In this engagement a task group commanded by Rear Admiral Walden L. Ainsworth had made contact with a Tokyo Express convoy and, after a violent surface engagement, in which he lost the *Helena*, managed to turn it back.

At the first report of surface contact, Com AirSols alerted Fighter and Strike Commands to prepare to support Ainsworth at daybreak. At first light the next morning some 60 small planes took off to cover the ships' retirement, protect the two destroyers remaining behind to rescue survivors of the *Helena*, and to attack the fleeing enemy.

### COMAIR NEW GEORGIA OPERATIONS

On 14 August 1943, General Mulcahy moved the ComAir New Georgia command Post from Rendova to Munda Point. An advance detail had already set up a fighter control and operations headquarters in a Japanese-built tunnel in Kokengolo Hill, located on one side of the landing strip and within one of the taxi-loops. Although Seabees had previously cleared the tunnel of all debris and dead enemy, the smell was still quite noticeable, and this combined with the extremely high temperature made the need for exhaust fans quite evident. It was a protected location, however, and, being underground, permitted the use of lights at night, thus facilitating a 24-hour work schedule. When the first fighters landed that day at 1500, to report to Mulcahy for duty, ComAir New Georgia was prepared to begin immediate operations.<sup>14</sup>

The first full day of operations from the Munda strip, 15 August, Mulcahy sent his Munda- and Segi-based fighters to cover the landings at Vella Lavella. Twice that day ComAir New Georgia planes intercepted enemy air attacks; twice the Americans turned back

<sup>14</sup> ComAir New Georgia, AR.



**MAJOR ROBERT G. OWENS** lands his F4U in the first scheduled landing on the newly operational airstrip. From this day, 14 August, until the establishment of fields at Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville about three months later, the Munda airstrip became the scene of intense activity as planes landed and took off in the campaign to reduce Rabaul.

the Japanese, claiming 26 kills, admitting the loss of two planes and one pilot. Although Allied shipping suffered only superficial damage, Japanese pilots reported four large transports, one cruiser and one destroyer sunk, four transports damaged, and 29 Allied aircraft destroyed. The enemy acknowledged the loss of 17 planes.<sup>15</sup>

From 16 to 19 August enemy shells fell on Munda airfield during the day; hostile aircraft harassed the area at night. The former hazard was terminated on the 19th with the capture of Baanga Island, but the air raids persisted and fighter sweeps from Kahili continued to strike Barakoma, where the air warning system was still incomplete. Although ComAirSols intercepted most of the enemy strikes over the target area, some Japanese planes succeeded in slipping through the screen for ineffectual

bombing and strafing runs. The enemy paid dearly for these strikes. In the week ending 4 September, for example, ComAirSoPac estimated Japanese losses at 58 planes.

On 24 August Colonel William O. Brice, the new commanding officer of Fighter Command, moved his command post to Munda field and relieved ComAir New Georgia of responsibility for control of fighter aircraft operating there. Three days later Mulcahy organized a detachment of his operations section as an Acting Strike Command to coordinate the activities of all liaison, spotting, or visiting strike aircraft using Munda.

In August the air war cost the foe an estimated 220 planes destroyed, bringing the total for the past three months to 704. Despite these losses and the increased pace of Allied attacks against enemy fields in the Northern Solomons and the Rabaul area, the number of naval planes available to the Rabaul command was

<sup>15</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations, II; Combat Narratives, XI, 21-22.*



**WITH ENEMY OPPOSITION CLEARED FROM WESTERN NEW GEORGIA**, the ComAir New Georgia command post moved above ground. To the right rises a semi-permanent "Quonset Hut," while to the left is the sand-bagged sick-bay and hospital.

kept at approximately July's level by continual reinforcement and replacement. General Ima-mura, however, decided to move his Fourth Air Army out of Rabaul. But in the long run this had little effect on the course of Japanese operations. Admiral Kusaka's Eleventh Air Fleet had long been responsible for the defense of the Solomons area, and the help it had received from the handful of Fourth Air Army planes had been negligible.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout September Kusaka's planes continued to harass and damage Guadalcanal, Munda and Barakoma. On 14 September, therefore, ComAirSols launched an all-out campaign to make the enemy's southern Bougainville fields inoperable, and impede Kusaka's effort.

### MISSION COMPLETED

At this time the dwindling number of ground support missions and the recognized predominance of air missions permitted removal of

ComAir New Georgia from New Georgia Occupation Force control. On 23 September, the day of the first successful landings and take-offs from the new Barakoma field, Brigadier General James T. Moore relieved General Mulcahy and became a new Task Unit commander under ComAirSols. A program of stepped-up activity, applying direct and aggressive pressure on southern Bougainville soon got underway. Introduction of radar-sighted SB-24's in late August aided this effort by permitting increased night bombing of Japanese shipping, especially barges. In September ComAirSols reported the damage or destruction of 68 such barges.<sup>17</sup>

Japanese losses continued to mount. When the enemy began to evacuate their Central Solomons garrisons at the end of September and the beginning of October, ComAirSols teamed with Admiral Halsey's PT boats and destroyers to sink three small ships and destroy 56 barges.

<sup>16</sup> *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, 46-50, 83-84.

<sup>17</sup> Craven and Cate, *op. cit.*; ComAir New Georgia, AR.

The effectivity of the air offensive became evident by mid-October. Japanese planes made fewer raids and the number of enemy aircraft sighted at southern Bougainville fields dropped from 446 on 2 October to 338 on 16 October. Despite this, Japanese interceptors made Allied air sweeps over Bougainville anything but an easy run. The enemy ferried in new replacements whenever they could and continued construction and repair of fields at Kara, Buka and Bonis. But the cumulative weight of the ComAirSols attacks caused replacements to lag behind losses.

As the Allied drive neared New Britain, the Japanese apparently decided it was wiser to concentrate aircraft there rather than expend them in a hopeless attempt to hold the Solomons. They increased the number of planes based at Rabaul at the expense of outlying fields, and shifted them about as needed to meet the various Allied thrusts. Aerial reconnaissance revealed that despite SoWesPac's heavy raids of 12 and 18 October, Rabaul could still contribute 116 fighters, 72 medium bombers and 23 light bombers for its own defense. Although reduced from its May and June levels, this force was still formidable.

On 20 October 1943 ComAirSols displaced forward to Munda and began operations from

that strip. The purpose of the Central Solomons campaign had been served: Admiral Halsey had moved up the Solomons Ladder, closer to Rabaul, and was now in position to undertake the neutralization of that Japanese base. But Rabaul itself was still an ever-present danger to Allied intentions in the South and Southwest Pacific; two more campaigns would have to be fought, one in each area, before Rabaul was completely neutralized and bypassed.

*Aircraft Losses in the Solomons-Bismarcks*

1943	Japanese Figures		Allied Figures	
	Japanese	Allied *	Japanese	Allied
Feb. . .	26	158	40	30
Mar. . .	6	47	8	.....
Apr. . .	33	148	69	20
May. . .	7	73	21	13
Jun. . .	84	195	266	43
Jul. . .	52	295	218	57
Aug. . .	42	187	220	19
Sep. . .	31	226	152	45
Oct. . .	37	117	163	24

\* Including Allied aircraft downed by antiaircraft fire over Rabaul.



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

# CHAPTER VII

# Epilogue

### THE ASSESSMENT

The first week in October marked the end of the TOENAILS operation. After a strenuous three-month campaign, South Pacific forces were firmly entrenched in the Central Solomons. To what end had this campaign been fought? What had the Allies gained? What had been the cost?

Stated simply, Admiral Halsey had undertaken the operation to advance U. S. air power toward Rabaul. It was necessarily a step-by-step project at this stage of the war because of the lack of aircraft carriers. In seizing the Central Solomons the United States acquired a series of unsinkable carriers. From two fields in the Russells, Allied planes not only covered Admiral Halsey's northward advance but also intercepted Japanese air strikes against the Guadalcanal-Tulagi base. At Segi Point, Seabees constructed a fighter strip within ten days of the 4th Raider Battalion's landing. Initially this field provided a haven for crippled planes returning from strikes in the north; later it harbored a small brood of fighter aircraft on which the New Georgia Occupation Force could call for immediate support. Once seized, Munda Field likewise became quickly operational; while infantry units fought for possession of Kokengolo and Bibilo Hills, Seabees and engineers began repairing the runway's eastern extremity, and by 14 August, only nine days

after capture, had completed enough work to receive the first American planes. On 27 September another group of Seabees put the airfield at Barakoma into business.

Throttling the Tokyo Express was equally important with advancement of the bomber line toward Rabaul. Allied aircraft in cooperation with PT boats operating from the Russells, or Rendova or from Lever Harbor, and with other combatant surface vessels operating out of Tulagi, struck the Express time after time. Finally, the Japanese were forced to adopt the expedient of replacing the destroyers of the Express with barges. When this occurred, PT's working closely with night-flying Black Cats sortied into the Slot on barge-killer hunts and achieved a high degree of success. Thus Japanese troops in the Central Solomons were denied badly needed supplies, reinforcements and evacuation. By the same token, as a result of this campaign Allied surface forces roamed with greater freedom of action farther and farther up the road to Rabaul.<sup>1</sup>

The campaign also increased the steady pressure on Rabaul, thus prohibiting General Ima-mura and Admiral Kusaka from grouping to launch a strong counteroffensive elsewhere in the South or Southwest Pacific areas. This pressure required the enemy commanders to concentrate in considerable strength in front of

<sup>1</sup> FltAdm E. J. King, First Official Report to SecNav, 1Mar44 (543-544 in *War Reports*).

the Allied advance, slow as it was, and expend planes, ships, men and materiel in an abortive effort to turn the tide. With the fall of Munda, Barakoma, Lae and Salamaua, coupled with their defeat in the North Pacific, Imperial General Headquarters realized that Rabaul no longer was an effective position. Before the end of September, therefore, the Japanese shortened their front line of defense from the trace Aleutians - Wake - Marshalls - Gilberts - Nauru - Ocean - Bismarcks - northern New Guinea - Timor - Java - Sumatra - Nicobar - Andamans, to the trace Kuriles - Marianas - Carolines - north-western New Guinea - Timor - Java - Sumatra.<sup>2</sup>

Although Imperial Headquarters had drawn a new line, local commanders in "abandoned" areas did not always follow that policy. No troops on the old front lines were withdrawn, and in some instances reinforcements were sent in despite the new policy. Even Admiral Koga made major departures from it, the most notable of which was when he sent carrier planes from Truk to Rabaul as late as November 1943.<sup>3</sup>

The most immediate beneficial effects of the TOENAILS operation, of course, were the tremendous losses inflicted on Japanese aircraft, naval vessels and materiel. But not to be discounted is the fact that the Allies were now firmly entrenched in forward positions that covered their defensive deployment in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas. Then too, these same positions soon became strong, well-supplied bases, whose excellent location provided sites from which to launch the successful offensive of the southern arm of the Allies great sweep across the Pacific.<sup>4</sup>

From the Allied point of view the Central Solomons campaign ended in far from a Pyrrhic victory. All these major advantages had been gained at a cost of only 1136 casualties,<sup>5</sup> the *McCawley*, *Helena*, *Strong*, *Gwin*, *Chevalier* and three LST's sunk, and 141 planes lost (including both combat and operational losses). Japanese losses cannot be determined exactly.

<sup>2</sup> *Campaigns*, 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Army Cofs ltr to CMC, 21Mar52.

<sup>4</sup> Adm R. K. Turner ltr to CMC, 19Mar52.

<sup>5</sup> These figures are incomplete and include Army and Navy statistics only. For Marine Corps casualty figures, see Appendix III. Cf. Morison, *Bismarcks*, 224.



**ADMIRAL HALSEY AND GENERAL GRISWOLD** return to Rendova from an inspection of positions on New Georgia made during a visit the Admiral paid to the forward area in September. It was during this trip that Halsey briefed Griswold on the coming Bougainville operation. (Army Photo.)

They expended 19 vessels and approximately 728 planes in attempting to hold the Central Solomons. Their losses in men and materiel, including losses at sea in abortive sorties down the gantlet of the slot, reached tremendous proportions.<sup>6</sup>

Yet withal, great credit for an excellent defense of the Central Solomons must be given to General Sasaki. With a relatively small force and little effective support by Japanese sea and air power, he had contained the advance of three reinforced and strongly supported U. S. Divisions;<sup>7</sup> moreover, he had evacuated the bulk of his troops when the posi-

<sup>6</sup> *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, II; JANAC, *Japanese Shipping Losses*; USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*; ComSoPac, Weekly Air Combat Intelligence Reports.

<sup>7</sup> 25th, 37th and 43rd InfDivs supported by 3d NZ Div, 1st Marine Raider Regiment, and 4th, 9th, 10th and 11th DefBns, FMF, plus other Army, Navy and Marine Corps units.



**MAJOR GENERAL NOBORU SASAKI**, commander of the Japanese Southeast Detached Force, whose brilliant defense of the Central Solomons materially delayed Admiral Halsey's march toward Rabaul. (Morison Project.)

tion became untenable, thereby enabling them to fight again.<sup>8</sup>

### THE BIG LESSON

In the various Solomon Islands campaigns true and workable unification of the services reached a pinnacle unmatched previously. And in the TOENAILS operation Admiral Halsey demanded it. Admiral Turner went a step further and wrote into his operation plan:

Under the principle of unity of command, the commander *NEW GEORGIA Occupation Force* will command all land, sea and air units assigned to that Force. Similarly, Army Commanding Officers of each occupied position will command land, sea, and air units assigned to that position. Administrative responsibility is direct to the usual duly constituted administrative authorities of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Allied Services. Command of the *NEW*

<sup>8</sup> Troops of the Kure 6th and Yokosuka 7th SNLF, and the 13th Infantry fought later at Bougainville.

*GEORGIA Occupation Force* will pass from Commander Task Force 31 to other military authorities when so directed by the Commander Third Fleet.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the operation, therefore, inter-service bickering and petty argument were nearly unknown. All hands were in New Georgia to do a job, not to discuss service politics or to propagandize by making insidious remarks or grandiose claims. New Georgia demonstrated that the Army, Navy and Marine Corps could work together. The three services were a team, and as a team they accomplished their mutual mission.

The Marine Corps portion of the team, itself the embodiment of unification, moulded itself into the team concept without the slightest difficulty. Marine aviators proved that the uniform worn by the commander had no influence on the effectiveness of Marine air. Marine tankmen, artillerymen and antiaircraft gunners of the defense battalions, interested only in doing a good job, gave equal support to Army and Navy as to Marine troops.

The interdependence of the services was the most obvious of the lessons redemonstrated in the Central Solomons. Planes themselves cannot seize and hold a ground target; this must be accomplished by ground troops. Ground troops need surface transportation, which, in turn, requires air cover. Furthermore, amphibious operations should have both air and naval gunfire support. The amphibious operation is essential to seize and hold a forward airstrip. Thus, each service depends upon the support of each of the others.

### TOENAILS vs. WATCHTOWER

Allied operations in the Munda area were strikingly similar to the Japanese attempts to retake Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. In 1942 the Japanese landed on two sides of their objective and, after an extended overland movement, built up strength on one front to strike the Henderson Field perimeter in October with a two-pronged assault. In 1943 the United States adopted precisely the same tactics at Munda. In 1942 the Japanese enjoyed air and sea superiority during the initial stages of their attack; through exercise of this superiority they denied

<sup>9</sup> TF-31 OpnPlan A8-43, 10.

a steady flow of supplies and reinforcements to Marines besieged on Guadalcanal. In 1943 the Allies enjoyed that superiority and with it effectively throttled the activities of the Tokyo Express; moreover, continuous harassment of the enemy (a tactic employed by the Japanese the preceding year) was possible. In 1942 Japanese ships leisurely bombarded American positions; in 1943 the situation was reversed. Therein, however, the similarity ends.

At Guadalcanal the Japanese used the airstrip (Henderson Field) as the sole objective, and expended most of their efforts in vain attempts to retake it. In New Georgia, the Allies attacked not only the Munda strip but also the vulnerable enemy supply lines.

Equally worthy of consideration is another important difference between the Guadalcanal and New Georgia campaigns: The separate atti-

tudes of the opposing forces in evaluation of enemy potential. In 1942 the Japanese with their propensity for underestimation felt that very few American troops held Guadalcanal; a graver error was their failure to take into account the tenacity and courage of the Marine defenders. In 1943, Admiral Turner, who had learned his Guadalcanal lessons well, insisted on overwhelming superiority in men, planes, and ships, before undertaking a campaign against a stubborn enemy. The inelasticity of Japanese plans, permitting no deviation, obviated the possibility of coordination when elements involved in an attack failed or were retarded in their respective missions. More imaginative Americans, on the other hand, modified their plans to suit a situation. Thus, higher American commanders, in order to insure success, postponed attack dates and altered dispositions in



**LOOKING EASTWARD, OVER MUNDA FIELD, TOWARD THE SCENE OF BATTLE**, this post-war picture shows how the jungle has already begun to encroach on what was the busiest Allied airstrip in the Solomons. Within a year dense vegetation had already obscured Bibilo Hill, while once bare Kokengolo (to the center left of the photograph) sprouts a thick growth. (Army Photo.)



the drives on Munda and Bairoko even after the landings. At Guadalcanal higher Japanese commanders, with a stubbornness that defies explanation, refused to change their original plans even though such refusal meant utter failure or destruction of their forces.

## MARINE TACTICS

As far as the Marines were concerned, the outcome of TOENAILS vindicated the doctrines they had formulated during the two decades following World War I. The Corps felt amply rewarded for its years of intensive study when it watched sister and Allied services successfully applying those concepts and techniques of amphibious warfare it had developed. It could point with pride to the accomplishments of the LVT and the Higgins boat, both developed under the Corps' aegis.

The experiences acquired by Marines in Latin American countries during the 1920's and early 1930's proved of limitless value. Lessons learned in Nicaragua's jungles were applied with vigor and effectiveness on New Georgia. On the foundation of those lessons the Marine Corps had formed the lightly equipped, fast-moving Raider Battalions that figured so prominently in the TOENAILS operation. From these battalions came the amphibious scouts who moved with speed and stealth behind enemy lines to gather information on which to base operational planning.

In the Central Solomons, the Marine defense battalions, operating directly under Army command, demonstrated beyond doubt the versatility and adaptability of Marines. As evidence members of these battalions could present the rapid transition of the 9th Defense Battalion's



**MARINE LVT'S SOMETIMES BROKE DOWN** after grueling hours of fighting mud. This Alligator is parked beside a Rendova "road". Without these vehicles however, the minimum supply level could not have been maintained on front lines or outlying positions. (Navy Photo.)



**TANK-INFANTRY PATROLS BULLED THEIR WAY** through the thick jungle to seek and destroy the enemy. The frequency with which the lumbering Marine tanks bogged down in viscid mud finally led one Army division commander to abandon use of the vehicles on extended patrols. Here a wire party pushes forward past a stuck machine. (Army Photo.)

Seacoast Artillery Group from a coast defense to a field artillery unit. Or they could cite the accomplishments of the various specialists within these units who effectively performed purely infantry duties, justifying the Corps' stand that every Marine is primarily an infantryman.

## THE LVT

Afterwards, American commanders declared that they could not have succeeded without the assistance of the LVT. Designed to operate on land as well as on water, the LVT proved just the thing to negotiate those muddy roads that thwarted all wheeled vehicles. The Marines made extensive use of amphibian tractors in logistic support of positions isolated because of mud.

The 9th Defense Battalion originally had been assigned three of the two-ton Alligators, but when these proved their value, a nine-tractor platoon of the 3d Marine Division also was attached. Without this reinforcement, the battalion never could have established and maintained positions on the various offshore islands. And at Vella Lavella, the 4th Defense Battalion also found LVT's invaluable.<sup>10</sup>

## THE TANKS

The work of the Marine 13-ton tanks (M-5) of the 9th, 10th and 11th Defense Battalions, during the drive on Munda and in later operations demonstrated that aggressiveness com-

<sup>10</sup> 9thDefBn, Informal Combat Report; Col W. O. Thompson ltr to CMC, 21Feb52; 4thDefBn Combat Report.

bined with thorough training pays dividends. Army commanders agreed that the fearlessness and efficiency of Marine tankmen was instrumental in saving the lives of many infantrymen. The enemy commander, General Sasaki, complained that the Marine tanks effectively stopped or neutralized his fires.<sup>11</sup>

In the Central Solomons the Marines proved that, although difficult of accomplishment, their light tanks could operate in mud and jungle. They pointed up the soundness of the established truth that tank-infantry coordination was necessary to success. Their experiments in combat led to the recommendation that a field telephone (EE-8) be strapped to the rear of each tank to facilitate tank-infantry communication, and that both the tank leader and the accompanying infantry leader be equipped with handy-talkie (SCR-536) radios.

An innovation resulting from this campaign was the development of flame-throwing tanks, by the simple expedient of mounting an infantry flame thrower in the bow of an M-5.

The tank-infantry tactics, improvised by General Griswold during the advance on Munda and improved by the 27th Infantry on Arundel,

<sup>11</sup> Griswold ltr, Aug43; MajGen J. L. Collins ltr of 17Sep43; MajGen Sasaki ltr of Aug43 to 17th Army CofS.

were considered most unorthodox in mid-1943. At that time, it must be remembered, armored employment in jungle terrain was believed impracticable, that tank warfare could be waged only in open country. But the successes achieved by XIV Corps and the Marines tanks in New Georgia's fetid jungle led to the development of a new concept. And Griswold's "unorthodox" tactics were accepted, written into new Field Manuals, and taught as doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

## MEDICAL SERVICES

At New Georgia, the Navy medical personnel attached to the Marine units faced and solved some particularly trying problems. These doctors, dentists and corpsmen worked a 24-hour day, drenched by rain, knee-deep in mud, with little shelter or adequate equipment. Heedless of enemy fire or primitive conditions, they performed delicate operations to save countless lives.

In the 1st Raider Regiment, a high incidence of recurrent malaria and a large number of cases of sheer, utter physical exhaustion complicated the problem. On 11 August the doctors reported that of the 956 Marines then remaining on the rolls, only 436 were fit for duty. Al-

<sup>12</sup> Ryneska 20Mar52 ltr; Gen Griswold ltr to Gen McNair, 29Aug43.

*Personnel and Tonnage Transported to the New Georgia Area for TOENAILS*

30Jun-31Aug43	Rendova-Munda	Vella Lavella	Segi	Enogai-Rice	Wickham	Viru	Lever Bay
<b>Personnel:</b>							
Army . . . . .	32,171	3,804	4,816	1,780	1,266	358	51
Navy . . . . .	2,907	1,357	1,360	15	490	263	.....
Marine . . . . .	1,723	1,344	(*)	1,682	368	350	.....
Total . . . . .	36,795	6,505	6,176	3,477	2,124	971	51
<b>Tonnage:</b>							
Rations . . . . .	9,442	1,097	1,193	733	437	324	40
Fuel . . . . .	7,388	843	3,200	195	318	725	516
Ammunition . . . . .	11,966	2,247	883	277	454	34	.....
Vehicles . . . . .	10,552	2,528	2,271	21	350	85	.....
Other Freight . . . . .	10,006	1,911	3,666	82	885	348	50
Total . . . . .	49,354	8,626	11,213	1,308	2,444	1,516	606

\* Marine personnel began to land at Segi on 21 June.

though there were only 38 doctors and corpsmen in the regiment, all patients received adequate care in the makeshift jungle hospitals, only a handful dying of wounds.

Fortunately for the Navy medical men, combat fatigue was almost unknown among Marines. This kept the patient census down and enabled the doctors to devote their full attention to wounds and disease.

Evacuation of casualties from New Georgia was especially effective and rapid. Although jungle and mud made movement between front lines and beaches most difficult, LST's serving as floating hospitals and PBY's working as flying ambulances got the casualties to base hospitals in the rearward areas without delay.

### NAVAL SUPPORT <sup>13</sup>

Motor Torpedo boats (PT's) supported Marine units throughout the campaign. Even before the initial combat landings, these speedy little craft transported amphibious scouts through enemy-held waters to beaches deep in Japanese territory. Some of these patrols sought and found bases from which PT's could operate effectively. Other patrols landed at Vella Lavella, Kolombangra, Vangunu, and Segi Point on scouting missions. Later in the campaign, PT's screened larger ships carrying Marines to various landings in the Central Solomons. While the 1st Raider Regiment was fighting on Dragons Peninsula, PT's on several occasions brought in supplies and evacuated casualties. At other times the raiders hid-out the boats in Enogai's little harbor. Such cooperation between the Marines and the PT-men emphasized the high degree of interdependence that marks the Navy-Marine Corps team.

Destroyer-transport (APD's) participated in each of the several Marine landings. Making innumerable trips, Transdiv 12 (Commander John D. Sweeney) and Transdiv 22 (Lieutenant Commander Robert H. Wilkinson) carried troops and supplies on a 'round-the-clock basis to keep the operation progressing smoothly.

<sup>13</sup> Only that naval support directly affecting Marine operations on shore is discussed here. For a more complete treatment of naval activities in the Central Solomons see one or more of the following: Morison, *Bismarcks*; *Combat Narratives*, IX, X and XI; Karig, *op. cit.*



**MEDICAL OFFICERS AND CORPSMEN** worked 'round the clock, performing miracles under the most unsatisfactory conditions. Many serious casualties owe their lives to the excellent service and prompt treatment they received in primitive field hospitals. (Navy Photo.)

Despite enemy air and surface attacks and shore battery fire, the APD's safely delivered all of their human cargoes at or near the designated objective.

The landing ship tank (LST) made its first combat appearance at New Georgia. This odd-looking craft, designed primarily to carry heavy equipment and place it on the beach with great rapidity, eventually became a principal means by which Marines were transported on amphibious landings.<sup>14</sup>

Mine sweepers, cruisers, tugs and destroyers all contributed to defeating the enemy, but seldom directly in support of the Marines.

### AIR SUPPORT

In their final reports, all commanders spoke of the high quality of air support given during the campaign. Although the failure to receive air support was the principal reason why Liversedge had to turn back at Bairoko on 20 July, generally requests for such support received prompt, accurate and dependable attention.

<sup>14</sup> LST's seldom were the sole means of moving troops; but even in the Central Pacific, where some students believed the distances prohibitive for such movement (*Cf* Morison, volume VII, 108), LST's—filled to capacity with assault troops—were used in nearly every operation. (Turner 19Mar52 ltr.)

*Japanese Vessels Sunk in the New Georgia Area*

Name	Type	Tons	Date	Agent	Area
<i>Kuroshio</i>	DD	1,900	8May	Mine	Blackett Strait
<i>Oyashio</i>	DD	1,900	8May	Mine	Blackett Strait
<i>Kagero</i>	DD	1,900	8May	Mine	Blackett Strait
<i>RO-101</i>	SS	525	1Jul	Surface (DD)	Blanche Channel
<i>Kashi Maru</i>	AK	654	2Jul	Army Air	Kula Gulf
<i>Nagatsuki</i>	DD	1,500	6Jul	Surface (CL&DD)	Kula Gulf
<i>Niizuki</i>	DD	2,450	6Jul	Surface (CL&DD)	Kula Gulf
<i>I-25</i>	SS	2,212	11Jul	Surface (DD)	Kula Gulf
<i>Jintsu</i>	CL	5,900	13Jul	Surface (CL)	E of Vella
<i>Kiyonami</i>	DD	2,100	20Jul	Combined Army Navy, Marine Air	N of Vella
<i>Yugure</i>	DD	1,600	20Jul	Combined Army Navy, Marine Air	N of Vella
<i>Arashi</i>	DD	1,900	6Aug	Surface (DD)	Vella Gulf
<i>Haigkaze</i>	DD	1,900	6Aug	Surface (DD)	Vella Gulf
<i>Kawakaze</i>	DD	1,580	6Aug	Surface (DD)	Vella Gulf
Special Sub-Chaser #15	SC	100	18Aug	Surface (DD)	S of Choiseul
Special Sub-Chaser #12	SC	100	18Aug	Surface (DD)	S of Choiseul
<i>I-20</i>	SS	2,180	1Oct	Surface (DD)	N of Kolom
<i>Yugumo</i>	DD	1,900	6Oct	Surface (DD)	N of Vella

Seldom did enemy fighters and bombers penetrate the combat air patrol. Only adverse weather interrupted continuous protection.

Whenever possible, ComAirSols furnished planes for artillery spotting, aerial photography, or reconnaissance. The 9th Defense Battalion for example, found the effectiveness of their 155mm guns vastly increased when an aerial observer controlled the fire. Patrol planes (PBY's) ranged far and wide to observe enemy activity, rescue downed aviators, drop or bring in supplies and evacuate wounded.

It might be said that the modern Navy-Marine Corps technique of close air support had its beginnings in the Central Solomons campaign. True, ground controllers operating under General Rupertus on Tulagi in August 1942 had first applied the Navy-Marine Corps theory in actual combat. But it remained for the men involved in the TOENAILS operation to develop a more efficient, easily worked solution of the close air support concept. The organization and techniques used in the Central Solomons eventually evolved—with modifications and refinements—into those employed in future operations where air support was con-

trolled by the Navy.<sup>15</sup> Before the operation General Mulcahy formed seven special units, called air support parties (ASP's). Each party consisted of an officer and two highly trained enlisted communicators, provided with a command car, an SCR 193 radio, an Aldis lamp and panel signal equipment. In theory, these parties would control air strikes from positions on the ground, close to the front line command posts.

According to the concept of close air support then extant, missions were planned in some detail the day prior to execution. Requests passed through General Mulcahy's headquarters and, if approved, back to base fields on Guadalcanal, in the Russells, or—later in the campaign—at Segi Point. Upon receiving the approved request, Strike Command detailed planes and pilots to the mission, and the next day these reported on station to the designated ASP. The men on the ground would then signal the orbiting planes, mark the target with smoke shells, and finally turn the mission over to the flight commander.

At this stage in the war, air strikes were never made very close to the lines. Difficulties of

<sup>15</sup> Turner 19Mar52 ltr.

communication in the jungle, with less than satisfactory radio sets, made it expedient that pilots be well briefed on the ground before they took off on a strike. On New Georgia, however, the ASP's learned that they could talk a plane into a target area without the pre-strike briefing and, when the target itself was marked, the planes could attack most effectively.<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Central Solomons campaign revealed a number of gross inadequacies and inefficiencies. But these are by far overshadowed by the

<sup>16</sup> Gabbert report; Sherrod *op. cit.*

gains achieved and the lesson of unification learned.

This campaign was over, but ahead lay Bougainville, another barrier on the road to Rabaul that must be taken before the Allies could approach the Far East. And at Bougainville, as in succeeding campaigns, the lessons of the Central Solomons would be applied.

In speaking of the Marines who served with him in the Central Solomons, General Griswold said, "Without exception, they were brave and gallant, and it was an honor and privilege to serve with them. . . ."



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

# APPENDIX I

# Bibliography

This bibliography cites only the more important and useful of the several thousand separate documents consulted in the preparation of this monograph. These basic sources were supplemented by letters from and interviews with key participants in the campaign. Those letters and interview reports are available in the files of the Historical Branch, G-3, Headquarters Marine Corps, and, within the limitations of security and restrictions imposed by originators, are available for the use of any bona fide student. Letters and interview reports are not included in this bibliography, but are cited in footnotes to the text.

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- Schmueck, Maj Donald M. Ltr to CG, IMAC. 30Jan44. This is a report of operations of the Forward Echelon, Corps Troops, on Vella Lavella.
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- Task Force 18 (Task Group 36.1). Operation Order 10-43. Serial 00111; 1Jul43. This is Adm Ainsworth's order to his Force to land the Northern Landing Force at Rice Anchorage and provide requisite naval support.
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- Task Force 31. Daily Intelligence Summaries. These are the daily evaluations made by Adms Turner and Wilkinson regarding enemy capabilities and results of friendly operations.
- Task Force 31. Dispatch 0001 of 11Jul43. Changes to Western Force Loading Order Number 11-43.
- Task Force 31. Dispatch 2320 of 13Jun to all holders of Operation Plan AS-43. 14Jun43. This dispatch makes several minor modifications in Adm Turner's plan.
- Task Force 31. Endorsement to ComDesRon 22 ltr, serial 0012 of 5Sep43. Serial 00635; 20Dec43. This is Adm Wilkinson's view of the action of 16-19Aug, off Vella Lavella.
- Task Force 31 (LST Group 14). War Diary of period 12-22Aug43. Serial 061; 20Aug43 (sic). Concerns the work of the Second Echelon at Vella Lavella.
- Task Force 31 (LST Group 15). Action Report. Serial 0015; 12Oct43. This report concerns the movement of Task Group 316 into Vella Lavella.
- Task Force 31. Ltr, to all holders of Eastern Force loading order 1-43. Serial 0013b; 22Jun43. This document changes the composition of Eastern Force in accordance with the situation arising out of the premature seizure of Segi.
- Task Force 31. Ltr to ComSoPac, serial 0036, 13Jan43. Suggests immediate move against New Georgia; rec-

- ommends reorientation of boundary between SoPac and SoWesPac.
- Task Force 31. Operation Order A12-43, 11Aug43. This is Adm Wilkinson's order directing the seizure of Vella Lavella.
- Task Force 31. Operation Plan AS-43. Serial 00274; 4Jun43. This plan includes appendices and annexes. It is the basic plan for the amphibious phase of the TOENAILS operation.
- Task Force 31. Report of Occupation of Vella Lavella, 12Aug-3Sep43. Serial 00400; 20Sep43. Appended hereto is Adm Wilkinson's operation order with its appendices and annexes.
- Task Force 31. War Diary for Sep43. Contains a general account of the progress of the TOENAILS operation, as seen from Adm Wilkinson's headquarters.
- Task Force 32. Memo to ComSoPac. Serial 00284; 12 Jun43. This memo recommends that additional forces be made available to Adm Turner for the conduct of the TOENAILS operation.
- Task Group 31.1 (Western Force). Dispatch 2333, 26 Jun43, 27Jun43. Changes to Western Force Loading Order Number 2-43.
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- Task Group 31.3 (Eastern Force). Changes to Eastern Force Loading Orders 1-43 and 2-43. 14Jul43. These changes were dictated by resistance encountered, and poor beach conditions in Eastern New Georgia.
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- Task Group 36.9. Operation Plan 6-43. Serial 0028; 25Jun43. Adm Merrill's plan for the bombardment of Munda Point on 9Jul43.
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- 3d MarDiv. Observers Report, New Georgia (Col E. A. Craig). Serial EAC/cm; 28Aug43. Observations of CO, 9th Marines, Munda Operation, 18-23Aug43.
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- Thirteenth Air Force. Ltr to ComAirSoPac. Serial AG 320.2; 16Apr43. Proposes assignment of USAAF planes to ComAirSols Fighter and Bomber commands.
- 37th Inf Division. Report of Operations, Munda Campaign, New Georgia Operation. No serial or file; 25Aug43.
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## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX II

### Chronology

1942	
23 January	Japanese seize Rabaul
6 March	Adm E. J. King, USN, proposes consideration of an approach toward Japan from the south
30 March	JCS assigns responsibility for conduct of Pacific combat operations to Adm Chester W. Nimitz and Gen Douglas MacArthur; sets boundary between South Pacific and Southwest Pacific at 160° east
20 April	The South Pacific Command established
3 May	Japanese forces seize Tulagi
4-8 May	Battle of the Coral Sea; Japanese southward thrust slowed
3-4 June	Battle of Midway; Japanese attempt to move eastward through the Central Pacific thwarted
2 July	JCS approves Operation WATCHTOWER; specifies Rabaul as a primary target for South and Southwest Pacific forces
2 July	Boundary between South and Southwest Pacific areas moved westward to 159° east
7 August	1st Marine Division lands on Guadalcanal in first American offensive of World War II; begins Solomon Islands campaign
8-9 August	Battle of Savo Island; while protecting Guadalcanal, U. S. Fleet suffers a defeat
23-25 August	Battle of Eastern Solomon Islands; Japanese attempt to land reinforcements on Guadalcanal turned back by U. S. naval forces
11 October	Battle of Cape Esperance, Guadalcanal; once again, the U. S. Fleet turns back a Japanese attempt to retake Guadalcanal from the sea
18 October	VAdm William F. Halsey, Jr., USN, relieves VAdm Robert Ghormley, USN as ComSoPac
26 October	Battle of Santa Cruz Island; U. S. planes and surface units inflict severe damage on the Japanese
13-15 November	Battle of Guadalcanal; Japanese navy suffers defeat in its attempt to engage in naval action in the southern Solomons
21 November	Japanese begin construction of



30 November	an airfield at Munda Point Battle of Tassafaronga, Guadalcanal; this naval engagement ended in a draw	1 April	MacArthur's general direction RAdm Marc A. Mitscher becomes ComAirSols
4 December	South Pacific observers identify the Japanese airfield at Munda Point	7 April	FAdm Isoroku Yamamoto begins the abortive Japanese "I" Operation, designed to drive the Allies out of the Solomons
25 December	Japanese Imperial Headquarters decides to abandon Guadalcanal and establish a holding line passing through New Georgia	15 April	Allied planes begin operations from Russell Islands' landing strips
		18 April	Death of FAdm Yamamoto; Admiral Mineichi Koga becomes commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet
	1943		
4-5 January	First naval bombardment of the Munda airfield area		
23 January	Casablanca conference approves and directs implementation of ELKTON plan of operations against Rabaul	2 May	Japanese commanders at Rabaul create the "Southeast Detached Force" for the defense of the Central Solomons
23 January	Adm Nimitz gives oral approval to Adm Halsey's CLEANSLATE operation plan for seizure of the Russell Islands	6-7 May	American naval units mine Blackett Strait
23-24 January	Vila-Stanmore district on Kolombangara bombarded by a naval task group	12-13 May	A US naval force bombards the Vila-Munda area; mines the coast of Kolombangara
8 February	Radio Tokyo announces a successful enemy evacuation of Guadalcanal	3 June	ComSoPac Operation Plan 14-43 published; envisages seizure of positions in the Central Solomons
21 February	Task Force 31 seizes the Russells; 3d Marine Raider Battalion and 10th Defense Battalion, FMF, participated	4 June	RAdm Richmond K. Turner issues Operation Plan A8-43 to Task Force 31
1-4 March	Battle of the Bismarck Sea; a small Japanese Task Force transporting troops to New Guinea destroyed	8 June	Japanese MajGen Noboru Sasaki decides to drive the Allied coastwatchers from Segi Point
5-6 March	A US naval force bombards the Vila-Munda area	17 June	MajGen John H. Hester issues New Georgia Occupation Force order #1
6 March	Japanese aircraft make first raids on Russell Islands	19 June	RAdm Turner decides to occupy Segi Point immediately with a strong force
21 March	Marine amphibious patrols begin scouting the Central Solomons area	21 June	One-half of the 4th Marine Raider Battalion lands at Segi Point; begins operations in eastern New Georgia
28 March	JCS directs that the Solomons campaign be conducted by Adm Halsey under Gen	27 June	4th Marine Raider Battalion begins approach to attack Viru Harbor

28 June	4th Marine Raider Battalion meets first organized resistance of the New Georgia campaign	11-12 July	Cruiser-destroyer force bombards Munda area to support advance of 43d Division; results unsuccessful
29-30 June	RAdm Aaron S. Merrill's 12th Cruiser Division bombards the Vila-Munda and Shortland-Faisi areas and mines Shortland Harbor area	12 July	4th Marine Raider Battalion reassembles on Guadalcanal after operating in eastern New Georgia area
30 June	12th Defense Battalion and Army troops occupy the Trobriands	12 July	Adm Halsey directs his staff to prepare a plan for seizure of Vella Lavella
30 June	Task Force 31 lands on Rendova	12-13 July	Battle of Kolombangara; marks the end of Japanese efforts to resupply and reinforce their New Georgia garrison via destroyer
30 June	Marines and soldiers land at Wickham Anchorage; begin operations on Vangunu Island	15 July	MajGen Oscar W. Griswold, XIV Corps CG, relieves Maj Gen Hester as CG, NGOF and RAdm Theodore S. Wilkinson relieves RAdm Turner as CTF-31
1 July	4th Marine Raider Battalion seizes Viru Harbor area	16 July	Naval force rescues about 175 <i>Helena</i> survivors from enemy-held Vella Lavella
2 July	Japanese launch successful air raid against the American Rendova beachhead	17 July	Daylight air strike against shipping in the Kahili-Buin area results in heavy destruction in enemy air and surface forces
5 July	Northern Landing Group lands at Rice Anchorage	17 July	161st Infantry of the 25th Division lands at Laiana and goes into position to the center of the XIV Corps front
5-6 July	Battle of Kula Gulf; US loses the cruiser <i>Helena</i> , Japan loses destroyers <i>Niizuki</i> and <i>Nagatsuki</i> . The Japanese succeeded in landing reinforcements on Kolombangara during this battle	17-18 July	Japanese 13th Infantry makes uncoordinated attacks against Laiana beachhead and the 169th Infantry on the 43d Division right
7 July	Northern Landing Group seizes Maranusa I and Triri villages on Dragons Peninsula	17-18 July	4th Raider Battalion rejoins parent regiment on Dragons Peninsula after a short rest on Guadalcanal
8-9 July	Capt Thomas J. Ryan, Jr., leads a destroyer task unit in a bombardment of the Munda area in support of the advance of the 43d Division	20 July	1st Raider Regiment launches unsuccessful attack on Bairoko Harbor
10 July	Northern Landing Group attacks and takes Enogai	21 July	Covered by one of the heaviest air strikes of the Central Solomons campaign, the Northern Landing Group
11 July	Segi Point landing-strip becomes operational		
11 July	Adm Nimitz suggests that SoPac forces by-pass Kolombangara		

	withdraws from vicinity of Bairoko to Enogai				attached Force" moves to Kolombangara
21-22 July	Six-man amphibious patrol lands near Barakoma to scout area for proposed landing on Vella Lavella	9 August			Northern and Southern Landing Groups of the New Georgia Occupation Force establish contact
23-24 July	Naval units engage shore batteries at Bairoko during a resupply operation for the Northern Landing Group	10 August			Northern Landing Group passes to operational control of 25th Infantry Division; 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry, replaces 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry in Northern Landing Group
24-25 July	Heavy air and naval bombardments of Lambeti Plantation area have little effect. Participating forces included 52 TBF's, 53 SBD's, B-17's, B-24's and B-25's; seven destroyers under Cdr Arleigh A Burke	10 August			43d Infantry Division troops land on Baanga Island
		11 August			RAdm Wilkinson and Brig-Gen Robert B. McClure issue their operation orders for the Vella Lavella landings
31 July	An amphibious reconnaissance patrol reports to RAdm Wilkinson that a landing at Barakoma on Vella Lavella is feasible	12-13 August			A 25-man advance party lands at Barakoma, Vella Lavella
		13 August			Japanese Imperial Headquarters issues Navy Staff Directive No. 267, authorizing abandonment of Central Solomons after imposing a delay on the Allies
2 August	43d Division elements push across Lambeti Plantation and reach eastern end of Munda airstrip				
3 August	The Japanese local commanders decide to abandon the Munda Point area and retire slowly to Kolombangara	15 August			Landings in force on Vella Lavella; 4th Defense Battalion, FMF, included in Landing Force
4 August	25th and 37th Division elements drive to Hathorn Sound, north and west of Munda airfield	17-18 August			American destroyer force fails to prevent enemy from landing troops on northern Vella Lavella
5 August	XIV Corps occupies Munda airfield	20 August			Baanga Island secured
6-7 August	Battle of Vella Gulf; Americans smash Japanese attempt to furnish reinforcement for the Central Solomons area	23 August			XIV Corps reaches Hathorn Sound; during night of 23-24 August, the last 19 barge loads of enemy withdraw from Bairoko area
8 August	Battery B, 9th Defense Battalion, goes into position on Kindu Point, New Georgia, to undertake the seacoast defense mission of Munda Point	24 August			3d Battalion, 145th Infantry, enters Bairoko
		25 August			Japanese establish a barge-staging base at Horaniu, Vella Lavella, to facilitate the evacuation of the Central Solomons
8-9 August	Main body of "Southeast De-				

27 August	172d Infantry lands on Arundel Island	18 September	3d New Zealand Division lands on Vella Lavella to relieve BrigGen McClure's landing force
29 August	1st Marine Raider Regiment withdrawn from New Georgia operation	19 September	Marines and soldiers sweep Arundel
30 August	Marine "long toms" begin shelling Kolombangara from positions at Piru Plantation	20-21 September	MajGen Sasaki withdraws last Japanese survivors from Arundel; MajGen Griswold declares the island secure
3 September	Amphibious phase of Vella Lavella operation ends; command passes from RAdm Wilkinson to BrigGen McClure	25 September	Forward Echelon, Corps Troops, IMAC, lands at mouth of Juno River, Vella Lavella
15 September	Vicious Japanese counterattack halts American drive to clear Arundel Island	27 September	ComAirSols planes begin operations from Barakoma airstrip
16 September	Three platoons of Marine defense battalion tanks reinforce US Army troops on Arundel Island	2-3 October	Last Japanese troops evacuated from Kolombangara
		6-7 October	Naval Battle of Vella Lavella; Japanese succeed in evacuating Vella Lavella
17 September	Adm Halsey decides to establish a forward Marine staging base on Vella Lavella	9 October	3d New Zealand Division declares Vella Lavella secure



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX III

# Casualties

MARINE CASUALTIES—CENTRAL SOLOMONS <sup>1</sup> 21 JUNE-13 OCTOBER 1943	Officers		Enlisted	
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded
<b>1ST MARINE RAIDER REGIMENT</b>				
H&S Co. ....	0	2	1	6
<i>1st Raider Battalion</i>				
Hq Co. ....	1	3	5	19
A Co. ....	1	0	15	26
B Co. ....	1	0	13	27
C Co. ....	2	1	11	17
D Co. ....	0	3	24	35
<i>4th Raider Battalion</i>				
Hq Co. ....	0	1	2	10
N Co. ....	1	3	12	30
O Co. ....	0	0	16	41
P Co. ....	0	3	8	48
Q Co. ....	1	1	14	31
<b>4TH DEFENSE BATTALION</b>				
H&S Btry. ....	0	0	1	5
155mm Group. ....	0	0	1	7
90mm Group. ....	0	0	0	6
SplWpns Group. ....	0	0	2	6
<b>9TH DEFENSE BATTALION</b>				
H&S Btry. ....	0	2	1	12
155mm Group. ....	0	0	4	17
90mm Group. ....	0	0	3	1
SplWpns Group. ....	1	1	3	21
<i>10th Defense Battalion</i>				
Tank Platoon. ....	0	0	2	4
<i>11th Defense Battalion</i>				
Tank Platoon. ....	0	0	0	7
DefBtry K. ....	0	0	0	2
FWD ECH, CORPS TROOPS, IMAC. ....	0	4	37	112
<b>MARINE AVIATION</b>				
.....	5	7	4	13
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>503</b>

<sup>1</sup> Derived from HQMC Muster Rolls, these statistics do not include none-battle casualties.



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX IV

### Command and Staff List<sup>1</sup>

**1ST MARINE RAIDER-REGIMENT**  
Commanding Officer ..... Col Harry B. Liversedge  
Executive Officer ..... (None shown)  
R-1 ..... 1stLt George E. Leppig  
R-2 ..... Capt Merwin C. Plumley  
R-3 ..... LtCol Joseph P. McCaffery  
R-4 ..... Maj Ira J. Irwin  
Communications Officer ... Maj William D. Stevenson  
Medical Officer ..... LtCdr (MC) Wesley B. Van-  
Cott  
Medical Officer ..... Lt (jg) (MC) Harry A. Mil-  
ler  
Air Officer ..... Lt (jg) George M Rounds<sup>2</sup>  
*1st Marine Raider Battalion*  
Battalion Commander .... LtCol Samuel B. Griffith, II  
Executive Officer ..... Maj Charles L. Banks  
Bn-1 ..... 2dLt Robert E. Laverty  
Bn-2 ..... Capt John B. Sweeney  
Bn-3 ..... Maj George W. Herring  
Bn-4 ..... 2d Lt Thomas H. Driscoll  
Demolitions Platoon ..... MarGun Angus R. Goss  
(to 20 July)  
Medical Officer ..... Lt (MC) James F. Regan  
Medical Officer ..... Lt (MC) Stuart C. Knox  
Company A Commander ... Capt Thomas F. Mullahey,  
Jr.  
Company B Commander ... Capt Edwin B. Wheeler  
Company C Commander ... Capt John P. Salmon  
Company D Commander ... Capt Clay A. Boyd  
(to 20 July)  
1stLt Frank A. Kemp<sup>3</sup>  
*4th Marine Raider Battalion*  
Battalion Commander .... LtCol Michael S. Currin  
Executive Officer ..... Maj James R. Clark  
(to 22 July)  
Maj Robert H. Thomas

Bn-1 ..... Capt Foster C. LaHue  
Bn-2 ..... (None shown)  
Bn-3 ..... Maj Robert H. Thomas  
(to 22 July)  
Maj Roy J. Batterton  
Bn-4 ..... 1stLt Francis L. White  
Demolitions Platoon ..... 1stLt Robert P. Smith  
Medical Officer ..... Lt (MC) J. C. Lockhart  
Company N Commander ... Capt Earle O. Snell, Jr.  
(to 20 July)  
1stLt Thomas J. Connor  
Company O Commander... 1stLt Raymond L. Luckel  
Company P Commander ... Capt Anthony Walker  
(to 20 July)  
1stLt Malcolm N. McCarthy  
Company Q Commander .. Capt William L. Flake  
(to 13 July)  
Capt Lincoln N. Holdzkorn  
*3d Battalion, 145th Infantry*<sup>4</sup>  
Battalion Commander .... LtCol George G. Freer  
Company I Commander ... Capt David N. Marshall  
Company K Commander ... Capt Donald W. Fouse  
(to 8 July)  
1stLt Alfred A. Potteiger  
Company L Commander ... Capt Clifford W. Morrow  
(to 13 August)  
1stLt Richard J. Vial, Jr.  
Company M Commander... Capt Arthur H. Walton  
*3d Battalion, 148th Infantry*<sup>4</sup>  
Battalion Commander .... LtCol Delbert E. Schultz  
Company I Commander ... Capt Denton C. Roundtree  
Company K Commander ... Capt Vernon B. McMillen  
Company L Commander ... Capt Lawrence D. Robert-  
son  
(to 31 July)  
Capt Armas L. Gremillion,  
Jr.

<sup>1</sup> Derived from HQMC Muster Rolls.

<sup>2</sup> Temporarily attached from VB-21.

<sup>3</sup> During those periods when Capt Boyd was absent on patrol, Lt Kemp commanded Company D.

<sup>4</sup> Attached from the 37th Infantry Division, U. S. Army.

Company M. Commander . . . Capt Charles A. Henne

#### 9TH DEFENSE BATTALION

Battalion Commander . . . LtCol William J. Scheyer  
Executive Officer . . . LtCol Wallace O. Thompson

(to 6 August)  
LtCol Archie E. O'Neil  
(to 25 August)

Maj Harold B. Meek  
Bn-1 . . . . . Maj Benjamin J. Beach

Bn-2 . . . . . Maj Harold B. Meek  
(to 25 August)  
Capt William A. Buckingham

Bn-3 . . . . . Capt William C. Givens

Bn-4 . . . . . Maj Albert F. Lucas

Tank Platoon Commander . . . Capt Robert W. Blake

Demolitions Officer . . . . . MarGun Ralph B. Brouse  
(to 21 August)

Medical Officer . . . . . LtCdr (MC) Miles Krepela

Medical Officer . . . . . Lt (MC) Nathan I. Gershon

#### 155mm Gun Group

Group Commander . . . . . LtCol Archie E. O'Neil  
(to 6 August)

Maj Robert C. Hiatt  
Executive Officer . . . . . Maj Robert C. Hiatt  
(to 6 August)

Maj Frank C. Wenban, Jr.  
Battery A Commander . . . . . Capt Henry H. Reichner, Jr.

Battery B Commander . . . . . Capt Walter Wells

#### 90mm Antiaircraft Group

Group Commander . . . . . Maj Mark S. Adams  
(to 21 August)

Maj Arthur B. Hammond,  
Jr.

(to 28 August)  
Capt Norman Pozinsky  
(to 3 September)

Maj Arthur B. Hammond,  
Jr.

Executive Officer . . . . . Capt Arthur M. Finkel  
(to 21 August)

Capt Norman Pozinsky  
(22-28 August)

Battery C Commander . . . . . Capt Milton M. Cardwell,  
Jr.

Battery D Commander . . . . . Capt Norman Pozinsky  
(to 21 August)

Capt James W. Love

Battery E Commander . . . . . Capt William M. Tracy

Battery F Commander . . . . . Capt Theron A. Smith

#### Special Weapons Group

Group Commander . . . . . LtCol Wright C. Taylor  
(to 26 September)

Maj Norman E. Sparling  
Executive Officer . . . . . Maj Norman E. Sparling

Battery G Commander . . . . . Capt DeWitt M. Snow

Battery H Commander . . . . . Capt Lynn D. Irvin

Battery I Commander . . . . . Maj Arthur B. Hammond,  
Jr.

(to 21 August)  
Capt Mark S. Smith

#### 4TH DEFENSE BATTALION

Battalion Commander . . . . . Col Harold S. Fassett  
Executive Officer . . . . . LtCol John H. Cook, Jr.

Bn-1 . . . . . 1stLt William H. Kapanek

Bn-2 . . . . . 1stLt Jack Loss

Bn-3 . . . . . Capt Jo S. Jersig

Bn-4 . . . . . 1stLt Guy F. Turner

Tank Platoon Commander . . . . . Capt George M. Anderson

Demolitions Officer . . . . . MarGun John F. Powrozniki

Medical Officer . . . . . LtCdr (MC) Fulton E. Dye

Medical Officer . . . . . Lt (MC) Ralph M. King

#### 155mm Gun Group

Group Commander . . . . . Maj Frank G. Umstead  
Executive Officer . . . . . Maj Earl E. Demers

Battery A Commander . . . . . Capt Richard A. Vanderhoof

Battery B Commander . . . . . Capt Alexander Stevenson

#### 90mm AAA Group

Group Commander . . . . . Maj Kenneth A. King  
Executive Officer . . . . . Maj Howard B. Bengé

Battery D Commander . . . . . 1stLt Edward L. Parke

Battery E Commander . . . . . Capt John S. Hartz

Battery F Commander . . . . . Capt William H. Junghans,  
Jr.

Battery G Commander . . . . . 1stLt Walter R. Miller

#### Special Weapons Group

Group Commander . . . . . Maj McDonald I. Shuford  
Executive Officer . . . . . Maj Charles T. Hodges

Machine Gun Battery  
Commander . . . . . Capt Robert W. Kash

20mm Battery Commander . . . . . Capt Marvin L. Ross

40mm Battery Commander . . . . . Capt Carl M. Johnson

#### FORWARD ECHELON, CORPS TROOPS

Commanding Officer . . . . . Maj Donald M. Schumuck

#### LIAISON OFFICERS AND OBSERVERS

(From IMAC and 3d Marine Division)

Col Evans O. Ames  
Col Edward A. Craig  
Col William C. Hall  
Col George W. McHenry  
LtCol Edward H. Forney  
LtCol John T. Gabbert  
LtCol Francis M. McAllister  
LtCol Wilbur J. McNenny  
LtCol James M. Smith, Jr.



## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

# APPENDIX V

# Japanese Task Organization

JUNE 15, 1943

### *Central New Georgia Sector*

#### 1st New Georgia Area (RAdm Minoru Ota)

##### Ground Units

- Eighth Combined SNLF Headquarters
- Kure 6th SNLF, 14cm Flat Traj Gun Btry (2 guns)
- Yokosuka 7th SNLF, 12cm Flat Traj Gun Btry (2 guns)
- Yokosuka 7th SNLF, 8cm Flat Traj Gun Plat (4 guns)
- Kure 6th SNLF, Antiaircraft Machine Gun Company
- 21st Antiaircraft Unit
- 17th Pioneers
- 131st Pioneers

##### Lookout Units

- Banieta : 1st Plat, 8th CSNLF Lookout Company
- Visuvisu : 1st Sqd, Kure 6th SNLF Lookout Plat
- Ramada : 2d Sqd, Kure 6th SNLF Lookout Plat
- Mburongo : 3d Plat, 8th CSNLF Lookout Company
- Munda Area : 4th Plat, 8th CSNLF Lookout Company

##### Boat Units

- 8th CSNLF Landing Craft Company
- Shipping Company (Army), New Georgia Sector

#### 2d New Georgia Area (MajGen Noboru Sasaki)

##### Ground Troops (Col Genjiro Hirata)

- 229th Infantry (less 3d Co and 7th Co (less one Plat))
- 2d Bn, 10th Ind Mt Arty (less 5th and 6th Btrys)
- Rendova Defense Unit:
  - 7th Co (less one Plat), 229th Inf (1stLt Toshio Suzuki)
  - 2d Co, Kure 6th SNLF (Lt(jg) Gonshiro Funada)

##### Dragons Defense Unit (Cdr Saburo Okumura)

- Kure 6th SNLF (less detachments)
- 2d Bn, 13th Inf (plus 12th Co and one Plat, Yoko-

#### suka 7th SNLF, Detachments 3d MG Co)

#### Munda Army Antiaircraft Defenses (Col Shunichi Shioto)

- 15th Field Antiaircraft Artillery
- 41st Field AA Bn (less 2d Btry)
- 31st Ind. Field AA Bn
- 27th Machine Cannon Co
- 3d Field Searchlight Bn (less 2d Btry)

#### Munda Reserve (Maj Masaji Kamiya)

- One platoon, 7th Co, 229th Inf
- 60th Ind. Radio Platoon (less one Sqd)
- 2d Field Hospital, 38th Division
- Detachment, 17th Army MP's

### *Western New Georgia Sector*

#### (Kolombangara)

#### Army Ground Troops (Col Satoshi Tomonari)

- 13th Infantry (less 2d Bn, 12th Co, and one Plat, 3d MG Co)

#### 6th Btry, 10th Ind Mt Arty

#### Naval Ground Troops (Cdr Koshin Takeda)

- Yokosuka 7th SNLF (less detachments)

#### 19th Pioneers

#### Kolombangara Army Antiaircraft Defenses (Maj

#### Toshio Yamanaka)

- 58th Field AA Bn (less 1st Btry)

#### 22d Field Machine Cannon Co

#### 23d Field Machine Cannon Co

#### 2d Btry, 3d Field Searchlight Bn

### *Eastern New Georgia Sector*

#### Viru Area (1stLt Takagi)

- 3d Co, 229th Inf (less one Plat)

#### Kure 6th SNLF Antiaircraft Machine Gun Co

#### Yokosuka 7th SNLF, 8cm Flat Traj Gun Squad

#### 2d Plat, 8th CSNLF Lookout Co (at Tetipari)

#### Wickham Area (Lt(jg) Yamamoto)

- 1st Co, Kure 6th SNLF

#### One Plat, 3d Co, 229th Inf





## MARINES IN THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX VI

# Navy Unit Commendation

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The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the  
NINTH MARINE DEFENSE BATTALION

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces at Guadalcanal, November 30, 1942, to May 20, 1943; Rendova-New Georgia Area, June 30 to November 7, 1943; and at Guam, Marianas, July 21 to August 20, 1944. One of the first units of its kind to operate in the South Pacific Area, the NINTH Defense Battalion established strong seacoast and beach positions which destroyed 12 hostile planes attempting to bomb Guadalcanal, and further engaged in extensive patrolling activities. In a 21-day-and-night training period prior to the Rendova-New Georgia assault, this group calibrated and learned to handle new weapons and readily effected the conversion from a seacoast unit to a unit capable of executing field artillery missions. Joining Army Artillery units, special groups of this battalion aided in launching an attack which drove the enemy from the beaches, downed 13 of a 16-bomber plane formation during the first night ashore and denied the use of the Munda airfield to the Japanese. The NINTH Defense Battalion aided in spearheading the attack of the Army Corps operating on New Georgia and, despite heavy losses, remained in action until the enemy was routed from the island. Elements of the Battalion landed at Guam under intense fire, established beach defenses, installed antiaircraft guns and later, contributed to the rescue of civilians and to the capture or destruction of thousands of Japanese. By their skill, courage and aggressive fighting spirit, the officers and men of the NINTH Defense Battalion upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the NINTH Defense Battalion during the above mentioned periods are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN,  
*Secretary of the Navy.*

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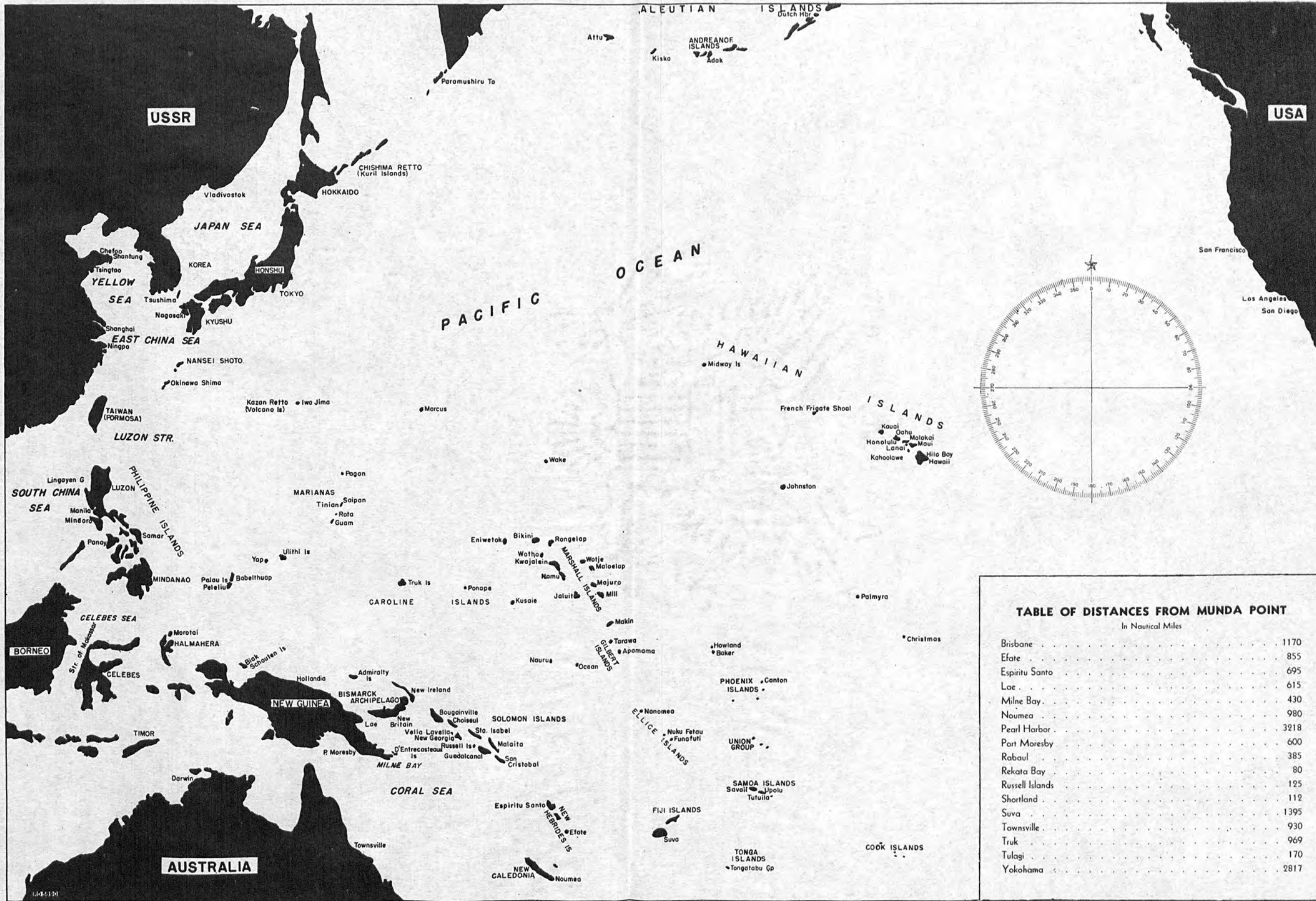
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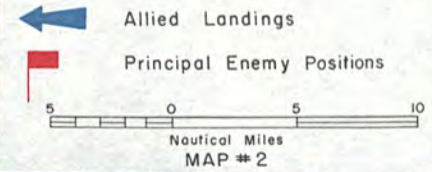
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In Nautical Miles

Brisbane	1170
Efate	855
Espiritu Santo	695
Lae	615
Milne Bay	430
Noumea	980
Pearl Harbor	3218
Port Moresby	600
Rabaul	385
Rekata Bay	80
Russell Islands	125
Shortland	112
Suva	1395
Townsville	930
Truk	969
Tulagi	170
Yokohama	2817

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