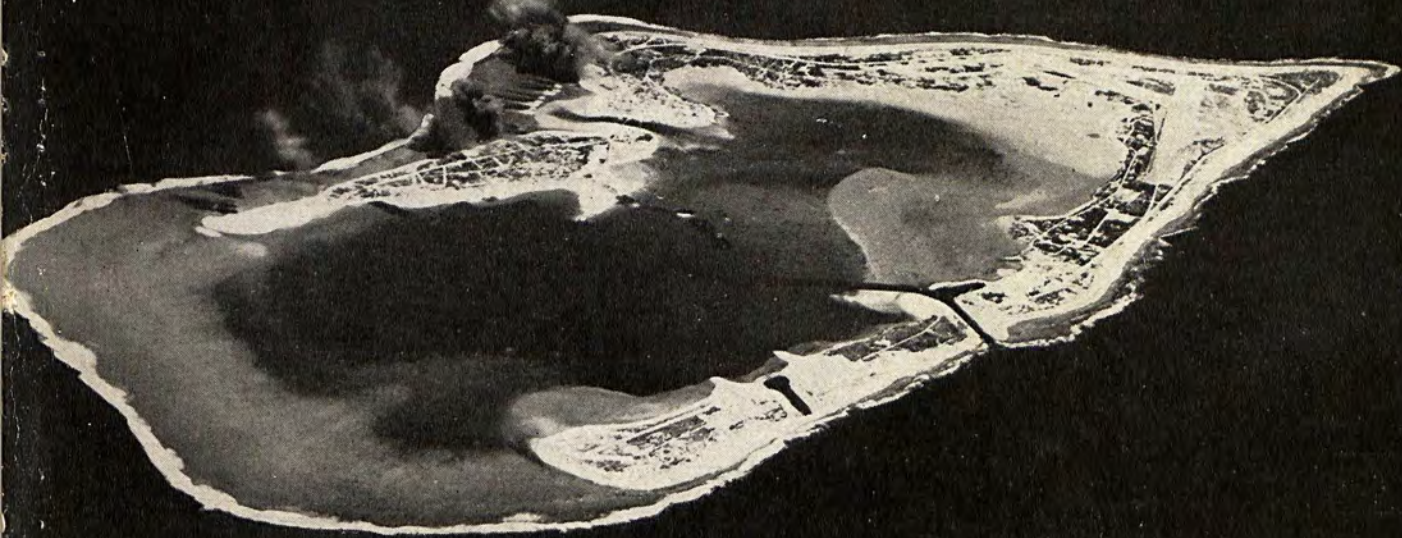


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The DEFENSE of

SEMPER PARATUS



WAKE



U. S. Colors Being Hoisted Over Wake Once Again by
Marines as Japanese Officers Salute, 7 September 1945

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THE DEFENSE OF WAKE



HISTORICAL SECTION
DIVISION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION
HEADQUARTERS
U. S. MARINE CORPS

Lt. Col. R. D. Heinl, Jr. USMC

1947

45



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

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THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

Foreword

During December 1941, the stubborn defense of Wake by less than 450 Marines galvanized not only the American public but their comrades in arms. In days of disaster then, as of uncertainty later, the thought of Wake and its defenders encouraged Marines to hang on longer, and to fight more resolutely. Small in time and numbers though the action was by comparison with Guadalcanal or the other great battles to come, Wake will never be forgotten.

To my mind, in addition to the obvious military lessons which may be drawn from any battle, be it victory or defeat, the defense of Wake points up two soldierly characteristics which may well be remembered by Marines. These are military adaptability, and the realization that, first and always, one must be prepared to face ultimate close ground combat with the enemy.

The officers and men of the 1st Defense Battalion on Wake were artillerymen of a highly specialized type; those of VMF-211 were aviation technicians. Neither group let its specialized training or background prevent it from fighting courageously and well as basic infantry when the chips were down. Despite its specialization, each group did the best it could with what it had.

These capabilities and attributes, I submit, should characterize Marines now as they characterized those Marines on Wake, who, though they were outnumbered and eventually overwhelmed, were never outfought.

A. A. VANDEGRIFT

GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

Preface

"The Defense of Wake," a monograph prepared by the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, is one of a series of operational monographs designed to provide both student and casual reader with thorough and complete narratives of the major operations in which Marine Corps units participated during World War II. As a sufficient number of monographs are brought to completion, these in turn will be condensed and edited for final compilation into official operational history.

Production of this monograph on the defense of Wake has presented special problems. Not only are the character and scale of the action much different from those ordinarily encountered in the operational history of the Marine Corps during the past war, but the sources are far less reliable and more subject to error than would ordinarily be the case.

Virtually all the documentation of the operation was produced five or more years after the battle was concluded, and there is scarcely an original source which does not somewhere allude to the possible fallibility of memory during the interval. As a result, even in cut-and-dried matters, such as important dates or casualty figures, the reader must accord a tolerance more broad than would ordinarily be acceptable in a historical study. In cases of conflict—and there have been many—the historian has been forced to weigh evidence, compromise, deduce, and reconstruct, processes which may produce results unacceptable to isolated individual recollections.

This preface would not be complete without acknowledgement of the generous and scholarly assistance of the Office of Naval History and especially of the Navy's operational historian, Capt. Samuel Eliot Morison, USNR, together with his assistant, Lt. Comdr. Henry Reck, USNR. Both of these officers have rendered invaluable aid in research and criticism.

For cartographic assistance, acknowledgement must go to the Reproduction Section, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Va.

All photographs are United States Marine Corps or Navy official.

Above all, however, credit must be given to the numerous officers, all survivors of Wake, who, in lengthy interviews or by painstaking replies to official questionnaires did so much to clarify the record as to what actually took place. It is strongly hoped that these and others with first-hand experience will make possible further improvement of this narrative either by submitting comments or, when in Washington, by visiting the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, for interview and discussion of the points involved.

W. E. RILEY,
BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

Wake in the Shadow of War

CHAPTER I

The complete history of the defense of Wake commences well before December 1941, possibly as early as 1940, when the Navy commenced construction of base facilities on the atoll—and certainly in early 1941, when the decision was made to establish a Marine defending garrison.¹

In the strategic context of 1940 and 1941, the importance of Wake, both to the United States and Japan, was considerable.

At this time, it must be remembered, the United States had not won its ocean-girdling net of Pacific bases, and, with the exceptions of Wake, Midway, and Guam, the expanse between the Hawaiian Islands and the Philippines was *terra incognita* lumped under the awe-inspiring, mysterious phrase, "The Mandated Islands."

Wake, therefore, a prying outpost north of the Marshalls and on the flank of the Marianas, would be a strategic prize to Japan for her own outpost-line, and a corresponding embarrassment while in the hands of the United States. These factors had been thoroughly if discreetly indicated by the Hepburn Report of 1938,² which, according Wake high priority, recommended a \$7,500,000 three-year base-development program intended to make the atoll an advance air base, primarily for long-range

¹ For a résumé of the previous history of Wake, see Appendix II, "Prewar History of Wake, 1586-1941."

² The so-called "Hepburn Board," headed by Rear Admiral A. J. Hepburn, U. S. N., was created in May 1938, to institute a strategic survey and report to Congress on United States needs for additional naval bases and facilities. Its recommendations, many, though not all of which were adopted (the fortification and development of Guam went by the board), constituted throughout the prewar period a fundamental strategic plan for development of United States naval bases in the Atlantic and Pacific.

patrol-plane reconnaissance, and secondarily an intermediate station on the air route to the Far East. Wrote the Board:

The immediate continuous operations of patrol planes from Wake would be vital at the outbreak of war in the Pacific.

In response to the Hepburn recommendations, initial development of Wake was initiated early in 1941, beginning, as is always the case in peacetime, with base-construction at first priority and defense distinctly secondary.

By 18 April 1941, however, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, USN, then Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, fully aware of the strategic situation of Wake, had become alarmed over its defenseless condition. This he expounded to the Chief of Naval Operations in a prophetic study which, within less than a year, would by its realization do credit to his foresight and judgment; pertinent excerpts from the text are therefore quoted:

The strategic importance of Wake is increasingly evident, as one inquires into means by which the Pacific Fleet may carry on offensive operations to the westward. It is 2,000 miles from Pearl Harbor, over 1,000 miles from Midway, and about 1,400 miles from Johnston. On the other hand, it is but 450 miles from Bikini in the Marshalls, while Marcus, which itself is an outpost of the Bonins and Marianas, is 765 miles to the northwestward.

As an operating patrol plane base, it could prove highly valuable to us in observing the Marshalls, or in covering advance of our forces toward the Saipan-Honshu line. In the hands of the Japanese, it would be a serious obstacle to surprise raids in the Northern Marshalls, or on Marcus, Port Lloyd,³ or Saipan, and

³ Port Lloyd is the principal port on Chichi Jima in the Bonins. It was then highly regarded by planners as a key point in Western Pacific strategy.



MAJ. JAMES P. S. DEVEREUX, who commanded the Marine defenders of Wake.

would be capable of causing serious interference with other secret movements of our forces.

To deny Wake to the enemy, without occupying it ourselves would be difficult; to recapture it if the Japanese should seize it in the early period of hostilities, would require operations of some magnitude. Since the Japanese Fourth Fleet includes transports, and troops with equipment especially suited for landing operations, it appears not unlikely that one of the initial operations of the Japanese may be directed against Wake.

If Wake be defended, then for the Japanese to reduce it would require extended operations of their naval force in an area where we might be able to get at them; thus affording us opportunity to get at naval forces with naval forces. We should try, by every possible means, to get the Japanese to expose naval units. In order to do this, we must provide objectives that require such exposure.

With the foregoing considerations in mind, it is considered essential that the construction work now in progress on Wake be proceeded with and that the eventuality of war should not interrupt it. To this end, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, believes that defense installations and defense forces should be established on Wake at the earliest possible date, even at the expense of slowing down construction. It may be

pointed out, in this connection, that in the absence of defense forces, construction on Wake, in the event of war, is subject to serious interruption or even complete stoppage, through enemy action.

It is therefore recommended that units of a marine defense battalion⁴ be progressively established on Wake as facilities there permit.

In light of the growing tenseness between Japan and the United States, Admiral Kimmel's wise recommendations regarding Wake could hardly be disregarded. Indeed, all possible steps were already being taken to reinforce our position in the Pacific. Midway, much further along in development, was already garrisoned by elements of the 3d Defense Battalion. Johnston and Palmyra were occupied by task-units of the 1st Defense Battalion, while Pago Pago, American Samoa, was defended by the 7th Defense Battalion, a hybrid organization which alone among FMF defense battalions of this time contained a small infantry component. Only Guam, defensive development of which had been hamstrung by the 1922 treaty and subsequent nonappropriation of funds, remained static and undefended.

As may be divined from Admiral Kimmel's remarks so as to the necessity of providing the Japanese with objectives which would require exposure of their fleet, the Pacific strategy of 1941 contemplated rendering our bases relatively secure against air raid hit-and-run surface attacks, or even minor landings. Fleet Marine Force defense battalions, organized for defense against just such operations, could provide antiaircraft protection, could stand off light men-of-war and transports, and, in extreme emergency, could fight on the beaches with individual weapons in the classic tradition that every Marine, first and last, is an infantryman.

Within and about the structure of such lightly held but secure bases, the Pacific Fleet was expected

⁴ For details as to composition and organization of the Marine defense battalion of this time, see United States Marine Corps tables of organization D-133 through D-155-D. Generally speaking, the defense battalion was an artillery unit containing three 3-inch antiaircraft batteries, three 5-inch (Navy weapons) seacoast artillery batteries, a searchlight and sound locator battery, and antiaircraft (.50 caliber) and ground (.30 caliber) machine gun batteries. In 1941, strength of a typical battalion was 43 officers and 939 enlisted, and its two most characteristic attributes were all-around, balanced structure and a high degree of strategic mobility. The latter characteristic, however, disappeared at the battalion's destination, and, once in position, a defense battalion was perpetually plagued by insufficient transportation and by the stringency of personnel deliberately written into its organization.

to ply, awaiting the moment when battle could be joined with enemy naval forces—"to get at naval forces with naval forces," Admiral Kimmel put it—in decisive action for control of the sea.

As might be expected, on the other hand, the Japanese concept of strategy in the Central Pacific was to seize or neutralize the few advanced United States bases west of the Hawaiian Islands with maximum rapidity after the outset of war. For this purpose Japanese forces in the Marshalls and Carolines (the Fourth Fleet) were organized along lines more nearly resembling an American amphibious force than anything else.

Commanded by Vice Admiral Inouye, Nariyoshi, IJN, the Fourth Fleet was in fact composed of amphibious shipping, a few old cruisers, destroyers, submarines, shore-based aircraft, and a Japanese version of our own Fleet Marine Force: the Special Naval Landing Force.⁵ Fleet headquarters were at Truk, where Admiral Inouye's flag flew in the light cruiser *Kashima*.

The war missions of Admiral Inouye and his fleet had generally been decided in 1938 when the basic East Asia war plans had been prepared in Tokyo. It was not, however, until November 1941, that detailed instructions for commanders within the Combined Fleet⁶ were formulated and issued. In these instructions, Wake was dismissed with one phrase within one sentence:

"Forces of the Fourth Fleet:

defend the South Seas Islands, patrol, maintain surface communications, capture Wake * * *

Wake, then, was to be strictly a local operation. By Admiral Inouye's scheme, 450 Special Naval Landing Force troops could, in a pinch, turn the trick.

Final Preparations, Autumn, 1941

Admiral Kimmel's prophecies to the Chief of Naval Operations regarding Wake did not fall upon

⁵ The Special Naval Landing Force ("SNLF," sometimes contracted to "SLF") were Japanese Navy personnel organized for service and duties in limited land operations similar to those performed by U. S. Marines; throughout the war, they gave outstanding account of themselves.

⁶ Despatch war instructions to key fleet commands were issued by the Japanese Navy Ministry on 5 November 1941, based upon a current concept of operations against the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands.

deaf ears, and, on 23 June 1941, the latter directed that elements of the 1st Defense Battalion, FMF, be established at Wake "as soon as practicable." This directive (as eventually modified) specified that the following units should compose the defensive garrison:

Four 3-inch antiaircraft batteries.

Three 5-inch seacoast batteries.

Appropriate automatic weapons.

One SCR-268 fire-control radar, and one SCR-270B search radar.

Altogether, for the times, this would constitute an adequate if not imposing garrison.

CNO's "as soon as practicable," was translated into immediate action by the Pacific Fleet command. About 1 August, Major Lewis A. Hohn, with five officers and 173 enlisted Marines and sailors from the 1st Defense Battalion, commenced loading U. S. S. *Regulus*, a 20-year old "Hog Island" transport which would carry the battalion advance detail to



COMMANDER WINFIELD S. CUNNINGHAM, U. S. N., Island Commander of Wake, 29 November-23 December 1941.



MAJ. PAUL A. PUTNAM, commanding officer of Marine Fighting Squadron 211.

Wake. *Regulus* sailed on 8 August, and, after an uneventful voyage out, arrived off Wake on 19 August. Disembarkation and lightering ashore of weapons and camp equipment—mainly the latter—were begun without delay, and, by the time the *Regulus* departed, on 22 August, camp had been made in the now-abandoned contract workmen's original temporary "rag camp" facing the lagoon on a site toward the west end of the south leg of Wake Island. To distinguish this camp from the luxurious new one completed west of Heel Point for the 1,200 Pacific Naval Air Base contract workmen, the Marine camp was designated as Camp 1, and the civilian establishment as Camp 2.

Wake, as it appeared to the Marines of the 1st Defense Battalion, was a V-shaped atoll composed of three islands: Wake Island proper,⁷ the body of the V; and Wilkes and Peale, the two tip-ends. Its land-mass consisted of some 2,600 acres of sand and coral,

⁷ To prevent confusion, Wake Island as distinguished from the entire atoll, will hereinafter be entitled "Wake Island", whereas the single word, "Wake", will designate the atoll.

a substantial part of which was, in 1941, covered by very dense low brush. Offshore, heavy surf roared continually against a coral reef which surrounded the whole atoll at distances varying from 30 to 1,100 yards. The beaches and much of the terrain inland were covered with coral boulders, some large enough to conceal several men. The interior lagoon, although affording sufficient surface and depth for seaplanes, was studded with coral heads and foul ground which must be dredged clear before ships could enter through the one channel, that between Wilkes and Wake Island. Despite its limited land area, however, Wake's coastline was extensive, altogether exceeding 21 miles, or more than half the distance between Washington, D. C., and Quantico, Virginia. An excellent vignette of Wake⁸ in 1941 was given by Colonel Bayler:

Wake is by no means the bare sandy spit one thinks of when atolls are mentioned. Considerable areas of it are covered by woods, and though the trees are small, their thick foliage and the scrubby tangled underbrush provided admirable cover. * * * Walking in these jungles was difficult but not impossible. * * *

In August 1941, Wake was in rapid transition from its past wild solitude to the mechanized modernity of an outlying air base. Patrol-plane facilities and a concrete ramp were already available on Peale. Just inshore of Peacock Point, along the south leg of Wake Island, a narrow airstrip, 5,000 by 200 feet, had been chopped out of the dense growth. A main road-net, 30-foot packed coral, was rapidly taking shape as the contractor's workmen, equipped with every mechanical aid, blasted, slashed and dozed Wake into the image of America.

In a broader sense, as well, however, the Wake of Autumn, 1941, was literally in the image of America: an island in the path of inevitable war; an island vibrant with unceasing construction in an effort to recapture time lost; an island militarily naked.

In spite of the mounting pressure, however, rigid official separation existed between the construction efforts of Marines and of the contractors. Operating on a semiprivate basis, with the heavy equipment, supplies and facilities which American civilian enterprise takes for granted, the naval air base contract

⁸ For a detailed description of Wake's terrain and hydrography, see Appendix VII, "Terrain and Hydrography of Wake".

⁹ Officially designated Contract Noy 4173 Wake.



WAKE PRIOR TO 1941, a view on Peale Island, looking southeastward across the lagoon.



OFFSHORE, HEAVY SURF ROARED CONTINUALLY against the coral reef which surrounded the entire atoll. Note the large boulders along the shoreline of Wilkes Island in right background.



THICK FOLIAGE provided admirable cover for the defenders of Wake, but eventually facilitated Japanese infiltration.

proceeded with its mission of building roads, shops, utilities, quarters, air-base facilities and the like, but no military defenses. The Marines, with little engineering equipment save picks and shovels or the luxury of a borrowed civilian bulldozer, were required to install their heavy weapons by hand, hew out emplacements and foxholes from the coral, and maintain their own living facilities as well.

Understanding this basic difference in available means, the Navy's construction representative, Lieutenant Commander Elmer B. Greey, USN,¹⁰ as well as the civilian general superintendent, Mr. N. D. Teters, did their best in small ways and by small aids to assist the shorthanded and meagerly equipped Marines. At no time—even after the outbreak of war—did the contractor's establishment or workmen come under full military control.

On 15 October, Major Hohn was relieved as Marine detachment commander by Major James

¹⁰ "Resident Officer-in-Charge" was Lieutenant Commander Greey's official designation. With four enlisted Navy radiomen to maintain his communications, he or his predecessor had been, until the arrival of Major Hohn's detachment, sole Naval representative on Wake.

P. S. Devereux, who until this time had been executive officer of the 1st Defense Battalion. By virtue of his seniority, Major Devereux also became Island Commander, an additional and onerous duty which he would hold until relieved, on the brink of war, by a Navy officer, Commander W. S. Cunningham, at this time still navigator of the U. S. S. *Wright*.

Wake, as Major Devereux saw it at this time, he describes as follows:

When I arrived on the island, the contractor's men working on the airfield near the toe of Wake proper had one airstrip in usable condition and were beginning the cross-runway. Five large magazines and three smaller detonator magazines, built of concrete and partly underground, were almost completed in the airfield area. A Marine barracks, quarters for the Navy fliers who would be stationed on the island, warehouses and shops also were going up on Wake. On Peale Island, work was progressing on a naval hospital, the seaplane ramp and parking areas. On Wilkes, there were only fuel storage tanks and the sites of proposed powder magazines, but a new deepwater channel was being cut through the island. In the lagoon, a dredge was removing coral heads from the runways for the seaplanes which were to be based at Wake. Some of these installations were nearly finished; some were partly completed; some were only in the blueprint stage.

To accomplish his urgent military mission of getting Wake's defenses into highest readiness in the shortest time, Major Dexereux found much to be done, few tools and little time. In addition, however, to this pressing matter, as top representative of the armed forces on Wake, he was confronted by other problems hardly less demanding.

To reinforce Army air strength in the Philippines, B-17 "Flying Fortresses" were being staged across the Pacific as they could be spared. Wake was a necessary stop, but no Army—in fact, no aviation—ground crews were available to service the great airplanes. One B-17 of this type consumed some 3,000 gallons of gasoline at a drink, and, since Wake did not yet afford proper facilities for aircraft fueling, this bulk and weight of fuel for each airplane had to

be manhandled and pumped¹¹ by the Marines—in addition to their normal duties and at any hour of the day or night. This arrangement had been put into effect on order from the Fourteenth Naval District Headquarters (Pearl Harbor), of which Wake, although two thousand miles distant, was an outlying station.

It was, in a sense, ironic that these aircraft, which

¹¹ Tankers would pump bulk aviation gas into tank storage ashore; Marine working parties would pump this gasoline into 50-gallon drums and would transfer the drums to dispersed fuel dumps; finally, on arrival of planes, the same gasoline would again be pumped by the same means into a lone tank-truck for delivery to the aircraft; when time pressed—as it usually did—Marines reinforced the truck by pumping directly from 50-gallon drums into the Fortresses.



AVIATION GASOLINE being pumped ashore from a Navy tender moored off the mouth of Wilkes Channel in the Autumn of 1941. Camp Two (contractors' camp) lies across the lagoon in left background.

cost Wake so many man-hours of vital defensive preparations, would themselves be trapped on the ground and largely destroyed by the initial Japanese attacks on Clark and Nichols Fields in the Philippines, which took place after the attacks on Wake and Pearl Harbor.

Although Army aviation servicing represented the heaviest single additional demand upon the Marines, whenever a ship arrived, they were also required to act as stevedores in the time-consuming, exhausting process of transfer and lightering which would remain necessary until the channel, berthing and turning facilities inside the lagoon could be completed.

Because of all the foregoing additional duties, much less fortification and construction of defenses—not to speak of training—was accomplished during the Autumn months of 1941 than would ordinarily have been the case. Fortunately, as far as training was concerned, the defense detachment, although even now carrying its share of recruits, contained considerably more than a cadre of veteran noncommissioned officers, “old Marines” of the best type.

Two weeks after Major Devereux's arrival and assumption of command, the Wake garrison was, on 2 November, augmented by a further draft from the parent 1st Defense Battalion, when 9 officers and 200 enlisted arrived from Pearl in U. S. S. *Castor*, bringing the total Marine strength on Wake to 15 officers and 373 enlisted Marines.

During October and November, progress on and about the air strip, by now a going concern, indicated that there was room on Wake for the aviation component of fighters necessary to balance and round out the defense force. Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, had determined that this was to be Marine Fighting Squadron 211, supported in its independent role by a provisional service detachment drawn from Marine Air Group 21, to which VMF-211 was assigned. To establish the ground facilities required to maintain this squadron, Major Walter L. J. Bayler, from the staff of MAG-21, together with a detachment of 49 Marines commanded by Second Lieutenant Robert J. Conderman,¹² was despatched from Pearl on 19 November, in U. S. S. *Wright*, an aircraft tender which was also bringing out the prospective Island Commander and commanding officer of the Naval Air Base.

While the *Wright*, also a “Hog Islander,” plowed westward bearing VMF-211's ground component, the air echelon of that squadron, consisting of the squadron commander, nine officers and two enlisted pilots,¹³ had on the afternoon of 27 November received secret verbal warning orders to prepare for embarkation aboard a carrier.

Since some such orders had been expected by the squadron commander (though not by the pilots, none of whom carried more than toilet-articles and change of clothing), few preparations were required other than to fly the 12 new F4F-3 (Grumman Wildcat) fighters from Ewa Mooring Mast (as the air station was then designated) over to Ford Island, the naval air base in the middle of Pearl Harbor, for further transfer by air to the flight deck of U. S. S. *Enterprise*. This was a routine operation for any Marine squadron, trained as all were in carrier operations, and, save for the newness of the aircraft and the fact that one plane's starter¹⁴ misbehaved badly the morning flight of 28 November onto the *Enterprise* went off without incident.

The best description of VMF-211's voyage to Wake is contained in a personal letter, composed on the eve of the squadron's debarkation, from Major Putnam to Col. Claude A. Larkin who commanded MAG-21. Excerpts are quoted:

¹² This detachment, like a similar one organized for the Marine air component at Midway, had been provisionally made up from key personnel representing each squadron in MAG-21, inasmuch as, at the time of organization, final decision had not been made as to which squadrons from the group would be assigned to which islands. Wake aviation ground detachment therefore included personnel not only from VMF-211, but from Headquarters and Service Squadron 21 and Marine Scout Bombing Squadrons 231 and 232.

¹³ The pilots of VMF-211's Wake detachment were: Major Paul A. Putnam (commanding), Captains Henry T. Elrod, Herbert C. Freuler, Frank C. Tharin, First Lieutenant George A. Graves, Second Lieutenants Robert J. Conderman (in command of advance detail and ground maintenance, but also pilot), Carl R. Davidson, Frank J. Holden, John F. Kinney, David D. Kliwier, Henry G. Webb, Technical Sergeant William J. Hamilton, and Staff Sergeant Robert O. Arthur.

¹⁴ A hint as to the importance of the squadron's mission might have been drawn at this time from the fact that, when this starter-trouble developed, the defective plane's pilot was flown out by a torpedo-plane from *Enterprise*, and a brand new F4F-3 from VF-6, an *Enterprise* squadron, was substituted on the spot.

At Sea,
December 3, 1941.

Dear COLONEL LARKIN:

It is expected that we will go ashore tomorrow morning. The extreme secrecy under which we sailed is still in effect, and I understand is to remain so at least until this force has returned to Hawaiian operating area. Therefore I am sending this first report via guard mail on this ship, rather than by air mail after landing. * * *

You will recall that I left one plane at Ford Island. The Admiral at once gave me a plane to replace it, from VF-6; and he made it plain to me and to the whole ship that nothing should be overlooked nor any trouble spared in order to insure that I will get ashore with 12 airplanes in as near perfect condition as possible. Immediately I was given a full complement of mechs and all hands aboard have continually vied with each other to see who could do the most for me. I feel a bit like the fatted calf being groomed for whatever it is that happens to fatted calves, but it surely is nice while it lasts and the airplanes are pretty sleek and fat too. They have of course been checked and double checked from end to end, and they have also been painted so that all 12 are now of standard blue and gray. * * *

The Admiral seems to be most determined to maintain secrecy regarding the position and activity of this force. There has been a continuous inner air patrol during daylight, and a full squadron has made a long search to the front and flanks each morning and evening. They are armed to the teeth and the orders are to attack any Japanese vessel or aircraft on sight in order to prevent the discovery of this force.

My orders, however, are not so direct. In fact I have no orders. I have been told informally by lesser members of staff that I will be given orders only to fly off the ship and go to the land, and that there will be nothing in the way of instructions other than to do what seems appropriate at the moment. Of course I shall go and ask for orders and instructions, but it seems unlikely that I shall be given anything definite. * * *

This is written Wednesday forenoon. Should I receive any orders at variance with the foregoing, I will add a postscript. Otherwise I think of nothing further of importance or interest at this time. * * *

When the *Enterprise* had reached a point approximately 200 miles northeast of Wake, the squadron, from a matériel standpoint, was "as far as possible ready for combat service," according to Major Putnam. However, he added, it was

seriously handicapped by lack of experience in the type of airplane then used. It is believed that the squadron was excellently trained and well qualified for war duty in a general sense, but it was unfortunate that the new type of airplane, so radically different from the type in which training had been conducted, had been received too recently to permit familiarization in tactical flying and gunnery.

On the morning of 4 December, met and led in by a Navy PBY sent out from Wake,¹⁵ VMF-211 took off from the flight deck of the *Enterprise*, and within less than two hours, the last F4F-3 had pancaked on the narrow strip at Peacock Point.

Having arrived on 29 November, Major Bayler, busy setting up air-base communication facilities on Wake, and Lieutenant Conderman, with his 49 headquarters and service personnel, were waiting to greet the squadron, but the aircraft operating facilities at Wake were hardly in a finished stage.

The landing strip, although sufficient in length, was too narrow to permit safe operation of more than one airplane at a time, thus precluding takeoffs or landings by section, the most expeditious means of getting the maximum number of planes airborne in the shortest time. Parking was extremely restricted, and all areas about the hardstand parking mat were in such rough and unfinished condition that passage of airplanes over them, even when pushed by hand, could occasion serious damage. Fueling facilities were the same as those just described for the B-17's.

Although their necessity had been early realized by Major Devereaux, no shelters or aircraft revetments as yet existed, a matter which was immediately made the subject of representation by Major Putnam¹⁶ to the Island Commander (now Commander Cunningham). Finally summarized Putnam,

¹⁵ On the day before, to the surprise of persons at Wake, a 12-plane squadron of PBY's had glided down onto the lagoon, anchored, and commenced what, through 5 December, was to be a daily series of long-range air searches to the south of Wake. No information is available as to their findings, if any. The PBY which assisted VMF-211 with its navigation was of course from this squadron.

¹⁶ Major Putnam's official report (cited in Appendix I as source 19), an informative and vivid document, describes the negotiations required to initiate construction of revetments, as follows:

"Backed by a written request from the Commander, Aircraft Battle Force, a request was made through the Island Commander to the Civilian Contractor's superintendent on the morning of 5 December, asking for the immediate construction of bunkers for the protection of aircraft, and outlining various other works to follow. Great emphasis was put on the fact that speed, rather than neatly finished work, was required. However, an inspection that afternoon revealed a young civil engineer laboriously setting out stakes with a transit and three rodmen. It required an hour of frantic rushing about and some very strong language to replace the young engineer and his rodmen with a couple of Swedes and bulldozers."

The difficulty now presenting itself was that of operating new type airplanes, engines, and propellers without either instruction manuals or experienced airplane and engine mechanics.

Realizing the urgency not only of construction and material facilities but of training and familiarization with the new aircraft, Major Putnam immediately instituted a training syllabus which could be carried on in conjunction with the daily dawn and dusk patrols ordered commenced by Commander Cunningham on the morning after VMF-211's arrival. These patrols, to be executed in each case by four aircraft, were to circle the atoll at not less than 50-mile radius and would be combined with navigation and instrument training. The latter were rightly deemed of special importance because no electronic homing or navigational aids suitable for fighter operations existed on Wake, a small mark for a returning fighter pilot to locate through a floor of intermittent clouds.

With the arrival of the *Wright*, on 28 November, just prior to that of VMF-211, numerous changes had taken place. Commander Cunningham of course was now Island Commander. With him he had brought Commander Campbell Keene, U. S. N., eight Navy officers and 58 bluejackets, the initial detachment for establishment of the Naval Air Base. All these personnel, like the existing Army Air Force communication detachment¹⁷ of one officer and four soldiers, were without arms or field equipment.

Although unfamiliar with detailed plans for defense of Wake, should it be attached, Commander Cunningham took immediate steps to assert his general authority as Island Commander and to coordinate (insofar as this was not already automatic) the activities of the ground and air components of the Marine defense force.

As of 6 December 1941, the defensive status of Wake may be summarized in a few sentences.

The ground defenses, embodying the complete artillery of a defense battalion, had by dint of unceasing 12-hour working days been emplaced, and some protective sandbagging and camouflage accomplished. To man these weapons, which even by the economical 1941 tables of organization required 43 officers and 939 enlisted, the 1st Defense Battalion detachment had but 15 officers and 373 en-

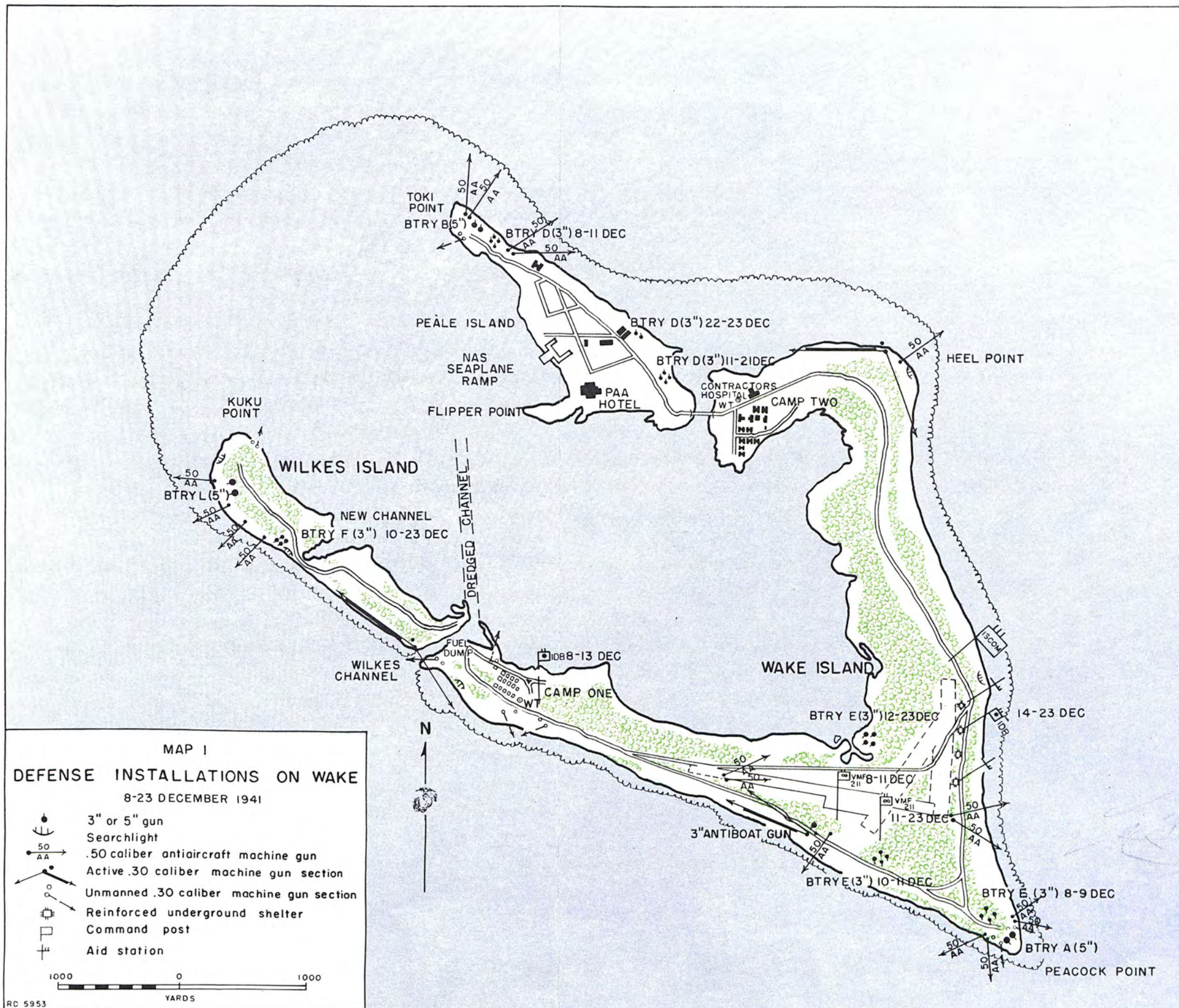
¹⁷ Commanded by Captain Henry S. Wilson, AUS, this detachment manned an Army Airways Communication Service radio-van to assist B-17's enroute westward.

listed. In terms of effect this meant that one 3-inch antiaircraft battery¹⁸ was entirely without personnel, and that the other two batteries could each man but three of their four guns—therefore that of twelve 3-inch guns on the island only six were active weapons. Only one 3-inch battery (D) had its full allowance of fire-control equipment; Battery E had a director but no heightfinder, and was thereby forced to rely for target altitude-data upon telephoned information from Battery D. Less than half the minimum personnel were on Wake to man the machine guns, both ground and antiaircraft. Despite existing plans for its eventual provision, no radar, either fire control or early warning, had reached Wake, and the searchlight battery did not have its sound-locators to pick up the noise of approaching aircraft. Only the 5-inch seacoast batteries were at or near authorized strengths, and even these, like all other units, were devilled by unending minor shortages of tools, spare parts and miscellaneous ordnance items.

Of the three islands, it would be safe to say that Peale was the most advanced, both in general base development and in defensive organization. Although Battery B, the 5-inch seacoast unit at Teahupo Point, had only been fully organized since arrival of personnel on 2 November, the battery position was generally well organized. Much the same could be said of Battery D, 3-inch antiaircraft, set up near the southeast end of the island. Although not all emplacements had been completely sand bagged, there were adequate personnel shelters plus underground stowage for 1,400 rounds of 3-inch ammunition. Complete, though not underground, telephone lines linked all positions and the island strongpoint-command post.

On Wake Island the progress of high-priority construction, especially in the vicinity of the fighter strip, together with the general realization that this was the important land mass of the atoll, had combined to bring readiness almost to the level of Peale. Battery A, 5-inch seacoast at Peacock Point, was completely emplaced and well-camouflaged although without individual shelters. Battery E, 3-inch antiaircraft, could show progress almost as great. Working with only 43 Marines, the battery nevertheless had completely emplaced, sand-bagged and camouflaged two guns and the director, while the

¹⁸ This was Battery F. For this battery, however, the necessary fire-control equipment had not yet arrived, so, even with full gun-crews, its effectiveness would have been slight.



third gun was well along toward completion. Although a complete telephone net (with important trunks doubled or tripled) connected all units on Wake Island, the field-wire lines were all on the surface, and, because of the dense brush (particularly along the south shore) followed the road net.

Of Wilkes at this time, Capt. Wesley McC. Platt, the strong-point commander, wrote:

Wilkes was the least developed island of the Wake group. At the outbreak of war, weapons * * * had been set up. All were without camouflage or protection except the .50 caliber machine guns, which had been employed. All brush east of the new channel had been cleared. The remaining brush west of the new channel was thick and difficult to negotiate. As a result of the density of this brush, .50 caliber machine guns had been placed fairly close to the water line. The beach itself dropped abruptly from 2½ to 4 feet just above the high water mark.

Other than his machine guns (four .50 caliber AA and four .30 caliber) and two searchlights, Captain Platt had but one active battery on Wilkes, Battery L, the 5-inch seacoast unit at Kuku Point. The four 3-inch guns destined for Battery F were parked on Wilkes without personnel or fire-control gear. Wire communications between the island command post and all units were in and complete.

The situation of VMF-211 has been discussed in detail, but the air-defense picture may well be re-summarized. Wake, intended primarily as a patrol-plans base for PBY's, "the eyes of the Fleet," had no scouting aircraft, and only the most primitive facilities for any type of aircraft operations. Its defending fighter squadron, VMF-211, was learning on the job how to operate wholly new aircraft which, beautiful as they were, had no armor, no self-sealing fuel tanks; and on which the bomb racks (always mounted by naval fighters) did not match the local supply of bombs.¹⁹

Over and above the 1,200 civilian contract employees, the military population of Wake (almost 20 percent of whom were without arms or equipment) totaled 38 officers and 485 enlisted as follows:

1st Defense Battalion detachment.	15 officers, 373 enlisted.
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¹⁹ Captain Freuler, squadron ordnance officer, at this moment was devising homemade modifications of the troublesome bomb lugs so that, by 8 December, two 100-pound bombs could be precariously swung onto each aircraft, though hardly in any manner to inspire pilot confidence in clean release, or assurance that return to base could be accomplished without dangling armed bombs.

VMF-211 and attachments.	12 officers, 49 enlisted.
United States Naval Air Station.	10 officers, 58 enlisted (without arms).
Army Air Corps-----	1 officer, 4 enlisted (without arms).
U. S. S. <i>Triton</i> -----	1 enlisted (without arms, landed for medical attention).

On the entire atoll, therefore, equipped and trained for combat, there were but 449 marines of all ranks, the sole defense of Wake against attack by land and sea and air.

Supplies on Wake, although aggravatingly short in many particular items, were generally adequate. The Marines had 90 days' rations on hand, while the contract organization's storerooms contained a 6-months' supply. Despite the fact that no natural water supply existed, a catchment system and a sufficient number of evaporators were in service to meet all needs for human consumption. Ammunition and aviation ordnance supplies on hand, while enough for limited initial operations, were not sufficient for any protracted, continuing defense. Medical supplies were those normal for a remote, outlying station, and could thus be considered adequate. In addition to the naval medical equipment and personnel on Wake, the contractor's organization operated a fully equipped hospital in Camp 2.

The general level of readiness as distinct from adequacy of supply and sufficiency of personnel, though not nearly ideal, was nevertheless excellent and fully up to local possibilities. During the month of November, dispatch warning had been received from Pearl that:

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION INDICATES
YOU SHOULD BE ON THE ALERT

At this time the island commander, then Major Devereux, had responded with a query as to whether the situation was such that contractor's personnel should be diverted to construction primarily military and defensive in nature. Upon receipt of a negative reply, some two days later, this suggested revision of priorities was abandoned, but small arms ammunition was nevertheless issued to individual Marines, to be kept in readiness in each tent, and the amount of ready-service ammunition stowed at every gun position was increased.

Although the field telephone equipment was old and battered and the field wire frayed, above-ground

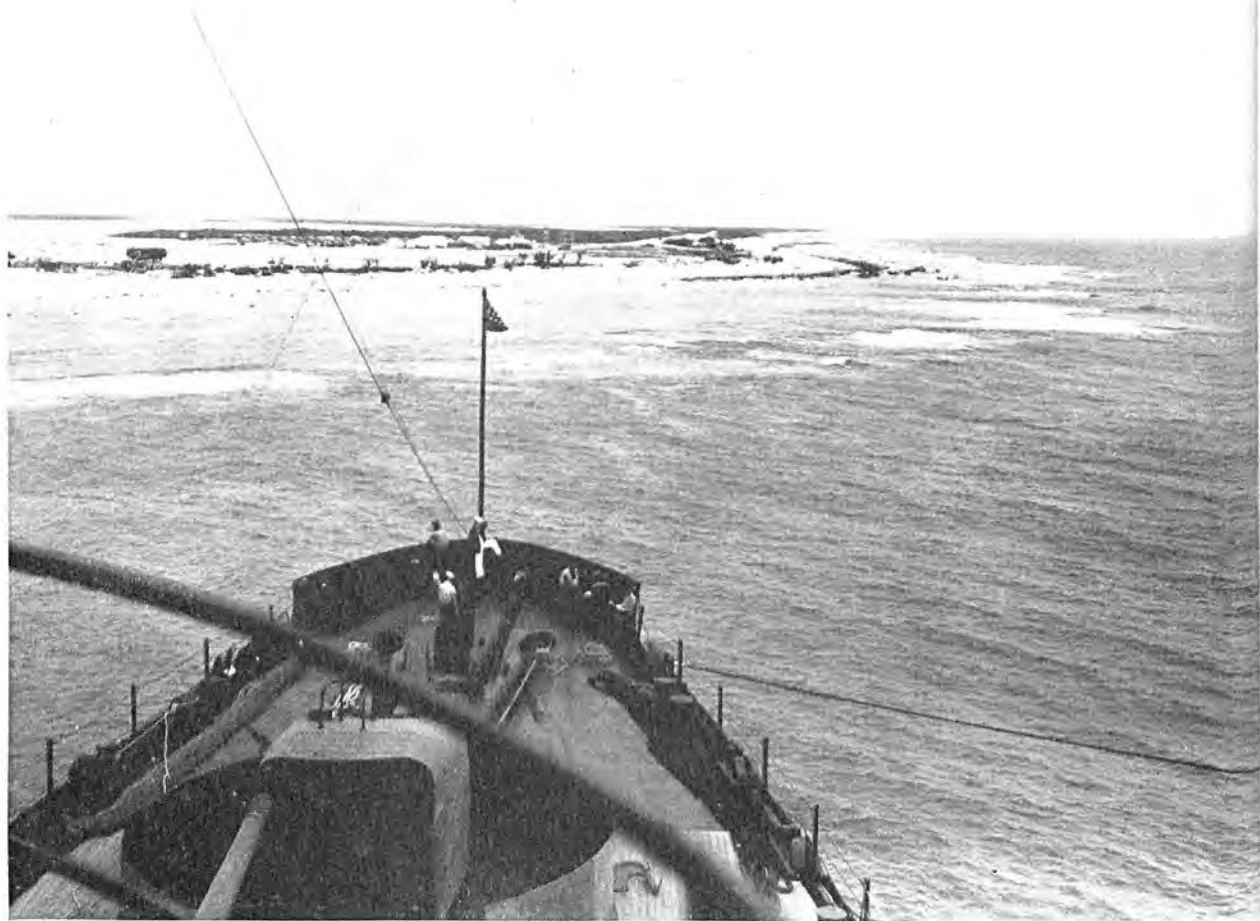
wire communications connected all positions, and, in addition, a common J-line, so-called, joined all batteries, command posts, observation-posts, and other installations with which the commander might need contact during battle. By means of primitive "walky-talkies," a radio net had been established to parallel wire communications between the respective command posts on Wake Island, Wilkes, and Peale. Atop the 50-foot steel watertank at Camp 1, the highest point on Wake, Major Devereux had established a visual observation-post linked by field telephone to the command post. This OP, with a seaward horizon of about nine miles, was the only substitute for radar.

On the morning of Saturday, 6 December, a few hours of freedom from external interruption enabled Major Devereux, for the first time since assuming command, to hold general drills for the entire de-

fense battalion detachment. "Call to Arms" was sounded, all gun positions were manned (to the extent which personnel shortages permitted), communications tested, and simulated targets were "engaged".²⁰ The drill ran smoothly and much to the commanding officer's satisfaction. In return for excellent performance, and because his Marines had been working a seven-day week all autumn, Major Devereux decided to grant something almost unheard-of on Wake: Saturday afternoon off and holiday routine on Sunday.

His timing of the pause for rest was better than he knew.

²⁰ Prior to the outbreak of war, no opportunity had been found for test-firings, calibration, or other gunnery exercises after emplacement of weapons on Wake. The first actual firing was in combat against the Japanese.



MARINE CAMP ON WAKE Camp One, seen over the bow of a Navy tender moored off Wake prior to the outbreak of war in 1941. The water-tank visible on center horizon served as Wake's lone observation post during the siege.



CHAPTER II

The Enemy Strikes

The Pan American Airways *Philippine Clipper*, which had spent the night of 7-8 December at Wake, embarked passengers shortly after sunrise on Monday morning,¹ 8 December, taxied out into the calm green of the lagoon, took take-off position, and at 0655 soared outward toward Guam. Ashore on Wake the usual 0600 reveille had broken out the Marines, all of whom were well rested after their Sunday of holiday routine. Breakfast was being concluded in the mess halls, and many Marines were already squaring away their tents prior to falling out for the day's work. Major Devereux was shaving.

In the Army Airways Communications Service radio van set up by Captain Wilson near the air strip, an operator was coming up on frequency with the base at Hickam Field on Oahu, when, at 0650, a frantic, uncoded, procedureless transmission cut through from Hickam: Oahu was under enemy air attack.

Captain Wilson made for Major Devereux's tent, and delivered it to the defense commander. Major Devereux, after attempting unsuccessfully to reach Commander Cunningham by telephone, called the base communication shack, and learned that a coded priority² transmission just in from Pearl was now being broken down. Without hesitating further, Major Devereux dropped the telephone, called for the

field music on watch and ordered him to sound "Call to Arms".³

Marines piled into the trucks which rolled to the battery areas in Camp 1 as gunnery sergeants broke out their men and checked to see that they had their rifles and ball ammunition. By 0735, all positions had reported manned and ready, a defense battalion officers' conference had been briefly held, and a watch had been established as previously planned atop the water tank OP in Camp 1.

Aviation, which already had the dawn patrol airborne prior to arrival of the news from Pearl, was initiating measures for the safety of the 12 new Wildcats as the *Philippine Clipper*, recalled only 10 minutes out of Wake, circled and let down into the lagoon. At the air strip something close to consternation existed. VMF-211, which had been on Wake but four days, one a holiday, could hardly be said to have gotten established. Although dispersed aircraft revetments were being dozed up and would be ready by 1400 that day, the equally necessary net of access roads which, for the sake of the airplanes, had to be smoothly surfaced, was also uncompleted. The small size of the existing parking area prohibited dispersal beyond rather narrow limits. Major Putnam was thus confronted with a dilemma which he described as follows:

The Squadron Commander was faced with a choice between two major decisions, and inevitably he chose the wrong one. Work was progressing simultaneously

¹ By east longitude date; this was the same day as 7 December east of the date line.

² At this time, relative priorities in despatch traffic were as follows: Urgent (to be used only for a few types of battle reports), priority, routine, deferred. Thus a priority despatch presented a considerably more important transmission than it now would.

³ Captain Cunningham, who immediately recalled the *Philippine Clipper*, has since stated that it was he who ordered the defense battalion to general quarters, but it appears that this action had already been taken prior to his issuance of any order.

on six of the protective bunkers for the airplanes, and while none was available for immediate occupancy, all would be ready not later than by 1400. Protection and camouflage for facilities were not available but could be made ready within 24 hours. Fox holes or other prepared positions for personnel did not exist but would be completed not later than 1400. To move the airplanes out of the regular parking area entailed grave risk of damage, and any damage meant the complete loss of an airplane because of the complete absence of spare parts * * * The Squadron Commander decided to avoid certain damage to his airplanes by moving them across the rough ground, to delay movements of material until some place could be prepared to receive it, and to trust his personnel to take natural cover if attacked.

Thus the primary morning activities of VMF-211's handful of pilots and mechanics were to disperse the aircraft as widely as possible in the open parking area and usable vicinity, to relocate the squadron radio installation from its original temporary site to one under cover, and, above all, to commence arming and servicing all aircraft for combat, in itself no light job.

At 0800, but a few hours after the gutted and blazing *Arizona's* colors had been broken out aboard the dying ship, under a hail of enemy fire at Pearl Harbor, Morning Colors sounded on Wake, and the flag announced to all hands the garrison's determination and courage for the job ahead.

Defensive preparations hummed throughout Wake. Full allowances of ammunition were dropped off by truck at each unit; the few spare individual weapons in Marine storerooms were issued—as far as they went—to the unarmed AAF soldiers and to the naval air base bluejackets; gas masks and the old style World War I helmets, on hand only for Marines, were distributed to the battery positions. On order from Major Devereux, watches were set at fire-control instruments and guns, while the balance of personnel worked on fox holes, filled the few remaining sandbags at hand, and set about other measures of defensive fortification. The 3-inch antiaircraft batteries were specifically directed to keep one gun, plus all fire-control instruments, fully manned.

Initial command posts, not only for Marine units, but for the island commander, were hastily set up, in most instances for the time being resembling that of the 1st Defense Battalion detachment, which was simply a switchboard in the brush just east of Camp 1. Commander Cunningham's was located in Camp 2, and VMF-211's remained in the squadron office

tent, personnel being unavailable from more pressing duties, such as belting extra ammunition and transferring bulk fuel into more dispersable drums.

At 0900, Major Putnam's four-plane combat patrol returned to base, and after refuelling and taking a smoke and stretch, the four pilots⁴ clambered back into F4F's 9 through 12, took off, executed their section rendezvous and climbed to 12,000 feet scouting the most likely sectors for enemy approach south of Wake. Shortly afterward, the first pilot, the *Philippine Clipper*, Capt. J. H. Hamilton, reported to Major Putnam at VMF-211's headquarters, with orders from the Island Commander to prepare to conduct a long-range southward search with fighter escort during the afternoon.⁵

While VMF-211's combat air patrol was making a swing north of Wake at 12,000 feet, a half mile below them 36 twin-tailed Japanese bombers dropped northward toward the atoll. This was Air Attack Force No. 1 of the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla, based at Roi, 720 miles to the south. As the group leader signalled for a gliding let-down in his 10,000-foot approach, he noted that the south coast of the atoll was masked by a drifting rain squall at about 2,000 feet. The three divisions, in 12-plane V's, dropped rapidly down into the squall and emerged a few seconds later, almost on top of the Wake airstrip.

At 1158, First Lieutenant Lewis, commanding Battery E at Peacock Point, chanced to look skyward just in time to see a V of 12 strange aircraft heading over a point just midway between Camp 1 and Peacock Point. He jumped for a field telephone connected to the "J"-line as a spray of bright sparks began to sail through the air ahead of the formation, and, as one civilian exclaimed, "the wheels dropped off the airplanes." Japanese bombs were falling on Wake.

Lewis, an experienced antiaircraft artilleryman, had not only complied with the commanding officer's directive to keep one gun manned, but he added another for good measure, and, within

⁴ These were: Captain Elrod, who relieved Major Putnam and Second Lieutenant Davidson in one section, and First Lieutenant Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton in the other.

⁵ This search was never conducted, inasmuch as the clipper took off for Midway at 1250, evacuating certain PAA personnel plus all passengers—except Mr. H. P. Hevenor, a Government official who missed the plane, was marooned on Wake and eventually ended up in Japanese hands. "It struck me a rather drastic lesson in the wisdom of punctuality," commented Colonel Devereux.

matter of seconds, two of Battery E's 3-inch guns were barking at the Japanese, using fire-control data supplied by Lewis's estimate.⁶ All along the south shore of Wake, as enemy incendiary bullets began to prickle and spit, .50 caliber antiaircraft machine guns opened fire.

A closed spaced pattern of 100-pound fragmentation bombs and 20-mm. incendiary bullets laced the entire VMF-211 area, where eight Grummans were dispersed at approximately hundred-yard intervals. While two 12-plane enemy divisions continued to release bombs and to strafe Camp 2, one division broke off, swung back and approached Camp 1 and the airstrip from the westward over Kuku Point, and headed for the Pan American installations on Peale, which were likewise heavily attacked. By 1210, the enemy divisions had expended bombs and ammunition, turned away, rendezvoused and commenced their climb back to cruising altitude. "The pilots in every one of the planes were grinning widely. Everyone wagged his wings to signify 'BANZAI'".⁷

On the ground, despite prompt and fairly dense antiaircraft fire, not only from Battery E but from D (3-inch, Peale) and from .50 calibers all over the atoll, the enemy attack had taken telling effect, especially in and about the airstrip.

As pilots attempted to man their planes, seven of the eight F4F-3's had been burned or blasted from tail to rudder, and the remaining one had sustained serious but not irreparable damage to its reserve fuel tank. Major Bayer's air-ground radio installation was severely damaged by fragments and strafing, and the whole aviation area seemed a sea of blazing gasoline from the 25,000-gallon avgas tank which had been hit in the first strike; on all sides, as well, 50-gallon fuel drums popped into flame. VMF-211's tentage, containing the squadron's scanty stock of tools and spares, had been riddled and partially burned.

Worst of all, of 55 Marine aviation personnel then on the ground, 23 were killed outright or died of wounds before morning, and 11 more were wounded

⁶ Battery E, it will be recalled, had no height-finder, but was supposed to rely for this data on telephonic information from Battery D on Peale. Without waiting for word from Peale, Lieutenant Lewis made an instantaneous estimate of target altitude, cranked it onto his director, and had the battery in action within a matter of seconds.

⁷ Account by Tsuji, Norio, a Japanese observer during the raid.

and survived. At one stroke, VMF-211 had sustained over 60 percent casualties. Two pilots (Lieutenants Graves and Holden) were killed, Lieutenant Conderman would die before daybreak, and another, Lieutenant Webb, was seriously wounded. Three more pilots, Major Putnam, Captain Tharin and Staff Sergeant Arthur, had received minor wounds but remained on their feet. Almost half of the ground-crews were dead.

In Camp 2 and the adjacent Pan American area, the luxurious hotel, together with more important seaplane-base facilities, was afire, the *Philippine Clipper* had received a few stray machine-gun bullets, and some 10 Chamorro civilian employees of PAA had been killed.

So far as is known, the enemy escaped without the loss of a single airplane, although several of the bombers sustained damage from AA fire. The Marine combat air patrol, well above the raid and momentarily scouting to the north, had not made contact, and executed a routine landing some minutes after the attack. To add the final stroke of ill fortune, F4F number 9, piloted by Captain Elrod, was unable while landing to avoid striking its propeller on a mass of bomb debris, and it too was out of action with a bent propeller and a badly jarred engine.

Admiral Inouye might well congratulate the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla for their devastating strike and upon their initial good fortune.

Raids Through 10 December

The most bitter lesson to be derived from the initial Japanese raid was of course the very short notice with which the raiders struck. This factor was undoubtedly heightened by the fortuitous rain squall which masked the enemy let-down and approach, but the complete lack of any type of early warning was much more than a matter of bad weather. It was a matter which pointed squarely at Wake's most critical shortage: the want of radar. Throughout the operation, time and time again, despite the most vigilant visual observation, Japanese planes, assisted by the ever-booming surf which masked engine-noises, would be almost at the bomb-release point by the time they were spotted.

After the enemy had departed, the immediate problem was damage-control at the airstrip. Casualties were despatched to the contractor's hospital, a one-story structure containing two wards, isolation facilities, an operating room and clinic which had

been taken over as the island aid station.⁸ Hardly less important than the human casualties were those inflicted by the Japanese on Major Putnam's "sleek and fat" airplanes.

The intact three (numbers 10, 11, and 12) were immediately sent aloft on combat air patrol and to safeguard them against further surprise on the ground. Before the fires were completely out, the squadron commander had designated Second Lieutenant Kinney as the replacement Engineering Officer, vice First Lieutenant Graves, who had been killed. Kinney's principal assistant was Technical Sergeant Hamilton, an enlisted aviation pilot of many years' experience in all phases of Marine Corps aviation. Within a few hours, Kinney and Hamilton had commenced the ceaseless scavenging of burnt-out wreckage for salvageable tools and parts which was to mark outstandingly the maintenance in effective operation of the remnant of VMF-211.

Other reassignments were necessitated by casualties, and these were promptly made. Captain Freuler reorganized the ordnance section, Lieutenant Kliever took over the radio section, while Captains Elrod and Tharin, experienced Marine pilots whose diversified training had included thorough fundamental instruction in ground warfare, supervised construction of individual fox holes, shelters and infantry defensive works in the VMF-211 area. Of all these projects, the most important—in addition to that already progressing on the aircraft revetments—was the mining of the airstrip with heavy dynamite charges at 150-foot intervals. This was primarily a counter-airborne scheme, and was coordinated with deep bulldozed furrowing of all open ground about the strip where airborne landings might be accomplished. Commencing that night as a further precaution, heavy engineering equipment was parked at regular intervals so as to obstruct the runway at all times when friendly planes were not aloft. Based on what was then known of enemy capabilities, it was planned not only to continue the dawn and dusk reconnaissance flights but to maintain a noon combat air patrol to attempt interception of succeeding raids.

⁸The battalion surgeon of the 1st Defense Battalion detachment, Lt. (j. g.) Gustave M. Kahn, (M. C.) U. S. N., was ably assisted by his civilian colleague, Dr. Lawton M. Shank, the contractor's surgeon, whose coolness under fire and medical efficiency won high praise throughout the defense. Dr. Shank did not survive imprisonment, but he has since been recommended for posthumous award of the Navy Cross.

Throughout the atoll, the tempo of activity—except among the majority of contract workmen⁹—ready swift, had been accelerated perceptibly as result of the first air raid, which had demonstrated so graphically the enemy's power to inflict damage.

At all battery positions, individual improvement of emplacements, fox holes, camouflage and all possible defensive work was pursued. As a protection against any attempt by the enemy to force Wilkes channel, a Navy lighter, loaded with dynamite and a stack of concrete blocks, was anchored directly in the channel. Telephone lines, exposed as they were above ground, had been pounded and whipped apart in the bombing. Steps were therefore initiated to double up key trunks and to attempt to dig the most important underground.¹⁰ Construction of more durable and permanent command posts and shelters were likewise initiated before the day closed in a cold drizzle.

As a final, somewhat macabre touch, the bodies of Wake's first dead were taken from the hospital which had no mortuary, to an empty reefer box at Camp 2, and were placed there pending eventual burial.

During the night, working as best they could in black-out, aviation Marines, assisted by volunteer civilian equipment operators, followed a previous design experimentally worked out at Ewa by Marine Air Group 21, and completed eight blast-proof aircraft revetments. By next morning, 9 December, which dawned bright and clear, the four operational aircraft (including number 8 with the damaged reserve fuel tank) were therefore relatively safe. Plane 9, which required an engine overhaul and propeller repairs, was also being worked on within the bunker.

Forty-five minutes before dawn, at 0500, the day began with general quarters, following which the defense commander set Condition 1. This condition of readiness consisted of having all phones manned and

⁹ Approximately 10 percent of this group immediately volunteered for duties connected with the defense of Wake and many of these served with heroism and efficiency throughout the operation, some attempting to enlist.

¹⁰ One strongpoint commander comments: "Surface lines could not seem to stand up although they were all paralleled. We wanted to bury them, but we could not do so by hand * * * considering the scarcity of men to do the work. We could not obtain permission to use the ditch-diggers of the contractors * * *."

circuits open; weapons and fire-control instruments fully manned; and battle-lookouts posted.

At 0545, after their morning warm-up, the four F4F-3's took off over Peacock Point, rendezvoused in section over the field and climbed upward to scout 60 to 80 mile sectors along the most probable routes of enemy approach. At 0700, by the time the fighters had finished their search and were close aboard homeward bound, the defense battalion detachment was released to Condition 2, which relaxed personnel readiness to permit only half the guns at each position to be manned, reduced fire-control instrument crews, and allowed circulation of Marines around positions while at work—of which there was ample amount.

At 0730 the Grummans returned with negative reports, and, at the airstrip, Lieutenant Kinney continued his tinkering with plane 9. With the squadron's engineering problem what it had become, it was evident that means must be established for hangar overhaul and night work by black-out. Considering these problems, Major Putnam determined to modify two of the new plane shelters by enlarging them, ramping down entrances from ground level, and roofing them over with I-beams, lumber and light-proof paulins. By this expedient it would be possible to conduct extensive overhaul and maintenance around the clock and always with maximum protection.

As the morning wore on, individuals tended to keep closer to their fox holes and peel a weather eye skyward. Based on the known distance to the mandated Marshalls, it had already been a simple matter to compute that, with a dawn take-off, Japanese bombers could reach Wake at any time after 1100.

At 1145, methodical almost to a fault, the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla arrived over Wake from Roi. This time they were spotted by Marine Gunner H. C. Borth, who was in charge of the water tank OP. Within a few seconds after he had shouted his warning into the J-line, the air-ground radio (once more in operation with makeshift equipment obtained by Major Bayler from the Naval Air Base), was telling the combat air patrol of the raid; on the ground, batteries were going to general quarters; and, all over

¹¹ At no time did Wake ever possess a single air-raid alarm. Failing this, the traditional three-shot sentinel's alarm-signal was the only alternative. Experiments were tried whereby dismounted auto horns were wired to storage batteries, but this system failed.

the island bursts of three shots, the now accepted air-raid alarm,¹¹ were being fired to spread the word.

As the leading Japanese planes approached Peacock Point at 13,000 feet—a welcome change from the previous day—batteries opened fire from Peale and Peacock just before the first salvo of bombs was released. A few moments before, south of Wake, the combat air patrol had made contact with one flank of the line of division V's, and, while the enemy planes droned steadily on at 160 knots, Lt. David D. Kliewer and Technical Sergeant Hamilton managed to cut off a straggler despite hot return fire from a top turret. As the bomber nosed down into its final, flaming spin, 3-inch high-explosive shells began to burst in and around planes of the center division, and the fighters broke off.

Bombs began to strike the ground: first on Peacock strong-point, all about Battery E, one of the 3-inch batteries now in action, damaging a 3-inch gun and shattering the range-finder of closely adjacent Battery A (5-inch seacoast). Up the east leg of Wake Island travelled the strike of bombs; Camp 2 was next. The contractor's hospital received direct hits and burst into flames; civilian and Navy barracks; garage and blacksmith shop; advance-base storehouse and machine shop—all were destroyed within a few minutes by fire or explosion. The incomplete Naval Air Station, adjacent on Peale, despite the steady fire of Battery D's 3-inch guns, took destructive hits in the aerological building, hangar, and radio station, where a greater part of Wake's Navy radio gear was destroyed on the spot.

But the tight Japanese air discipline, excellent for defense against fighters, made their formations a well-aligned, carefully closed-up, massed target for antiaircraft guns, and, by the time bombs had hit Peale, five bombers were visibly smoking from the ground. A moment later, one of these burst into a sheet of flame and disintegrated in the air, Wake's second certain kill. The other four limped toward home somehow but were still smoking¹² when the 24-power antiaircraft height-finder tracked them out of sight.

The resultant damage almost equaled that of the initial raid. The hospital, filled with wounded from the day before, burned to the ground while the two surgeons saved first the patients and then what medical supplies and equipment could be salvaged. Camp

¹² A Japanese journal indicates that 14 of the bombers were damaged by antiaircraft fire during this attack.



3-INCH ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN of the type employed by Marines on Wake. This picture was taken on Samoa, in 1942, and actually shows Marines of the Second Defense Battalion.

2 and the Naval Air Station were now as badly off as the airstrip and VMF-211's area.

Four Marines and 55 civilians were killed.

Japanese aviation's performance this day, however, had conveyed some lessons to the defenders. Summing them up, from 9 December until the final carrier-strikes, Major Putnam would write:

The original raid * * * was tactically well conceived and skillfully executed, but thereafter their tactics were stupid, and the best that can be said of their skill is that they had excellent flight discipline. The hour and altitude of their arrival over the island was almost constant and their method of attack invariable, so that it was a simple matter to meet them, and they never, after that first day, got through unopposed * * *

The afternoon of 9 December saw commencement of what would be a painfully familiar and laborious

process on succeeding afternoons: the business of collecting wounded, of picking and salvaging for undamaged items amid blasted ruins, the relocation of undamaged installations in safer spots.

The Japanese attack on Peacock Point's anti-aircraft battery (Battery E) suggested to Major Devaux that the enemy were working in a familiar and logical sequence. On the day before, they had struck at Wake's means of fighter defense. Today they had bombed not only the Naval Air Station but the 3-inch battery which had opened so promptly against their first raid. To protect his remaining nest-egg of AA weapons, the commanding officer of the defense detachment therefore ordered that Battery E evacuate its present position and displace to a new site some 600 yards east and north, from which the battery could carry out present anti-air missions equally

well. At the same time, to bring the battery up to its former effectiveness, Marine Gunner McKinstry was sent to Wilkes to pick up one of the unmanned Battery F 3-inch guns as a substitute for that knocked out by today's raid. The displacement was executed with care, one platoon (two guns) at a time, the first being set up and ready to fire at the new site before the second quit the old.

With the hospital destroyed, another pressing problem had arisen. That afternoon, therefore, the Island Commander directed that ammunition now stored in Magazines 10 and 13—"igloos" of reinforced concrete and steel—be placed in the open to make way for two 21-bed underground wards. Interior dimensions of the erstwhile magazines were 20 by 40 feet on the sides, and, at the highest, a 15-foot overhead. Blacked-out operation of the new aid stations would of course be possible and electric lighting was to be provided by small gasoline generators. The shelters were located at the north and south ends, respectively, of a group of four such newly completed magazines. Separation of the two wards was intentional, for the sake of safety in dispersion, and medical supplies were equally divided between them. A Marine aid station, under Dr. Kahn, functioned in the southern shelter, and a Navy-civilian aid station was established in the northern one under Dr. Shank. By nightfall, both were in operation.

All through the night the Marines of Battery E labored to complete displacement. Aided by contractor's trucks and almost a hundred civilian volunteers, the guns, sandbags (too valuable and scarce to be left at the old position), fire-control equipment and ammunition were removed to the new site where emplacements were dug, sandbags refilled and the guns set down again. By 0500, just in time for dawn general quarters, Battery E was in position and ready to fire.

On 10 December, after a morning of continued defensive activity, the Japanese confirmed the defenders' expectation that the previous day represented a fair sample of the prospective pattern of life (and death) on Wake. At 1045 or a short time after, 26 of the same bombers appeared, this time from the east. Again VMF-211 intercepted, and again the squadron scored. Captain Elrod, leading the combat-air patrol, personally shot down two more bombers while the 3-inch guns slammed away.

This day's raid again hit what luckily was now the empty original 3-inch battery position at Peacock

Point, although Battery E's guns were firing on the enemy from their new site. Battery D, the other active 3-inch unit, on Peale, received two successive passes by one division. During the first, although the battery very inconveniently suffered a power-plant casualty at just the wrong moment and thus had to fire on barrage data, one enemy plane was seen to catch fire, and circled back, smoking badly.

On Wilkes, however, heretofore uninjured, the enemy scored a success which compensated for his bad bombing over Peale. One stick of bombs lit squarely on a construction dump of dynamite in which 125 tons were cached west of the "New Channel".¹³

The resultant explosion denuded the greater part of Wilkes of brush, set off all 3-inch and 5-inch ready ammunition at Batteries L and F (fortunately the latter was still not in full commission), and swept the seacoast battery (L) clean of accessories, light fittings and anything else in the least movable. To everyone's amazement, casualties on Wilkes amounted to but one Marine killed, four Marines wounded, and one civilian suffering—as well he might—from shock.

Damage to Battery L was serious if not crippling. When the dazed gunners picked themselves up, they found that all battery fire-control instruments (except the gun telescopes on Gun 2) had been destroyed, blown away or damaged beyond repair. The guns themselves, rugged pieces of naval ordnance built to stand long and hard lives at sea, were similarly battered. Gun tubes were dented, firing locks torn off, training and elevating racks burred and distorted.

Battery F, the hitherto unmanned 3-inch battery, had suffered similar but not quite so serious damage. One more gun (over and above the damaged weapon which had just been towed down from Peacock Point) had suffered serious injury from blast and flying debris. Marine Gunner McKinstry who, this very morning, had been directed by the defense detachment commander to form with these guns a scratch antiboat battery from sailors and civilian volunteers, had lost half his weapons before starting in. Finally, one 60-inch searchlight on Wilkes had been knocked end-over-end, with resultant major damage to the delicate arcs, bearings, and electronic fittings of the multimillion-candlepower light.

¹³ The "New Channel" was a partially completed water-filled cut through the center of Wilkes.

His judgment ratified that the enemy were definitely attempting to knock out Wake's anti-aircraft defenses, Major Devereux again ordered Battery E, principal object of enemy attentions, to displace, this time to a position north of the airstrip in the interior angle of the lagoon. The dummy guns set up in the original Peacock Point anti-aircraft emplacements, by now rather badly battered, were renewed during the afternoon of 10 December and the unmanned fourth gun of Battery E was detached from the battery for anti-boat emplacement elsewhere.¹¹ Reasoning which prompted selection of the site above the airstrip was subsequently explained by the battery commander:

Most all bombing runs were made from the east or west and the bombs were dropped along the length of the island. In this position the Japanese must make a run for the battery alone and most of the bombs would be lost in the lagoon.

All night the Marines of Battery E sweated out a second displacement, and again before daylight the much displaced 3-inch battery was in position and ready to shoot.

And they, as well as the other Marines on Wake, might well now ask, "What next?"

Genesis of the Relief Expedition

In his first message after the Pearl Harbor holocaust, President Roosevelt had warned the American people to be prepared for word of the fall of Wake. Yet before the gutted *Arizona's* hulk had ceased burning at Pearl Harbor, thought was being given and initial action taken to attempt a relief or reinforcement of Wake.

There were many commitments to be made, however, and few resources available. With the core of the fleet on the bottom of Pearl Harbor, there could be little question, for the time being, of a sustained and aggressive fleet defense. Wake, as well as the other outer islands, would stand or fall largely by its own strength and by the ability of its Marine garrison, perhaps slightly augmented from the small resources at Pearl Harbor, to keep from being snuffed out like Guam.

To reinforce these islands—Johnston, Palmyra, and Midway were the key points in the inner defensive area about Pearl—available Marine forces on

¹¹ This single 3-inch gun, which later figured conspicuously in the defense, was located south of the airstrip and VMF-211's area. See map 1.

Oahu included two defense battalions, the Third and the Fourth;¹⁵ elements of the First Defense Battalion; and miscellaneous barracks and ships' detachment personnel. If personnel were to be sought for the relief of Wake, it would constitute a challenge against this meager balance.

From the standpoint of matériel, it was fortunate that a stock-pile of base-defense equipment and advanced base supplies (including radar) was already on hand at Pearl Harbor in the hands of the Marine Defense Force quartermaster. Fighter aircraft, and to radar the most crucial need on Wake, were already en route to Pearl from San Diego, from which the U. S. S. *Saratoga*, with Marine Fighting Squadron 221 embarked, had departed at maximum speed on 8 December, at 1019 (west longitude time—this would be 9 December on Wake).

By 9 December,¹⁶ Admiral Kimmel's staff had general plans for an attempt to relieve Wake. On 11 December, the next day, these had crystallized.

The expedition to Wake itself would be sent forward under cover of Task Force 14 to be composed of one carrier (*Saratoga*, still bearing VMF-221), Cruiser Division 6 (three heavy cruisers, *Astoria*, *Minneapolis*, *San Francisco*), and Destroyer Squadron 4 (9 destroyers), the *Tangier*, a seaplane tender suitably adapted for transportation of troops and equipment, and a fleet oiler (*Neches*). To divert Japanese in the Marshalls and to provide strategic support, Task Force 11, a similar force (less transport) built around the U. S. S. *Lexington*, would strike enemy forces and bases supposed to exist at Jaluit, 814 miles south of Wake. In general support of Task Forces 8 and 14, Vice Admiral Halsey, U. S. S. *Enterprise*, commanding a third similar force, would operate west of Johnston Island.

Marine ground units for the relief of Wake would consist of selected elements and equipment from the

¹⁵ This battalion, which during 1941-43 executed more overseas displacements than any other defense battalion in the Fleet Marine Force, had been pulled out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, during late October 1941, moved secretly through the Panama Canal to Pearl Harbor, and had arrived on Monday, 1 December, just in time to meet the Japanese. On 7 December, although hardly unloaded, the battalion had put a 3-inch battery (Battery F) into action in defense of the Navy Yard together with anti-aircraft machine-gun units. Since it had just completed an overseas movement and had its equipment ready for service, the Fourth was a logical choice for its eventual role in the attempt to relieve Wake.

¹⁶ Throughout this section dealing with the relief attempt west longitude dates and local times will be employed.

Fourth Defense Battalion, which, on 10 December, were alerted for immediate embarkation. Batteries went into march order, fire-control instruments were checked for any minute flaw, and troops were issued clothing as well as the hand-etched monel-metal identification tags, still as novel as the steel helmets which all hands had donned on the 7th. Among the Marines, the destination was secret, but like many such it was badly kept: "We're headed for Wake" was the word which circulated all day on 10 December. By nightfall substantial progress had been made in equipping the tiny relief force for departure, and assembly of supplies by black-out, no simple task in those days, was well along.

Late on 10 December, however, came further orders to delay the preparation and return troops and weapons to their former battery positions. This delay—which on troop levels appeared to be a cancellation of the whole project—was occasioned by two factors: (1) necessity to await arrival of *Saratoga* with VMF-221, then making all speed from San Diego; and (2) desire by CinCPac's staff to complete an over-all estimate of the Pacific situation.

On 12 December, at early dawn, the relief force began loading equipment and supplies aboard the *Tangier*, which was berthed at Navy Yard Pier 10. Having received at least partial information from Wake as to the beleaguered island's most pressing needs, Marine supply activities at Pearl Harbor could furnish the following critical items:

Three complete sets of fire-control instruments and data-transmission systems for 3-inch antiaircraft batteries, plus additional electrical data-transmission cables, and ordnance tools and spares.

Replacements—plus needed spare items—for all 5-inch seacoast fire-control and ordnance gear previously damaged.

More than 3 million rounds of belted .50- and .30-caliber machine-gun ammunition, plus ample rifle and pistol ammunition and grenades. Barbed wire, antipersonnel mines, and additional engineer tools were also included.

Nine thousand rounds of 5-inch shell and 12,000 rounds of 3-inch shell. The latter, equipped with new type 30-second mechanical time fuzes, would give the Wake antiaircraft batteries a higher ceiling and far more dependable ballistic performance than the World War I 21-second powder-train antiaircraft fuzes with which they were supplied.

Most important in this critical cargo, however,

was radar—something unfamiliar even as a word to many Marines of those days. One early warning set, an SCR-270, and a primitive fire-control radar, the SCR-268, were stowed aft on the flight-deck of the *Tangier*.

As the loading swirled to completion on 13 December, the following Marine relief force, commanded by First Lt. R. D. Heintz, Jr.,¹⁷ embarked aboard the *Tangier*:

Battery F, Fourth Defense Battalion, FMF (3-inch antiaircraft).

Battery B, Fourth Defense Battalion, FMF (5-inch seacoast).

Provisional ground and antiaircraft machine-gun detachment from Batteries H and I, Fourth Defense Battalion, FMF.

Provisional headquarters and service detachment from H & S Battery, Fourth Defense Battalion, FMF.

Detachment of VMF-221.

While all this loading was being carried out, Cruiser Division 6, commanded by Rear Admiral Frank J. Fletcher, USN, remained in Pearl Harbor, awaiting arrival of the *Saratoga* with her load of aircraft for Wake, and the venerable *Neches*, of a class well-known for its slowness (12 knots with a fair wind was maximum speed), stood by to act as task force train.

By nightfall on 13 December, loading and embarkation were completed, and the *Tangier* shifted to a berth in upper Pearl Harbor. After darkness on the next day, 14 December, *Saratoga* arrived in the Hawaiian area, but was unable to enter Pearl by night while the antisubmarine nets were closed. At 0900 next morning, 15 December, *Saratoga* stood in and commenced to refuel, and, at 1600 the same day, the *Tangier*, *Neches*, and a temporary escort of four destroyers stood out of Pearl in a twilight sortie, to rendezvous later at sea with *Saratoga* and Cruiser Division 6.

Help, it seemed, was enroute to the defenders of Wake.

Enemy Plans And Actions, 8-11 December

From Truk, Admiral Inouye, commanding the Imperial Japanese Fourth Fleet, had set numerous projects and operations in motion on 8 December.

¹⁷ Two days later, just prior to sailing, it was determined to send Col. H. S. Fassett forward to assume duty as Island Commander, Wake, and upon boarding the *Tangier*, this officer took command of the Marine force embarked.

Not only was he charged by current war plans with capture and base development of Wake, but, more important, that of Guam and the Gilberts (notably Makin and Tarawa). Simultaneous operations, roughly similar, were therefore in progress on 8 and 9 December against Wake, Guam, Makin, and Tarawa.

By dark on 10 December, Guam, defended by a few Marines with no weapons larger than machine guns, had fallen to an outnumbering naval attack force. Earlier that same day, Makin had surrendered, and Tarawa had been raided by a Japanese landing party which had rummaged about while the British authorities lay in hiding, and withdrawn after taking a few prisoners.

Wake alone remained. Despite its small size, and the offhand manner in which Admiral Inouye's directive from higher authority had dismissed it, the people on the ground at Truk and Kwajalein were not inclined to dismiss it so lightly, because, even though the other objectives had fallen with anticipated ease, it was known that Wake's defenses were much farther along, and it was estimated that some 1,000 troops and 600 laborers composed the defending garrison. Finally, although the initial raid had accomplished all that could possibly have been expected, it was apparent that Wake's fighter aviation still remained aggressive, and the flak, if not heavy, was continuous and prompt. Between these two, the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla had certainly lost five of its airplanes, and at least four more "smokers" seen from Wake may well have failed to reach their base at Roi.

The Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla was composed of Air Attack Forces 1 and 3. The former, as we have seen, flew shore-based bombers, and the latter, some 15 four-engined patrol bombers (probably Kawanishi 97's). Air Attack Force 1 based on Roi, while Air Attack Force 3, which was also bombing or scouting Baker, Howland, Nauru, and Ocean islands, was for the time being at Majuro, 840 miles south of Wake.

Commander Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla was charged with preliminary air operations, including necessary aerial softening of Wake. His plan of preparing Wake for the Japanese landing was orthodox and correct. The first raid had been directed at the airstrip and VMF-211's twelve new fighters: without them, succeeding raids would be easier. The second raid was essentially a mop-up for the first.

Principal targets had been the naval air station, plane facilities, and the various other support establishments which could contribute to any defense of the atoll. This accomplished, the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla could settle methodically down to the more routine business of taking out various batteries, both antiaircraft and sea-coast. With this in mind, the raid of 10 December had concentrated on Peale (where poor bombing as Battery D's return fire had netted the Japanese zero return) and on Wilkes, whose dynamite had rewarded the airmen with a gratifyingly massive and visible explosion.

Perhaps by the standards of aerial preparation required by the Japanese for reduction of other objectives this could be considered adequate. Nevertheless, as events would shortly prove, the days' bombing, while inflicting considerable damage on Wake, had been insufficient to warrant the landing as it would be attempted.

Actual conduct of this operation was delegated to Rear Admiral Kajioka, Commander Destroyer Squadron 6, whose flag flew in the new light cruiser *Yubari*. Perhaps the best summary of the landing plan itself comes to us from the mouth of his chief of staff:

In general, the plan was to have 150 men land on Wilkes Island and the balance, 300 men, on the south side of Wake Island to capture the airfield. The northeast coast was unsuitable for amphibious landings; we didn't think this was too favorable a place for the defenses. The alternative landing plan was that in the event of bad winds on the south side of the island we would land on the northeast and north coast. We expected to have a rough time and that we would have difficulty with a landing force of only 450 men. It was at the beginning of the war; we couldn't muster as many men as we considered necessary, and it was planned in an emergency to use the crews of the destroyers to storm the beach.

The naval force at Admiral Kajioka's disposal for the capture of Wake comprised a task force of one light cruiser (the flagship), two obsolescent heavy cruisers (fire support and covering duties), six destroyers, two destroyer-transport, two new transports, and two submarines.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Yubari*, *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu* (2 old light cruisers, comprising Cruiser Division 18); *Oite*, *Hayate*, *Mutsuki*, *Yagi*, *Mochizuki*, and *Yayoi* (6 older destroyers, comprising Destroyer Divisions 29 and 30); Patrol Boats 32 and 33, so-called (actually old destroyers converted into light transport-carrying craft with missions similar to the American *Albatross* and *Kongo* and *Konryu Maru*, both medium transports-

For his air support, the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla would act as necessary inasmuch as reduction of a small "South Seas" island such as Wake could hardly be deemed of sufficient priority to warrant employment of carrier air.

The 450 men of the landing force were Kajioka's share of Special Naval Landing Force personnel assigned to the Fourth Fleet. What their armament or special equipment was is not known, but is presumed to have been that normal for Japanese infantry formations of company and battalion size: light machine guns, knee mortars, and infantry cannon.

Nor is their distribution aboard ship accurately known. It seems likely, based upon the Japanese dispositions afloat during the succeeding landing, that the Special Landing Force men—i. e., the assault echelons—probably were embarked in the two old destroyer-transport, while the follow-up garrison, and base-development echelon was assigned to the medium transports.

In anticipation of execution of all this, Admiral Kajioka's naval forces and assault shipping had arrived at Roi from Truk on 3 December. On 9 December,¹⁹ moving by a rather circuitous track to westward of the direct line from Roi to Wake, movement to the objective commenced.

Although no American surface opposition was expected, the approach of the Japanese force was screened with customary caution. The two submarines, maintaining position approximately 75 miles ahead of the main body, were to conduct general reconnaissance plus a detailed size-up of Wake upon arrival,²⁰ with special attention to the possible presence of motor torpedo boats, of which the Japanese appear to have been leery throughout. Well in rear of the submarines, but 10 miles forward of the main body, a picket destroyer was stationed to make the landfall and conduct further similar reconnaissance.

As the enemy ships, now following a northward track, neared Wake on the evening of 10 December, the weather turned against them, with high winds and heavy seas. To make up for this disadvantage,

¹⁹ The only Japanese source of this information gives this date as 8 December, but, inasmuch as his other dates are consistently 1 day behind in all cases subject to check, it is a fairly safe guess that December is correct.

²⁰ Since the submarines' estimated time of arrival at Wake would be prior to dawn, it is a fair question just what a submarine's lookouts could have contributed in the way of amphibious reconnaissance information of any great value.

however, the weather provided a natural screen behind which the approach would surely remain undetected.

This anticipation was confirmed by negative reports from the submarines and from the destroyer. The former, after executing whatever after-dark reconnaissance they could, had turned southward and proceeded to meet the main body, seemingly a rather hazardous maneuver for submarines, especially during the first days of a war.

By 0300 on the morning of 11 December, Admiral Kajioka had made his landfall, and the landing force was preparing to boat despite the heavy wind and seas. Wake, barely visible through the darkness, remained dark and silent. If the defenders were alert and their batteries manned, there was no sign to indicate it, and, with Kajioka's flagship, *Yubari*, in the van, the Japanese attack force commenced its final northwesterly approach to bombardment and debarkation stations 5 to 6 miles off the south shore of Wake.

The Attempted Landing, 11 December

Just prior to 0300, on 11 December, after lookouts had reported ships in sight, Major Devereux discerned an indefinite but considerable naval force well offshore to the south of Wake approaching the atoll on what seemed to be a northwesterly track, led by a cruiser. As the ships closed Wake, it became apparent that the formation included cruisers, destroyers and some auxiliaries—all Japanese.

The garrison was immediately ordered to general quarters, and, after ascertaining that four aircraft were operational that morning, the defense detachment commander took steps to insure that his shore batteries were prepared to engage the now dimly-seen enemy. Emphatic orders went out to hold fire²¹ for the time being, no matter how tempting the targets appeared to be. Major Devereux reasoned that the enemy force undoubtedly outgunned Wake both in effective range and weight of metal, and that premature commencement of fire would not only reveal the location and strength of the seacoast bat-

²¹ Commander Cunningham's postwar report states that Major Devereux requested permission to illuminate the enemy force with searchlights and desired to open fire much sooner, but that these requests were denied. Supported by all other pertinent records of the action, Colonel Devereux denies that this was the case.

teries, but would probably rob them of surprise, their best ally.

The enemy force, in fact composed of three light cruisers, six destroyers, two destroyer-transport and two former merchantmen now in service as transports, closed Wake cautiously, continuing on a northwesterly course and attempting, despite the heavy seas and high winds, to boat the 450 Special Landing Force troops who were supposed to capture Wake that morning. Because of the unfavorable weather, boating progressed slowly and unsatisfactorily, with some landing craft being overturned or swamped.

By 0500, just as dawn was breaking, the cruiser *Yubari* (force flagship, Rear Admiral Kajioaka) still in the van, reached a position approximately 8,000 yards south of Peacock Point, turned westward and commenced a run, broadside-to, paralleling the south shore of Wake. Keeping about a thousand yards further to seaward of the still silent island, the other enemy ships likewise turned and proceeded westward. Although the enemy were not yet aware of it, the *Yubari* was already being tracked by Battery A (5-inch seacoast) on Peacock Point from which camouflage had been removed so that the guns could train.

A few minutes later, the *Yubari* and the other two cruisers (*Tatsuta* and *Tenryu*) opened fire at area targets along the south shore of Wake, laddering successive salvos in deflection from Peacock Point to the vicinity of Camp 1. As the high-velocity 6-inch shells hit near Camp 1, they set fire to the Diesel oil tanks between that place and Wilkes Chan-

nel, and Lieutenants Barninger and McAlister, respectively commanding Batteries A and L, the 5-inch batteries at Peacock and Kuku Points, were restrained from returning fire by a repetition of original hold-fire order. Meanwhile the Japanese ships proceeded behind the cruiser and destroyer screen to take stations for their various missions. The best reconstruction of their maneuvers and tactics during this period, see Map 2.

At this time, with daylight now full, the action can best be described in two roughly simultaneous phases, that off Peacock Point and that off Wilkes Point.

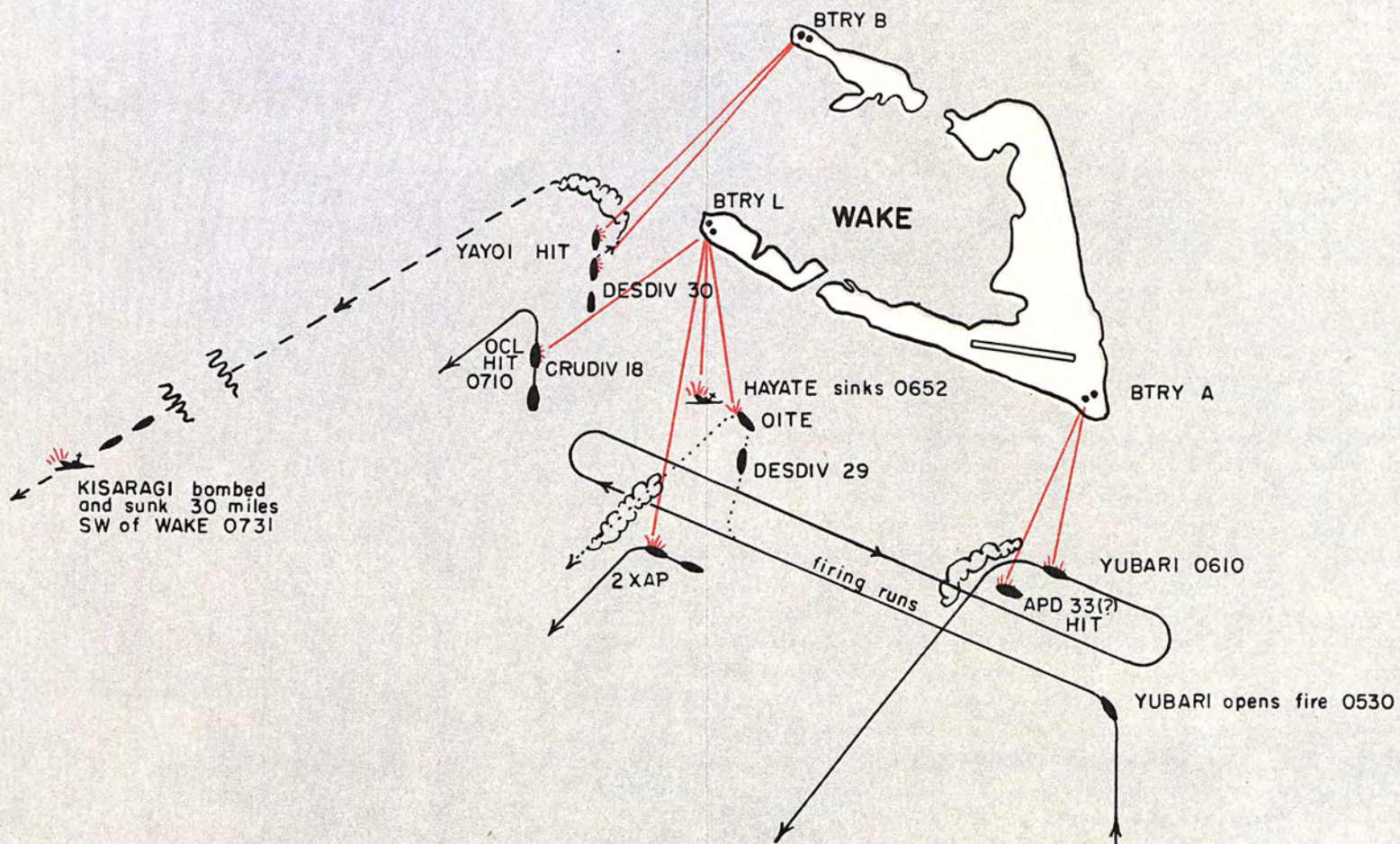
After completing her initial firing run down the shore of Wake, the *Yubari*, apparently accompanied by the two destroyer-transport, reversed course, turning toward the atoll and thus closing the range. By 0600, she had reached a position almost directly south of Battery A, some 4,500 to 6,000 yards distant.²² Battery A's rangefinder had been put out of action during the air raid of 9 December, but, using estimated data, the battery range section was already plotting the target, and the gun sections were standing by to fire.

At 0615, the defense detachment commander, now standing on the beach beside his command post, gave orders to commence firing.




²² Because of the fact that the rangefinders of both Batteries A and L had been rendered inoperative by previous bombing, all ranges were initially estimated and then "shot in." As a result, there exists considerable variance among the reported ranges at which fire was opened, hits scored, etc. An unavoidable discrepancy was undoubtedly heightened, after hits had begun taking effect, because of the flat trajectory and resultant long-range pattern of the 5-inch Navy guns.

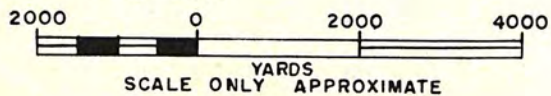


JAPANESE FLAGSHIP, the light cruiser *Yubari*, which lost a duel with Battery A, First Defense Battalion, during the unsuccessful attempt to land on Wake, 11 December 1941.



MAP 2
SURFACE ACTION OF 11 DECEMBER 1941

-  — Smoke-screen
-  — Ship hit by shore battery
-  — Ship sunk



YUBARI	ICL
TATSUTA, TENRYU	2 OCL
HAYATE, OITE	
MUTSUKI, KISARAGI	
YAYOI, MOCHIZUKI	6DD
PATROL BOATS	
32-33	2APD
KONGO MARU	
KONRYU MARU	2XAP

What then happened to the *Yubari* and her consort can best be described in the words of a report by Lieutenant Barninger:

At a range of forty-five hundred yards and a bearing of about 190° true we received the word to engage. We opened with an over and came down five hundred. At the opening salvo the cruiser turned and raced away from the battery on a zig-zag course, picking up speed rapidly. She now concentrated her fire on the battery position which had been disclosed by the initial firing * * *. The fire from the cruiser continued to be over and then short throughout her firing. She straddled continually, but none of the salvos came into the position. They landed about 200-300 yards over and then 100-200 yards short on the reef. The deflection was good.

The first salvo from our guns which hit her was fired at a range of 5,500-6000 yards, bearing about 180 to 190. Both shells entered her port side about amidships just above the waterline. The ship immediately belched smoke and steam through the side and her speed diminished. At 7,000 yards two more hit her in about the same place, but more probably slightly aft of the first two. Her whole side was now engulfed in smoke and steam and she turned to starboard again to try to hide in the smoke. At this time the destroyer which had accompanied the cruiser, came in at high speed, tried to sweep between us to lay smoke, but a shell, an over, aft of the cruiser struck the forecastle of the destroyer. This hit was observed by Lt. Hanna, .50 caliber machine-gun officer from his CP. The destroyer immediately turned, although fire was not directed at her, and fled. We continued to fire on the cruiser and although I am quite certain that we got two more into her side, I could not be sure of it. I am sure of the first four. The only hit I am certain of after this time was a hit on her forward turret. A shell hit the face of the turret and this turret did not fire again * * *.

After we ceased firing, the whole fleet having fled and there being no other targets to engage, the cruiser lay broadside to the sea still pouring steam and smoke from her side. She had a definite port list. After some time she got slowly under way, going a short distance, stopping, and continuing again; she was engulfed in smoke when she crept over the horizon.

Despite the onshore wind which carried the smoke from the burning cruiser and the protecting smoke screen down the line of sight toward Battery A, it therefore seemed certain that the *Yubari* had been hulled at least four times and had taken one more hit on her forward turret. As she retired southward out of 5-inch range, but still within that of her own 5-inch guns, she continued to return fire, although this slackened after the final hit on No. 1 turret. About 18,000 yards offshore, almost across the horizon, she ceased fire, having slightly wounded one Marine of Battery A.

During Peacock Point's duel with the *Yubari*, just described, Battery L on Wilkes had rapidly engaged a succession of enemy ships with excellent effect.

A slight initial delay in Battery L's commencement of fire had resulted from the battery commander's hesitation to fire with such rough data as could be obtained without the aid of his rangefinder, which had been blown out of operation by the explosion of Wilkes Island's dynamite cache during the Japanese air raid of 10 December.

The targets which meanwhile virtually filled the battery's field of fire consisted of a division of three destroyer's, both enemy transports, and two of the light cruisers (*Tatsuta* and *Tenryu*), which had broken off from the *Yubari* at the westward end of her earlier firing track, and were now steaming northward, at a range of about 9,000 yards southwest of Kuku Point. The destroyers, probably Destroyer Division 29 (*Hayate*, *Oite* and one other, either *Mutsuki* or *Mochizuki*), had originally preceded the cruisers during the initial westerly run parallel to the shore, but had likewise broken off from the bombardment track of *Yubari* near its westward terminus, and had steamed rapidly in, heading directly for shore, firing as they closed. Approximately 4,000 yards offshore, they executed a left (westward) turn, and the leading ship, *Hayate*, was just settling down on a run close along the shore of Wilkes when Battery L opened fire. At 0652, just after the third two-gun salvo, the *Hayate* was swallowed up in a violent explosion, and, as the smoke and spray drifted clear, the gunners on Wilkes could see that she had broken in two and was sinking rapidly. Within two minutes, at 0652, she had disappeared from sight.²³

For a moment, the effect of Battery L's shooting proved too much for the 5-inch gun crews, and firing was involuntarily checked until a veteran non-commissioned officer broke the spell and reminded the Marines that other targets remained.

Fire was then shifted onto *Oite*, the destroyer which had been following *Hayate*, now so close to shore that Major Devereux was forced to forbid .30 caliber machine gunners from trying to open fire. One hit was observed before the troublesome onshore wind smoke-blanketed the target, which had already

²³ The *Hayate* therefore became the first Japanese surface craft to be sunk during the war by United States naval forces, and in all probability was the first consequential war loss sustained by the Japanese Navy in our times.

turned to seaward, leading the remaining ship of the division away from Battery L. Several more salvos were fired into the smoke, but splashes could not be spotted, possible evidence in itself that the shells were hitting. Some observers on Wilkes believed that they saw this ship transfer survivors and sink, but otherwise reliable enemy records indicate only that she sustained damage.

Approximately 10,000 yards offshore, the two transports *Kongo Maru* and *Konryu Maru* steamed almost due south of Wilkes. McAlister checked fire against the retiring *Oite* and trained onto the leading transport. After being hit once, she too turned to seaward and retired behind a destroyer smoke screen probably provided by the two retreating ships of Destroyer Division 29, whose retirement track carried them close by the transport area.

While Wilkes Island civilians turned-to as volunteer ammunition handlers, the battery commander picked up a cruiser 9,000 yards offshore steaming northward off the west end of Wilkes. This was either *Tenryu* or *Tatsuta*. Whatever her identity, one taste of Marine gunfire was sufficient—after a few salvos she was hit aft, and turned away trailing smoke.

It was now 0710, and no targets remained within range of Battery L, which had fired some 60 salvos (120 rounds), and had, in one hour's hot work, sunk one destroyer, damaged another, and probably damaged a transport and a light cruiser. Two Marines on Wilkes had sustained slight wounds which were dressed by the hospital corpsmen on the island.

Destroyer Division 30, comprising the other half of the Japanese destroyer force, was meanwhile proceeding west of Kuku Point on a northwesterly course, led in all probability by the *Yayoi*. At a range of 10,000 yards, shortly after 0600, the division steamed into the field of fire of Battery B, the 5-inch unit on Peale, which immediately opened on the leading ship. The Japanese reaction was prompt and aggressive, consisting of a concentrated return fire which raked Peale and scored hits in and about the guns of Batteries B and D, destroying communications between the 5-inch guns and the battery command post. At this juncture, the worst possible time, Gun 2 of Battery B sustained a disabling recoil-cylinder casualty which put the piece out of action. Continuing the duel with only one gun, Lieutenant Kessler, the battery commander, shifted Gun 2's crew to Gun 1 as additional shellmen and powdermen and kept up his fire.

A few minutes later, after 10 salvos mainly fired on local control (enemy counterbattery fire had knocked out communications and forced the battalions back to fundamental gunnery methods), persistence was rewarded, and the stern of the *Yayoi* was seen to be hit and afire. Kessler shifted his gun onto the second ship of the column, which was maneuvering to lay a smoke screen behind which the injured *Yayoi* could retire. Under cover of this diversion, three destroyers reversed course and retired seaward out of range.

The Japanese force was now in full retirement. Admiral Kajioka's plans had been thwarted not only by the inauspicious weather but by the stout and accurate fire from the beach, and, at 0700, having broken away from Battery A's pounding of *Yubari*, he ordered a general retreat on Kwajalein. Within a few minutes the enemy force had withdrawn beyond gun range of Wake, and, there being no more targets, Major Devereux gave the cease-firing order.

This was exactly the logical moment for an attack to harry the retiring Japanese, and VMF-211, which had been airborne since the commencement of the surface action, was on station and fully armed, with four Grummans operational.

Major Putnam had taken off with his three most experienced pilots, Captains Elrod, Freuler, and Tharin. Their primary mission being the air defense of Wake, the fighter-pilots conducted a thorough sweep at 12,000 feet to make sure that the enemy force was not backed up by carrier aviation or a coordinated strike from bases in the Marshalls. This possibility disposed of, the squadron intervened in the surface action in time to catch the Japanese fleet little more than an hour's sail southwest of Wake.

Probably due to the fact that enemy destroyers and cruisers presented a recognition problem under the best of circumstances, the pilots' accounts as to exactly which ships each hit are somewhat confused. Certain it is, however, that VMF-211 inflicted heavy casualties on the retreating Japanese.

Both light cruisers of Cruiser Division 18 (*Tenryu* and *Tatsuta*) were bombed and strafed, probably by Captains Elrod and Tharin, in face of thick anti-aircraft fire which damaged both planes. The torpedo battery of the *Tenryu* was put out of action and the topside radio shack of the *Tatsuta* was silenced. Captain Freuler singled out a transport, the *Kongo Maru*, which he hit on the stern with



JAPANESE LIGHT CRUISER, the *Tenryu*, which was damaged during an attack by the planes of VMF-211 following the unsuccessful landing attempt on 11 December 1941.

of his island-modified 100-pound bombs, starting a gasoline fire which burned fiercely on the topside and in the holds.

As each fighter expended its two bombs, the pilot would return to Wake, rearm and fly out again. During one of these periods, two fresh pilots, Lieutenant Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton, relieved and continued the attacks. To Kinney fell the greatest frustration of the day. Just pushing over at 0731 to press home an attack on a Japanese destroyer below him, he saw her blow up with a tremendous single explosion. This was the destroyer *Kisaragi*, which had unwisely been carrying a deckload of depth charges. She was in all probability victim of a previous strike by Captain Elrod, but exact information is missing inasmuch as no survivors could be found.

Patrol Boat 33, one of the two converted destroyer-transports, was also hit during the air strikes, but information as to the extent or nature of damage is not available. In all probability, if only by elimination, it appears that this ship was also the so-called destroyer hit by Battery A during the Peacock Point action.

Although the results of VMF-211's fine strike combined admirably with the defense battalion's gunnery to deliver a handsome success to the Marine forces, the Japanese flak had exacted a toll which could ill be met from Wake's scanty resources. Captain Elrod's Grumman had a main fuel line cut, and, although he was able to make the island, the resultant crash-landing amid the boulders along the south beach completely demolished the airplane. Freuler

took a hit which pierced his oil cooler and one cylinder, but he was fortunate enough to be able to reach the field even though the engine was a total loss.

VMF-211 had flown a total of 10 sorties, expended twenty 100-pound bombs and approximately 20,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition.

Accurate assessment of enemy losses during the course of the whole action is by no means easy. The consensus of seemingly reliable postwar enemy records credits Wake on this occasion with having sunk two ships, the destroyers *Hayate* and *Kisaragi*, by gunfire and bombing respectively. Two more destroyers, *Oite* and *Yayoi*, were damaged, together with Patrol Boat 33. One transport, *Kongo Maru*, was bombed and set afire. All three cruisers (*Yubari*, *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu*) received injuries from air or surface attacks.²⁴

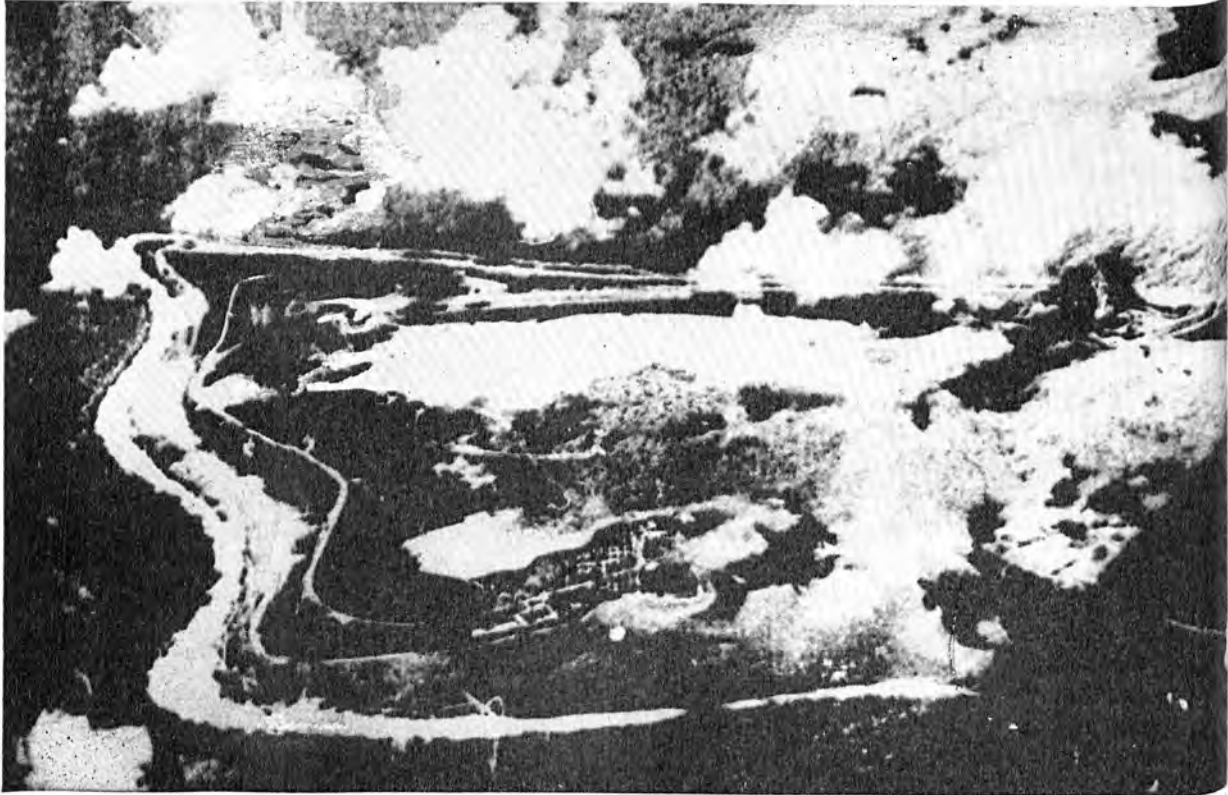
Japanese personnel casualties can be fixed only approximately. Assuming that the two sunken destroyers were manned by crews comparable to those required by similar United States types (about 250 officers and men per ship), it would be logical to

²⁴ The widely credited claim, originated in evident good faith, that dive-bombing attacks sank a cruiser off Wake cannot be supported. Of the three cruisers engaged, all survived to return to Wake to support the final attack less than 2 weeks later. The officially established occasion of the loss of each is as follows: *Yubari* (Philippine Sea, 27 April 1944); *Tenryu* (Bismarck Sea, by submarine action, 18 December 1942); *Tatsuta* (off Yokohama, by submarine action, 13 May 1944). As indicated in the text, the violent explosion and sinking of the *Kisaragi*, combined with recognition inexperience, probably accounts for the cruiser claimed.

claim approximately 500 for these two losses with the fair assumption that no survivors escaped in either case. Seven more ships were damaged, but with what personnel losses we do not know. Two hundred does not seem an excessive figure, all things considered; if this is anywhere near correct, we may

well believe that their ill-fated attack of 11 December cost the Japanese at least 700 casualties, most dead, and possibly more.

Set against the total Marine casualties of four killed and 11 wounded in action, the comparison for this day reflects very favorably upon the defenders of Wake.



JAPANESE BOMBER'S EYE VIEW OF WAKE is shown in this battered aerial view of Wake captured among enemy documents in the Southwest Pacific.



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

Enemy Attacks Through 22 December

CHAPTER III

Hardly had VMF-211's planes returned to base (in one condition or another), before it was time for the two serviceable remaining fighters to take off on the early midday combat patrol, piloted by Lieutenants Davidson and Kinney.

The fighter section did not have long to wait. At about 1000, 30 shore-based bombers of the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla appeared at 18,000 feet, this time approaching from the northeast, for their daily milk run on Wake. The two fighters slashed in, and Davidson accounted for two bombers, while Kinney sent one homeward smoking. Batteries D and E, 3-inch antiaircraft respectively on Peale and Wake Island, opened fire with their usual promptitude, getting off between them some 225 rounds during the action, an excellent showing for six guns. The results, too, were excellent: one bomber crashed in the water off Wilkes, and three more, when last seen, were smoking heavily. During the antiaircraft firing, enemy bombs dropped close to Battery D on Peale, confirming Major Devereux's supposition that his battery positions were accurately located. Fortunately no casualties resulted from this raid, and, although Wake Island and Peale received numerous bomb salvos, no major material damage was inflicted.

Within a few hours after the bombers had departed, Battery D, evidently a located target, received orders to displace from the neck of Toki Point to a new position on the eastern end of Peale.

For the balance of the garrison, the remainder of the day was spent in replenishing ammunition, effecting minor repairs, and discussing the day's battle.

At 1700, just prior to actual commencement of Battery D's displacement, a smoke bomb, combined with a chain flare of three red balls, was sighted

about 2 miles to seaward northeast of Toki Point. During the next 20 minutes, the same signal was twice repeated. The significance of these signals has never been established. It is known, however, that Japanese submarines were operating in the vicinity of Wake, and it is at least a possibility that enemy survivors, either air or surface, could still have been afloat in the waters near Wake. Taken together, these facts lead to the supposition that the mysterious signals might have resulted from some type of attempted rescue operations.

As soon as night began to fall, at 1745, Battery D commenced displacement, assisted by a mixed working party of civilians and Marines. At this time, the critical shortage of sandbags was further emphasized when condition of the bags at the old position prohibited further reuse. Cement bags and empty ammunition boxes were made to serve instead. It was 0445, shortly before dawn, when the back-breaking displacement was complete, and Battery D was ready to fire from its new position.

The enemy opened the day of 12 December early. Shortly after 0500, two four-engine Kawanishi patrol bombers from the Japanese No. 3 Air Attack Force, still on Majuro, bombed and strafed Wake Island and Peale, with bombs dropping about the airstrip. Captain Tharin, who had just taken off on the morning reconnaissance patrol, was able to intercept one of the big flying boats and shot it down.

During the morning, routine work went forward. On Wilkes, beach defenses were improved, and Battery L's battered 5-inch guns received much needed servicing from the Ordnance Officer, Marine Gunner Borth. From his improvised aviation maintenance set-up, Lieutenant Kinney was able to deliver

one more serviceable airplane, so that, for this day, there would be three available fighters for VMF-211.

To the defenders' surprise, for the first day since the opening of hostilities, the anticipated noon raid failed to materialize.¹

For the garrison, this freedom from attack was a welcome and profitable interlude. Captain Freuler of VMF-211 who had been attempting since the opening of the war to devise some means of employing welder's oxygen to augment the dwindling supply for the fighter pilots of VMF-211, was able to improvise, at great personal hazard, a means of transferring the gas from commercial cylinders to the oxygen bottles of the Grumman. This was the sole means of keeping the squadron in effective fighting condition.

Another experiment, almost equally important, but unfortunately not so successful, was the attempt, about 12 December, to construct a home-made aircraft sound locator ("a crude pyramidal box, with four uncurved plywood sides," Major Devereux described it). But in order to exclude extraneous noise and trap every decibel of the sound of aircraft engines, sound locators must be designed and shaped in accordance with precise acoustic formulae, and this local improvisation to make good the lack of radar only served to magnify the roar of the surf.

On the evening air patrol of this day, three planes were in operational status. By the order of rotation in effect, the pilots were Lieutenants Kinney and Kliever and Technical Sergeant Hamilton. Kinney and Hamilton got off on time, but Kliever's airplane, a chronically difficult starter, was delayed almost 15 minutes on take-off.

As Kliever climbed out to overtake his companions, he saw, some 25 miles offshore, bearing 225° from Wake, a completely surfaced submarine. He took position at 10,000 feet so as to approach from the sun, pushed over into a fast dive, and dropped down to identify the vessel. As he neared

¹ Beginning with 12 December, and extending until about 20 December, another day on which no enemy air activity took place, the recollections of Wake survivors are sometimes confused beyond any possible reconciliation. This condition is acute with regard to the period 12-14 December, inclusive, dates on which no two written sources seem to agree. This monograph's schedule of events during this time therefore represents the best possible compromise between these conflicts.

the surface, it was evident that this was an enemy submarine, and he opened fire with his four .50-caliber machine guns. A few seconds later, as he executed a pull-out to the right, he released his two 100-pound bombs. Neither bomb scored a direct hit, but both exploded, he estimated, within 15 feet of the target, and his pull-out was so low that both fragments tore holes in his wing and tail surfaces. As he climbed to cruising altitude for return to base, he saw the submarine go below water, leaving a large oil slick.²

After nightfall on 12 December, the first memorial of Wake's dead took place in a common grave located about 100 yards southwest of the main aid station in Magazine 10, the southernmost of the four igloo magazines along the east leg of Wake Island. Simple prayers were read by a lay preacher from the contractor's group.

Whatever may have been the final fate of Lieutenant Kliever's submarine, 13 December, the day following this incident, saw no enemy action against Wake whatsoever. It was the first such day since the beginning of the war, and this unlooked-for cessation of hostile activity seemed to confirm what had been the suspicion of the defenders, that the Japanese were using submarines for radio navigational homing purposes in the long-distance raids on Wake. As Lieutenant Kinney put it,

Wake was a hard place to find. It was small and there were usually a lot of scattered clouds around. They had come in at night, it would have been possible for them to hit by accurate celestial navigation. But they were making five- and six-hundred-mile flights over water with no landmarks, by dead reckoning alone, and they always seemed to hit the island on the heels just about the same time each day. Moreover, we heard a lot of funny radio signals. We never had any radio direction-finding equipment, and therefore couldn't take any bearing on these strange signals. I am convinced that the sub was leading them in.

² The question as to whether or not this submarine finally sunk remains difficult. Enemy records are not clear with regard to this loss, but Lieutenant Colonel Kinney stated that, after the fall of Wake, he and other pilots were questioned by a representative of Japanese naval intelligence who asked specifically what had happened to a Japanese submarine in the vicinity of Wake at this time. Inasmuch as the balance of this officer's questions related to other estimated naval losses, especially those of flying boats shot down over Wake, Kinney believes that the submarine must have been sunk, and that this officer was attempting to account for it.



GRUMMAN F4F-3 FIGHTER of the type employed by VMF-211 to intercept daily Japanese raids on Wake, as well as to bomb and strafe enemy naval vessels on 11 and 12 December 1941.

But even this quiet day,³ which afforded all hands an opportunity to freshen camouflage, improve foxholes, and bathe in the lagoon, did not pass without loss. While taking off for the evening air patrol, Captain Freuler's fighter swerved to the left without warning toward a group of workmen and a large crane beside the runway. To avoid hitting the crane, Freuler swung further left in a steep bank, and the plane lost lift and altitude, settling into the brush, a permanent washout. Along with other such wrecks, it was set up in the parking area as a dummy, where it continued to draw bombs.

Well before dawn on 14 December, three of the four-engine Kawanishi 97 flying boats now oper-

³ A marked innovation inaugurated this date was the service and delivery of hot rations, cooked in the contractor's galley, from a "chuck wagon" which visited all battery positions. This was one of Mr. Teters' many contributions to the defense.

ating from Wotje droned over Wake at 0330 and dropped bombs about the airstrip without damage. The garrison made no attempt to return fire.

After beginning the day this early, the Twenty-fourth Air Flotilla resumed its daily routine of forenoon bombing attacks. Thirty shore-based bombers arrived from Roi at 1100, and released bomb salvos on Camp 1, the lagoon off Peale, and the west end of the airstrip. Two Marines from VMF-211 were killed and one wounded, but, sad as these deaths were, the worst loss incurred by this raid was that of one more of the dwindling number of F4F's; one of the serviceable fighters suffered a direct bomb hit inside its revetment and was totally destroyed, leaving but one effective airplane in operation on Wake.

When this airplane was hit and the after end seen to burst into flame, Lieutenant Kinney, VMF-211's engineering officer, accompanied by his two principal assistants, Technical Sergeant Hamilton and

Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class James F. Hesson, USN,⁴ who were under cover nearby, sprinted for the revetment, and, despite the fire, accomplished the unbelievable feat of removing the still serviceable engine from the fuselage and dragging it clear.

In exchange for the loss of this airplane, however, the 3-inch batteries shot down two enemy bombers.

During the morning combat patrol of 15 December, a submarine was again sighted to the southwest, this time by Major Putnam. Confused by her markings, which from the air looked orange in color, the pilot hesitated to attack her for fear that she might be a Netherlands boat. Since aircraft destined for the Netherlands East Indies, and bearing similar Dutch markings, had been in the Hawaiian area in late 1941, this was an understandable error. The submarine in question, however, appears to have been Japanese.

Even though this submarine was not actually attacked, it is noteworthy that on this day again, the noon raid from Roi failed to arrive.

Although handicapped by the critical shortage of sandbags, 300,000 of which were requested by despatch this date, fortification proceeded uninterrupted. Two deep underground shelters with 3-foot overhead rock cover were dozed out of Peacock Point at Battery A's position. Around the airfield, in VMF-211's area, personnel shelters adequate for all hands were completed.

At 1730, well off to the east of Wake, an airplane was spotted in and out of the clouds. A half hour later, at 1800, just at dark, four to six four-engine Kawanishi 97 flying boats arrived from Wotje after an easterly approach with a load of heavy bombs which were apparently aimed at Battery D on Peale, but most of which hit in the lagoon just off shore. Wake Island and Peale were both strafed in a low-flying run over the atoll. One civilian was killed.

Before nightfall on this date, one important transaction had been completed. This was destruction of classified documents. The first step in this direction had been undertaken by Commander Cunningham on 8 December after the first attack, when the Com-

⁴Hesson was a Navy aviation instrument repairman sent over to VMF-211 from the naval air base after the first attack had played such havoc among the fighter squadron's ground personnel. He turned out to be an outstanding general aviation maintenance man, and, for his courage and resource on this, as well as other occasions, he was subsequently awarded the Navy Cross.

mandant, Fourteenth Naval District, ordered destruction of the naval air base's reserve codes and ciphers. This was done immediately. VMF-211's codes still remained intact, however, until this time when Major Bayler, assisted by Captain Thompson, shredded all codes into an oil-drum, soaked them with gasoline, and destroyed every vestige of their existence.

After a routine morning which commenced at 0500 general quarters, the day of 16 December was marked at 1315 by a resumption of the heavy light raids by Air Attack Force No. 1 from the east. Twenty-three bombers approached the island at 18,000 feet from the east and bombed Peale's Camp 2. This raid was spotted on its incoming course by the two-plane combat air patrol (Lieutenants Kinney and Kliever) which, mindful of the dependence of antiaircraft gunners upon accurate altitude data, immediately radioed down the altitude of the enemy formation with excellent served effect upon the firing. Although the patrol had no luck this day, the antiaircraft shot down one plane in sight of Wake, and four more were seen heavily as they limped away. Both 3-inch batteries D and E, fired, and it was probably due to this that many of the enemy bombs hit inside the lagoon rather than on ground targets.

Again conforming to the now established pattern of dusk harassing, one Japanese flying boat at 1915 made an attack on Peale, coming in out of the clouds and low visibility. Four heavy bombs were released, some of which hit in the lagoon, and Battery D's position, near which the remaining bomber hit, was heavily strafed. Due to the low ceiling and lack of warning, the 3-inch guns could not fire. This was Wake's tenth air raid.

Shortly after midnight, at about 0200 on the morning of 17 December, lookouts on Wake reported, through a heavy drizzle which was falling, that approximately 12 ships were offshore. The antiaircraft defenders were immediately ordered to general quarters, but the threat failed to materialize. There was no enemy record of any such ship movement in the vicinity of Wake, and no friendly surface forces were at this time within this proximity of the atoll.

As of 0600, VMF-211's engineering crew proudly report that four airplanes were again in commission. This high strength was solely due to the unceasing efforts of Lieutenant Kinney and his helpers, Marine, Navy, and civilian. In a subsequent

report, the squadron commander, Major Putnam, was to say of this work:

These three,⁵ with the assistance of volunteers among the civilian workmen, did a truly remarkable and almost magical job. With almost no tools and a complete lack of normal equipment, they performed all types of repair and replacement work. They changed engines and propellers from one airplane to another, and even completely built up new engines and propellers from scrap parts salvaged from wrecks. They replaced minor parts and assemblies, and repaired damage to fuselages and wings and landing gear; all this in spite of the fact that they were working with new types with which they had had no previous experience and were without instruction manuals of any kind. In the opinion of the squadron commander their performance was the outstanding event of the whole campaign.

"Engines have been traded from plane to plane, have been junked, stripped, rebuilt, and all but created," another report said of VMF-211's engineering section.

At 1317, flying from the southeast in line of division V's, 27 shore-based bombers arrived from Roi at 19,000 feet. For a change from their previous concentration on Peale, they hit Wilkes, where a Diesel oil supply tank was set on fire; and Camp 1, where the majority of the 1st Defense Battalion Detachment's tentage, its mess hall and quartermaster storage, were destroyed. One of the evaporators, necessary on waterless Wake, was also damaged. Three-inch antiaircraft brought down one of the attackers.

As a final touch, one more of the precious fighter planes washed out on take-off for the afternoon combat air patrol. It, too, joined the dummies.

Appearing in their greatest strength during the entire operation, eight Wotje flying-boats hit Wake at 1750 with bombs and strafing but without inflicting major damage.⁶

On 17 December, the construction authorities at Pearl Harbor, who seem to have been under the impression that the planned program for development of Wake was progressing without interruption, requested a progress report on dredging in the

⁵ Lieutenant Kinney, Technical Sergeant Hamilton, and Aviation Machinist's Mate Hesson.

⁶ This major raid, which not a single defender recalled in his postwar account, is an excellent example of how the defenders' memories blurred. There is no doubt that the raid actually was delivered, inasmuch as it was reported by despatch to Pearl Harbor within a few hours after it took place.

lagoon and asked for a specific date by which certain improvements would be completed.

In preliminary reply, having prefaced his report with information of the day's latest air raid (that by the four-engine flying boats), the island commander briefly summarized the matériel status of his command. Half of his trucks and engineering equipment were destroyed; the better part of his Diesel oil and commercial explosives had gone up; the Navy garage, the blacksmith and machine shops, and the major warehouse for building supplies—all these had been burnt or blasted to the ground. Continuing in a supplementary report which commenced with the statement that defending the atoll and keeping its garrison alive had been his main preoccupations, Commander Cunningham reminded Pearl Harbor that night work was impossible; that the lack of air-warning gear restricted daytime construction, especially with heavy equipment the noise of which masked sounds of approaching bombers; that the raids had depleted his effective engineering equipment and destroyed repair facilities; and that civilian morale was generally bad. He closed with the statement that no deadlines could be predicted or met unless enemy pressure were lifted.

No further such queries were received from rear areas during the balance of the defense.

18 December was a quiet day.⁷ The only enemy activity in the vicinity of Wake, however, was ominous. A single shore-based airplane was picked up almost overhead at 25,000 feet, well out of anti-aircraft range and much above the combat air patrol. It flew up the northwesterly axis of the atoll, and then turned south, presumably returning to Roi. This was believed to have been a photo-reconnaissance flight.

Next morning, after an uneventful night, the defenders continued their routine tasks. By now, even with their limited tools and personnel, the various batteries had begun to be well dug in. Beach defenses, to the full extent of personnel available to man them, had been set up, even including alternate machine-gun positions fully equipped with weapons and ammunition but only to be manned under par-

⁷ Likewise typical of the day-to-day confusion which exists in the Wake records and recollections is the fact that contemporary records—the Wake despatches and Major Bayler's official narrative report prepared in December 1941—indicate that the memories of the survivors have almost unanimously transposed the events of 17 and 18 December.

ticular contingencies. Trained men were the most critical shortage of all.

With one plane in commission and the one other suffering from engine trouble, the Marines began 19 December as usual, at morning general quarters.

At 1050, 27 of the shore-based bombers from Roi coming in from the northwest at 18,600 feet, worked over the VMF-211 area south of the airstrip, Camp 1 to the west (where they finished off the Marines' mess hall and tentage), and PanAir. Defending 3-inch fire from Batteries D and E hit four of the bombers, one of which crashed after its crew had parachuted over the water. Except in Camp 1, already partially razed, no serious damage was done, and no casualties resulted.

The next day, 20 December, dawned gloomily with heavy rain, low ceilings, and poor visibility all day. This frontal rain, which covered a wide area, dissuaded the Japanese from making their usual noon visit, but it could not stop a PBY, and, at 1530, a United States Navy patrol bomber, the first physical contact between Wake and the outer world, landed in the lagoon bearing detailed information for the island commander as to plans and actions underway for relief and reinforcement of the atoll.

All civilians, except key personnel essential to upkeep and certain high-priority projects, were to be evacuated. A Marine fighting squadron (VMF-221) would be flown in to reinforce VMF-211, now near the end of its tether. Substantial reinforcements of Marine Corps personnel and matériel were being despatched for the 1st Defense Battalion Detachment. A complete loading-plan of the *Tangier* was included.

After delivering their messages, the pilots of the PBY asked where the hotel on Wake was located, not realizing that it had been destroyed almost 2 weeks previously.

As night fell, all hands worked on brief letters and official reports to be transmitted back to Pearl. Commander Cunningham, Majors Devereux and Putnam, and Commander Greey sent back reports. Major Bayler, his mission long since completed, would carry the papers back and leave Wake in compliance with orders directing his return "by first available Government air transportation." Mr. Hevenor, the Bureau of the Budget official who had missed the *Philippine Clipper* on 8 December, was originally to return as well, but someone pointed out that he could not travel in a Naval aircraft without

parachute and Mae West, neither of which available, so he remained at Wake.

At 0700 next morning, 21 December, the P turned over its engines and took off. Within less than two hours, at 0850, with no warning, 29 Japanese Navy attack-bombers, covered by 18 fighters, laid down through the overcast and bombed and strafed all battery positions. These were planes from Carrier Division 2 (*Soryu* and *Hiiryu*), called in by the Japanese to help soften Wake's unexpected toughness. Due to the low ceiling, the attack was coordinated and summated before the 3-inch batteries could get into action, but the .50-caliber antiaircraft machine guns helped to render the attack, while ominous in implications, ineffective as far as results went.

Only three hours later, at 1220, 33 of the shore-based Japanese bombers arrived from Roi. As they had so often in the past, they again took Peale as Camp 2 as their targets. The approach was from the east at 18,000 feet in two major formations, and the bombs of the second group plastered Battery D position on Peale. Some 35 3-inch rounds had been fired, and one bomber hit after about a half minute in action, when a bomb fell squarely inside the direct emplacement of the battery, killing the firing battery executive, Platoon Sgt. Johnalson E. Wright, and wounding the range officer and three enlisted Marines.

The effects of this hit were of critical seriousness to the antiaircraft defense of Wake.

The only remaining director on the atoll belonged to Battery E, located in the elbow of Wake Island. This battery, however, had no height finder, something which Battery D on Peale possessed. Between the two 3-inch batteries, there thus remained only sufficient fire-control equipment for one. Since Battery E was more centrally located and had thus apparently escaped detection or direct attack, it seemed more logical to retain it as the primary antiaircraft defense of the atoll. In addition, if attacked, its location was such that near-misses would fall well clear of other installations. Because of all these considerations, Major Devereux directed Battery D to send its height finder, now the only one on Wake, together with certain other fire-control gear, one gun and the necessary personnel, to Battery E, which, for the first time on Wake, would be a full manned, fully equipped four-gun battery. Of the remaining three 3-inch guns on Peale, two were to be shifted to a new location from which they could

execute beach-defense missions, and one was to be kept active in the old Battery D position amid dummies, to create the impression that the battery was still in its former location. As a further measure of deception, Battery F on Wilkes, now reduced to two guns, was also to open fire by local control methods whenever air raids occurred.

The net result of enemy attrition, therefore, was that Wake now possessed but one antiaircraft battery of four 3-inch guns, whereas at the outset of hostilities, it had possessed 12 such guns, eight of which were potentially effective. Of 12 fighters, only two remained in commission.

That night, after Platoon Sergeant Wright had been buried in the battery position where he fell, Battery D proceeded to carry out the defense detachment commander's orders, and by next morning Battery E was fully manned and equipped as directed. The remaining strength of the garrison on Peale was now less than a hundred Marines plus a group of civilians who had been trained under Marine noncommissioned officers to act as one of Battery D's gun crews.⁸

On the morning of 22 December, two airplanes were in commission although one suffered from starter trouble which delayed the take-off of Captain Freuler on the midmorning combat-air patrol. Lieutenant Davidson had been out almost an hour, and was just covering the northern approaches to Wake at 12,000 feet when he spotted enemy planes coming in. He called Captain Freuler, who was then south of the atoll, and the latter headed back.

The incoming flight consisted of 33 enemy carrier attack planes escorted by six fighters, all from the *Soryu-Hiryu* carrier division. The fighters were at 12,000 feet and the dive bombers at 18,000. The fighters were of a sleek, new type, the first Zeroes to be encountered over Wake.

Confronted by six Zeke's, Captain Freuler in his patched-up F4F-3 unhesitatingly dived at the enemy division, and, seconds later, as he pulled up, found the formation scattering around him and his

⁸ Of them, the Peale strongpoint commander, Captain Godbold, was to write, "The civilians who served with this battery were of inestimable value * * * under the capable leadership of Sergeant Bowsher, they soon were firing their gun in a manner comparable to the marine-manned guns. Before the surrender of the island some of these men were slated to be evacuated to Honolulu; however, the entire gun crew offered to stay on the island and serve with the battery."

first victim already smoking on its way down. Flipping his airplane into a difficult opposite approach, he attacked another of the Zeroes, which exploded only 50 feet below, sending a curtain of flame and flying fragments about the Grumman. The Marine fighter was badly scorched, manifold pressure dropped, and the controls reacted sluggishly.

At this moment, looking back toward Wake, the only possible landing place, Freuler saw Lieutenant Davidson in action against the dive bombers. The other Grumman was diving at a retreating bomber, while behind Davidson one of the Zeroes was already commencing a run of his own. This was the last time Lieutenant Davidson or his airplane were ever seen.

While Freuler looked, another of the carrier fighters got on his tail and fired a long burst, wounding the Marine pilot in the back and shoulder. Captain Freuler pushed his plane over into a steep dive, managed to shake off his pursuer, and dragged the shattered, scorched F4F into the field for a crash landing. In the words of Lieutenant Kinney, whose shoestring maintenance had kept VMF 211 flying for 15 days, "This left us with no airplanes."

In spite of the fighting squadron's last blaze of heroism, the dive bombers had methodically worked over all battery positions again, although, by United States Navy standards of dive bombing, commented Lieutenant Barninger, "We who have been used to seeing only the propeller hub are a bit taken aback by their shallow dives and their inaccuracies." There had been no casualties on the ground.

That afternoon, preparations for ground defenses were intensified. On Peale, organization of the beach-defense positions for the two remaining 3-inch guns was pressed and concluded. On Wilkes, Captain Platt, the strong-point commander, issued detailed instructions to Marine Gunner McKinstry, in command of the provisional Battery F (3-inch), that, upon initiation of actual landings, he was to fire on the boats as long as the guns could be depressed to hit, and then to fall back as infantry into contact with Battery L Marines, who would also be acting as infantry in this contingency. Now having no airplanes, Marine Fighting Squadron 211 reported to the defense battalion as infantry. The squadron included less than 20 effectives, both officers and men.

The words of one officer on Wake summed up the situation as of 22 December quite accurately:

"All that can be done is being done, but there is so little to do with."

Enemy Plans and Actions, 11–21 December

As the enemy forces, damaged and defeated, executed their southward withdrawal toward Kwajalein during 11 December, it was readily apparent to Rear Admiral Kajioka (whose flagship, the *Yubari*, had had more than a taste of Wake's accurate gunfire) that the difficulty of the mission had by no means been underestimated by his pessimistic chief of staff, and that additional means and more favorable conditions must be sought.

On 13 December, the battered force entered Kwajalein Atoll and anchored while conferences were held and plans recast. Rear Admiral Marushige, Kuninori, who had commanded Cruiser Division 18 (the old light cruisers, *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu*, both of which had been well worked over), analyzed the failure factors⁹ of the unsuccessful attempt in the following order:

- Vigorous seacoast artillery defense;
- Fighter opposition;
- Adverse weather;
- Insufficient Japanese forces and means.

The Wake invasion force's losses and injuries had been impressive; two destroyers sunk; substantial damage to all three cruisers present; three more destroyers and one destroyer-transport damaged; and one transport partially burnt out. None of the damage, however, was beyond repair, and this was immediately set on foot with such facilities as Commander Fourth Fleet had at Kwajalein.

Despite the fact that the same general difficulties were anticipated for the next attempt, the Japanese higher echelons let the basic scheme of attack remain largely unchanged, an example of the lack of flexibility which so characterized much enemy planning. To make good immediate losses and strengthen the force somewhat, Commander Fourth Fleet contributed two replacement destroyers (*Asanagi* and *Yunagi*, sisters of the sunken ships which they replaced), together with one more, *Oboro*, a much

⁹ Admiral Kajioka's chief of staff later spoke of "* * * your three aggressive fighter planes" and added, "the defense guns were very accurate * * * The American fighter pilots were admired for their skill and bravery."

more powerful and newer ship of destroyer-lead characteristics, armed with six 5-inch guns. In addition to these reinforcements, the mine layer *Tsugata* then in the Marianas, embarked the personnel of the Maizuru Second Special Landing Force on Saipan and transported them to Roi, where they were incorporated into the Wake landing force organization. Another transport, *Tenyo Maru*, and a float-plane tender, *Kiyokawa*, were also added.

While troop rehearsals were in progress on 15 December, Commander Fourth Fleet urged the sufficiency of his force for the mission, and, in reply to the Commander in Chief, Combined Fleet, was apparently convinced that Wake, by contrast with other central Pacific objectives, constituted a major stumbling block, diverted what, by United States standards, amounted to a carrier task force: two fleet carriers (*Soryu* and *Hiryu*, Carrier Division 2); four older heavy cruisers (*Aoba*, *Furutaka*, *Kako*, *Kinugasa*, Cruiser Division 6); two very new heavy cruisers (*Tone* and *Chikuma*, Cruiser Division 8); and a task-force screen of six destroyers. Commander Cruiser Division 8, Rear Admiral Abe, Koki, would act as task-force commander, and was also, on 15 December, designated by Commander Fourth Fleet as over-all commander of forces afloat for the projected operation, leaving as before, however, the amphibious force command to Rear Admiral Kajioka.

The new plan and estimate of the situation were in essence, amplified versions of the original one which had failed.

The necessity—so clearly indicated by the battle of 11 December—for adequate prelanding softening of Wake was, however, taken into account. Commencing on 21 December, 2 days prior to the target date, which was set for 23 December, the aircraft of Carrier Division 2 would work over the Wake defenses, concentrating in order of priority on United States aircraft, batteries, and machine gun positions, locations of which were beginning to be fairly well known and pin-pointed.

In order that Wake's deadly seacoast batteries might be afforded minimum opportunities, initial landings were to take place by darkness, shortly before dawn. As a measure of surprise, indicates our source, there was to be no preliminary naval bombardment on 23 December.¹⁰ To insure that the

¹⁰ But see note 1, page 40, as to the possibility that a bombardment did take place.

troops actually landed, regardless of how the battle fared for the forces afloat, the two destroyer-transports, Patrol Boats 32 and 33, were to be run aground on the south shore in the vicinity of the airstrip. At least four—and possibly six¹¹—landing barges, each bearing 50 men, would land along the south shore as follows: two on Wilkes; two between the end of the airstrip and Camp 1; and two (possibly) just west of Peacock Point. In the event that all these Special Naval Landing Force troops, totaling approximately 1,000, were unable to force a decision ashore, a 500-man reserve, to be organized from ships' landing forces, would be committed. As a desperate, ultimate expedient, the destroyers themselves would be beached, and the remainder of their crews would swarm ashore. It would truly be a fight to the finish.

The possibility of United States naval surface intervention was taken into consideration. This had been dismissed as out of the question on 11 December, because it was correctly believed that the shock of Pearl Harbor would immobilize American surface operations for some days afterward. On this second attempt to seize Wake, the enemy judged without ever knowing of Pacific Fleet Task Force 14's operations, United States surface opposition was probable. To anticipate this threat, Cruiser Division 6, the four heavies, was to be stationed as a covering force east of Wake. In the event that a major surface action should develop Rear Admiral Abe, of Cruiser Division 8, would conduct the fight.

As on the first attempt, submarine reconnaissance would precede the invasion force, not only to size up the island situation but to look out for United States surface forces.

In compliance with the orders of the C-in-C Combined Fleet, the *Soryu-Hiryu* carrier task force, which had been operating northwest of Midway, balked by weather from delivering a major strike against that base, proceeded on 15 December toward the Marshalls. The earlier increment of reinforcements, including the Marianas Special Landing Force troops, had already reached Kwajalein, having been released from operational commitments after participating in the comparatively easy seizure of

Guam, which had been completed by nightfall of 10 December.¹²

After issuance of final orders, completion of rehearsals and making good battle damage from the action of 11 December, at 0900 on 21 December, the Wake invasion force, under Admiral Kajioka, cleared Roi on a northward track for a second attempt to crush the defenders of Wake.

The Relief Attempt, 15–23 December

On 15 December,¹³ the *Tangier*, *Neches* and a temporary escort of four destroyers had sortied by twilight from Pearl Harbor, while the *Saratoga*, loaded with planes and pilots of VMF-221 (Major Verne J. McCavl), was fueling inside the harbor for the trip forward to Wake.

The Pacific Fleet operation order which directed the relief attempt directed Task Force 14 to depart Pearl in two task groups. The train, consisting of *Tangier*, *Neches*, and escort, would leave early and rendezvous next day with the *Saratoga* task group. The mission of the task force was to deliver supplies, reinforcements and aircraft to Wake, evacuate wounded (together with a portion of the civilians), and return to Pearl. VMF-221 was to be flown off to Wake as soon as possible. The train was to be protected from air, submarine, and surface attacks while unloading at Wake (anchored to buoys in the roadstead off Wilkes channel), but the *Saratoga* was to remain out of visual range of Wake and clear of the lines of approach to Wake from enemy bases. Fueling at sea might be carried out at discretion of the task force commander (Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, USN), and the *Neches* would then be released for independent return to Pearl. The task force was to arrive at Wake on 23 December, east longitude date.

At 1115 next day, 16 December, the fighting elements of the task force having completed a somewhat delayed fueling, sortied from Pearl Harbor, one carrier, three heavy cruisers and nine destroyers in all. That afternoon they joined up with the train at a rendezvous southwest of Oahu, and the westward voyage to Wake began.

In spite of the impatience which chafed all hands to reach Wake, the speed of advance of Task Force 14 was considerably curtailed by the maximum

¹¹ Dates in this section are west or east longitude as applicable to the location at which the respective events occurred. Where confusion is possible, the type of date will be indicated.

¹² See page 47.

¹³ Units involved in the Guam operation and now assigned to Wake were *Oboro* (destroyer), *Kiyokawa* (float-plane tender), *Tsurgaru* (mine layer), and Cruiser Division 6 (the four heavy cruisers).

speed of its slowest component, the old *Neches*, which could only make 12 knots, and, with the zig-zagging considered necessary in the no-man's sea west of the Hawaiian Islands, the actual advance was even less.

To the Marines and scamen of Task Force 14, which constituted the first westward naval sally of the war, the waters beyond sight of Oahu seemed very lonely waters indeed. No contact, either friendly or enemy, varied the tenseness of the run. Aboard the *Tangier* each day there was dawn general quarters followed by a morning of such training for the embarked Marines as was possible. To introduce the antiaircraft personnel to radar, indoctrinatory lectures were put on by the technicians who had come aboard just prior to sailing. The radar sets themselves were stowed aft on the flight deck, still mysterious and puzzling to all hands, both officers and men.

The few available maps and charts of Wake received intense study. In anticipation that Wake's 3-inch guns might have to deliver direct, local-control fire on ships or ground targets, improvised forward-area sights were designed and turned out in the ship's machine shop, while the machine-gun detachment commander contrived with the ship's force to construct special slings with which his .50 caliber antiaircraft machine guns could be hoisted from ship to barges in the full ready position to ward off enemy attacks while unloading. The 5-inch seacoast men stayed in practice by standing their share of condition watches on the after 5-inch gun of the *Tangier*. All Marine antiaircraft machine guns were of course set up and manned on the superstructure.

Disembarkation and unloading at Wake were the subject of many conferences. Since entrance into the lagoon would be impossible, troops and supplies would have to be lightered in. If vitally injured during the tedious process, it was stated that the *Tangier* would be run aground should this be necessary to ensure delivery of the vital cargo.

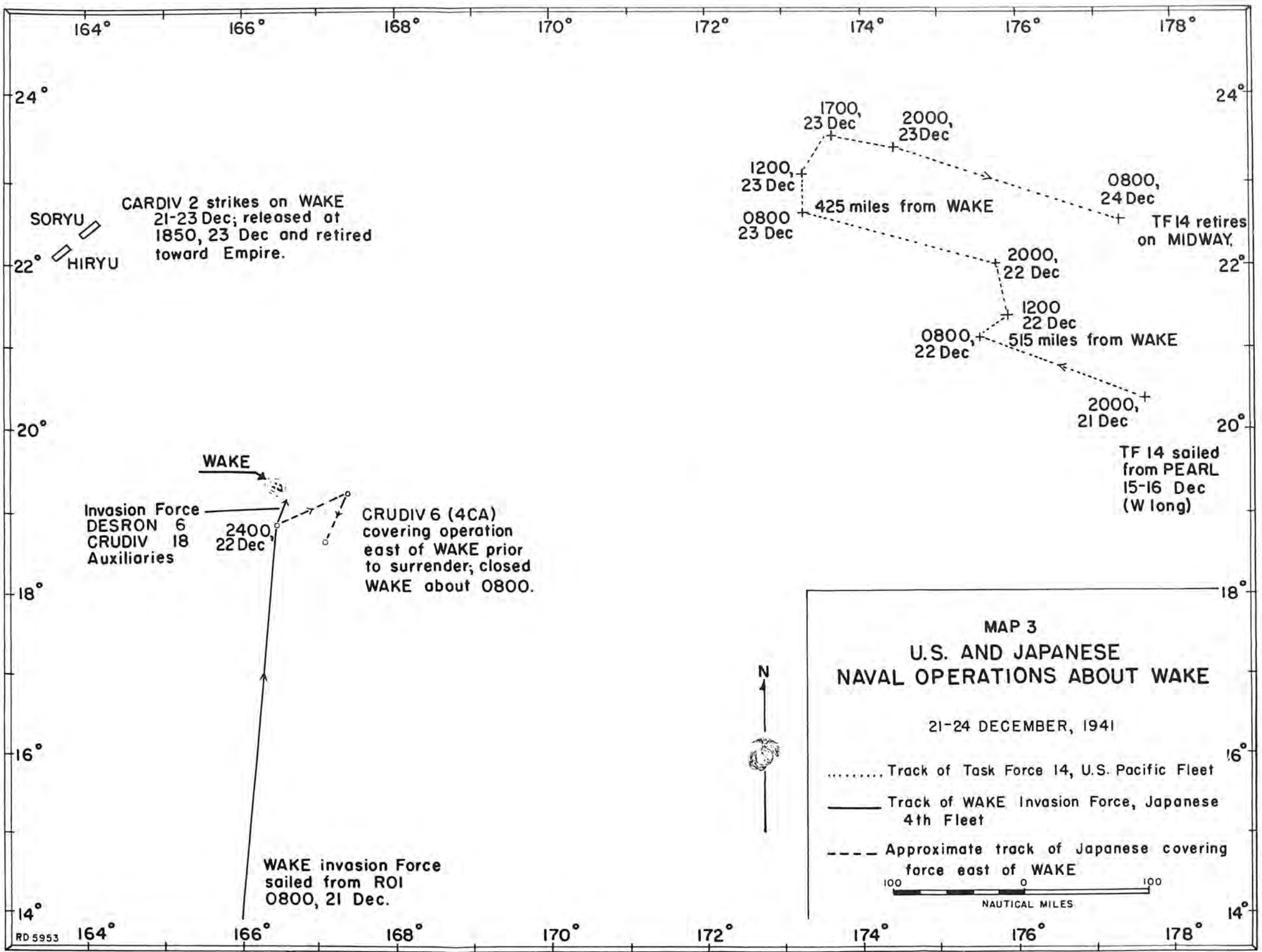
On 18 December, as Task Force 14 plodded westward, CinCPac, mindful of the possibility of dangerous confusion about Wake, ordered Task Group 7.2, the Wake submarine patrol, to withdraw from that vicinity and operate near Rongelap. On 21 December, intelligence available at Pearl Harbor indicated a heavy concentration of shore-based Japanese aviation strength in the Marshalls, with the possibility that hostile surface forces might be en-

countered astride Task Force 14's approach to Wake. Task Force 11, operating to the southeast with the *Lexington*, was therefore ordered to act in support of Task Force 14. By this date, also, it was known at Pearl that enemy carriers in unknown strength were operating to the northwest of Wake. CinCPac surmised that the *Soryu* might be one of them, a highly accurate deduction.

Meanwhile, at 2000 on 21 December, the relieving force had reached a point only 627 miles east of Wake. By the next morning at 0800, there remained but 515 miles to go. Aboard the *Astoria*, the task force commander was in touch with the urgent situation on Wake, as CinCPac was relaying all of the Wake reports to the relieving force, which, however, maintained strict radio silence.

Although the destroyers' fuel supply was reasonably adequate, their margin, in the event of a fight near Wake, seemed slim to Admiral Fletcher, and on the 22d, rather than pressing in toward Wake, he commenced to fuel destroyers from the *Neches*, steaming slowly northward on a track which brought the force no nearer its destination. After all-day difficulties which slowed fueling, the task force again turned generally westward during the night of 22-23 December, and, by 0800, 23 December, at the very moment when Commander Cunningham was ordering Major Devereux to arrange the surrender of Wake, the relieving force was but 425 miles distant. The 0800 position of the *Saratoga* on 23 December, in 173°15' east longitude and 22°30' north latitude, was the nearest that relief was to approach Wake.

During the night of 22-23 December (21-22 December, it was at Pearl), where the closeness of the race against time was forcefully apprehended by Admiral Pye, acting as CinCPac pending arrival of Admiral Nimitz from Washington, was in conference with Capt. Charles H. McMorris, USN, and Rear Admiral Milo F. Dracmel, USN, both of the CinCPac staff. The question was whether or not to risk losing what was left of the Pacific fleet in what might well be a vain attempt to relieve Wake. During the night, as a compromise measure, it was decided to send in the *Tangier*, a fast new ship, to Wake by herself, fly off the Marine fighters from the *Saratoga* at maximum range, and retire. But before Admiral Fletcher could execute this hazardous decision (which would have spelled destruction for the *Tangier* and her relief force of Marines), the order



CARDIV 2 strikes on WAKE
 21-23 Dec; released at
 1850, 23 Dec and retired
 toward Empire.

SORYU
 HIRYU

1700, 23 Dec
 2000, 23 Dec
 1200, 23 Dec
 0800, 23 Dec
 425 miles from WAKE
 0800, 24 Dec
 TF14 retires on MIDWAY.

2000, 22 Dec
 1200, 22 Dec
 0800, 22 Dec
 515 miles from WAKE

2000, 21 Dec
 TF 14 sailed from PEARL 15-16 Dec (W long)

WAKE

Invasion Force
 DESRON 6
 CRUDIV 18
 Auxiliaries
 2400, 22 Dec

CRUDIV 6 (4CA)
 covering operation
 east of WAKE prior
 to surrender; closed
 WAKE about 0800.

WAKE invasion Force
 sailed from ROI
 0800, 21 Dec.

were countermanded. To add to the difficulties of decision, Admiral Pye knew that Wake was already, in the minds of many, written off as lost, and that some doubted if we could continue holding, even if this crisis was averted.

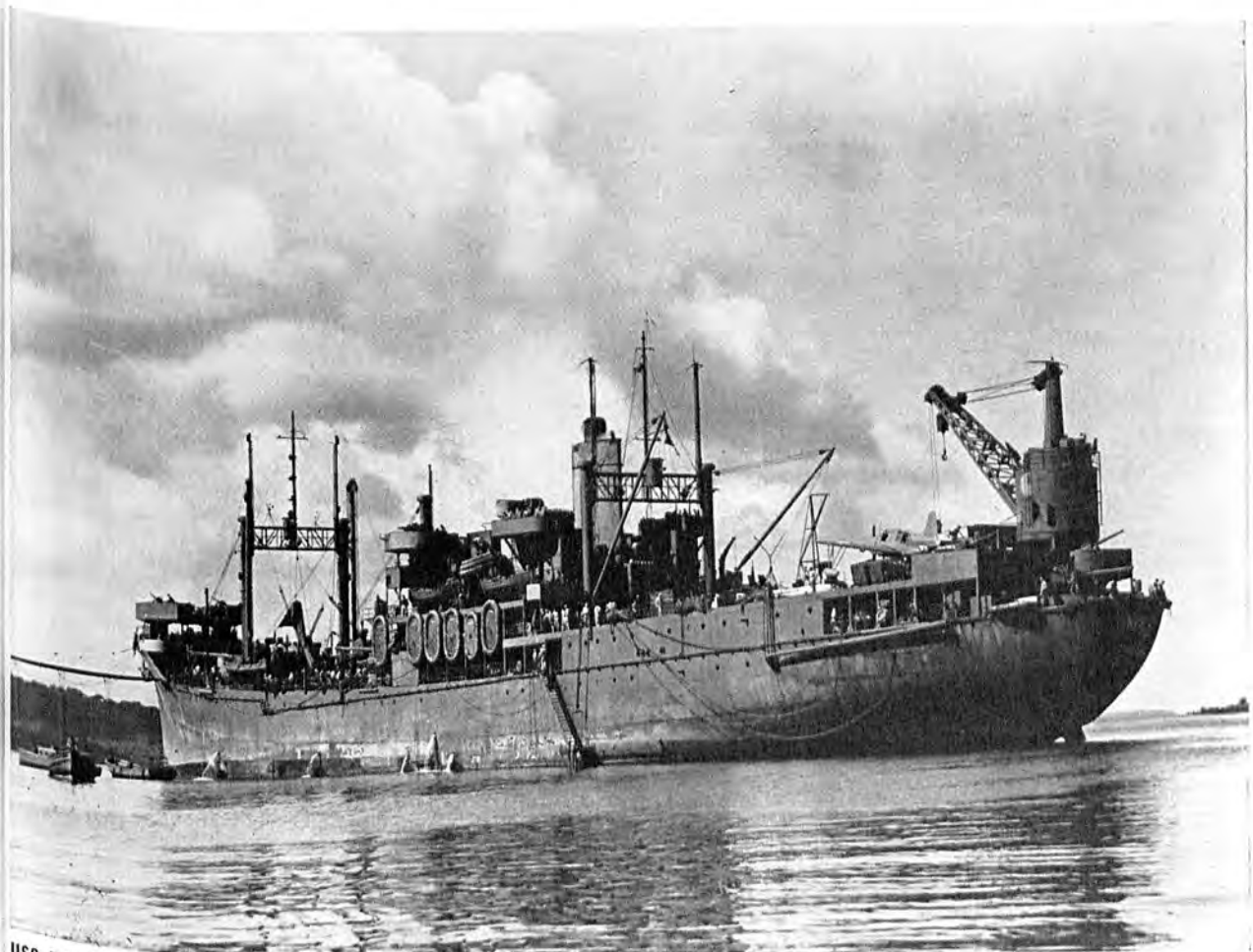
Finally, as day was breaking over Makalapa, the decision was reached. At 0811, Hawaiian time, some two and a half hours before Wake was to surrender, Task Force 14 was recalled.

Aboard the *Astoria*, *Saratoga*, and *Tangier*, reactions varied from astonishment to shame and anger. There were even some staff officers who counselled Admiral Fletcher to disregard orders and make a dash in to Wake. They did not know that at this very moment, some four enemy heavy cruisers (Cruiser Division 6) were patrolling east of Wake,

separated from any Japanese carrier air support by hundreds of miles,¹¹ a sitting target for the airmen of the *Saratoga*; nor did they know that the Japanese attack force was disposed about Wake with no apparent measures for security against surface attack. Had all this been known, the story of Wake might have been very different.

But it was not known, and Task Force 14, which might have relieved Wake, spent most of 23 December refueling its cruisers, and that night retired on Midway.

¹¹ The two enemy carriers, *Soryu* and *Hiryu* (Carrier Division 2) were stationed some 250 miles northwest of Wake, well beyond supporting distance for the surface covering force of heavy cruisers east of Wake.



USS TANGIER, THE RELIEF SHIP which never got to Wake, was loaded with much-needed radar equipment, ammunition and additional Marines.



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

CHAPTER IV

The Fall of Wake

Intermittent, gusty rain-squalls ushered in the black early morning of 23 December on Wake, adding their clamor and discomfort to the steady boom of the surf. At some time after 0100, to enhance the uneasiness of the defenders, a succession of vivid, irregular flashes showed beyond the horizon north of Peale. Obviously they were not individual lights or signal searchlights, for the brilliance and irregularity ruled out both possibilities. To those who previously had seen gunfire at sea during fleet exercises, it suggested a night battle practice.¹

At 0145, moreover, via the J-line, came an alarming report: the enemy are landing on Toki Point (Peale). Major Devereux alerted all units and called on First Lieutenant Kessler, commanding Battery B at Toki Point, for confirmation and further information. Kessler replied via a command line that, although some lights could be seen offshore (as had been reported on several previous nights), no landings were in progress. The beach defenses on Toki were manned, he added, inasmuch as boats were "believed" to be somewhere offshore.

By this time Wake was thoroughly alerted, and all units were at general quarters. To Second Lieutenant Poindexter, commanding the scanty mobile reserve² at Camp 1, it seemed that immediate action

¹ One enemy source of excellent credibility states that Cru-Div 18 (the two old light cruisers) bombarded Peale at 0100, although no shelling was in fact received in that area until well after daylight. Considered in light of the "gunfire" seen to the northward at about this time, it has been conjectured that due to gross navigational error on a dark and stormy night the Japanese, probably firing without visual data, might well have been expending 6-inch bombardment ammunition on the empty ocean.

was needed to counter the reported Toki Point landing. He reported to the command post that he was moving out with the reserve for Peale Island, and that his little force in motion. Major Devereux, by realizing that whatever enemy action might be in progress, Peale was not immediately threatened, ordered that the truck be intercepted en route as the reserve passed the command post.

A few minutes later this was done, and Major Devereux held Poindexter with him pending clarification of the situation.

The Enemy Approach On Wake

After completing the revised plans, rehearsals and preparations described earlier, Rear Admiral Kurojima had, at 0900, 21 December, set sail from Wake with the Wake occupation force, composed of two heavy cruisers, two old light cruisers, six destroyers, one auxiliary float-plane tender, the two patrol boats, and three medium transports. Virtually all this force, except the aircraft tender and two destroyers which replaced *Asanagi* and *Hayate*, had seen action against Wake on 11 December, and several ships still bore scars from that day.

Already operating to the north of Wake was the *Soryu-Hiryu* task force composed of carriers, heavy cruisers and escorts fresh from the recent success at Pearl Harbor. This was the force, carrier plane

² This detachment consisted of eight enlisted Marines with four .30 caliber machine-guns, with one truck for transportation. With a few Marine supply and administrative personnel and 15 Navy enlisted men commanded by Boatswain's Mate First Class James E. Barnes, U. S. N., it was also responsible for defense of the Camp 1 area.

from which had hammered Wake on 21 and 22 December.¹

As before, the approach was screened by submarines advanced well forward as a scouting force in accordance with Japanese doctrine. These ships (RO-60, 61, and 62) were able, on 22 December, to allay some of Admiral Kajioka's apprehensions by reporting that no motor torpedo boats (much feared by the Japanese during this and the previous attempt) appeared to be in the vicinity of Wake.

The approach disposition and the distribution of the troops aboard ships are not entirely clear. The total strength of the landing forces, which was composed of approximately 1,000 Special Naval Landing Force personnel for the assault, plus the reserve to be assembled if needed from ships' landing parties, numbered some 1,500. Of these, approximately 800² SNLF, were distributed between the two destroyer-transport. Some 200 more, to be landed in four or more medium³ landing craft (somewhat similar to the American LCM) were embarked elsewhere, presumably aboard one or another of the transports, *Kongo Maru*, *Tenyo Maru*, or *Konryu Maru*. So far as is known, the 500-man provisional reserve of landing parties remain distributed aboard parent ships.

The Maizuru Second Special Naval Landing Force, now brought to full strength by reinforcements from Saipan, was essentially a Japanese version of the battalion landing team (BLT). Its three rifle companies all possessed numerical designations but were more commonly called by the names of the respective company commanders. Thus the First Company, commanded by Lieutenant Uchida, Kinichi, IJN, would be referred to as "the Uchida unit." Similarly, the Second and Third Companies were styled "the Takano unit" and "the Itaya unit."

The Uchida and Itaya companies⁴ were to execute the assault landings on Wake Island. One hundred "picked men" of the Takano unit were to seize Wilkes, and the balance of that company presumably

¹ For task-organization of the Japanese forces, see appendix V.

² One account indicates 500. At this time, all SNLF units attached to the Fourth Fleet were concentrated for the seizure of Wake in much the way in which United States Fleet Marine Force units would have been so employed.

³ See page 47, this chapter, regarding the possibility that an additional boat-group may have landed near the southeast tip of Wake Island.

⁴ Itaya's name and thus that of this company appears in one Japanese source as "Itatani."

would be employed on Wake Island to back up Uchida and Itaya.

Except for one submarine scare, the final approach to Wake was uneventful. Beginning on 22 December, however, the weather, which had handicapped the previous attempt, was again unfavorable. At about 2200, when Admiral Kajioka's flagship was within approximately 30 miles of Wake, an observer⁵ aboard reported:

The storm came down upon the ship * * * and the terrific wind whistled over the mast. The angry waves tossed the ships around as if they were toys.

At about 8 knots the force advanced cautiously under cover of the weather. If it was bad for their projects, it would nevertheless blind the defenders. Lookouts strained for the landfall, more difficult than usual on such a night, "Now, the ship became all eyes * * *"

Suddenly a blinking light was seen. It was a light signal, "Island is sighted," from a destroyer which had increased its speed and was in the advance guard. We had finally located the island for which we had set out * * * The course was changed and the speed was gradually reduced. The sight of the island appeared faintly in the darkness. Really faintly. "Break off and land the naval landing party." The honorable first order of "CHARGE" was given, and the daring officers and men, with white sashes, bravely went down to the surface of the sea.

The time was close to 0200, and men of the Special Naval Landing Force clambered down into the medium landing craft, two bound for Wilkes bearing the Takano personnel and others for the south shore of Wake Island. Aboard Patrol Craft 32 and 33, now close aboard Peacock Point, on a northwesterly course, the SNLF rigged out their Jacobs' ladders and ropes while the ships' captains rang up beaching speed (12 knots) on bridge telegraphs.

The hardships encountered in lowering the landing barges were too severe even to imagine. Now, we, the Naval Landing Force, on the barges which we were in, must charge into enemy territory and carry out the final step of securing a landing point after touching the shore.

Just south of the airstrip, the destroyer-transport

⁵ This was one Ibushi, Kayoshi, of the Imperial Japanese Naval Information Section, a sort of combat correspondent, who later stated of himself, "This reporter, as a member of the Naval Information Section, was able to have the honor of taking the first step upon the island as a man of letters." He then added, "* * * the capture of Wake Island * * * was so heroic that even the gods wept."

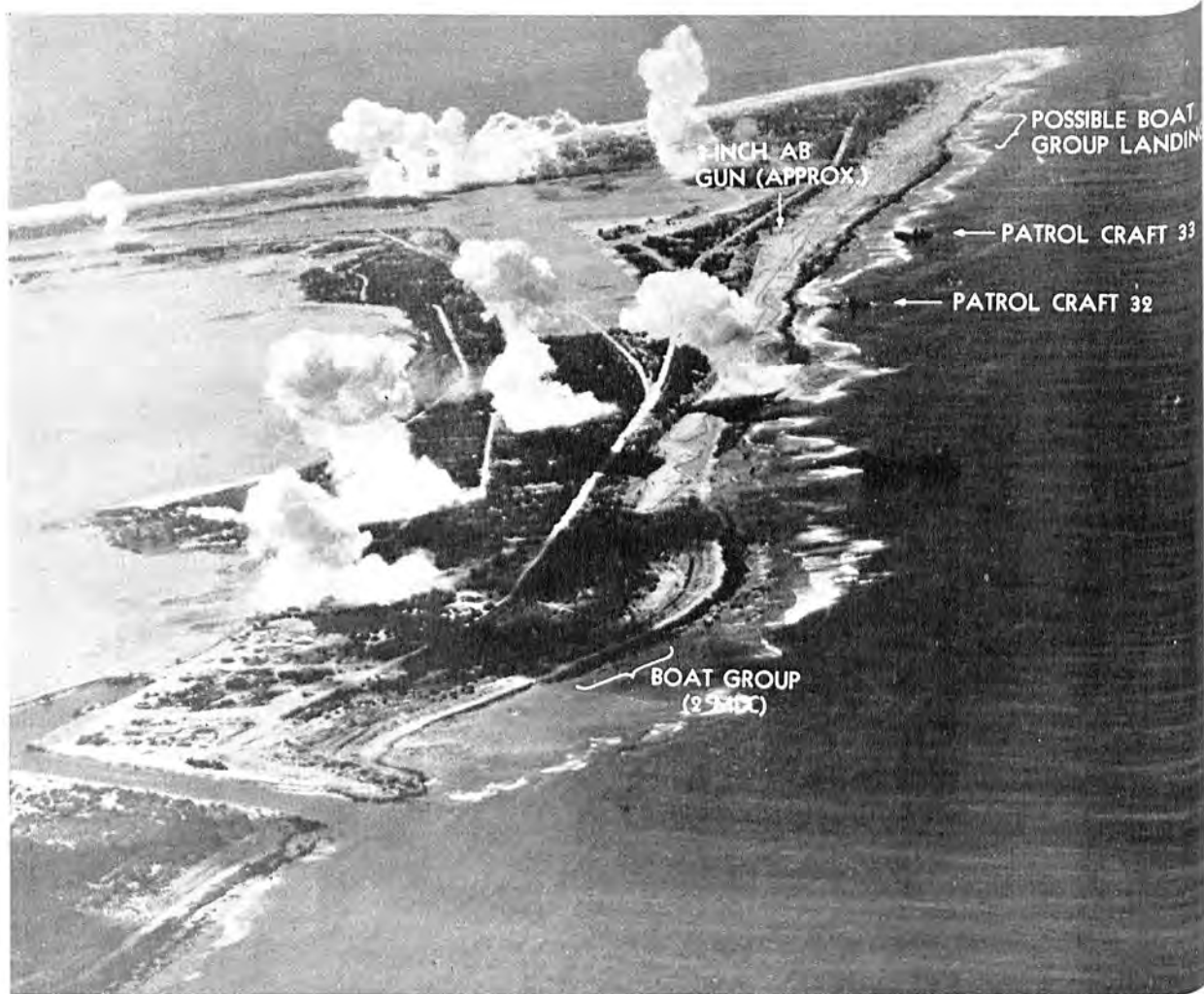
turned hard astarboard, commencing the final run onto the reef, and the landing barges butted through the darkness toward the ominous low-lying bulk of Wake. With a reverberating crunch, Patrol Craft 32-33 mounted the reef in a smother of breakers and foam. They were aground off the west end of the strip. Two barges scraped bottom as they approached the reef near Camp 1, with still no sign that the Marines were awake.

Suddenly a pink tracer-stream pencilled from the beach of Wilkes, and .50 caliber slugs ripped through the gunwales of one barge. A moment later, also from Wilkes, a searchlight flared on, silhouetting offshore the picked men of the Takano unit and sending a blue band of light parallel to the south

shore of Wake. The time was 0245, and battle joined.

The Defense of Wake Island

By 0215 it was evident to the Marines on Wake that a landing attempt was in progress. Lights could be seen offshore, not only north of Peale, which had come the first alarm, but all along the south coast of Wake Island and Wilkes. At about 0220 men on Peacock Point thought that they could discern two barge-like shapes offshore, heading west toward the air field. Though they did not realize it, these were the destroyer-transporters swinging into their final run for the reef. Reports of



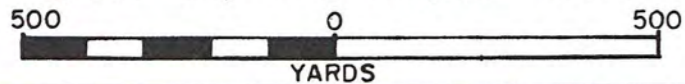
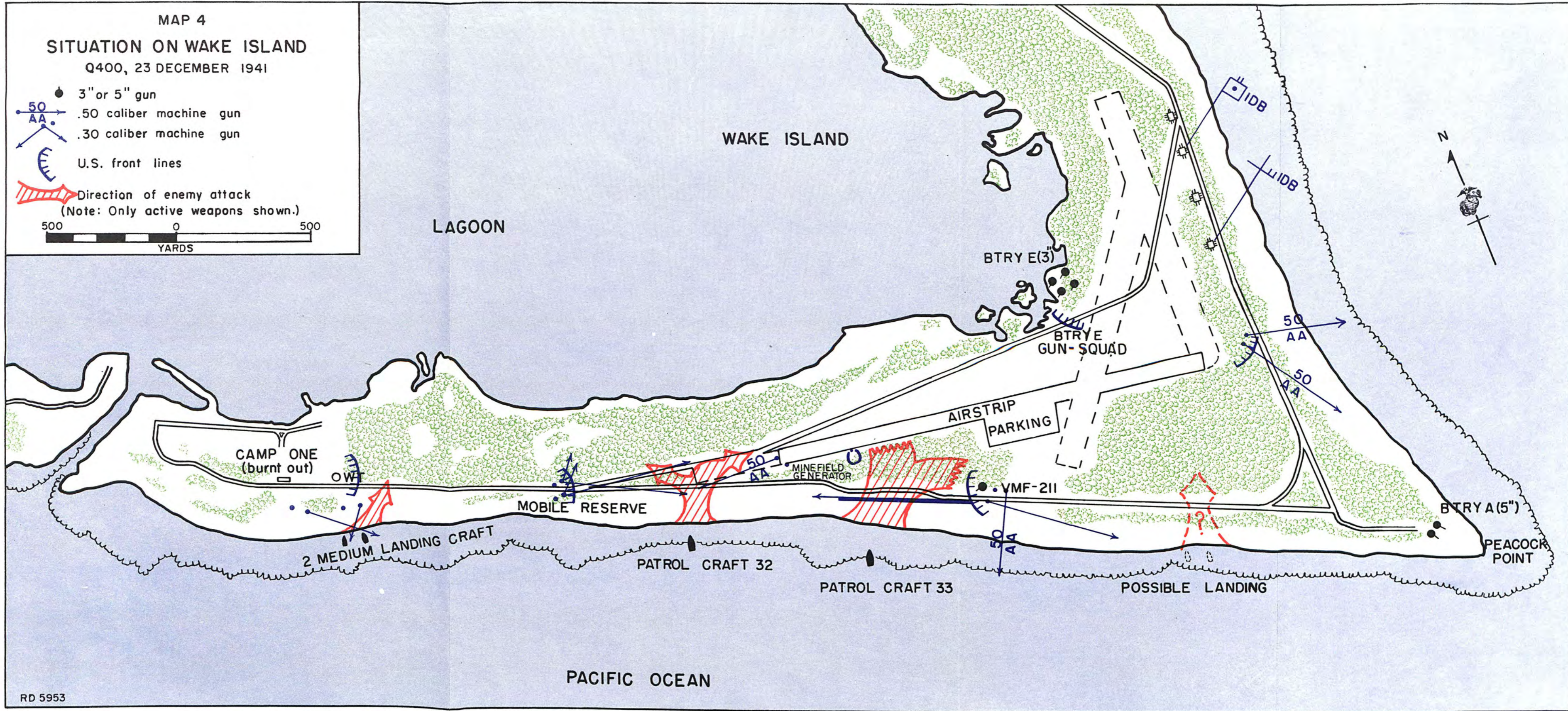
SOUTH SHORE OF WAKE ISLAND where elements of the Maizuru Second Special Naval Landing Force landed on 23 December 1941. Note Patrol Craft 32 and 33, still awash on the reef to right of airfield, which had been completed by Japanese when picture was taken in 1945.

MAP 4

SITUATION ON WAKE ISLAND

Q400, 23 DECEMBER 1941

● 3" or 5" gun
 50 AA .50 caliber machine gun
 30 AA .30 caliber machine gun
 U.S. front lines
 Direction of enemy attack
 (Note: Only active weapons shown.)

ward activity deluged the command post, where Majors Devereux and Potter, aided only by one enlisted talker and a switchboard operator, attempted to keep up with the situation, relaying the most important information to Commander Cunningham in his dugout to the north.

Certain by now that the south shore was most threatened, Major Devereux ordered Lieutenant Poindexter to move the Mobile Reserve to the area between Camp 1 and the western end of the airstrip. Since the whole reserve (eight Marines and four .30 caliber machine guns) had remained entrucked, less than a quarter of an hour elapsed before both machine-gun sections were in position just west of the road-junction which was in turn west of the airstrip, commanding not only the south shore road but the critical section of beach south of the field. Although Poindexter states that some naval gunfire from enemy ships offshore was already being received, no signs of enemy ashore, or of actual landings, could yet be discerned.

By 0235⁸ however, word had been received from Wilkes that barge engines could be heard above the surf, and Marine Gunner McKinstry had opened fire with a .50 caliber antiaircraft machine-gun on a dark shape close offshore of his provisional 3-inch battery. A few moments later, about 0245, Captain Platt requested permission to illuminate the beach with his 60-inch searchlight, and the landing was discovered, not only on Wilkes, where two barges were spotted on the beach, but on Wake, where the destroyer transports had just grounded.

Neither of the 5-inch batteries which commanded the south approaches to Wake⁹ and had done such yeoman service on 11 December, could bear, and it appears that the enemy approach, whereby Patrol

⁸ 0235 is the Japanese official time of landing, and, all things considered, appears to be the most accurate figure available. Statements of Marine officers on Wake are unaccountably divided as to the time of landing, so that approximately half place it in the vicinity of 0130, while the remainder agree almost an hour later. Typical of this confusion are the two accounts of Colonel Devereux. In his official report, he gives the time of landing on Wilkes at 0215, whereas, in his published narrative, it is 0120. He has subsequently stated, after considerable study of all available data, that he regards the Japanese time (0235) as preferable. Curiously enough, the variance between the two groups disappears later in the action and, by dawn, an excellent reference point, general agreement is obtained.

⁹ Battery A (Peacock Point) and Battery L (Wilkes). Both had drawn blood on 11 December.

Craft 32 and 33 got right inshore as soon as possible, might well have been predicated on the hope of getting inside the batteries' arcs of fire.¹⁰ In fact the only weapon larger than a machine-gun capable of attacking the all-important destroyer-transports, already beginning to spew out their cargo, was the unmanned 3-inch antiboat gun emplaced on the rise between the beach road and VMF-211's hardstand parking area. Second Lieutenant Robert M. Hanna, then in command of the antiaircraft machine-guns about the field, sensed the situation, gathered a scratch crew consisting of one Marine, Corp. Ralph J. Holewinski, and three civilians,¹¹ and set out at the double for the gun. Within a few moments Major Devereux, realizing the critical importance of holding this area and of supporting Hanna, had ordered Major Putnam to take what was left of VMF-211, some 20 men in all, and form an infantry support between the 3-inch gun and the enemy landing.

With all units now at general quarters, dispositions to meet the Japanese landing on Wake Island were as follows:

The mobile reserve (Lieutenant Poindexter's four machine-guns) was in position and already firing eastward along the beach at a dimly discerned destroyer-transport (Patrol Boat 32). Enemy troops landing from this ship had disclosed themselves by injudicious use of pyrotechnic signals and came under rifle and machine-gun fire which was to continue during most of the night.

At Camp 1, four .30 caliber machine-guns set up for beach-defense were manned by Battery I's gunshed crew and the 1st Defense Battalion's sailor boat crews who had been acting as lookouts on the watertank OP.

Hanna, with his scratch gun-crew covered by VMF-211, a squadron now smaller than a platoon, was south of the air strip.

Squarely in the track of the enemy's initial rush toward the west end of the strip, was Second Lieutenant Kiewer, with three aviation Marines, guard-

¹⁰ One of the advantages of the Navy 5-inch/51 for sea-coast defense-missions was that it had 360° train, as contrasted to the limited traverse of the 155 mm. field guns favored by the Army for this role. In this instance, however, terrain masks, slight though they were, prevented either A or L from bearing.

¹¹ Of these three civilians, two (Paul Gay and Bob Bryan) were subsequently killed in action, and the third, Eric Lehtola, was wounded in action. Hanna states that they fought with "exceptional gallantry."

ing one of the generators wired to supply power for detonation of the mines under the air strip.

Perhaps 75 yards northwest of Kliever was a section of two .50 caliber antiaircraft machine guns.

These guns, together with the section similarly posted at the east end of the strip,¹² commanded the length of the field, a perfect field of fire for a machine gunner, and to some extent interdicted northward movement across the strip. Other machine-gun sections, both .50 and .30 caliber, were emplaced in the Peacock Point area, with the primary mission of protecting Peacock strongpoint against landing or air attack. All of these guns participated according to terrain and situation in the subsequent action south of the air strip. For exact disposition of these weapons, see Map 1.

At all battery positions, including, in the threatened area, A (Peacock Point) and E (inside the elbow of Wake Island), gun crews stood by their weapons and manned such perimeter defenses as their meager strength permitted.

Shortly before 0300, as the action was just developing, the defense detachment commander was suddenly thrown out of wire communication with Camp 1, VMF-211, Lieutenant Hanna's .50 caliber battery CP near the air strip, and Battery A. Although normal switchboard communication via the tactical line to Wilkes also went out at this time, it was still possible to raise Captain Platt via the J-line, which followed a route entirely north of the air strip (the tactical line paralleled the south side of the field).

The exact cause and time of this major casualty cannot be fixed with entire certainty. The almost simultaneous nature of the failure suggests that it might have been caused by a single agency, and that the location of the major break, if there was one, must have been near the command post, where lines were close together. On the other hand, all survivors of Wake agree in opinion that the Japanese cut these lines, and point out that the Wilkes J-line (laid north of the air strip) did not go out until some time after that south of the field, a circumstance which would

¹² The sections at either end of the field had originally been sited, as was common defense battalion practice, both to provide antiaircraft fires up the long axis of the field and to cover the surface of the strip against airborne landings. Colonel Devereux has subsequently stated in light of hindsight that he would have moved both sections to positions just south of the ends of the strip, and tied them into a plan of defensive fires to cover the beaches south of the strip.

indicate that the lines were being cut as the end attack progressed inland.

This should have been an occasion for use of the interisland radio net, but this had never been reliable, and on the morning of 23 December the net failed to function. The limited—in fact, the nonexistent—command post communication personnel were unable to “trouble-shoot” lines, and, from that time on, Major Devereux was compelled, both figuratively and literally, to conduct his defense of Wake in the dark.

While Major Devereux was receiving his last complete reports at the command post, the situation south of the air strip, to Hanna's right where the destroyers were beached, was developing rapidly. Hanna and his crew had reached the gun, fumbled in the dark for a moment to break out ammunition, and, after Hanna had laid the 3-inch gun by “Kettucky” methods¹³ on the nearest (easternmost) destroyer transport (Patrol Craft 33), the first round cracked out. Since the target, which had just grounded, was stationary, and the range less than 500 yards, the high velocity 3-inch gun scored a hit on the bridge structure, seriously wounding the captain and navigator, killing two seamen and wounding five more. As Japanese of the Uchida and Itaya units swarmed down the sides into the water, Lieutenant Hanna and his crew put 14 more 3-inch rounds into the superstructure and hull of Patrol Craft 33, which burst into flame and illuminated the landing area. “The scene was too beautiful to be a battlefield,” reported a Japanese observer aboard the *Yubari*.

By the light of the burning ship, Hanna shifted his fire onto the other beached vessel, Patrol Craft 32, which was also holed, although reports are in-

¹³ The 3-inch Army antiaircraft guns of this type were equipped only for indirect fire at aerial targets, with fire control data electrically computed and transmitted from a remote point and, since current doctrines of the Coast Artillery Corps, the using Arm, did not encourage use of antiaircraft weapons for alternate missions, no sights, special ammunition, or other fire-control equipment for local combat were furnished with such guns. The Marine Corps and Navy (with defense battalion missions in mind) had, prior to March 1940, to some extent made good this deficiency by adapting a Navy 3-inch common projectile for use against surface targets with the Army gun, and some units had devised home-made direct-laying, forward area type sights to be mounted by village blacksmith methods on the gun-tube or mounting. Needless to say, such local modifications of ordnance items were officially prohibited, and it appears in any case that the 3-inch guns on Wake were not so equipped.



PATROL CRAFT 33, 5 years later, her back broken by Marine 3-inch gunfire and subsequent magazine-explosion during Japanese landings on Wake, 23 December 1941.

clear as to whether she was set afire. The crews of both vessels mingled with the SNLF and added their combined strength of possibly 100 more to the Japanese forces working toward the air strip.

Major Putnam had meantime posted VMF-211's handful in what originally was a line facing westward between the gun emplacement and Patrol Craft 33. As the Uchida unit commenced working eastward to silence the gun which had already proved so costly an obstacle, what had begun as a line was gradually bent back around the position into what Colonel Devereux described as "a box-shaped thing" which nevertheless continued to hold despite the alternate creeping infiltration and screaming rushes of the enemy.

Now that action was evidently in progress all along the south leg of Wake Island, Major Devereux realized that his sole reserve for infantry action must come from Peale. Obviously the 5-inch unit (Bat-

tery B) should be maintained intact for possible sea-coast missions against ships inshore or any secondary landing, whereas the 3-inch battery (D, under Captain Godbold) was by now reduced to practical ineffectiveness for antiaircraft missions, having no remaining fire-control equipment and but two guns. Lieutenant Lewis's 3-inch battery (Battery E) in the interior elbow of Wake Island, although a nearer source of reinforcements, was untouchable because it now represented the only completely equipped, up-to-strength¹⁴ antiaircraft battery on Wake, and was thus, quite literally, the entire effective antiaircraft defense of the atoll. By elimination, as by the

¹⁴ "Up-to-strength" in this instance should not convey any sense of puissance. The 1941 defense battalion table of organization strength of the Marine 3-inch antiaircraft battery was 2 officers and 75 enlisted, supposed to perform the same missions as a corresponding Army battery with a strength of 5 officers and 125 enlisted. Battery E, at this time, had an actual strength of 2 officers and approximately 50 enlisted.

fact that his unit was stationed in the least threatened area, Captain Godbold's battery, numbering after various deductions, two officers and less than 40 enlisted, became the island reserve.

At 0300, while Hanna continued his fire into the beached hulks, Major Devereux, aware of the composition of the antiboat gun's "crew," ordered Godbold to send one 3-inch gun section (some nine men) by truck to the battalion command post to be further despatched to man the gun. This section, led by Corp. Leon Graves, promptly entrucked in a contractor's vehicle with civilian driver, and within less than 15 minutes had reported at the command post.

Major Devereux's orders to Corporal Graves were to continue southward down the shore road, which ran the length of the east leg of Wake Island, to the vicinity of a road junction about 600 yards south of the air strip and there disembark; then to advance generally westward through the brush until contact could be made with Lieutenant Hanna. The squad then moved out and this was the last which was heard of them for more than an hour.

Meanwhile, the fighting west of the beached destroyer-transport was in stubborn progress.

The light of Patrol Craft 33, whose magazine seemed to have been touched off, had revealed to the machine gunners of the mobile reserve that enemy troops were working their way across the south shore road and past the west end of the airstrip where they would then disappear into the thick brush. Lieutenant Poindexter tried to interdict the edge of the brush with the fire of one machine-gun section, if only to protect the dense approaches to his own left (north) flank.

A few minutes later, the sound of machine-gun firing could be heard from the Camp 1 area, where emergency crews had remained to man four beach-defense guns. Leaving Gunnery Sergeant T. Q. Wade to continue the fire fight, Lieutenant Poindexter returned to Camp 1 to discover that two large landing craft had grounded on the reef about 30 yards offshore at a point 1,200 yards east of Wilkes Channel entrance. Although all four machine guns were firing at the barges, tracer ricochets made it apparent that the .30-caliber bullets were not penetrating. A moment later, both barges backed off and attempted to nose in again, as if seeking a break in the reef. Not meeting with success, and still being peppered by machine-gun fire, the Japanese made still

another attempt to reach shore, but at no time probably because of the Marines' fire—did they commence debarkation.

Taking advantage of this momentary stalemate Lieutenant Poindexter formed two teams of grenadiers to move down to the water's edge and lob hand grenades at or into the barges. One team consisted of himself and Boatswain's Mate First Class James E. Barnes, USN, while the other consisted of Major Sgt. Gerald Carr, and a civilian, R. R. Rutledge, who had served as an Army officer in France during the previous war. While the machine guns suspended fire, the grenadiers attacked, meeting with partial success when Boatswain's Mate Barnes was able to place at least one grenade inside a barge just as the enemy debarkation commenced, inflicting heavy casualties.

Despite this counterattack, however, the remainder of the enemy, numbering from 75 to 100, managed to overrun the water's edge and were soon infiltrating the brushy area east of Camp 1. The heavy growth north of the shore road thus soon became a sort of no-man's land in which the Japanese continued to infiltrate and expand their beachhead.

Poindexter managed to convey fragmentary reports of this back to Major Devereux in a brief telephonic message from Camp 1 before wire communication was lost. Shortly afterward, however, a panicky civilian who had managed to pick his way through the brush from Camp 1 to the defense detachment command post, brought in reports that were totally untrue—that Camp 1 was being overrun and that he had seen Japanese troops bayoneting the machine gunners of the mobile reserve.

Although enemy records contain no reference to any such tactics, it seems likely that at 0300 or shortly thereafter interior landings were executed from rubber boats within the lagoon,¹⁵ probably along the north (interior) shore of the south leg of Wake Island. Entrance to the lagoon by these small units was not effected through the channel between Wilkes

¹⁵The evidence on this point is indirect but generally convincing. After the surrender, Marine working parties searched beached rubber boats along the lagoon shore near the east end, and several individual reports speak of red flares rising from within the lagoon at about 0330; one enemy source in turn states that a red rocket was to be used throughout the operation as a signal meaning, "We have succeeded in landing." Finally, interior landings of this character satisfactorily explain without necessarily ruling out infiltration, the casual presence of individual Japanese at various points along the lagoon shore.

and Wake Island, which, at its widest, is only 52 yards across and was covered throughout the action by sections of .30-caliber machine guns at either side of the entrance. Colonel Devereux surmises that the boats found their way into the lagoon through the open end between Kuku and Toki Points, where there is little if any surf and waist-deep water over the reef.

Seeing the flares previously mentioned, Captain Godbold, in command of Peale, ordered Battery B (the 5-inch battery on Toki Point) to work a two-man patrol eastward along the lagoon shore of Peale, and himself despatched a similar three-man patrol westward to the NAB area. Both patrols made contact at about 0330, having found no enemy. At 0400, Godbold nevertheless established a three-man outpost with a BAR to hold the bridge connecting Peale with Wake Island.

At 0330, while Japanese cruisers¹⁶ shelled Wake Island, the situation in and about the airfield was clarifying—unpleasantly so from the defenders' standpoint. Despite prearranged 3-inch air-burst concentrations fired by Battery E within the enemy beachhead, VMF-211, still grouped about the anti-boat gun, was receiving steady and continuing Japanese attacks. As a result, the defensive formation in this area, astride a slight rise in ground, was being compressed more and more into a rough circle about the gun position.

The combat of these Marines was thus more and more that of personal preservation, simply to defend the gun and emplacement, which had been located on a slight rise a few yards inshore of the main road. From this time on, although VMF-211 would hold its final position with unshakable tenacity,¹⁷ Major Putnam could not prevent eastward movement of the Japanese into the rough triangle bounded by opposite shore lines of Peacock Point and the south side of the field. And it was access to this triangle which the Japanese most desired in order to mount their attack northward up the east leg of Wake Island.

The detached gun squad from Battery D, com-

¹⁶ Presumably *Yubari*, *Tenryu*, and *Tatsuta*. One report indicates that Peale was shelled, but United States reports make no mention of this.

¹⁷ It was about this time, or soon after, that Major Putnam, already wounded, forming his defensive line about the gun-emplacment, uttered his final order to the remnant of VMF-211: "This is as far as we go". Six hours later, at the time of surrender, the position was still held.

manded by Corporal Graves, had been sent southward by truck from the battalion command post shortly after 0300, with the initial objective of reaching the road junction some 600 yards below the end of the strip. Due to the darkness, however, or possibly the truck driver's anxiety to return northward, the squad debarked considerably north of their intended destination, probably less than 200 yards below the strip. Under Graves's leadership, they struck out through the brush to the west, in the general direction of VME-211's area in and about the hard stand parking strip. Before they had penetrated far, however, they came under enemy machine-gun¹⁸ and small-arms fire which killed one Marine, were pinned down for a time and withdrew northward toward the command post, where the squad subsequently participated under Major Potter in the fighting thereabouts.

The rapid build-up of enemy strength which turned back Graves's patrol presents the question: how did they get into the Peacock triangle so soon?

From a logical point of view, the most satisfactory explanation would be that an enemy landing had actually taken place between Peacock Point and the beached destroyer-transport. Colonel Devereux is strongly of that opinion, although without tangible supporting evidence, since no beached landing craft now remain to confirm or deny this hypothesis. Some Japanese accounts, including Captain Koyama's interrogation and one correspondent's report, speak of a landing "near the southeast tip of Wake" with the mission of overrunning Battery A which, especially aboard the *Yubari*, was well remembered from the action of 11 December. This would ordinarily clinch the matter except that Koyama's interrogation refers categorically only to two barge landings, each of two barges; and two such landings are definitely accounted for: one on Wilkes, and the other near Camp I, where Poindexter actually met the landing at the water's edge. The only possible resolution of this conflict is to surmise that, as in the case of possible rubber-boat landings within the lagoon, Japanese reports may have omitted a third boat group's landing midway between Patrol Craft 33 and Peacock Point.

The repulse of the patrol within Peacock triangle

¹⁸ Colonel Devereux suggests that some of the machine-gun fire which swept through the Peacock triangle might have come from friendly weapons. He points out that Marines had .30 or .50 caliber machine-gun sections on virtually the entire perimeter of the triangle, as inspection will show.

indicated clearly, and for the first time, that the enemy in force had overrun or bypassed not only Lieutenant Kiewer and the .50-caliber positions off the west end of the strip, but VMF-211 and Hanna, and if it had not been certain earlier, it was now sure that there would be little possibility of pushing the Japanese off the island.

There were in addition other disturbing indications of enemy strength below the airstrip.

Battery E, in the elbow, began at this time to receive light mortar and long-range machine-gun fire while Battery A, down on the tip of Peacock, received continual mortar¹⁹ and small-arms fire, much of the last probably being "overs" from the struggle to the west. Battery A's commander therefore, armed his range section with two .30-caliber machine guns and formed an infantry outpost line facing northwest across the high ground in rear of the 5-inch gun emplacements.

Enemy mortar- and automatic-weapons fire into Battery E's position seemed to come from the thick brush to the southwest of the battery, across an intervening arm of the lagoon. One Japanese automatic weapon was located in this area and silenced by direct 3-inch fire, but this did not seem to ease the enemy pressure to any extent, so Lieutenant Lewis, the battery commander, pushed out one gun section (approximately 10 men under Sgt. Raymon Gragg) to the west along the east-west road which runs north of the airstrip. As Gragg advanced astride this road, his squad came under heavy fire which forced them to ground about 50 yards beyond the battery perimeter. From this position, however, the Marines took up a fire fight which checked any further Japanese advance and continued until the subsequent surrender.

About 0430, in confirmation of all evidence that the Japanese were massing forces in the Peacock triangle for a decisive thrust, an alarming report came in to Major Devereux from one of the few forward positions with which the command post retained wire communication, that of the .50-caliber machine-gun section posted at the east end of the airstrip, commanding not only the field, but the southward length of the shore road. This position, manned by Corp. Winford J. McAnally, six other Marines, and some three civilian volunteers, included two adjacent anti-aircraft machine guns, with a very small support of riflemen.

¹⁹ Barninger's report speaks of occasional fire from "a small field-piece" as well. This was probably a 70-mm howitzer of the type organic to Japanese infantry formations.

McAnally reported that Japanese in force were attacking northward up the shore road, and that his section was in action trying to hold them short of the airstrip.

What confronted Corporal McAnally at this time was at least a reinforced company, possibly the Itaya unit of the Special Naval Landing Force. Leaving the Uchida unit to deal with VMF-211 and the 3-inch antiboat gun, the Itaya unit, which landed on the left, appears to have moved north of Hanna and Putnam into the Peacock triangle, and prepared to launch their main effort northward up the east beach of Wake Island.

Although it was still dark, the Japanese, trained in night operations, were attempting by individual and small-unit infiltration to secure all the ground they could and it was in course of this effort that enemy leading elements made contact with McAnally, who immediately opened fire down the road, halting their advance. Moreover, McAnally in turn retained lateral wire communication with the .50-caliber machine-gun section on the east shore some 400 yards south of his position. By this means, he exchanged information and commenced to coordinate the fire of both sections, telling the marines to the south where he would be firing in their direction, and directing their fires when possible into the right flank of the attackers.

Enemy reaction to this obstacle was at first confused, and it does not appear that they were able initially to locate the exact source of the fire which had arrested them. In some instances before daylight, McAnally reported, Japanese were actually all about his position, but either killed by the riflemen or stopped by bursts of fire. Throughout the period, the little combat group not only carried on a resolute, well-coordinated defense but also acted as a front-line observation post for Major Devereux whose picture of the developments within the Peacock triangle were largely dependent on McAnally's reports and upon what he himself could see and hear of firing to the south.

By 0500, a half hour before first dawn, the outstanding development was that the Japanese force which could overwhelm the defenders at any point, had at length secured a firm beachhead and were in steady exploitation of initial gains.

In this connection, it should be understood that the total of less than 500 defenders, small as it is in comparison against 1,000-odd Japanese already ashore on Wake Island at this time, is itself misleading.

ing as a yardstick of defensive power. "Little Wake" has a vulnerable shore line about 21 miles in length, and the 1st Defense Battalion Detachment included insufficient personnel even to man existing antiaircraft and seacoast batteries, which key weapons dispersed though they were, had to remain operational to the last.

Considering Wake Island alone, where some 201 Marines were stationed, approximately half of this number were immobilized at Batteries A and E (5-inch and 3-inch batteries which had to remain ready for immediate action against hostile air or surface targets, especially after daybreak). Some 15 more Marines manned the machine guns and searchlight at Heel Point, beyond the contested area. This means, then, that at no time prior to 0600 were there more than 85 Marines on the whole of Wake Island who could oppose the enemy landing force, which finally exceeded 1,000 in strength. Of those 85, fully half were machine-gun crewmen, so that the number of bona fide riflemen on Wake Island who could oppose the enemy as infantry became almost microscopic—probably not more than 40 in all.

Despite stubborn resistance at all points of contact, the Japanese therefore had, within the area east of Camp 1 and south of the airstrip, virtual freedom to maneuver and deploy at will.

VMF-211 still held its position, but was by now surrounded. Earlier attempts to relieve this situation, either by ground reinforcements or by the air-burst concentrations of Battery E, had proven futile. Although the mobile reserve was holding its ground in and west of Camp 1, this was of course not known by the defense commander because communications south of the defense battalion command post or with Wilkes were now nonexistent. It was no wonder therefore that, at 0500, Commander Cunningham drafted and released his message:

ENEMY ON ISLAND—ISSUE IN DOUBT

At this time the situation of the defenders of Camp 1, however, was actually as follows:

After making certain that the defense of Camp 1 was tied in and organized to the best possible advantage, employing the spare machine guns fortunately stored there, Lieutenant Poindexter made his way back through the now lightening darkness to the two mobile reserve machine-gun sections still in position just west of the airstrip.

From the brush to their left (north) flank came not only some enemy fire, but shouting and pyro-



CAPT. HENRY T. ELROD, posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroism both as a fighter-pilot and during the last stand of VMF-211, was killed by a Japanese marine of the SNLF shortly before daybreak, 23 December 1941.

technic signals. As dawn began to break, the Marines were taken under quite accurate fire by light mortars, and one gun was put out of action. The increased enemy pressure and the threat that the little group would be outflanked indicated that it would be wise to withdraw on Camp 1 and consolidate all defending personnel in a single location. Poindexter therefore ordered a withdrawal by section on that place, the disabled section moving first under cover of fire from the two guns of other section. Displacing by 150-yard bounds in this manner, the mobile reserve reached Camp 1 after daylight and tied in the additional machine guns and personnel to form a north-south defensive line east of the Camp 1 water tank.

Meanwhile during the hour before dawn, the Japanese movement northward up the east shore road gained momentum, with a corresponding increase of pressure against McAnally's combat group east of the airstrip. Major Devereux, who had been

following this development with understandable concern, sent a two-man reconnaissance patrol south from the command post with orders to report on the enemy situation. Meanwhile, McAnally's reports indicated that he had been definitely located and was under small arm and grenade attack. By detecting the approaching Japanese and holding fire until the last possible moment, several rushes were broken up, but with daylight coming, this group, 10 against a company, could hardly expect to hold much longer. As for VMF-211, which had by now sustained numerous casualties, including the gallant Captain Elrod, killed by a Japanese who feigned death among the welter of casualties below the 3-inch gun,²⁰ the end could only be a matter of time.

If the Japanese were to be confined to the general extent of the ground they now held, plainly Corporal McAnally was not equal to the task and, at 0530, Major Devereux directed his executive officer, Major Potter, who had until now assisted in the command post, to assemble every headquarters, service, supply, or casual Marine in the command-post area (including the detached squad from Battery D, these finally totaled about 40), and to commence forming a final defensive line approximately 100 yards south of the command post astride the threatened north-south main road. After issuing these orders, Major Devereux then called Captain Godbold (commanding Battery D on Peale) and directed him to move his entire battery, plus the few .50-caliber gunners on Peale, by truck to the battalion command post for immediate employment as infantry. With these orders, the final reserve on Wake Island, totaling approximately 30 officers and men, was committed to action.

As day broke, shortly before 0600, enemy activity increased.

Second Lieutenant Kliever and his three Marines had survived the night at their post beside the mine-field generator, despite a determined attack just be-

²⁰ By an ironic coincidence, at approximately the same time, if we are to believe a Japanese correspondent, Navy Lieutenant Uchida, who was leading the attack against Putnam's position, was shot through the head and killed. His death is described as follows:

"To the continuous calls of 'Unit Commander, Sir, Unit Commander, Sir,' there was now no answer. It was a matter of just a moment. Unit Commander Uchida, who had landed with and stood at the head of his troops, and who laughed while commanding his troops against the enemy was no more."

During the advance on the 3-inch gun, Uchida's company sustained at least 62 casualties.

fore dawn, which was broken up by in-fighting with submachine guns and grenades. At dawn, the Japanese launched a shouting bayonet charge against the group, but, with the aid of the .50-caliber machine guns just north of his position west of the strip, Kliever was again able to hold his own.

At the other end of the field, the combat group under Corporal McAnally, which had now stemmed the enemy for an hour and a half, was at length almost surrounded, and under continual infantry attack. Unless he was to lose the personnel, who could not be spared, Major Devereux had no alternative but to pull them back. This he did shortly after 0600 when McAnally was ordered to withdraw northward and join Major Potter's line.

Although it was not known at the command post, Second Lieutenant Poindexter at Camp 1 had been able to stiffen his resistance appreciably, and by including Marine supply and administrative personnel, sailors, and civilians, Poindexter was now organizing a support of approximately 40 riflemen in all. With this backing the total of 10 machine guns now defending Camp 1, the strength at the place was sufficient to discourage anything but a sporadic fire-fight which the Japanese continued without attacking.

After Captain Godbold's truck, bearing the half of Battery D toward the command post, had cleared Peale, First Lieutenant Kessler became de facto strong-point commander inasmuch as Battery B (5-inch) was all that remained on the island. As the horizon to the south lightened, Kessler scanned Wilkes and the lower leg of Wake Island. What he saw on Wilkes was disheartening: a line of Japanese flags across the center of the island, and a large enemy flag or standard waving from the approximate position of Marine Gunner McKinstry's provisional Battery F (3-inch). All this he reported to Major Devereux, who could only conclude that Wilkes, which had been silent since about 0300, had shared the fate which appeared shortly imminent to the men on Wake Island.

Above the brush and slight rise of ground which topped the south leg of Wake Island, Kessler could also see the superstructure of a destroyer aground. This was Patrol Craft 32, the western of the two beached destroyer-transports. Observing that the

²¹ Among the Japanese killed before his position at this time were two flame-thrower operators. Although use of flame is not recorded, this was perhaps one of the earliest tactical employments of this weapon in the Pacific war.

ship appeared intact, Kessler at 0600 requested Major Devereux's permission to fire on it. Although the line of fire and intervening partial mask²² rendered this at least hazardous, the request was approved, and, on the first salvo, Battery B shot away the mainmast. As a result of subsequent adjustment, the ship was hit about the superstructure and upper hull, and finally caught fire, with what, if any, resulting infliction of enemy casualties, is not known. At 0625, fire was ordered ceased.

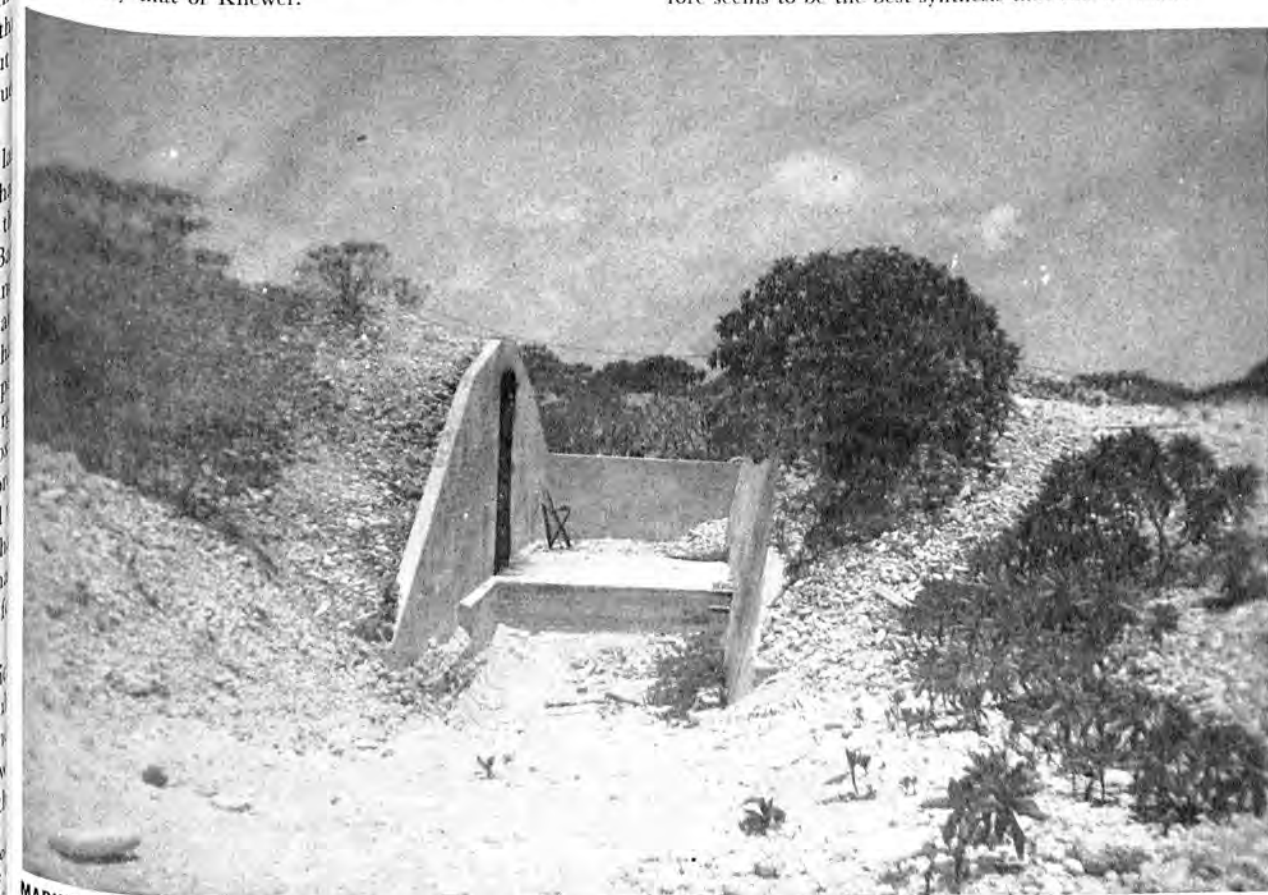
The first of Battery D's two trucks, with some 20 men commanded by Second Lt. Robert W. Greeley, had meanwhile reached the command post, where

²² Kessler had to train his guns, flat-trajectory 5"/51's with the high initial velocity of 3150 foot/seconds, so as to fire across Flipper Point and just clear the crest of Wake Island, with the line of fire passing less than 250 yards to the west of Second Lieutenant Kliever's position, from which the target itself was less than 400 yards distant. His final adjustment, after securing hits on the upperworks, was to spot down in range so as to lower the trajectory and thus hull the ship, a delicate operation not only from the gunner's standpoint, but undoubtedly that of Kliever.

Major Potter, trying to piece out and extend his sparse line to the right (west), directed that the reinforcements be placed on that flank around the edge of the clearing originally dozed out to prepare for the north-south leg of the airstrip. Captain Godbold followed a few minutes later, arriving, as nearly as can be ascertained,²³ about 0700. His orders were much the same as those given to Greeley, a few minutes before, to extend the line around to the right (northwest), more or less following the edge of the clearing.

At this point, it might be well to speak of the trace of Major Potter's line, regarding which some confusion has arisen. As might appear logical at first glance, this line is frequently reconstructed to have

²³ Like so many other questions as to exact times of events during the defense of Wake, this one is subject to conflict of testimony. Major Potter, in his report (item 37, appendix I) states that Godbold reached the command post at 0600. Godbold gives 0715 as the time. Other sources, while not giving times, put the arrival of Battery D shortly after daybreak. Balancing all accounts against each other, 0700 or shortly before seems to be the best synthesis that can be made.



MARINE COMMAND POST during the final battle on Wake was located in this igloo-type magazine.

extended along an east-west axis right across the east leg of Wake Island. Two factors, however, prevented any such disposition. These were: first, the existing fields of fire to the south and the character of vegetation, which had only been partly cleared for future airfield construction; second, the fact that this so-called "line" amounted in strength to about the size of a rifle platoon, and therefore could not contemplate covering anything like the entire cross-island frontage (at this point approximately 850 yards), a respectable defensive sector for a battalion. Even with Battery E as a possible anchor for the right (west) flank, a gap of more than 450 yards would—and did—exist, despite efforts to cover this by fire. The line of clearing and vegetation as they actually were, are shown in Map 5.

In the light of day, the defenders could not only realize the extent of their opposition on Wake Island itself, but could see offshore a formidable naval attack force. The island was now ringed with ships, and the defenders counted anywhere from 16 to 27 at various points about the horizon. Actually, there were at first 13, and subsequently, when Cruiser Division 6, the four heavy cruisers originally stationed east of Wake, closed, 17. With one exception, which will be described shortly, all these ships kept prudent distance from the redoubtable 5-inch shore batteries which had earned their respect on the 11th. As a senior Japanese officer put it later, "Due to the previous experience with the American shore batteries, we did not want to come within range."

That this caution was well founded was soon to be learned aboard the aging 1,400-ton destroyer *Mutsuki* which, at 0645, was leading the other two ships of Destroyer Division 30 in column toward Wilkes. As the formation closed the island—perhaps to render gun-fire support, Battery B (5-inch) on Peale opened fire. Hits were observed prior to the fourth salvo, and after that, she turned sharply and was thought by observers on Wilkes to have sunk (Japanese records do not confirm this, merely admitting that she sustained damage). Fire was then shifted to the next ship in column (probably *Yayoi* or *Mochizuki*, and was continued until they passed out of range on a retiring track.

Farther out to sea, northwest of Wake, ever since dawn the two Japanese carriers, *Soryu* and *Hiryu* had been warming up the same aircraft which, a fortnight before, had shrieked down on battleship row in Pearl Harbor. Launching all planes for a

maximum air effort, the two ships headed up with their cruiser and destroyer escort,²⁴ and, at 0700, "the gallant Eagles of the Navy," as the Japanese Naval Information Service styled them, approached Wake at 6,000-foot altitude. As the formation wheeled over Peacock Point, Battery E (3-inch) opened fire in what was the last antiaircraft action of the battle. The formation split into competing groups according to mission, and commenced a methodical but unceasing series of airstrikes in support of the Special Landing Force. Wilkes, Peale and Wake Island were hit and hit again, where the United States installation or position showed in the air.

Now no longer a support line, Major Peale's position began receiving rifle- and machine-gun fire with aggressive Japanese skirmishing north from the airstrip, while, at the same time (0715) carrier bombers hammered Battery B's gun position on Peale.

With his command post itself thus under attack with seemingly unimpeachable evidence of the presence of silent Wilkes, with enemy aircraft slashing handful of Marine defenders at will, Major Devereux, in his 0700 periodic report, notified Commander Cunningham of the seriousness of the situation and asked whether any friendly forces were on hand to relieve them. With Commander Cunningham's negative reply,²⁵ all hopes were dashed, and at 0800, in accordance with Commander Cunningham's decision, Major Devereux, bearing a white flag, moved southward down the shore road to deliver Wake to the Japanese enemy.

The Fight on Wilkes

"At this time," states a Japanese report, "Wake Island was the scene of a fierce and desperate battle."






²⁴ Over and above the two carriers, the task force was composed of the new 12,000-ton heavy cruisers, *Chikuma* and *Tone*; and six destroyers, two of which were *Tanikaze* and *Urakaze*.

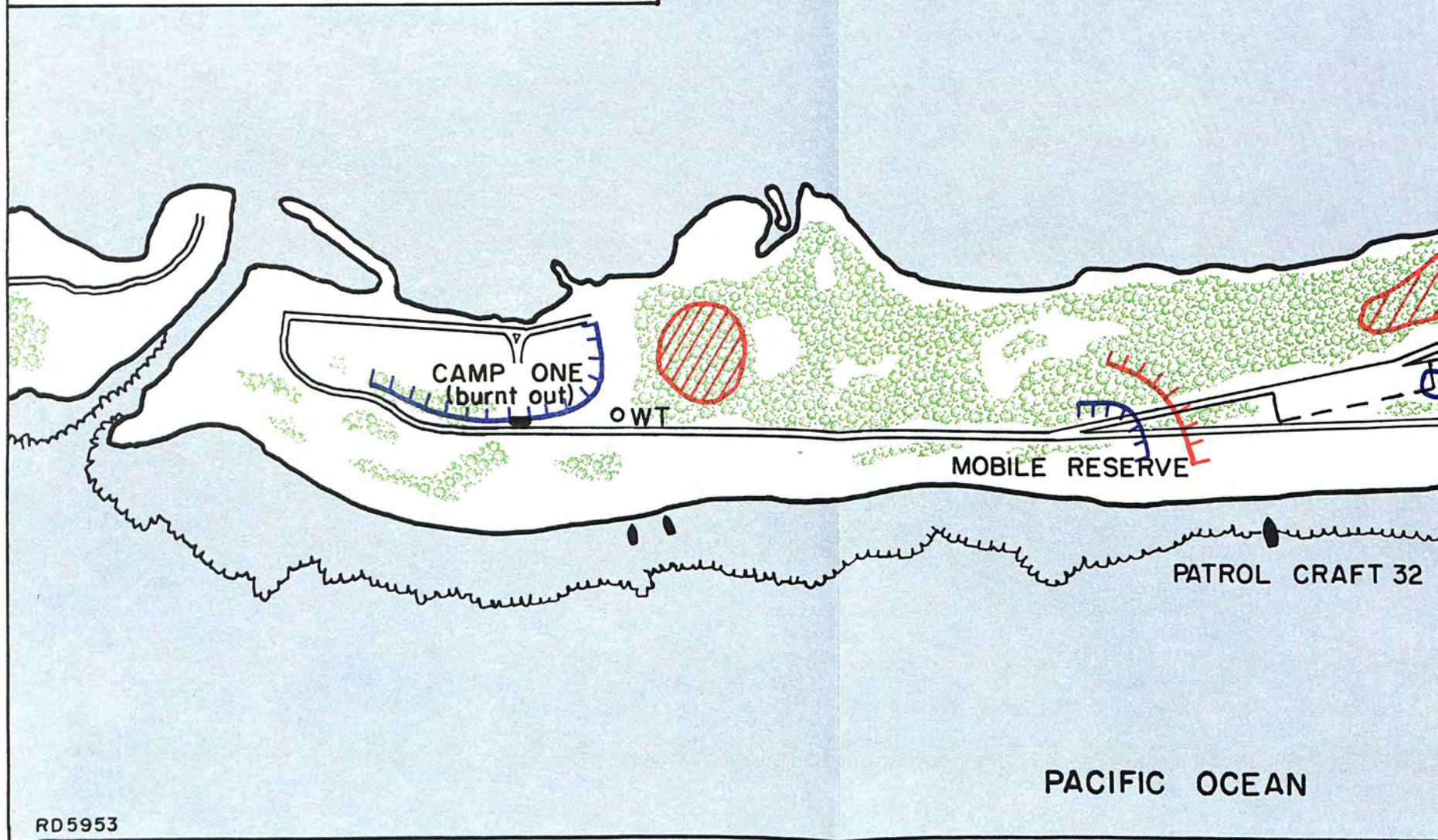
²⁵ Throughout the entire operation, although the Marine commander had been generally informed that the civilian (less certain key personnel) would be evacuated, and had been ordered to have the airstrip prepared to receive additional planes, no information was given Major Devereux as to the composition of the relief force (Task Force 14), or as to the quantity, nature, and type of reinforcements which he might expect to receive. This information, including a loading plan for *Tangier*, had reached Wake on 20 December, in the form of a message which took off Major Bayler.

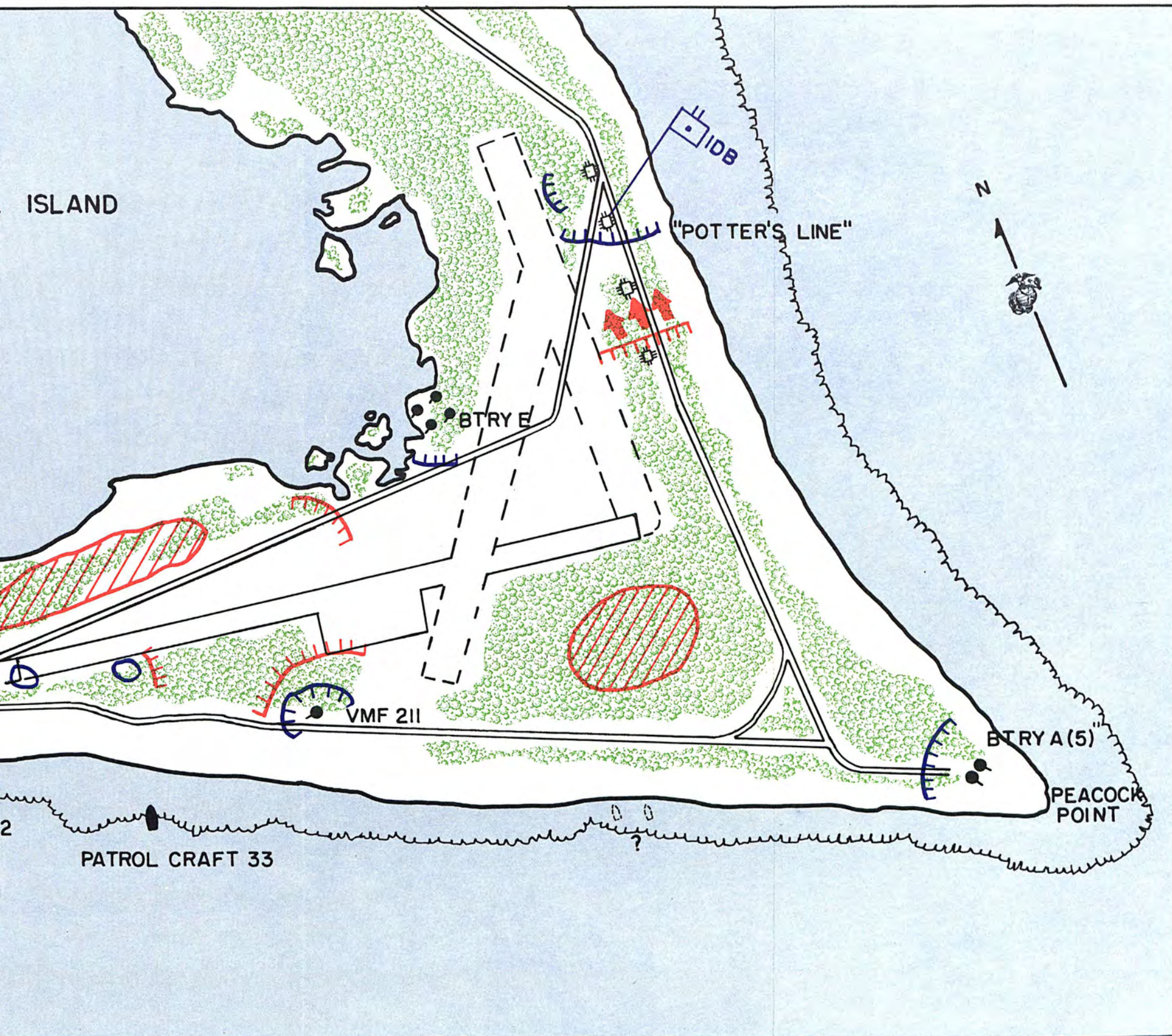
MAP 5

SITUATION ON WAKE ISLAND
AT TIME OF SURRENDER

0900, 23 DECEMBER 1941

-  3" or 5" gun
-  Enemy landing craft
-  Japanese front lines
-  Marine front lines
-  Japanese reserve or assembly areas





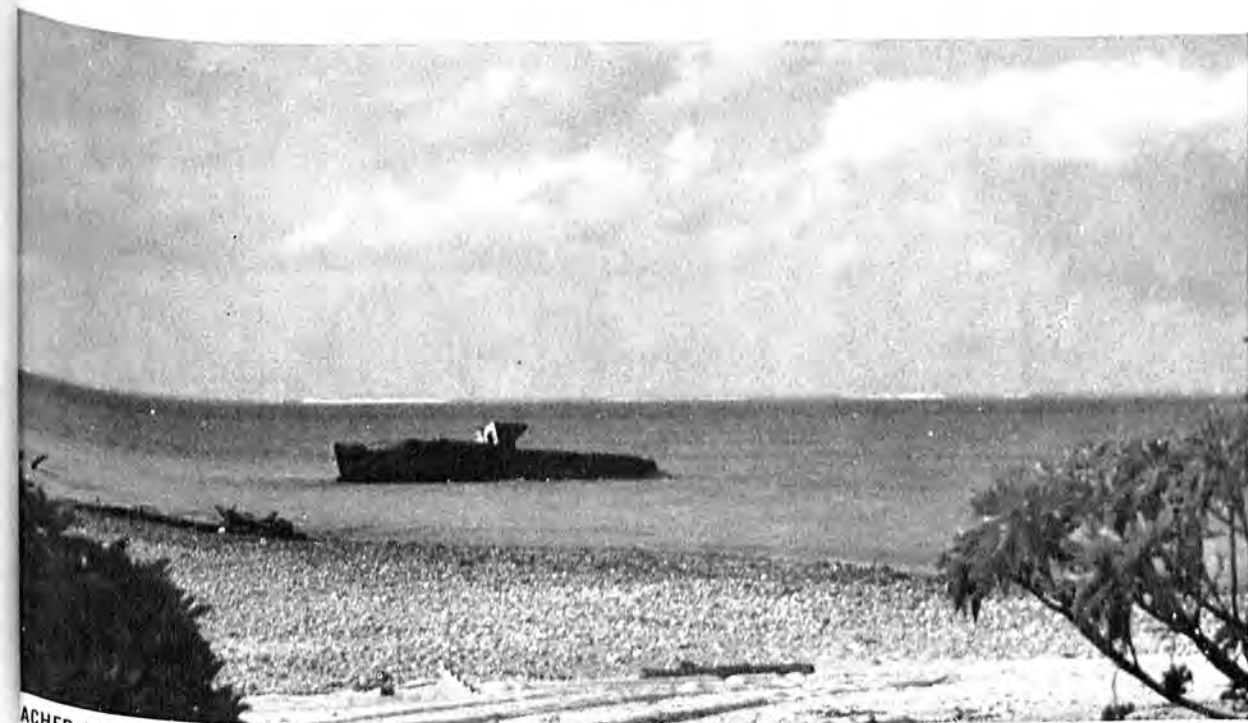
It will be recalled that at about 0245 .50-caliber machine gun 10 on Wilkes had fired the opening shots of the battle into a Japanese medium landing craft heard offshore through the darkness, and that, during its minute of successful illumination, the Wilkes searchlight near the new channel had disclosed an enemy landing in progress virtually under the muzzles of Battery F's two remaining 3-inch guns.

As the 100 picked men of the Takano Unit scrambled ashore under fire from two .50-caliber machine guns (Guns 9 and 10) located along the shore just west of the landing area, they found the Marines on Wilkes, numbering just 70, at battle stations and completely disposed to repel a landing. For this high condition of readiness, they had mainly to thank the erroneous report of landings on Peale. Upon receipt of this word, Captain Platt had immediately ordered Battery L to send two 5-inch gun sections (each roughly equivalent to a rifle squad) to the lagoon shore, west from the new channel toward Kuku Point, while the remainder of the battery, consisting of fire controlmen and headquarters personnel led by Lieutenant McAlister, took up previously prepared positions along the seaward beach between

the new channel and Battery F. McAlister established his command post with the searchlight section nearby. During the lull after the false alarm, extra ammunition and grenades had been issued, and Major Devereux, concerned as to possibilities of a lagoon landing, had warned Platt to reinforce his two-man, two-gun .30-caliber machine-gun section located on the north bulge of Kuku Point. Battery F, composed of a mixture of Marine searchlight operators, sailors, and civilians, had in turn been instructed—if a landing should materialize—to fire antiboat missions over the steeply inclined beach until masked, and then to fall off to the left (east) and protect the flank of Lieutenant McAlister's section beside the new channel. For the defenders' dispositions on Wilkes at the time of actual landing, see Map 6.

As the searchlight flickered out, Marine Gunner McKinstry opened fire on the one barge in sight²⁶ with Battery F's 3-inch high-explosive shells cut for muzzle burst, and McAlister, about 150 yards to the east, threw out a two-man party armed with hand

²⁶ Although but one barge was seen at this time by the defenders of Wilkes, the Japanese records indicate that two were used. This likewise agrees with the total number of enemy landed.



REACHED JAPANESE LANDING CRAFT ON WILKES. Taken 5 years later, this picture shows the sole surviving enemy landing craft on the beaches of Wilkes.

grenades to pelt the barge as the Japanese swarmed ashore. Hardly had the first grenades begun to burst when accurate Japanese return fire killed one Marine²⁷ and wounded the other.

Despite, or perhaps because of the 3-inch air bursts, the full weight of the initial Japanese thrust was directly to the front against Battery F, the guns of which were soon unable to depress sufficiently as the enemy climbed forward under cover of the embankment between the beach and battery position. Within a matter of minutes, the gun emplacements were in process of being overrun by an enemy attack through the darkness. As the Japanese expanded their beachhead they also commenced movement to the west, toward the 5-inch battery which had cost them so dear during the first landing attempt on 11 December.

As the Japanese closed on the 3-inch emplacements, a sharp hand-to-hand struggle ensued in the darkness with the enemy hurling grenades into the gun pits from all sides. In a few moments it was apparent to Gunner McKinstry that the position could not be held at such close quarters against the weight of enemy numbers, and, first stripping off the 3-inch firing locks, he directed a withdrawal toward McAlister's positions to the eastward. Japanese riflemen tried to pursue them in that direction, but the Marines' return fire halted these with casualties, and the remainder pulled back to the 3-inch position, now in enemy hands. Shortly after, the Battery F personnel made contact with Lieutenant McAlister's group, and the combined forces commenced a fire fight which successfully confined the Japanese (who returned the exchange vigorously with rifles and light machine guns), to their newly won position.

To the westward the only obstacle impeding rapid enemy exploitation of the landing was .50-caliber antiaircraft machine gun 9, along the beach less than a hundred yards away from McKinstry's former position.

To the consternation of the Takano unit, this gun, manned by two Marines, had commenced a deadly flanking fire down the beach soon after the landing, after Battery F's men had been forced to retire. Fortunately for these men, their gun, together with the other .50-caliber machine guns along this stretch of beach, had been carefully camouflaged. In aggressive reaction to this fire, the enemy attempted to

²⁷ Platoon Sgt. Henry A. Bedell, a veteran of 19 years' service.

locate the position exactly and rush it; and, about in the dark, the Japanese were soon on the sides of the position, often within 40 or 50 yards of the gunners, who nevertheless maintained the position and broke up the first of a series of attacks which would continue until dawn.

From the communications viewpoint, the landing could hardly have struck at a worse time. Communication with Wake Island had already been cut as a byproduct of the enemy landing on the latter,²⁸ and the single wire line connecting Captain Platt's command post not only with the rest of the atoll but with the areas on Wilkes where the fighting was in progress, lay, at the point of landing, less than a hundred yards of the shore line. This line was overrun and severed by about 0300, and, from that time on, Platt's ability to keep himself informed of the situation, to control the situation by telephone, or to limit to his remaining wire communication machine gun 9's beleaguered gun pit.

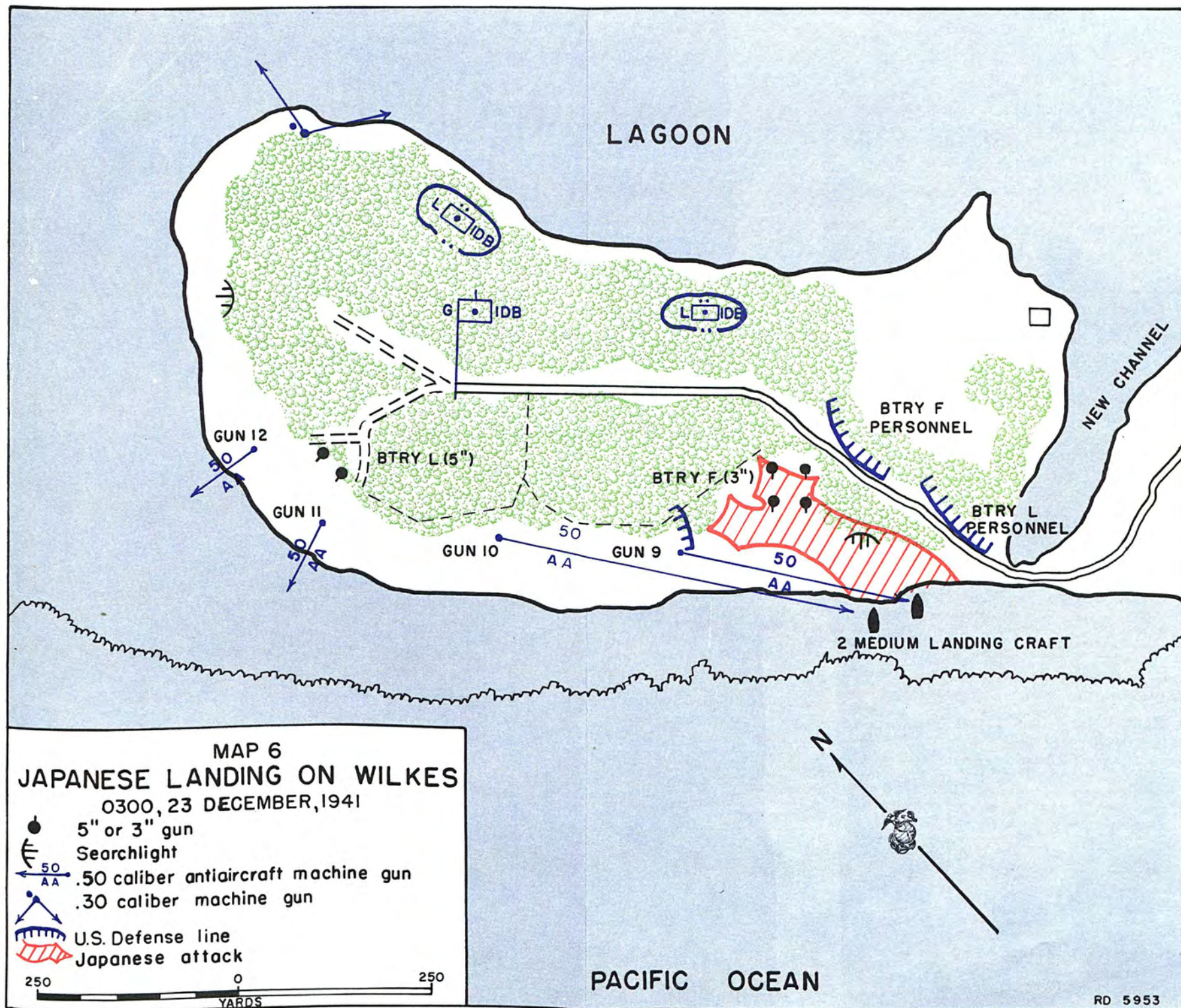
By 0400, the situation on Wilkes seemed to have time being to have stabilized. The Japanese were in firm possession of Battery F's 3-inch position. In the brush, they were prevented from any further expansion of the beachhead. To the west, as Gun 9 continued its redoubtable stand, the westward push towards Battery L's 5-inch gun was halted. In this direction, however, they were maintaining continued pressure.

Shortly after this time, Captain Platt, realizing that he could not hope to control the course of the action from his command post, which was not only out of communication with Major DeBelmont but with his own positions on Wilkes, moved to Gun 11, and, at 0430, set out through the darkness from that point to find out for himself what was going on.

After a half hour of crawling through the brush and around or over the jagged coral rocks of Wilkes's inhospitable beach, he reached a vantage point east of Gun 10, from which he could see that the bulk of the Japanese were massed about the 3-inch position.

Within 10 minutes, at 0510, he had made his way back to Gun 10 and issued orders that Platoon Raymond L. Coulson (in command of the .50-caliber machine-gun platoon on Wilkes) collect the .30-caliber machine guns and gunners from Battery Point, plus the searchlight crew at that place.

²⁸ See p. 44 for full discussion of this major casualty.





THICK BRUSH ON WILKES. A 1941 view taken from the general vicinity of Captain Platt's command-post, looking southeast along the lagoon shore toward Wake Island.

anyone else he could lay hold of, and join the strong-point commander at Gun 10, where Captain Platt remained.

It was twenty-five minutes before Coulson returned, leading a tiny force composed of the two machine guns and crews, and eight riflemen. In the darkness, under cover of the noise of the surf and the firing which was sputtering and crackling all along the south shore of Wake and Wilkes Islands, Platt briefed his Marines, little more than a squad.

He would lead them forward as close to the enemy-held 3-inch position as possible. Then, if still undiscovered, the two .30-caliber machine guns would be set up, one on each flank, just as it said in the field manuals, to provide a base of fire for the

riflemen's assault. On order, after the guns were posted, the attack would jump off. Machine gunners were to fire short bursts, well aimed and low, to prevent their fire doing hurt to McAlister and McKinstry, presumably on the other side of the enemy beachhead.

Darkness had begun to wane by the time Platt's column had reached its line of departure. Platt personally sited both machine guns and then took station with the right, or seaward gun. By careful maneuvering and painstaking crawling, the Marines had gotten within less than 50 yards of the enemy pocket. On signal from Platt, the machine guns ripped out their opening bursts, and the eight Marine riflemen swept forward as skirmishers against

a position held by some 10 times their number of Japanese.

At almost this moment, from his position in a finger of brush to the east of the Japanese, Lieutenant McAlister, who had collected all his available men during the night, saw, by first dawn, a six-man Japanese patrol working eastward along the beach, almost under the muzzles of his rifles. Promptly he opened fire, killing one enemy and forcing the others to cover behind a huge coral chunk on the beach. Battery L Marines fanned out around the flanks of this position and maintained continuous rifle fire to keep the Japanese pinned in position while Marine Gunner McKinstry and Pfc. William C. Halstead worked on top of the rock and killed the remaining Japanese.

While this melee was in progress, the Japanese were well occupied in attempting to fight off Platt's bold assault, which had taken them on a front from which little if any opposition had apparently been expected, their light machine guns being sited for fires toward McAlister's position to their east. Within a matter of minutes after the jump-off, Platt's men were engaging the Japanese within the 3-inch position, and McAlister, after mopping up the patrol, had formed a skirmish line from his 25 men. The two Marine combat groups joined forces on their immediate objective, and proceeded to sweep the entire position.

The enemy reaction to this sudden reversal of the situation demonstrated how the Japanese mind often fails to adjust itself to rapid changes. Instead of conducting the grim and tenacious defense which would later be thought the trade-mark of Japanese troops, these "picked men" of the Takano unit panicked and sought what individual safety they could. Some 30 of them eventually attempted to hide or take shelter under and about a single Marine searchlight truck, and were killed where they crouched. None volunteered to surrender.

Without wasting a moment, Platt reorganized the Marines after their successful assault, assigned to McAlister with 10 men the duty of mopping up the 3-inch position, and himself led the remaining handful on a sweep of the island. With the exception of one dead officer, who had been killed while on reconnaissance during the night by Marines on the lagoon side, no other Japanese was found.

In the course of his mop-up, which was uneventful except for discovery and capture of two wounded Japanese who had been playing dead, McAlister

made a count of the enemy dead, and removed—late as events would prove—the Japanese flags which the position had been ringed. The latter, presumably intended as crude front-line markers for ordination of air support and naval gunfire, were profusely stuck into the ground, and a single flag had been erected in the 3-inch position, which could be seen from Peale by first light, almost at the moment when the Marines on Wilkes were exterminating their unwelcome guests. On the bodies of Japanese were found a profusion of small maps of Wake with quite accurately located notations of the American defensive installations.

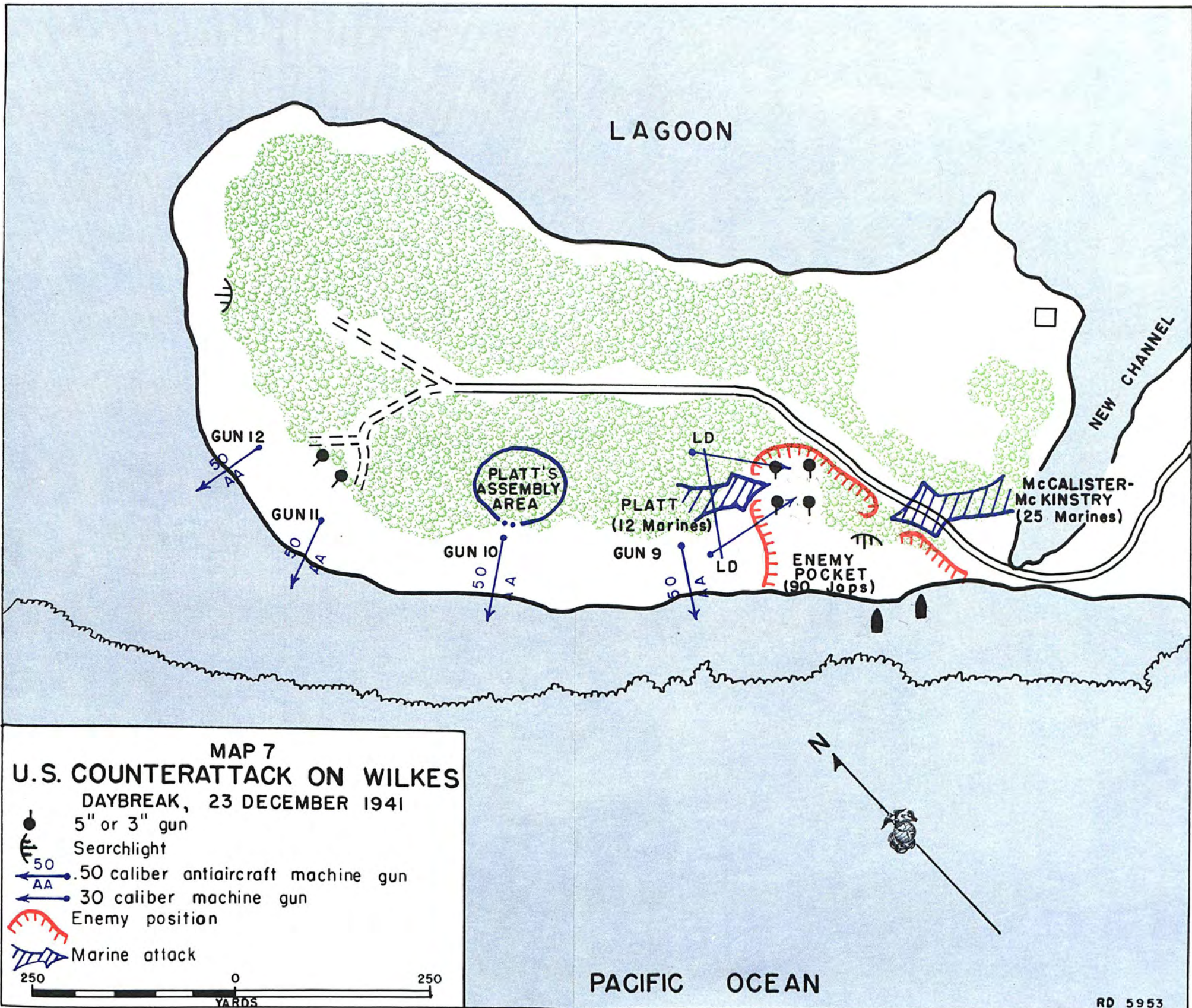
By actual count of dead, Japanese had expended four officers and 90 enlisted men in the attempt to take Wilkes. The four remaining unaccounted for—the picked hundred—may have perished in the initial landing or fallen unseen in the brush about Gull

In return, nine Marines and two civilians had been killed, while four Marines and one civilian had been wounded—defending casualties amounting to more than 16 percent.

Shortly after 0700, while Platt set about reorganizing forces on Wilkes in anticipation of possible further enemy attacks, carrier dive-bombers struck down onto the island, concentrating their attacks both bombing and strafing, on Kuku Point's 5-inch battery. From then on, intermittent strafing attacks were delivered against positions on Wilkes whenever Marine activity showed from the air. Enemy aircraft were fired on to the last by the .50-caliber aircraft machine guns.

Reorganization was nevertheless completed by 0800, and, taking stock of the general situation, Platt again attempted to reestablish communication with the battalion command post on Wake Island. This time he was able to raise a reply from Camp 1 motor pool, which Lieutenant Poindexter's reserve had successfully defended during the night, but no word could be gotten through to or from Major Devereux. The radio, not reliable at best, and much battered by the great dynamite explosion of 10 December, was no more successful, and on the events on Wake Island the Marines on Wilkes remained unaware.

Offshore to the southwest of Wilkes, several ships—probably destroyers—could be seen. Platt ordered that Battery L be reformed as artillery and ordered these targets, but immediate inspection revealed to McAlister that the ships were well out of range.



and showed no inclination to close. Having already come under Battery B's fire from Peale, and being under orders to keep beyond effective gun range, the enemy ships stayed well out on the horizon.

As the morning wore on, in the absence of any more enemy to kill Platt put finishing touches on his mop-up and reorganization. He reestablished telephonic contact with the two detached .30 caliber machine guns covering the channel mouth at the east end of the island, and found that they were unhurt and ready for action. The two wounded Japanese prisoners received first aid and were crudely interrogated in sign language. They were able to convey the idea that no further Japanese landings had been planned for Wilkes.

About noon, with still no word from Wake Island, while Japanese air attacks continued against Wilkes,

the report came in to Platt's command post that Japanese landing boats were in sight, heading for Wake Island, seemingly with some intention of entering the Wilkes channel mouth. Three transports, plus several combatant types, destroyers, and cruisers, had likewise closed Wake to a position about 4,000 yards off the entrance to Wilkes channel. Here were targets for Battery L, and McAlister was ordered to man his battery and engage them.

But the seacoast battery on Wilkes had finally been silenced. On manning the guns, the Marines discovered that the training mechanism of Gun 1 was inoperative so that it could not even track a target, while on Gun 2 the recoil cylinder had been riddled by bomb fragments.

Platt personally inspected the 5-inch guns. A few minutes later, as quickly as he could, he likewise



DEFENDER'S EYE VIEW looking toward Wake's south beaches where the landings took place. Close examination will reveal the entrance to Major Devereux's command-post dugout at the base of the CP symbol lettered on the photo.

checked the 3-inch guns in Battery F's position still surrounded by enemy dead. None would shoot. The reserve rifle ammunition and the machine guns remained, however, and, in the words of Platt's report,

Ordered McAlister, McKinstry, and Coulson get together all possible men, carry the two .30 caliber guns, start for old channel. Engage enemy as soon as possible.

While his Marines again marched to the sound of the guns, Platt made his way forward to join them. An enemy destroyer, sensing perhaps that the defenders of Wilkes now had only their individual weapons, closed to within 2,000 yards of the shore and commenced shelling the island. The incessant dive-bombers, seeing the advanced column, lashed down again, and one more Marine, Pfc Robert L. Stevens, was killed by a direct bomb hit. He was the last battle casualty sustained during the defense of Wake.

Inexplicably—for the time being at any rate—the destroyer ceased firing. The column had passed the new channel and was deployed in an irregular, open formation, rifles ready and Marines alert.

At about 1330, three men were sighted advancing in the opposite direction. Two, by their rumpled khaki, were Marines. Behind them was a shorter figure clad in dirty green and armed with a large sword. One of the Marines carried a white flag, and, a moment later, Captain Platt unbelievably heard Major Devereux informing him that the island had been surrendered. It was just after 1330.

In the words of Captain Koyama, of the Imperial Japanese Navy, who later discussed the fight for Wilkes, "In general, that part of the operation was not successful."

The Surrender and After

Prior to moving down the road toward the Japanese, who were still receiving determined small arms fire from the few Marines south of the command post, Major Devereux passed word of the surrender to all units still in communication with his command post. These were Batteries A and E on Wake Island, and B on Peale, together with a few small detachments, such as that at Heel Point, and some of the .50-caliber positions on Wake Island. All units were ordered to destroy their matériel as best they could prior to actual surrender.

These instructions were carried with all possible thoroughness. At Battery E, the 3-inch antiaircraft

guns (firing-locks of which had already been moved and smashed) were further damaged by stuffing blankets into the muzzles and then firing one round. Since this did not seem entirely successful, grenades were rolled down the muzzles to explode inside. All electrical fire control data receivers were smashed, electric cables chopped up, and the battery commander personally fired 20 rounds of .45-caliber ammunition through the delicate and electromechanical computing parts of the height finder and director. After completing these measures, Lieutenant Lewis fell in Battery E and marched them as a unit, even though under a white flag, to the battalion command post.

At Battery A, the 5-inch firing locks were destroyed and buried, and all gun telescopes smashed. The rangekeeper was damaged beyond repair. After the white flag was run up, and, wisely, in light of what was in store, Lieutenant Barninger ordered all his men to eat as much as they could hold. After that, he ordered his men on the position awaiting arrival of the Japanese.

As word of the surrender was received with incredulity even by the hard-pressed riflemen, some of these stripped the bolts from their rifles and threw them into the brush.

It was after 0800 before all this had been reported, and the rifle-fire of Potter's line was still covering the final operations of the command post. Major Devereux (as he thought), in communication with the Marine aid station located some 300 yards south in one of the underground magazines, attempted to telephone the battalion surgeon, but instructed him to make contact with the Japanese, whose advance must be almost up to that place. There was no answer, and it became apparent that a party would go forward into the enemy lines. Major Devereux, accompanied by Sgt. Donald Malleck, carrying a white rag tied to a swab handle, made his way down the road, despite enemy and American rifle fire still going on. As they passed Marines in action, he ordered them to cease firing.

Shortly before reaching the hospital, the party was halted by a Japanese rifleman who emerged from the brush and covered them with his weapon. They laid down their arms and helmets on the ground. Then he motioned them on toward the hospital, which they found to be already in enemy hands. All patients outside, trussed with telephone wire which bound their hands behind their backs

...oses about their necks. On taking over the hospital, the Japanese had fired among the patients, killing one and wounding another.

While Major Devereux was explaining his mission to a Japanese officer at the hospital who could speak some English, an American truck arrived bearing Commander Cunningham, who had shifted into his uniform for the occasion. Leaving the latter to arrange details of the surrender, Major Devereux and Sergeant Malleck, under escort of a Japanese officer armed with a large sword, set out to establish contact with the various isolated pockets of resistance on Wake Island and Wilkes, where Marines were still holding out.

Their first destination was the VMF-211 area, where, despite continuous enemy fire and grenade-throwing, the remnant of the fighter squadron and Lieutenant Hanna's men still held their position. Unable to advance over an area now strewn with their own casualties, the Japanese had taken positions behind nearby plane revetments, from which they could partially pin down the Marines by machine-gun fire and grenades.

Captain Tharin, the sole unwounded officer among the survivors, was still directing the defense at 0930, when Major Devereux ordered him to cease firing. Of 10 survivors, nine had been wounded, but all who remained alive were still fighting and VMF-211's final positions, taken up hours earlier, were still held.

At 1015, the sad procession reached Lieutenant Kliever and his three-man detail who had been trying ever since 0900 to coax their temperamental gasoline generator into operation so that the mines under the air strip could be set off. The night's rain had drowned out the motor, and, despite continued fire from enemy who had located the group, they were still tinkering with the generator when the fire ceased and Major Devereux called out that the group had been surrendered. One of the Marines attempted to dissuade Kliever, saying, "Don't surrender, lieutenant. Marines never surrender. It's a matter of life or death." As the lieutenant summed it up,

...was a difficult thing to do, but we tore down our guns and turned ourselves over.

Shortly before 1115, the surrender party, now west of the air strip, came upon the rear of a Japanese skirmish line facing westward, evidently engaged in a fire fight against Marines in the brush about the road junction west of the strip. After some confusion,

during which the Japanese fired on the surrender group, Major Devereux passed through the lines and made contact with Second Lieutenant Poindexter, whose mobile reserve, in ignorance of the surrender, had retaken the ground between Camp 1 and the road junction west of the strip during the morning's fighting.

At the time Major Devereux came upon Poindexter, the 30-odd Marines in his force had just completed a steady eastward advance from Camp 1, fighting their way forward along the beach and the edge of the brush to their left (north) flank. Special Naval Landing Force troops were in the thick brush to the north, but did little more than impose additional measures for security of Poindexter's flank. Divided into three 10-man squads, the improvised platoon had advanced with two squads in assault (one on the seaward side of the road, and the other north of the road) working forward through the brush; the support squad protected the exposed left flank by advancing in rear of the left assault squad. During the advance, particularly as he neared the air field and retraced by daylight the scenes of his night's fighting, Lieutenant Poindexter had counted approximately 80 enemy dead.

After assuring the surrender of the mobile reserve, Major Devereux led the Japanese toward Camp 1, still held by machine-gun sections of Poindexter's group. At this place, under the eyes of the Marine prisoners, a Japanese souvenir-hunter clambered up the water tank and cut down the Colors which had been flying there through the battle.

Proceeding from Camp 1 across Wilkes channel by launch, followed by a detail of approximately 30 Japanese, the surrender group landed on Wilkes at approximately 1300. No Marines were to be seen, and, as the party began walking cautiously westward, an enemy destroyer close aboard commenced firing on the island, presumably at them. This fire was soon checked by a Japanese signalman who contacted the ship visually and directed that she cease fire.

At 1330, almost midway between the new and old channels on Wilkes, Major Devereux saw "a few grubby, dirty men who came out of the brush with their rifles ready * * *." These were the Marines who had, only a few hours before, annihilated the enemy landing party on Wilkes, and were now advancing eastward to repel what they thought was still another landing.



CHAPTER V

Conclusions

The defense of Wake was the first wartime operation ever conducted by the Marine Corps in defense of an advanced naval base. It was also the first combat test of the Marine defense battalion, far reduced in strength though the Wake defense detachment was.

The main reason for the fall of Wake seemed obvious at the time, and remains so: the enemy in greatly superior strength, supported by ample surface and air forces, was able to effect a lodgement on Wake and then to apply his ground superiority so as to overwhelm the defenders at any and virtually all given points. Had it been possible at any time for United States surface forces to intervene, or for substantial reinforcements to reach Wake, the results might have been entirely different.

Even after we accept the foregoing broad reason for the eventual inevitability of Wake's loss, military lessons of some value may be drawn as we survey certain immediate reasons why the defense was handicapped. It should be remembered, however, that all these factors were interacting. No single one can be clearly isolated as responsible for the end product, which in this case was military defeat.

Japanese procedure for the reduction and seizure of Wake, if not executed with the skill or standards which the Marine Corps would demand in an amphibious operation, was nevertheless orthodox in that it consisted essentially of two phases: the first, of preliminary bombardment, or "softening"; the second, of the actual assault landing. As we have seen, the enemy considerably underestimated the amount of preparation required, and consequently paid for his miscalculation in the defeat of 11 December. Following this, he resumed and intensified his preliminary operations and mustered considerably greater means for the second try, which succeeded.

During the first phase, that of preliminary bombardment, the defenders of Wake were severely handicapped from the outset by the lack of radar and early warning. It would be difficult to overstate the effects of this lack, for it was this which also enabled the initial Japanese raid to destroy over half of VMF-211's fighters on the ground, and it was the lack of early warning which reduced greatly the effectiveness of fighter interception against the later raids.

Despite the magnificent skill and courage of VMF-211 on the ground and in the air, the lack of fighter interception, early and in force during the raid, permitted the Japanese to proceed quite methodically with their program for the aerial softening of Wake. In fact, the possible effectiveness of an entire squadron or stronger force during the defense of Wake can be readily measured by the yards of VMF-211's achievements, never employing more than four airplanes.

Both of the two foregoing handicaps under which the defense was conducted can be lumped together as matters of what is termed air defense. Air defense, just what its name implies, is the coordinated employment of fighter aircraft, antiaircraft artillery and the essential warning systems, all for the defense of an objective against air attack. Successful air defense depends equally upon all three elements; those three, however, on Wake only the antiaircraft artillery—undermanned and partially operational though it was—could be considered fully and consistently effective. Air warning was nonexistent, and fighter interception so weak—in numbers at least—that it could not prevent the enemy bombers from carrying out their missions.

In the first phase of the Japanese siege of Wake, phase essentially of air defense, the defense force was almost hopelessly handicapped from the start,



WRECKAGE ON PEALE as it appeared to the Japanese cameraman who accompanied the Occupation Force on 23 December. This picture found its way to the Southwest Pacific, where it was subsequently picked up by U. S. intelligence personnel.

the determination and stubbornness which marked the air defense of Wake, could not avert the final outcome nor do more than exact from the enemy the maximum cost for every bomb dropped. This was resolutely done until the last Grumman had been destroyed by massed enemy fighters on 22 December. After that, landing operations against Wake could proceed.

Once ground combat had commenced on Wake itself, the results could be foreseen. By the desperate expedient of grounding his transports, the enemy insured that a maximum force, well over twice that of the entire defense garrison, could be gotten ashore within the first half hour of the landing. The ultimate size of the landing force, approximately 1,200, was just three times the number of surviving Marines on the atoll. In addition, as we have seen, the defenders were necessarily so tied to their weapons and battery-positions during most of the action that defeat in detail was inevitable.

Had the Wake defense force included but one company of Marine infantry and a platoon of light tanks (such as was eventually added to the defense battalion tables of organization), such a reserve might well have been able to dislodge the Japanese by counterattack. The lack of such an element to act as general reserve for the defense permitted the enemy to expand and organize his beachhead at will,

and this necessity for a strong mobile reserve, including armor, could be considered one of the major tactical lessons of Wake.

A second major lesson to be derived from this phase of the operation was a reemphasis of Admiral Mahan's famous dictum that "Communications dominate war."

The complete failure of communications, which occurred shortly after the Japanese landing, operated to isolate the defense detachment commander from most of his subordinate units then in action. As a result, he not only lost control over much of the battle, but also—and perhaps more important in this case—he became unavoidably deceived as to the progress of the situation, so that, in ignorance of what had happened on Wilkes or Camp 1, he surmised that all was lost in those areas.

Had it been possible to have buried telephone lines and reliable field radios, this failure of communication, which largely influenced the surrender decision at that particular stage of the action, would not have occurred.

All things taken into account, however, the decision to surrender Wake was reasonable, especially when considered in light of the civilian situation and the fact that relief was no longer in prospect. Marines who fought through the Pacific campaigns could later see many examples of a totally unreason-

ing enemy who never surrendered but was always defeated. At the same time, insensibly, some might come to believe that unyielding refusal to surrender was the proper role of a defender. Of course, this was neither true nor logical. Wake had not only exacted a full and more than honorable toll from the Japanese, but, more important in a military sense, its defensive resources, never large, had been to a great extent sapped.

No fighter aircraft remained. Only one antiaircraft battery was effectively operational. Enemy divebombers on 23 December had completely disabled one 5-inch battery (Wilkes), and fire-control instruments for the remaining two were largely destroyed. Without more airplanes, fire-control instruments, radar, spare parts, and personnel to bring the defense to full strength (all of which and more had been embarked with Task Force 14)—without these Wake could not have carried on. The only answer was surrender.

This took place 15 days after the initial attack, and it was 11 hours after the fighting commenced ashore before the last strongpoint, Wilkes, surrendered in accordance with orders.

The Marine garrison of Wake had sustained almost 20 percent casualties. Although enemy losses will never be accurately known, they must easily have exceeded 1,000 in all.

During the course of the defense, Marines on ground and in the air had caused the loss of at least four enemy warships, the first major Japanese naval vessels to be sunk during the Pacific war. At least eight more ships sustained appreciable damage. Twenty-one enemy aircraft were shot down by fighters or flak over Wake, and 11 more left the atoll in obviously damaged condition. A total of 51 enemy aircraft had in fact sustained reportable damage from Wake's antiaircraft batteries.

With this record as a basis, Major Putnam's final report, which left the atoll on 21 December, could truthfully state:

All hands have behaved splendidly and held up in a manner of which the Marine Corps may well tell.



Documentation and Bibliography

APPENDIX I

All statements contained in this monograph have been thoroughly documented, although, in the interests of textual smoothness and appearance, no citations have been made. A documented master copy of the entire monograph is on file in the Marine Corps archives and may be consulted at any time subject to security regulations. Specific information as to documentation or source material will be furnished upon request.

As may readily be imagined, source material of first instance relative to the defense of Wake is scanty, fragmentary, and in large extent dependent on recollections more than four years old. No opportunity was of course accorded the Wake survivors of preparing anything like special action reports after the fall of Wake. The few officers who persevered in setting down some kind of journals or informal reports found these confiscated by the Japanese prison camp authorities. In one instance, that of Major Putnam, his report and record of events, much edited and garbled, found its way into print in the *Osaka Mainichi*, an English-language newspaper published in Japan.

The nearest approach to unit-action reports on Wake are a group of informal individual narratives submitted by the surviving Wake officers at the direction of Marine Corps Headquarters after their release from captivity. These are subject to all the faults of memory, hindsight, and the results of endless "rehashing" during the monotonous years of prison.

Altogether, some 77 sources have been consulted in preparation of this monograph. They are as follows:

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THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

Prewar History of Wake, 1586–1941

APPENDIX II

Although named¹ for Captain Wake, master of the British trading schooner, *Prince William Henry*, who is often said to have discovered Wake in 1796, Wake atoll was in fact first sighted more than two centuries earlier, in 1586 by Alvaro de Mendana, a Spanish explorer who, with two ships, *Los Reyes* and *Todos Santos*, lay-to off the atoll and finally landed in hopes of replenishing his supply of food and water. Mendana, who found neither food nor water, but only brambles, named it San Francisco, fixed it accurately in latitude and very badly in longitude (east of the Hawaiian group). This error may have been due to primitive pre-Summer Line methods of navigation.

During the succeeding two centuries, there is no record of Wake save under the title of *Lamira* (Look Out) or *Discierta* (Desert Island), both reported in the general vicinity of Wake, on the track of Spanish trans-Pacific treasure ships plying between Mexico and the Philippines. In 1796 Captain Wake arrived, located the atoll accurately, and gave it its eventual name; shortly after, a British fur ship, *Halcyon*, made a similar landfall and independently reported the discovery.

On 20 December, 1840, Charles Wilkes, U. S. N., the famous Pacific oceanographer and explorer, landed on and surveyed Wake, bringing with him as well the naturalist, Titian Peale, who collected many new specimens, mainly of marine life. From the explorations of Wilkes and Peale, the two lesser

¹ Wake has borne many names during its 361 years: Wake's Island, Waker's Weeks, Wreck, Helsing, Halcyon, Wilson, Eucel, Lamira, Discierta, San Francisco, and (under the Japanese) Otori-Shima, which last refers to what the Japanese considered to be its bird-like shape.

islands of the group were eventually to find names,² but at this time Wake was of insufficient interest to cause Commodore Wilkes to take possession in the name of the United States.

"Some authorities maintained that the atoll disappeared beneath the waves from time to time, but it was indubitably projecting on the night of 5 March, 1866," wrote Capt. R. A. Dierdorff, U. S. N., in describing the wreck of the German bark, *Libelle*, Wake's only recorded shipwreck prior to December 1941.

The *Libelle*, bound for Hong Kong from Honolulu, grounded on the reef offshore of the east leg of Wake Island during a storm, and only succeeded in landing survivors (and a money cargo of \$300,000) after 3 days. During the next 3 weeks, two ships' boats were fitted out for an attempt to reach Guam, and one (a 22-foot longboat bearing Mme. Anna Bishop, then a famous operatic singer), successfully attained its destination after 18 days at sea; the other, bearing 8 persons, including the ship's master, was never heard of again. Fittings from the *Libelle* were still found in the sands of Wake as late as 1940, and the unfortunate bark's anchor was salvaged in 1935 and placed as a marker before the entrance to the Pan American Airways hotel. What became of the \$300,000 is not known.

On 4 July 1898, Maj. Gen. Francis V. Greene, U. S. V., commanding the Second Detachment,

² Inasmuch as "Wake Island," so-called, is really an atoll composed of three islands, Wilkes, Wake, and Peale, this appendix describes the atoll as "Wake," and when mentioning the island proper speaks of it as "Wake Island." To the Japanese Wilkes was Ashi-Shima, and Peale, Hani-Shima, while the whole atoll was Otori-Shima.

Philippine Expeditionary Force, in the transport *Thomas*, ordered two boats ashore and raised an American flag ("a 14-inch banner tied to a dead limb"). Shortly after, on 17 January 1899, the U. S. S. *Bennington*, commanded by Commander Edward D. Taussig, U. S. N., acting on orders from Washington, "took possession of the atoll known as Wake Island, for the United States of America."²

The first intention in formally acquiring Wake had been to establish a cable station thereat for Guam-Midway cable, but the absence of fresh water, taken with evidence that Wake at some time previous had been completely inundated, dissuaded Commander Taussig from recommending that the cable station be put into service; as a result, the cable was laid past Wake directly into Guam. After the *Bennington* departed, although Wake was occasionally visited by trans-Pacific vessels, the only visitor of note was Capt. John J. Pershing, who, in December 1906, landed on Wake and caused a high durability canvas American flag to be hoisted.

Wake slumbered through World War I, still visited only by Japanese fishermen and gatherers of bird feathers, but in 1922 the U. S. S. *Beaver*, a submarine tender, made the first—and still the basic—survey of Wake. In 1923, the U. S. S. *Tanager*, bearing a joint scientific expedition sponsored by Yale University and the Bishop Museum of Honolulu, based at Wake for approximately 2 weeks (27 July–5 August) while further survey and collection of general scientific data were accomplished. The land area of the atoll was measured,⁴ and at this time Wilkes and Peale were formally recognized as separate islands and duly christened with their present names.

In 1934, by Executive order, jurisdiction over Wake was passed to the Navy Department, and, less than a year after, in 1935, Pan American Airways, extending their routes to the Antipodes and Orient,

² Extract from inscription on the brass plate affixed to the base of the first flagpole erected on Wake by Commander Taussig.

⁴ Wake, the expedition discovered, has a total land area of 2,600 acres.

selected Wake as a useful intermediate base for the Philippines run.

The Navy Department, quick to sense the potential military value of Pan American's base development of Wake, cooperated with the project by dispatching the U. S. S. *Nitro*, nominally an ammunition ship, but nevertheless man-of-all-work for the prewar Naval Transportation Service, to bring the 1922–23 surveys up to date. Two of the *Nitro*'s boats, hardly amphibious landing craft, were lost to the surf during this project.

Between 5 and 29 May 1935, Pan American's air base construction vessel, *North Haven*, landed supplies and equipment on Wilkes for eventual handling to Peale which, because of its more suitable soil and geology, had been selected as site for the PAA seaplane base. By the time of *North Haven*'s return to Wake, after a month's voyage westward from Manila, the project was well under way, and, months later, on 9 August a Pan American clipper made the first aerial landing in the atoll.

From 1935 until 1940, when two typhoons swept Wake with resultant extensive damage to the more elaborate Pan American facilities, development and use of the base were steady but uneventful. A hospital was built, farm animals imported, and hydroponic truck farming commenced.⁵

On 26 December 1940, in implementation of the Hepburn Board's recommendations, a pioneer party including 80 men and some 2,000 tons of equipment sailed for Wake from Oahu in the U. S. S. *William Ward Burrows*,⁶ as the advance detachment to commence establishment of a naval air station on Peale. The *Burrows* made her landfall on 9 January 1941, lay-to off Wilkes, and next day commenced landing naval supplies and advance base equipment for development of the base.

⁵ Funk and Wagnall's Dictionary, 1943, defines hydroponics as "soilless agriculture; the raising of plants in nutrient mineral solutions without earth around the roots."

⁶ A detailed and interesting account of this initial naval-base development is contained in "Pioneer Party—Wake Island," U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, April 1943, by Capt. R. A. Dierdorff, U. S. N., then commanding officer of the *Burrows*.



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

United States and Japanese Casualties

APPENDIX III

United States casualties during the defense of Wake were sustained by Marine, Navy, and civilian personnel as follows:

	Officers	Enlisted
U. S. Marine Corps:		
Killed in action.....	5	41
Wounded/killed in action.....	0	1
Missing in action, presumed dead.....	0	2
Wounded in action.....	6	26
Subtotal.....	11	70
Total.....	11	81
U. S. Navy:		
Killed in action.....	0	3
Wounded in action.....	0	5
Subtotal.....	0	8
Total.....	0	8
Civilians:		
Killed.....		70
Wounded.....		12
Total.....		82
Grand total.....		171

A percentile break-down of casualties sustained by United States personnel during the defense of Wake gives the following results:

	Percent
U. S. Marine Corps.....	18.1
U. S. Navy.....	11.5
U. S. Army.....	0.0
Civilians.....	6.8

For reasons which should be readily apparent, it will never be possible to obtain other than exceedingly approximate Japanese casualty data for the Wake operation. Fragmentary information of varying reliability is to be found in various sources, however, and, from these and from a reconstruction of probable casualties incident to known surface and aircraft losses, the following *estimated enemy losses* are tabulated:

	Killed	Wounded
Incident to aircraft shot down:		
4 carrier planes.....	4	0
1 four-engine patrol plane.....	6	0
16 two-engine bombers.....	80	0
Incident to aircraft damaged:		
51 aircraft damaged by flak.....	13	13
Incident to surface action of 11 December:		
2 destroyers sunk without survivors.....	500	0
8 ships which sustained appreciable shell or bomb damage.....	80	160
Incident to final assault, 23 December:		
Estimated casualties in ground combat.....	125	125
Casualties aboard Patrol Craft 33.....	7	25
Destroyer hit by Battery B's fire.....	5	10
Total estimated Japanese losses.....	820	333
Grand total.....	1,153	



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

APPENDIX IV

Wake Chronology

- 1941
- 9 January United States Navy pioneer party arrives and commences construction of naval base facilities on Wake.
- 19 August Advance party, First Defense Battalion, F. M. F., arrives and makes camp.
- 15 October Maj. James P. S. Devereux assumes duty as island commander and Marine detachment commander.
- 2 November Two hundred Marine reinforcements arrive in U. S. S. *Castor*.
- 29 November Marine Fighting Squadron 211's advance party arrives and commences preparations to receive aircraft. Commander Winfield S. Cunningham, U. S. N., arrives and relieves Major Devereux as island commander.
- 4 December Marine Fighting Squadron 211 flies in to Wake from U. S. S. *Enterprise*.
- 8 December First Japanese air raid on Wake. Seven fighter-planes of VMF-211 destroyed and numerous casualties.
- 9 December Second Japanese air raid on Wake.
- 10 December Third Japanese air raid on Wake. Dynamite cache, including 125 tons of explosives, blown up on Wilkes with major damage to batteries on that island.
- 11 December Japanese attempt to land on Wake decisively defeated with loss of two enemy destroyers and major damage to three cruisers, three destroyers, one destroyer-transport and one transport. Fourth Japanese air raid on Wake.
- 12 December Fifth Japanese air raid on Wake. Enemy submarine bombed and possibly sunk by VMF-211 25 miles southwest of Wake. Mass burial services held after nightfall.
- 13 December No enemy action.
- 14 December Sixth and seventh Japanese air raids on Wake.
- 15 December Eighth Japanese air raid on Wake.
- 16 December Ninth and tenth Japanese air raids on Wake. Task Force 14 sails from Pearl Harbor to relieve Wake.
- 17 December Eleventh and twelfth Japanese air raids on Wake.
- 18 December Japanese photo-reconnaissance conducted over Wake.
- 19 December Thirteenth Japanese air raid on Wake.
- 20 December PBY arrives from Midway with information as to relief expedition.
- 21 December PBY departs from Wake with last United States personnel to leave the atoll. Fourteenth Japanese air raid on Wake (the largest carrier-strike), followed by fifteenth Japanese air raid on Wake.
- 22 December Sixteenth Japanese air raid on Wake. Last two aircraft of VMF-211 rendered inoperational, and squadron reports to detachment commander as infantry.
- 23 December Maizuru Second Special Naval Landing Force executes predawn landing on southern shore of Wake Island and Wilkes, after almost 12 hours' fighting, surrender of the garrison is completed. Relief expedition recalled.
- 1942
- 12 January United States prisoners of war evacuated from Wake for confinement in the Empire of Japan.
- 24 February First United States carrier strikes on Wake.
- 1943
- 8 July Eight Army B-24's make first land-based strike against Wake from base on Midway. Succeeding shore-based air raids continue at intervals.
- 6-7 October Major United States carrier strikes on Wake.
- 7 October Approximately 100 United States prisoners remaining on Wake executed on order of Rear Admiral Sakaibara, I. J. N., Island Commander.
- 1944
- January-May Nine hundred ninety-six (996) United States Navy B-24's delivered against Wake, dropping 1,079 tons of bombs; and surface bombardments totaling 7,092 5-inch and 6-inch projectiles.
- September-October Repeated strikes by Army B-24's.
- 1945
- January-June Repeated sorties by United States Navy shore-based VP squadrons.
- July Major surface bombardment of Wake.
- 13 August Last United States air raid on Wake (conducted by Marine Corps aircraft against Peacock Point battery).
- 7 September Rear Admiral Sakaibara surrenders Wake to Brig. Gen. Lawson H. M. Sanders, U. S. M. C.

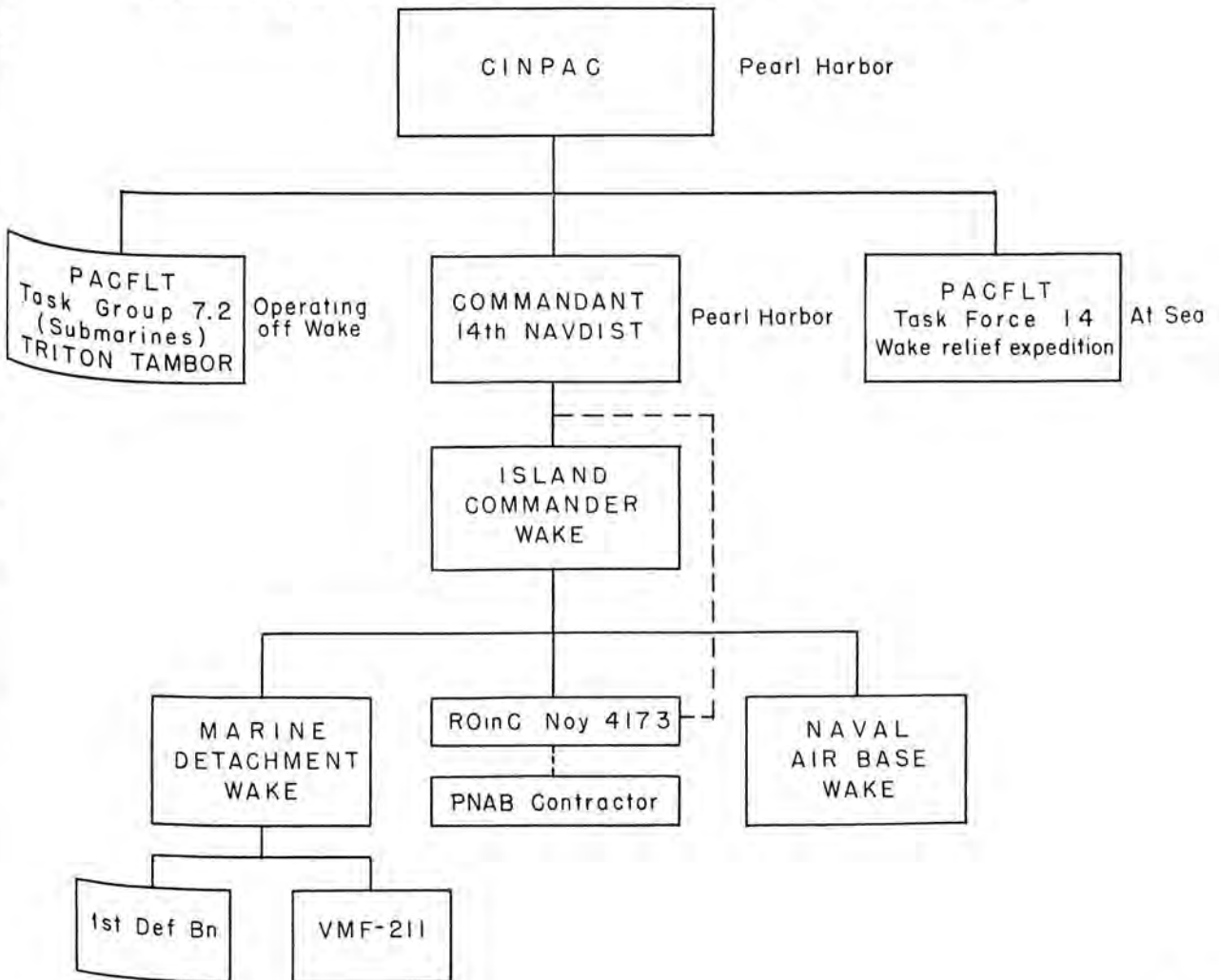


THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

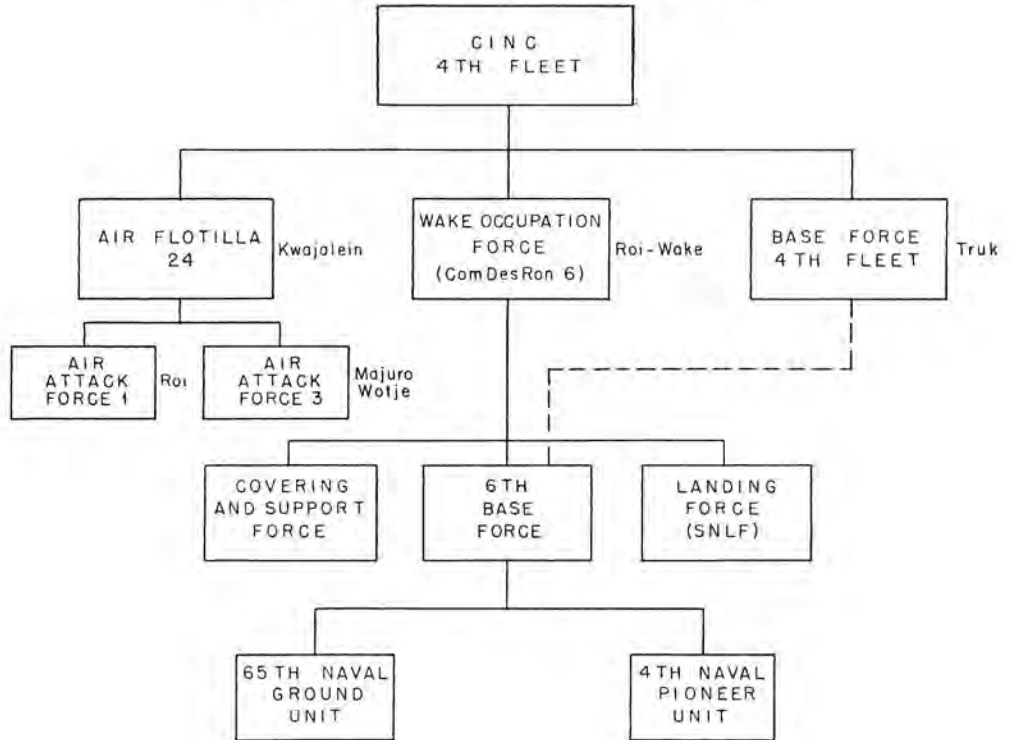
APPENDIX V

United States and Japanese Task Organization and Command Structures

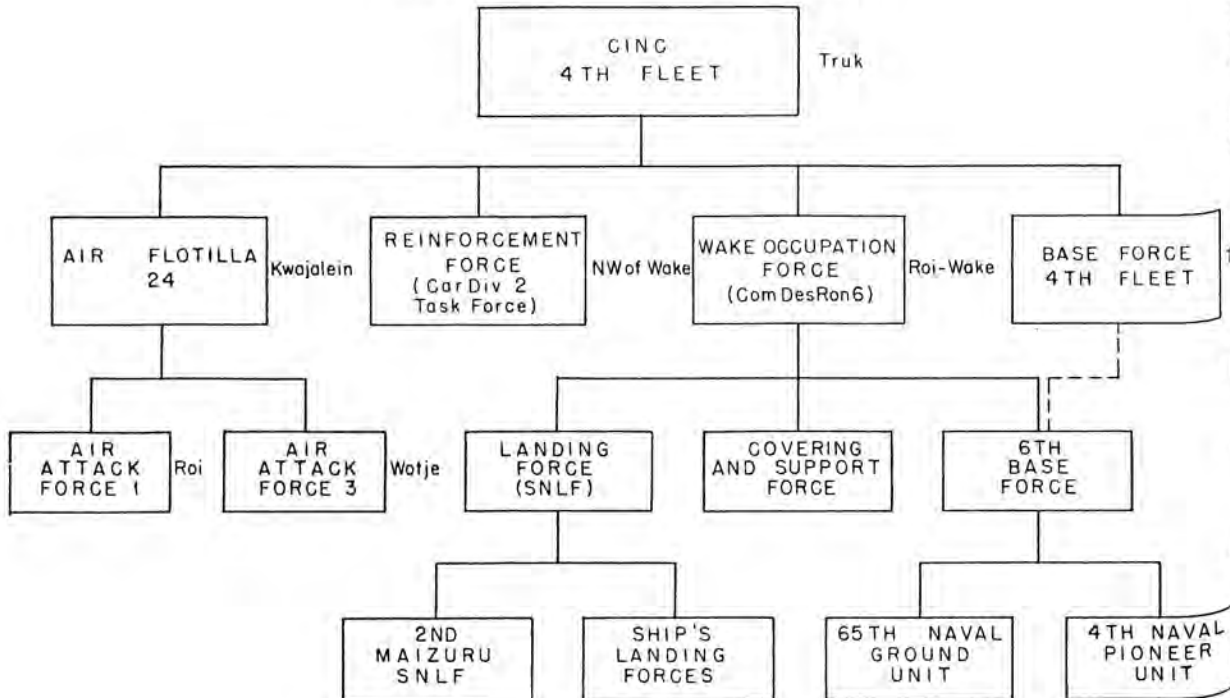
COMMAND STRUCTURE OF U. S. FORCES INVOLVED IN THE DEFENSE OF WAKE



**TASK ORGANIZATION OF JAPANESE FORCES
ATTACKING WAKE, 8-13 DECEMBER, 1941**



**TASK ORGANIZATION OF JAPANESE FORCES
SEIZURE OF WAKE, 23 DECEMBER, 1941**





THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

The Surrender of Wake by the Japanese

APPENDIX VI

On 7 September 1945, Rear Admiral Sakaibara, Shigematsu, I. J. N.,¹ undoubtedly undergoing an experience even more painful than that of Commander Cunningham and Major Devereux in 1941, resurrendered Wake to the United States. With fitting regard for the tradition of Wake, the surrender was received by a Marine officer, Brigadier General L. H. M. Sanderson, U. S. M. C., and the first American again to set foot on the soil of Wake was Colonel Walter L. J. Bayler, U. S. M. C., celebrated as "the last man off Wake Island," which he had left on 21 December 1941.

A detailed narrative of the resurrender and reoccupation of Wake is given in General Sanderson's official report, which is now quoted in entirety (but without certain enclosures thereto):

KV/A16-3/wcl
Serial 001165

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

Headquarters, Fourth Marine Aircraft Wing, F. M. F.,
c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California

7 SEPTEMBER 1945.

From: Commander Wake Surrender Acceptance Unit, CTU 96.14.1, Brigadier General L. H. M. Sanderson, U. S. M. C.
To: Commander Marshalls Gilberts Surrender and Occupation Command, C. T. G. 96.14 (C. T. F. 96), Rear Admiral W. K. Harrill, U. S. N.
Subject: Surrender Acceptance of Wake Atoll on 4 September 1945, Narrative of.

¹This officer was subsequently convicted of murder by the U. S. War Crimes Tribunal, and was sentenced to hang.

Reference: (a) ComMarGilsArea Operation Plan No. 4-45.

Enclosures: (A) Surrender Document.

(B) Copy of General Order Number One, Wake Atoll.

(C) Proclamation.

1. The Wake Surrender Acceptance Unit got under way from Ebeye for Wake late Sunday afternoon, 2 September 1945, aboard U. S. S. *Levy* (DE 162) which was accompanied by U. S. S. *Lehardy* (DE 20) and U. S. S. *Charles R. Greer* (DE 23). ComCortDiv 11, Commander H. E. Cross, U. S. N. R. (CTU 96.14.2), and Commander Prospective Occupation Unit, Commander W. Masek, U. S. N. (Ret.) (C. T. U. 96.14.4), were also aboard U. S. S. *Levy*.

2. A preliminary conference concerning the surrender acceptance and occupation of Wake was held that same afternoon in the wardroom. At this time, Commander Cross was requested to furnish 10 bluejackets with rifles from each ship for the flag raising ceremony to take place on Wake Island on Tuesday, 4 September 1945. Also requested for this ceremony were 20 bluejackets armed with pistols to form a cordon around the area. Aspects of naval support, communications, and occupation were discussed.

3. At a conference held at 1400 M. on Monday the following day all details concerning the operation were discussed. Arrangements were made for complying with various requests of press correspondents and photographers. A preliminary reading of the Surrender Document and General Order Number 1 was made. All hands participating in the surrender and flag-raising ceremonies were carefully instructed in their duties.

4. Our force arrived off Wake at 0700 M. on Tuesday, 4 September, the following day. General Quarters was sounded and the ships closed to 1,000 yards off the channel entrance to the lagoon. There was no evidence of enemy activity outside of one American Motor Launch, which proved later to be carrying the Japanese

Commander, Admiral Sakaibara and his staff, plus one Japanese assault boat. These boats were cruising in the vicinity of three mooring buoys 800 meters off the channel entrance.

5. Admiral Sakaibara and his staff (unarmed) came alongside just prior to 0800 and were taken aboard without honors and escorted to the boat deck where they were introduced by Colonel Walker, U. S. M. C., to General Sanderson's staff and to Commanders Cross and Masck (there was no handshaking). After all hands were seated, General Sanderson arrived on the boat deck. All hands were again seated after introductions and the press was given permission to take photographs at will. A Japanese Imperial Army Colonel accompanied Admiral Sakaibara.

6. A Japanese Nisei was introduced by General Sanderson as an American citizen with full authority to act as official interpreter. General Sanderson announced his authority as representative of Admiral Harrill, Commander Marshalls-Gilberts Area; the letter of authorization was handed to Admiral Sakaibara for inspection.

7. Admiral Sakaibara was next questioned about the instructions which had been previously dropped by plane. He stated that he was busily engaged in complying with those instructions. General Order Number 1 was then brought forward and tendered to the Japanese. Admiral Sakaibara stated that these instructions varied somewhat from previous instructions, but that he would comply with them in all respects.

8. The Surrender Document (including Japanese translations) was handed to Admiral Sakaibara for his inspection. After inspection of the document by himself and staff he announced that he was ready to sign. At this time he stated that he was sorry Japan had lost the War, but was happy that Americans were accepting his surrender. Two official originals (both translations) of the Surrender Document were signed, first by Admiral Sakaibara, then by General Sanderson at 0819 Mike zone time. These originals were sealed and one original of both translations was handed to the Japanese for retention. A few copies were also signed for record purposes.

9. General Order Number 1 was again brought forth, signed and promulgated by General Sanderson, and handed to the Japanese for compliance.

10. Admiral Sakaibara was requested to have his naval staff, the army staff, and a platoon of 40 enlisted at the boat landing at 1330 to take part in the flag raising ceremony.

11. Various items of information were then obtained from the Japanese. These items included questions on possible prisoners of war and civilian internees on Wake, ammunition, armament, marine and land mines, strength of garrison, condition of airfield runways, whether landings were possible in the lagoon, number useable vehicles, location of American graves, number of sick and nature of illnesses, et cetera. We had brought some medicine and a small amount of food for their garrison.

12. The above having been completed, press representatives requested a press interview from Admiral Sakaibara who granted them a few moments; interview took place in the wardroom.

13. Admiral Sakaibara then requested permission to leave the ship in order to inform his command that surrender had been accepted and in order to prepare for the flag-raising ceremony. This was granted. Japanese flag boat was called alongside and the nese departed at about 1000 M.

14. A small boat from *Lehardy* with segments flag pole and necessary tackle, plus a working came alongside, picked up Col. Walter L. J. Bayler, U. S. M. C., and departed for shore at about 1020. Immediately thereafter, *Levy* moored to center mooring buoy 800 meters off the channel entrance. A small boat carrying correspondents and photographers was dispatched to the beach.

15. Another small boat was called alongside took ashore Commander Cross, Commander M. Lieutenent Colonel Roberson, U. S. M. C., and members of an inspection party to make a preliminary inspection of the island and to spot a location for the raising ceremony. This was selected at a point 100 yards southeast of landing at head of boat basin.

16. Meanwhile Colonel Bayler, the last American to leave Wake prior to Japanese occupation stepped ashore. He was the first American to set foot on Wake after almost 4 years of war with Japan.

17. While the other two DE's were being nestled *Levy*, the inspection continued ashore. After a preliminary inspection of the airfield runways by vehicle a scouting line was formed and the entire 5,700 feet of the main east-west runway was inspected by personnel walking the entire length on foot.

18. At about 1130, a PBM from Eniwetok made a successful landing in the lagoon. Part of the crew came ashore to make a report.

19. At 1300 the preliminary inspection party members of the press returned to the boat landing. Admiral Sakaibara was told to place his staff and armed guard on the south side of the flag pole. This was accomplished. The Marine Color Guard and raising detail were mustered on the dock inboard a platoon of 30 bluejacket riflemen. A cordon of 20 bluejackets with pistols were stationed at regular intervals in the cleared area around the flag pole. Admiral Sakaibara requested and was granted permission to remain on the dock to receive General Sanderson when he came ashore.

20. At 1330 General Sanderson and his Chief Staff Colonel Walker arrived at the boat dock and disembarked. They were greeted by American Staff Officers and by Admiral Sakaibara. General Sanderson with Admiral Sakaibara on his left, followed by his staff, the colors, and the color platoon, then marched to the north side of the flag pole and halted. Admiral Sakaibara was ordered to rejoin his staff.

21. General Sanderson read a Proclamation and ordered the Colors to be hoisted. With the platoon

Present Arms," with both American and Japanese saluting, the Colors were then hoisted and two-blocked while the notes of "To the Colors" were sounded on the bugle. As the Colors reached the peak of the flag pole, the *Levy* commenced and completed firing a twenty-one gun salute.

22. Commander Masek, the Prospective Atoll Commander, was then ordered front and center and received command of Wake Atoll from General Sanderson.

23. General Sanderson informed Admiral Sakaibara that the United States had taken possession of Wake Atoll, that Commander Masek had relieved him of the Command of Wake Atoll, and that henceforward he would receive his orders from the senior naval officer present.

24. General Sanderson ordered Admiral Sakaibara to march off his troops. This was done after each Japanese had individually saluted Admiral Sakaibara, then General Sanderson. The American contingent was then marched off.

25. Shortly thereafter, General Sanderson requested Admiral Sakaibara to conduct him on a formal inspection tour of the island. The airfield was visited first, then the inspection party moved on to the northern end of Wake Island, crossed a wooden bridge to Peale Island, retraced this route and stopped at Admiral Sakaibara's quarters where the latter proffered his Samurai Sword to General Sanderson as a personal gift for Admiral Harrill. On this inspection no Japanese troops were in sight; Japanese military police were stationed at 100-yard intervals along all roads.

26. The inspection party then proceeded to the scene of the American graves which consisted of two mounds mounted by freshly painted white crosses. One grave

had been dug by Americans and one by Japanese. It was reported by the Japanese that 40 Americans were buried in the two graves.

27. The inspection party then returned to the dock where a Japanese flute and picture of little or no value were offered to General Sanderson. These gifts were accepted, but later returned in accordance with instructions. The inspection party then embarked aboard boats for *Levy*. A dispatch report was sent to Commander Marshalls-Gilberts Area immediately following the surrender. Later that evening a dispatch was sent reporting the conclusion of the flag raising ceremony and the inspection of the Atoll. Early the next morning General Sanderson, his staff, and members of the press departed by two twin-engined planes which had made successful landings on the airfield that morning. Prior to departure from the airfield Admiral Sakaibara offered a nonalcoholic beverage (cider) to General Sanderson and his staff.

28. On return to Kwajalein, General Sanderson reported in person to Admiral Harrill.

29. American troops wore plain Khaki with no neckties. Bluejackets were dressed in whites for the flag raising ceremony. Japanese naval personnel wore field blouses and trousers of light gray with boots, Sam Browne belts, and kepis. Japanese Army personnel wore the same uniform made of a brown-colored cloth.

30. The attitude of our people toward the Japanese was at all times serious; at no time was either familiarity or harshness in evidence. The Japanese appeared quite anxious to please, going out of their way to be helpful. Admiral Sakaibara was cheerful and cooperative, and appeared to possess a high degree of intelligence.

L. H. M. SANDERSON.



APPENDIX VII

Terrain and Hydrography

Wake (19°16' N., 166°37' E.) is a wishbone-shaped typical coral atoll approximately 4½ miles in length (NW.-SE.) and 2¼ miles wide. It is composed of a reef-enclosed lagoon, with three distinct islands, Wake Island (proper),¹ Peale Island, and Wilkes Island, comprising a land area of some 2,600 acres. Wake Island (the main or center section of the "wishbone") is much the largest of the three. V-shaped and pointed toward the southeast, it comprises the outer perimeter of the eastern half of the atoll. Peale and Wilkes Islands continue the open ends of the prongs of the wishbone on the north and south respectively. The northwestern side of the atoll is open, except for the coral reef, which surrounds the atoll and completes enclosure of the lagoon.

In the same latitude as the island of Hawaii, Wake lies slightly north of a line from Pearl Harbor to Saipan, at about four-sevenths of the distance. Unlike the groups of atolls in the Marshalls and Carolines, Wake is isolated. Pokaakku atoll, in the Marshalls, is 304 miles south-southeast, and the nearest Japanese base of importance, Kwajalein, was 639 miles to the southwest. For additional distances to adjacent friendly or hostile bases, see the strategic map printed within the end pieces.

Deep water surrounds the entire atoll. Seaward sides of the atoll barrier reef are steep-to.

Wake atoll itself is a barrier reef which varies in width from 30 to 1,100 yards. It is widest at the open, northwest end and narrowest along the southern side, where its width averages less than 100 yards. The underwater section of the reef is free of loose material but has occasional potholes and large coral boulders. Off the southern coast, the

reef has the usual characteristic fissures running perpendicular to the shoreline.

Three passageways open into the lagoon: the open northwest end of the atoll, (2) the opening between Peale and Wake Island, and (3) the channel between Wilkes and Wake Islands. The break opens the reef between Peale and Wake Island, and Wilkes channel was the only possible passage for vessels.² The western opening, between Peale and Wilkes, is some 2,275 yards wide. The channel has a width of 68 yards at the seaward end and narrows to 51 yards between the bridges spanning it. The distance from bank to bank between Peale and Wake Island is about 37 yards. Wilkes channel is from 37 to 48 yards wide. From bank to bank the distance is 48 to 52 yards. Approximately 4 miles long with an average width of 1½ miles the lagoon has an area of 3½ square miles. It varies greatly in depth within short distances and has many near-surface and protruding coral heads and much foul ground. The eastern side is more shallow, and large sections within the V-shaped Wake Island appear as tidal flats at low water.

The beaches are of white coral sand. At many places along the shore line they are strewn with jagged coral rocks and king-size boulders, some "large as a 5-ton truck."³ Beaches vary in width from 20 to 170 yards, but average 100 yards. The narrowest beaches are located on the north coast. Beach slope is quite gradual. Natural terraces or bankments exist only along the north coast (except

¹ For discussion of the distinction in use between the terms "Wake" and "Wake Island," see p. 4.

² Dredging of this channel and of a turning basin within the lagoon was one of the major prewar projects for development of Wake. In late 1941, the channel had been partially dredged to 20 feet but the basin was not completed.

³ Colonel Bayler's description.

along the south shore of Wilkes). At the coast line, or vegetation line, there is frequently a moderate rise in elevation. Exits from the beaches are available at all points.

A heavy surf roars continually against the northeast (windward) reef. The atoll is large enough to provide a lee in any weather and there is therefore much less surf on the southern (leeward) side, but heavy surf occasionally runs on the southeast end of Wilkes Island during periods of heavy swell and rough sea. The boom of the surf is never silent on Wake, and actually reduces the range and acuity of hearing of persons in any part of the atoll.

Inside the lagoon, the mean tide range is about 1/2 feet and the low waters have a stand of 2 or 3 hours.

The surface of the three islands is a smooth roll of disintegrated coral, interspersed with boulders, which are most numerous on Wilkes and the southern leg of Wake Island where they range to 5 or 6 feet in diameter. Maximum elevation on the atoll is 21 feet, with an average of 12 feet. Three "high" points with elevations of more than 20 feet are to be found: (1) at Heel Point, (2) on the seaward side of Peale Island about 500 yards from Toki Point, and (3) on the lagoon side of Wilkes Island some 50 yards from Kuku Point. The outside, seaward face of Wake Island, maintains a fairly uniform elevation of approximately 18 feet, with a gradual slant to the center of the island and then to the lagoon side. Due to the porous soil, drainage is good, too much so in fact, so that no natural water supply is available.

Trees, thick tropic shrub growth (often with thorns), and grasses are scattered through the islands and provide much opportunity for natural concealment. Vegetation is densest on the south leg of Wake Island, west and south of the airfield. Trees sometimes reach a height of 20-25 feet, but the towering coconut palms found on most atolls are missing.

There is no wide variation in temperature. Yearly maximum is 95°, minimum, 68°. Mean monthly temperatures run from 76° to 83°. Rainfall is light,

averaging 33 inches for the year. The wettest season is from July through October.

Wake lies in the belt of the northeast trade winds, and more than 50 percent of the wind observations range from east to northeast during all seasons of the year. Average cloud coverage for the year is approximately 0.5, or 50 percent, being heaviest during late summer and early fall, with cumulus clouds predominant.

From a military defender's point of view, especially that of a Marine defense battalion, several aspects of Wake's 1941 terrain are of preeminent importance:

First, the triangular shape and division of the atoll into three islands, which accords closely with the triangular organization of a defense battalion.⁴ In one sense an advantage, this three-way compartmentation could also work against the defense by preventing ready concentration of force at any point while assisting an enemy to inflict defeat in detail. Hardly less disadvantageous would be the problems imposed by interisland communications.

Second, the extensive total coast line which must be defended by any garrison. Although relatively small in net area, Wake has an exterior shore line in excess of 10 miles, and a lagoon shore line of almost that length. To cover the entire 21-mile perimeter would be out of the question, even for a full-strength defense battalion.

Third, the defense vegetation, with few fields of fire and many possible concealed approaches.

In some cases, especially before any enemy landing could be effected, this brush would provide valuable shelter and concealment, but should battle be joined on the ground the vegetation of Wake would be an ally to the attacker.

Finally, the continual roar of the surf, besides being a mere annoyance to individuals, could mask hostile sounds such as the movement of troops through the thickets, or the sound of approaching bombers.

⁴ For a discussion of the organization and composition of the Marine defense battalion, see note 4, page 2.



THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

APPENDIX VIII

Command and Staff, Marine Detachment, Wake

Senior Marine officer present..... Maj. James P. S. Devereux.

FIRST DEFENSE BATTALION DETACHMENT

Commanding Officer..... Maj. James P. S. Devereux.
Executive Officer..... Maj. George H. Potter.
Munitions Officer..... Marine Gunner John Hamas.
Ordnance Officer..... Marine Gunner Harold C. Borth.
Medical Officer..... Lt. (jg) Gustave M. Kahn, U. S. N.

5-Inch Artillery Group

Commanding Officer..... Maj. George H. Potter.
Commanding Officer, Battery A..... First Lt. Clarence A. Barninger.
Commanding Officer, Battery B..... First Lt. Woodrow W. Kessler.
Commanding Officer, Battery L..... Second Lt. John A. McAlister.

3-Inch Antiaircraft Group

Commanding Officer..... Capt. Bryghte D. Godbold.
Commanding Officer, Battery D..... Capt. Bryghte D. Godbold.
Commanding Officer, Battery E..... First Lt. William W. Lewis.
Commanding Officer, Battery F (prov.)..... Marine Gunner Clarence B. McKinstry.

Separate Batteries

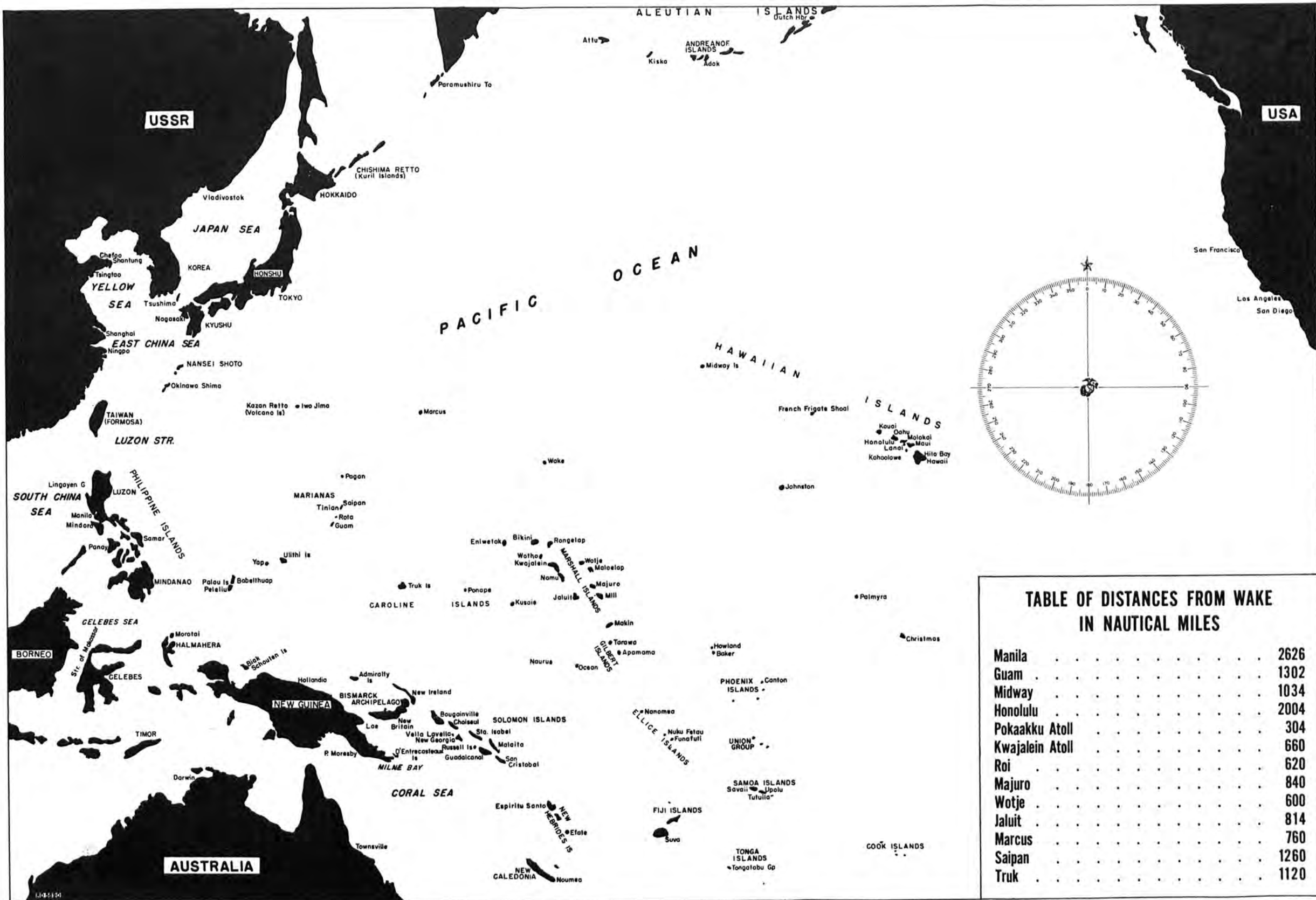
Commanding Officer, Battery G..... Capt. Wesley McC. Platt.
Commanding Officer, Battery H..... Second Lt. Robert M. Hanna.
Commanding Officer, Battery I..... Second Lt. Arthur A. Poindexter.

MARINE FIGHTING SQUADRON 211

Commanding Officer..... Maj. Paul A. Putnam.
Executive Officer..... Capt. Henry T. Elrod.
Flight Officer..... Capt. Frank C. Tharin.
Communications Officer..... Maj. Walter L. J. Bayler.¹
Gunnery Officer..... Second Lt. David D. Kliewer.
Engineering Officer..... Capt. Herbert C. Freuler.
..... Second Lt. John F. Kinney.

¹ Temporarily attached from staff, Marine Air Group 21, until 21 December 1941, when detached, and relieved by Second Lieutenant Kliewer.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Citation by

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

of

The Wake detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion, U.S.
Marine Corps, under command of Major James P.S. Devereux,
U.S. Marines

and

Marine Fighting Squadron 211 of Marine Aircraft Group 21,
under command of Major Paul A. Putnam, U.S. Marines

and

Army and Navy personnel present

"The courageous conduct of the officers and men who defended Wake Island against an overwhelming superiority of enemy air, sea, and land attacks from December 8 to 22, 1941, has been noted with admiration by their fellow countrymen and the civilized world, and will not be forgotten so long as gallantry and heroism are respected and honored. They are commended for their devotion to duty and splendid conduct at their battle stations under most adverse conditions. With limited defensive means against attacks in great force, they manned their shore installations and flew their aircraft so well that five enemy warships were either sunk or severely damaged, many hostile planes shot down, and an unknown number of land troops destroyed."

Franklin D. Roosevelt