

THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

HISTORICAL BRANCH, G-3 DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U. S. MARINE CORPS

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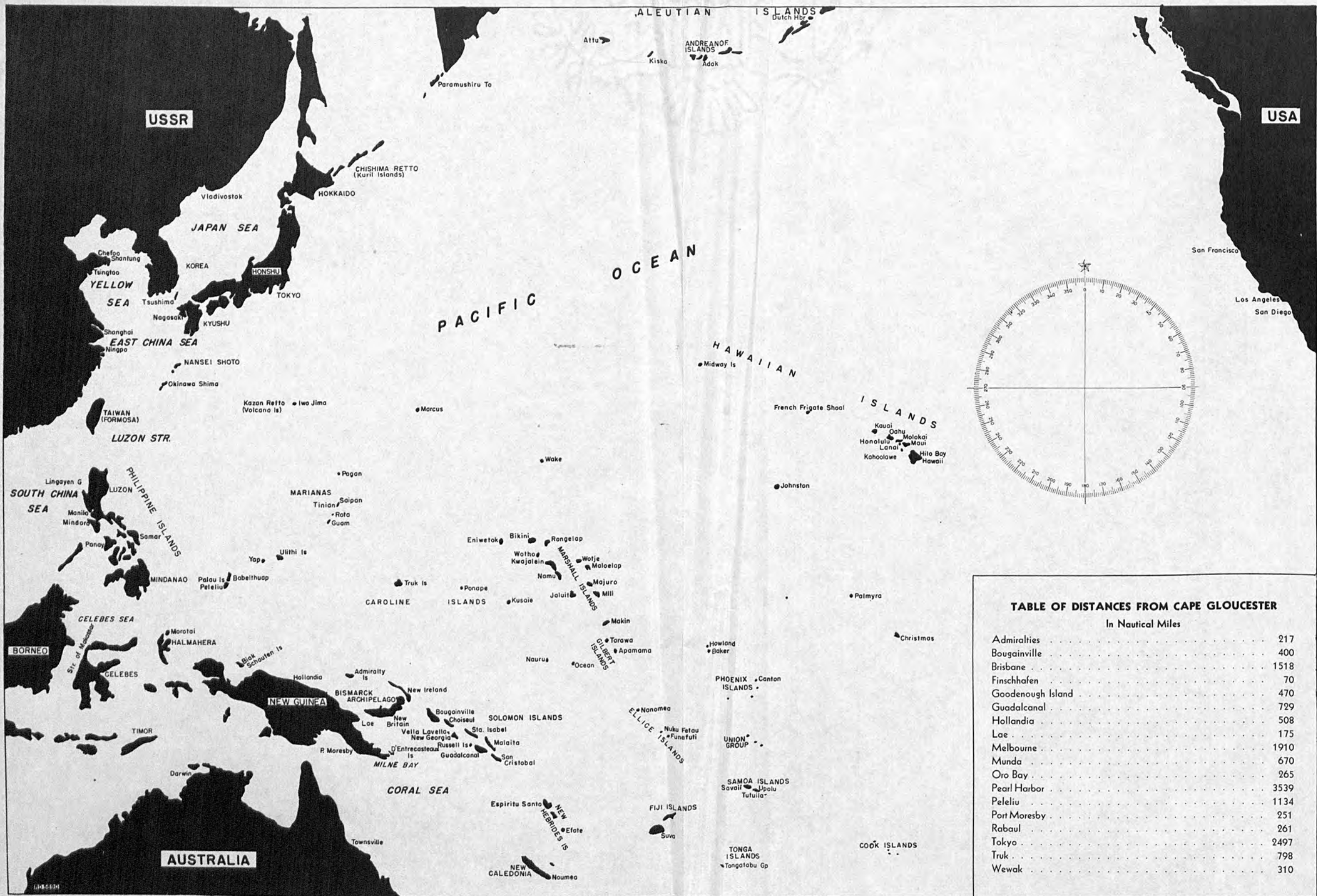


TABLE OF DISTANCES FROM CAPE GLOUCESTER	
In Nautical Miles	
Admiralties	217
Bougainville	400
Brisbane	1518
Finschhafen	70
Goodenough Island	470
Guadalcanal	729
Hollandia	508
Lae	175
Melbourne	1910
Munda	670
Oro Bay	265
Pearl Harbor	3539
Peleliu	1134
Port Moresby	251
Rabaul	261
Tokyo	2497
Truk	798
Wewak	310



U.S. Marine Corps.

THE CAMPAIGN



ON

NEW BRITAIN

HISTORICAL BRANCH
HEADQUARTERS
U. S. MARINE CORPS

Lt. Col. Frank O. Hough, USMCR
Major John A. Crown, USMCR

1952

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COVER PICTURE: Marines plunge through surf three feet deep as they storm Cape Gloucester beaches on D-Day.

MARINE CORPS
HISTORICAL

OCT 7 1968

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Foreword

Aside from my own participation, I have always felt a keen interest in the New Britain operation. Here, apparently, military teamwork came near to perfection. Here it would seem that all arms co-operated so smoothly as to make the result easy.

The truth is that nothing was easy on New Britain. Jungle, swamp and mountain combined with atrocious weather to multiply problems of time and space. Then, too, the Japanese held an inestimable advantage in their familiarity with the terrain—an advantage which they exploited with no little skill. It took maneuver on our part to cope with this phalanx of difficulties, and before the fighting ended it had sprawled over more territory than any other Marine campaign of the war.

There is no such thing as a "light" casualty list, and more than 300 Marines paid with their lives in New Britain's fetid jungle. But viewed in the light of numbers engaged, ground gained, and enemy losses, it was not a costly victory. On the contrary, the fighting that ranged from Cape Gloucester to Talasea ranks as one of the most economical operations in the entire Pacific.

Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr.

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



Preface

THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN, a monograph prepared by the Historical Branch, Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps, is the tenth in a series designed to give both a casual reader and the military student an accurate and complete account of the operations in which Marine units participated during World War II. When sufficient of these monographs have been brought to completion, they will in turn be condensed and edited into a final, definitive Operational History of the Marine Corps in World War II.

While the campaign on New Britain was conducted under the aegis of the Southwest Pacific commander, and the first assault landing was made at Arawe by an Army regimental combat team, Army activities are treated herein only as necessary to lend perspective and substance to the over-all account. This was done in the belief that Army agencies are better qualified to deal with Army operations, and would prefer to tell the Army story themselves.

Many officers and men who participated in this campaign have contributed to the preparation of this monograph, either by written comments on preliminary drafts or by submitting to interview. To them grateful acknowledgment is made. Major John A. Crown, a participant throughout the operation, prepared the story of the Talasea phases. The Office of Naval Records and History, Department of the Navy, and the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, made available their records and furnished helpful comments to assist in making this study complete and accurate. Maps included herein were prepared by the Reproduction Section, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia. Official Marine Corps photographs have been used to illustrate this monograph unless otherwise noted.

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



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THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER I

Background

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The Pacific island group known as the Bismarck Archipelago stretches across a sea-land area bounded approximately by the parallels 1° – 8° south latitude, 146° – 154° east longitude, describing a rough ellipse to embrace a body of water aptly called the Bismarck Sea during the war. The Solomons¹ lie to the southeast, beginning about 100 miles away; New Guinea to the south and southwest, at the nearest point less than 50 miles distant across Vitiaz Strait.

The islands range in size from very large to very small, how small depending on one's definition of what constitutes an island; in nature from extremely rugged terrain of volcanic origin, to low, flat coral atolls. The two largest, New Britain and New Ireland, comprise the arc of the ellipse reaching southeast to northeast. The St. Matthias Group (notably Massau, Emirau) bound the archipelago on the extreme north; the Admiralty Islands (Manus, Los Negros) on the northwest.

In this region hot, humid climate produces that type of jungle known as "rain

forest,"² characteristic of larger land masses of the Pacific tropics: giant trees towering up to 200 feet into the sky above dense undergrowth lashed together by savage vines as thick as a man's arm and many times as tough, in the coastal area interspersed with occasional patches of kunai grass sometimes higher than a man's head, and hip-deep swamps. Decay lies everywhere just under the exotic lushness, emitting an indescribable odor unforgettable to anyone who has lived with it. Insect life flourishes prodigiously: disease-bearing mosquitoes and ticks, spiders the size of dinner plates, wasps three inches long, scorpions, centipedes. Vertebrate animals occur in less variety, the only dangerous creatures indigenous to the region being alligators and giant snakes of the constrictor species.

For all practical purposes, there are only two seasons: wet and less wet. Dates of occurrence vary in different parts of the

²"Rain forest" is a very general term and in this case misused. By strict botanical definition, the jungle prevailing in New Britain's coastal areas is "swamp forest." (Capt. L. T. Burcham, comments on preliminary draft, hereinafter cited as *Burcham*.) However, since most sources on which this work is based refer to it as "rain forest," this term will be used in the interest of consistency. See Appendix II for further description of New Britain vegetation.

¹Buka and Bougainville, northernmost of the Solomons, had been politically, if not geographically, a part of the Bismarcks for several decades.

same island owing to the interposition of high mountains. In that portion of New Britain where the action of this narrative is centered, the northwest monsoon arrived in mid-December and lasted through most of March, a factor destined to have an important bearing on the operation under discussion.

Largest of the Bismarcks, New Britain is a rugged, volcanic island: roughly crescent-shaped, 370 miles long, with an average width of 40 to 50 miles. Viewed on a map beside neighboring New Guinea, world's second largest island, it does not appear especially impressive; yet, aside from that enormous subcontinent, it was by far the largest land mass on which U. S. troops fought in the Pacific short of Luzon and Mindanao. Its surface area exceeds that of all the Solomons combined. The total area of the Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas, Palaus, Iwo Jima and Okinawa would occupy only a small portion of that region of New Britain where the 1st Marine Division operated during the early months of 1944.³

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Densely jungled, with a spine of seemingly impassable mountains, New Britain was one of the many Pacific islands which no European power bothered to claim for three centuries following its discovery. In the memories of the men who fought there, American, Australian, and Japanese, it will remain one of the evil spots of this world. Nearly everybody had malaria, dysentery or fungus infection, often all three simultaneously; dengue fever and scrub typhus occurred, and among the Japanese beri-beri and scurvy as well. Volcanoes and earthquakes featured the local scene. Twenty Marines were killed by falling trees and at least three by lightning. A corporal found a nine-foot python in his foxhole during an air raid,

³R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook, 1944* (New York, 1944), 238. Except as otherwise noted, material dealing with times prior to and immediately following the Japanese invasion is drawn from this source.

and an Army officer had his arm chewed off by an alligator. Nine inches of rain fell in a single night, causing one stream to shift its course 200 yards, washing out two regimental CP's and depositing an eel in the commanding general's spare field shoes.

But this is getting a bit ahead of history.

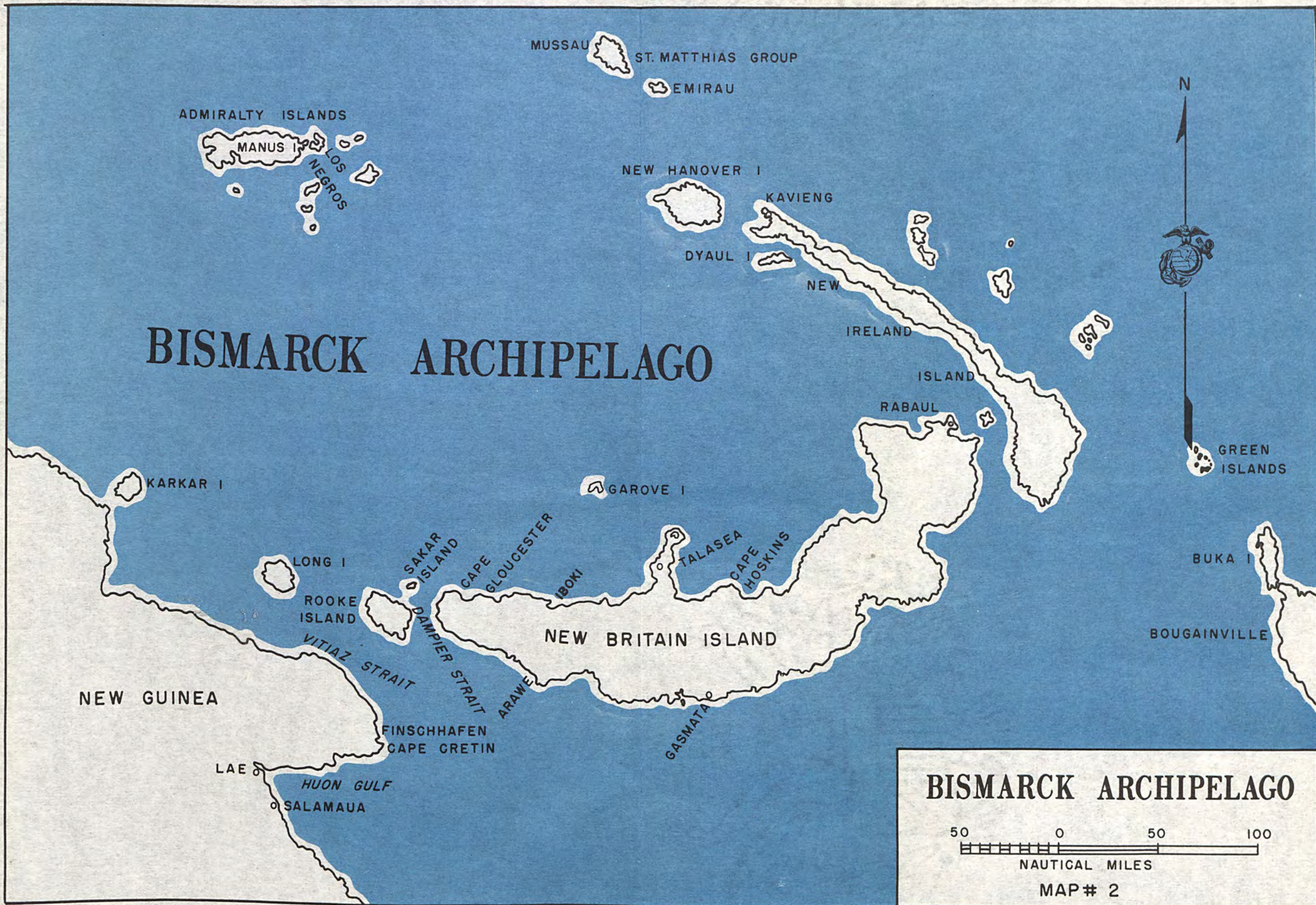
New Britain first achieved some measure of international importance in 1880 when Germany, belatedly empire-conscious, moved in and took over. Actually, this island constituted only one item in a sizeable land grab that included the rest of the Bismarck Archipelago, northeastern New Guinea and the northern Solomons. In 1910, after several other places had proved unsatisfactory, the Germans carefully planned and built the pleasant town of Rabaul, situated on splendid Simpson Harbor at New Britain's northeastern tip, to serve as administrative capital for the entire territory.⁴

This encroachment of a vigorous European power greatly worried the nearby Australians, who had themselves recently taken possession of southeastern New Guinea (Papua) in an effort to forestall such a move. Thus, with the outbreak of World War I, they lost no time in seizing the German territory, which was subsequently granted to them under a League of Nations Mandate. These changes in sovereignty explain the widespread occurrence of both German and English as well as native place names throughout the entire region, a situation not simplified by the penchant of the Japanese for superimposing their own nomenclature on all three when their turn came to take over.⁵

The Germans made some efforts to exploit New Britain commercially, but the Australians, hampered by limited means, did little with their new acquisition, such possibilities as it had seeming overshadowed by the rapid growth of gold mining in the New Guinea territory they had acquired at the same time. As a result, except for Rabaul

⁴*Ibid.*, 251.

⁵See Appendix III.



BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO

BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO



MAP # 2

and the territory immediately adjacent, civilizing development at the outbreak of World War II consisted only of a few scattered missions and plantations, the most notable being in the Talasea and Gasmata regions, nearly opposite each other on the north and south coasts respectively, about two-thirds of the distance from Rabaul to Cape Gloucester, the island's northwestern tip. And Rabaul itself was in a decline. The town had been severely damaged by volcanic eruption in 1939 and again in 1941, and the territorial government was in the process of displacing to Lae, on New Guinea, at the time the Japanese arrived.

The Japanese seized Rabaul by amphibious assault on 23 January 1942. The Australian garrison put up as game a fight as the circumstances permitted, but the Japanese had big plans for the place and came for it in overwhelming strength. The defenders' handful of obsolete fighter planes was quickly destroyed by carrier-based aircraft. On the ground the Japanese soon put to rout an understrength battalion, reinforced by a few local volunteers, driving into the jungle those men not killed or captured.⁶ The women and children, fortunately, had been evacuated beforehand, and those of the men who managed to survive the jungle were subsequently rescued at great hazard by a group of those colorful gentry known as coastwatchers.⁷ Prominent among these was G. H. R. ("Roddy") Marsland, a young plantation operator in the Talasea region, of whom more will be heard in the course of this narrative.

With the thoroughness of which they were capable on occasion, the Japanese converted

Rabaul into their most formidable advance base. During its flourishing phases the place boasted five⁸ airfields, a fine fleet anchorage, and the fanciest brothel⁹ east of the Netherlands Indies. How many troops passed through at one time or another is a matter for speculation, but with Rabaul's surrender at the end of the war nearly 100,000 were found in garrison there.

JAPANESE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

The Japanese staged their invasions of both the Solomons and New Guinea from Rabaul. Because these operations caused that base to become the principal focal point of Allied strategic thinking during the first two years of the war, they will bear a brief review.

In the Solomons, the Japanese moved southward unopposed with the object of cutting the supply route between the United States and Australia, constructing airfields as they went. They announced the occupation of Buka and Bougainville on 10 March 1942, and moved on into the Southern Solomons. On 4 May they seized Tulagi, the British Solomon Islands territorial capital, and shortly thereafter sent men and airfield materials into Guadalcanal. Their destiny caught up with them, however, on that memorable 7 August when U. S. Marines struck back¹⁰ in the first step of the Allied offensive against Rabaul, and thenceforth the tide began slowly to turn.

In New Guinea the picture was somewhat more complicated. The Japanese seized Lae and Salamaua on 8 March, and two days later landed at Finschhafen to gain control of the entire Huon Peninsula. In July they moved east into Papua, setting up a base

⁶ Missionaries and Rabaul's sizable Chinese population were interned in concentration camps, as were many of the less docile natives. (*The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, hereinafter cited as USSBS, 115).

⁷ Eric A. Feldt, *The Coastwatchers* (New York, 1946). Australia is noted as a nation of rugged individualists, but the Coastwatchers stood out on this count even among Australians. They must take rank among the bravest and most devoted men to serve in any war.

⁸ Only four were operational. The fifth, graded but not surfaced, was eventually abandoned owing to drainage difficulties. (USSBS, 12.)

⁹ 500-600 Japanese and Korean inmates provided "entertainment" for both officers and enlisted men. (*Ibid.*, 35.)

¹⁰ Maj. John L. Zimmerman, *The Guadalcanal Campaign*, monograph prepared by Historical Division, USMC.



TARGET: RABAUL. This bastion of the Japanese southeastern defenses was contained at a distance in 1943, but still presented a potent threat to Allied operations. (AF Photo)

in the Buna-Gona area for a drive southward over the Owen Stanley Mountains to Port Moresby,¹¹ the territorial capital of Papua, arriving within 40 miles of that place by mid-September. A secondary offensive with the same objective began on 26 August with a Japanese landing at Milne Bay, indenting the island's southeastern tip.

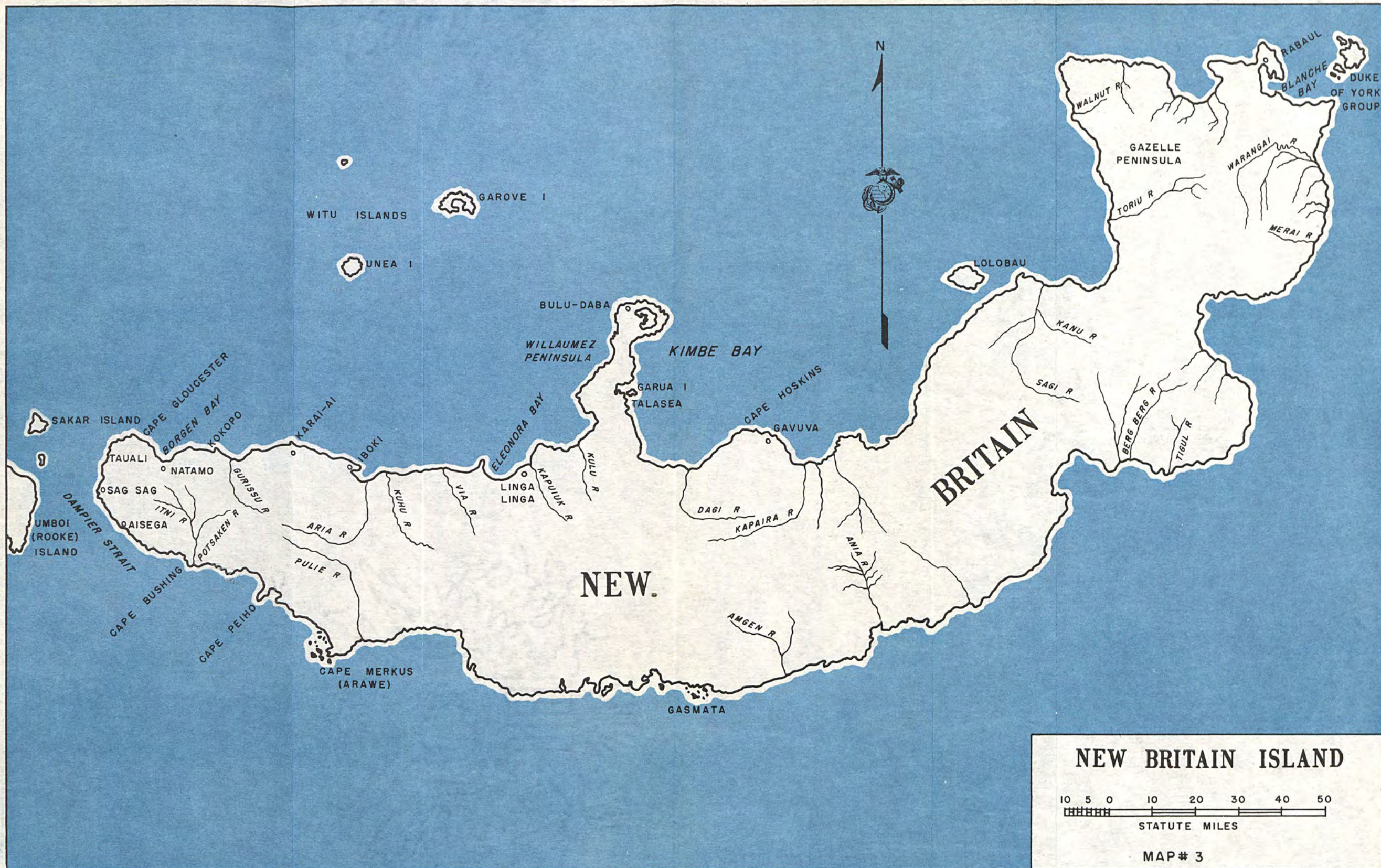
As subsequently disclosed, Japanese plans at this time did not contemplate an immediate invasion of Australia proper.¹² But with enemy air pounding Port Darwin from the conquered Netherlands Indies, enemy submarines shelling Sydney and Newcastle, and

enemy ground troops in New Guinea perched virtually on the Commonwealth's northern doorstep, the Australians had just cause for alarm. The bulk of their small regular Army (the AIF: Australian Imperial Forces) had been committed elsewhere. One division had been lost at Singapore, and frantic efforts were made to obtain the quick return of two others fighting with the British in North Africa.

However, the tide was beginning to turn in New Guinea as well as in the Solomons. Those Japanese who had crossed the Owen Stanleys found their position untenable because of the difficult supply route over the mountains, and were either wiped out or driven back by Australians and hurriedly committed U. S. Army troops. Veterans of

¹¹ This operation followed a previous over-water attempt which was thwarted at Battle of the Coral Sea, 4-8 May 1942.

¹² USSBS, 5.



the AIF, newly returned from Africa, annihilated the Milne Bay force four days after its landing. Australians and Americans labored over the mountains in their turn and, with amphibious and air-borne reinforcements, attacked the enemy north coast bases in one of the most bitter jungle campaigns of the war. Gona fell to the former on 10 December, Buna to the latter on the 14th. Capture of Sanananda on 20 January 1943, completed rectification of the situation in Papua, setting the Japanese back where they had been slightly less than a year earlier.

TARGET, RABAUL

Throughout the operations described, Japanese aircraft, warships and transports had poured from Rabaul, to bring aid and comfort to their own people and misery to their enemies. Whether this sore spot could be captured short of a prohibitive cost was a question which troubled the cogitations of Allied strategists. Whether it could be effectively neutralized under any circumstances was yet another matter. Only one point was wholly clear: to accomplish either, the Allies would have to fight their way within practicable attacking distance of the place, and the year 1943 was devoted primarily to this grueling work.

All through the spring and summer U. S. troops based on captured Guadalcanal slugged their way stubbornly through the Central Solomons, exacting heavy toll of Japanese sea and air strength in the process. The long jump northward to Bougainville on 1 November resulted in seizure of a usable portion of that big island. Airfields constructed there placed Allied planes only 210 miles from the critical target. Now attrition could begin in earnest.

Meanwhile, over on New Guinea, establishment of vast supply bases and airdromes along the northern Papuan coast and adjacent islands forecast the pattern of events to come. Of key importance was the drome at Dobadura, near Buna, from which flew

bombers capable of striking both Rabaul and the newer enemy bases which had sprung up farther west along New Guinea's northern shore: notably Madang, Wewak and Hollandia. Milne Bay, Goodenough Island and Oro Bay became major Allied staging areas. Farther offshore U. S. troops seized Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands to intercept Japanese flights coming down from Rabaul.¹³

Australian and U. S. ground troops resumed the westward movement early in July, recapturing Salamaua on 10 September and Lae six days later. On 3 October they took Finschhafen and set about consolidating their hold on the Huon Peninsula. But here, of necessity, forward movement paused until something could be done about the western end of New Britain, now squarely on the flank of the advance, across 50-mile Vitiaz Strait.

Thus, the last month of 1943 found Rabaul surrounded at a distance on the east, south and southwest, coming under increasingly heavy air attack; in a situation approaching a state of siege, but neither knocked out nor cut off from support, and still presenting a very potent threat to further Allied operations.

THE JAPANESE ON NEW BRITAIN

So long as everything continued to go their way, the interest of the Japanese in western New Britain was mainly negative in character: to deny its use to those enemies attempting to close in on Rabaul, a matter of no great concern while the New Guinea fighting remained as far away as the Buna-Gona area. However, early in March, an event occurred which necessitated some rapid reevaluation on their part: the plane versus

¹³ Also as a coordinated step in the over-all plan for closing in on Rabaul (Operation CARTWHEEL). These islands were seized simultaneously with U. S. offensive landings in the Central Solomons. (Maj. John N. Rentz, *Marines in the Central Solomons*, monograph in course of preparation by Historical Branch, USMC.)



THIS SMOKING JAPANESE SHIP was one of the casualties in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, March 1943. (AF Photo)

ship action known to history as the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

Following heavy naval losses in the Solomons and construction of strong Allied air bases in northern Papua, Japan's control over adjacent waters began to slip. Early in 1943 the commanders at Rabaul were faced with a momentous problem. They had gathered at that place a mobile force of about 50,000 fully equipped troops in hopes of retrieving their sagging fortunes. Only by that time their fortunes were sagging in two separate places, both of which could not be supported effectively even if means could be found for conveying the troops there. With great reluctance the decision was made to withdraw from Guadalcanal in favor of reinforcing the effort in New Guinea.

At the end of February the high command at Rabaul embarked approximately

6,900 of these personnel¹¹ in a convoy of eight transports escorted by eight destroyers, and started them for Lae via the northern coast of New Britain. From that point onward, so far as the Japanese were concerned, the operation was characterized by bad judgment, bad management and bad luck: a combination hard to beat as a formula for disaster.

The concentration of shipping in Simpson Harbor had not failed to attract the interest of Allied aircraft, but the Japanese relied on a heavy weather front to provide concealment and 200 fighter planes to furnish such air cover as might prove necessary. Unfortunately for them, a U. S. B-24 chanced to break through the overcast on the afternoon of 1 March: spotted the convoy and tailed it until darkness, long enough to estimate its strength, course and speed. Then during the night the weather front perversely drifted off to eastward, with the result that a reconnaissance plane of the U. S. Fifth Air Force found the convoy in the clear next morning, about 30 miles north of Cape Gloucester.

At once all Allied aircraft based in northern Papua and even far away Port Moresby converged on the target. The promised Japanese air cover of 200 fighters turned up in the form of 40 ZEROES, low on gas and wholly inadequate to cope with the attackers' strength, which the Japanese had grossly underestimated from the start. This attack sank one large transport and seriously damaged two others. Two destroyers picked up about 950 survivors from the sunken vessel, sped them to Lae and returned next morning in time to be in on the receiving end of the kill.

That day (3 March) finished it. By the time PT boats arrived to mop up floating survivors under cover of darkness, all eight transports and four of the destroyers had

¹¹ Components of Japanese Eighteenth Army, commanded by LtGen Hatazo Adachi. The latter survived the ensuing massacre, to give U. S. ground troops their largest battle during the entire Western New Guinea campaign: at Aitape in July 1944.



THE BISMARCK SEA BATTLE was disastrous for the Japanese in the New Guinea - New Britain area. Here Fifth Air Force bombs bracket a transport. (AF Photo)

been sunk, and the remaining destroyers were in full flight northward.¹⁵

This disaster brought home dramatically to the Japanese the futility of risking large vessels within effective range of Allied air power, and never again did they do so. Yet Rabaul remained no less responsible for support of the forces operating in New Guinea east of Madang, so clearly some other means

must be devised for carrying out this vital function. The one that came readiest to mind, already practiced with considerable success in the Solomons, was employment in quantity of craft capable of hiding out during the day, evading hostile planes by traveling only under cover of darkness: military landing barges, fishing boats and a type of small transport which the Japanese liked to call a "sea truck," roughly comparable in size to the U. S. LCI.

Making this method feasible entailed development of a series of small staging and hide-out points along the full length of New Britain's shores, and this the Japanese promptly set about doing. On the north coast from Cape Hoskins westward (see Map 4) the principal ones became Gavuvu, Talasea, Bulu-Daba, Garove Island (off-lying spatulate Willaumez Peninsula), Iboki, Karai-ai, Kokopo, Natamo and Cape Gloucester; then around the western tip of the island

¹⁵ This account derives from Samuel E. Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier* (Boston, 1950), 54-65, supported by Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol. IV (Chicago, 1950; hereinafter cited as *AAF in WWII*), 146-150, both of which draw on Japanese as well as U. S. sources. AAF reports at the time listed 22 vessels destroyed, or six more than composed the entire convoy. These figures were made "official" in Gen MacArthur's communique, and the fiction was perpetuated by Gen George C. Kenney in his book *General Kenney Reports* (New York, 1949). Conflicting estimates of air and personnel losses are omitted here as not pertinent to the aspects of the action affecting this narrative.

WESTERN NEW BRITAIN JAPANESE BOAT STAGING BASES AND AIRFIELDS

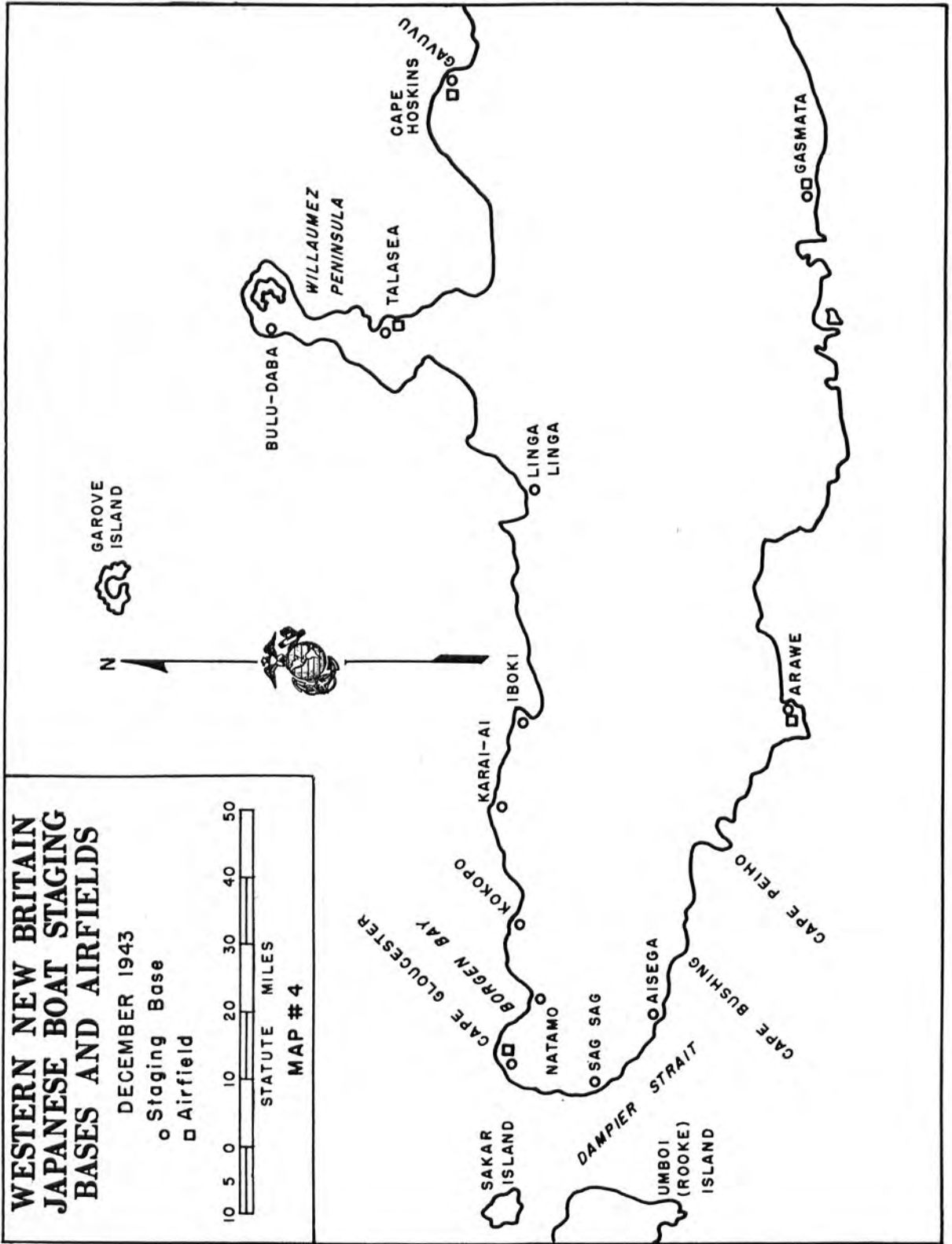
DECEMBER 1943

○ Staging Base

□ Airfield



MAP # 4



to Sag Sag and Aisega, and thence across Dampier Strait to the southern tip of Rooke (Umboi) Island. Main stop-overs on the longer, more vulnerable south coast route were Gasmata, Arawe and Cape Bushing. The importance and volume achieved by this traffic are indicated by tonnage tables subsequently captured and by the commanding general's order, dated 6 May 1943, directing that the "Tsurubu"¹⁶ [Japanese name for Cape Gloucester region] Sea Transport Base" be strengthened to serve as supply base for "all Area Army forces in the Lae Area."¹⁷

To facilitate communications and mutual support, existing trails connecting these various staging points were reconnoitered, both along the shores and inland through mountains and jungle from coast to coast.¹⁸ Engineers and labor details improved them as practicable and in a few instances built new ones. Auxiliary airfields were either constructed or improved at Cape Hoskins, Tala-sea, and Gasmata, and a bomber strip was completed at Cape Gloucester to supplement the commercial landing strip already in existence there.¹⁹

These activities brought the Japanese increasingly into contact with the New Britain natives, with results unfortunate to both parties.

These more or less typical Melanesians were an easy-going people who preferred to lead their own lives unless guided into some-

thing demonstrably better. The Australians had proved tolerant overlords on the whole, furnishing agreeable employment for a few on plantations and in the native constabulary, and leaving the others pretty much alone. Such treatment failed to imbue them with any very passionate craving for "liberation" by people whose skin was as alien to their own in color as that of white men, and from the outset their enthusiasm for the sublime ideals of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was something less than fervid. Perforce, they accepted occupation as a *fait accompli* and waited watchfully to see what might be in it for them.

By the middle of 1943 defeats elsewhere had tempered somewhat that arrogance which had made the conduct of Japanese conquerors so reprehensible during the days when they still cherished the superman complex. Foresighted officers made earnest efforts to win the Melanesians' friendship. They set up conciliation groups to arbitrate differences and enforce disciplinary measures applying to violations of the natives' rights, especially the plundering of their gardens where, characteristically, they cultivated only enough for their own immediate needs and any serious loss meant destitution.

This policy worked out to the extent that many natives supplied the invaders with more or less willing labor, and several instances were recorded of village chiefs freely presenting gifts of delicacies (pigs, chickens, fruit) to individual Japanese friends. But it could not stand the strain imposed by deterioration of the supply system in western New Britain under the mounting fury of Allied air attack along the barge route. Hungry fighting men, Japanese or other, do not tend to be overzealous of the rights of weaker civilians, and as the food shortage developed forcible seizure became the rule, highlighted by occasional murders and rapes. Terrified Melanesians fled to the hills en masse where, as Japanese disintegration set in, their fear and hatred grew into overt hostility.

Japanese garrisons at the barge staging points were small to begin with, mainly

¹⁶ Evidently Japanese pronunciation of "Taluvu," the Australian administrative district.

¹⁷ Allied Translator and Interpreter Section. Southwest Pacific Area. *Preliminary Examination of Documents*, Bulletin No. 757, Item 1. This source hereinafter cited ATIS, followed by bulletin no. and item no.

¹⁸ Interior New Britain had been sketchily explored, to put it mildly. Except for near its extremities, the island had been crossed by only one organized expedition during all the Australian occupation: at a point about midway of its length. *The Pacific Islands Handbook*, 1944, 238.

¹⁹ Another prewar emergency landing strip existed at Arawe, but it was in such bad condition that the Japanese did not attempt making it serviceable. Nevertheless, it was destined to play an odd part during operations in that region. (See Ch. IX.)

shipping engineers to service the transport craft and handle supplies as necessary, plus a few medical personnel to care for troops en route. Later, as the situation in New Guinea became more threatening with the Allies' westward push, key points were greatly strengthened. Thus, by the beginning of December, 1943, as the stage was being set

for the forthcoming drama, the Japanese had upward of 10,000 troops in the vulnerable area bounded on the east by a line drawn from Iboki on the north to Arawe on the south.

Who these were and how disposed will be treated in detail in Chapter IV.



CHAPTER II

Concept and High Level Planning

THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA

As defined during the closing months of 1943, General MacArthur's command, designated Southwest Pacific Area, embraced everything south of the Equator from the 159th Parallel East Longitude to the 133d Parallel East Longitude. From this point the line of demarcation jumped north to 20 degrees Latitude, west to the China coast, down the coast of Indo-China and Malaya, around the east coast of Sumatra, then east to the 110th Parallel East Longitude and south to an indefinite point. This included most of the Solomons, all of Australia, New Guinea, the Bismarcks, the Philippines, and a major part of the Netherlands East Indies. Originally the boundary had been set at 160 degrees East Longitude, but it had been moved westward to bring all of Guadalcanal within control of the South Pacific Area, commanded by Admiral William F. Halsey.¹

For operations in this vast area, General MacArthur commanded Allied as well as

American troops, ships and aircraft: notably Australian, a few Dutch and occasional British elements. Major organizational echelons were Allied Land Forces (Australian General Sir Thomas Blamey), Allied Air Forces (Lieutenant General George C. Kenney, USA) and Allied Naval Forces (Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid).² For operational purposes in 1943, two major forces were established: New Guinea Force commanded by Blamey, and New Britain Force³ under Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, Commanding General, U. S. Sixth Army. The latter force was created in June 1943 to provide a command operating directly under GHQ, SWPA, inasmuch as Sixth Army was under Allied Land Forces. But Krueger, the force commander, was unable to obtain elements from Krueger, the Army commander, without approval of GHQ, SWPA.⁴

However, in early 1943 MacArthur had far too little of practically everything, and his

² Kenney also commanded Fifth Air Force and Kinkaid the Seventh Fleet, relieving VAdm Arthur S. Carpender at this post 26Nov43.

³ Code name for New Guinea Force was PHOSPHOROUS. New Britain Force had two code names, ALAMO and ESCALATOR, the latter being its secret designation.

⁴ Ltr Col D. W. Fuller to Maj J. A. Crown, 28Jan 52, hereinafter cited as *Fuller*. New Britain Force was deactivated 16Sep44.

¹ A JCS directive issued 29Mar43 gave Halsey tactical command of the Solomons west of the 159th parallel, while retaining MacArthur's strategic authority. For operational purposes the two men moved the boundary between SoPac and SoWesPac westward several times, but the official line remained 159 degrees.

position might be described justly as precarious.⁵ Thus, when the badly battered 1st Marine Division was relieved at Guadalcanal, it was removed from SoPac Area to SWPA⁶ to provide him with a trained amphibious division as well as to provide the Marines with rest and rehabilitation. The division was not carried under Allied Land Forces in Australia, however, but was held in GHQ reserve directly under General MacArthur until its assignment to the New Britain Force.⁷

So much had been related concerning the 1st Division's fabulous sojourn in and around Melbourne as to render that interlude close to legendary in Marine Corps annals. Important to this narrative is merely the fact that the unit was there, recovering its collective fitness and efficiency during a nine-months period that saw sweeping changes take place in the Southwest Pacific Area. As inpouring fresh troops increased General MacArthur's strength, and the tide of battle set in against the Japanese in New Guinea, all hands knew without being told that they were destined to be committed on the offensive under Army command.

The realization made no one especially happy when formulation of definite plans for the forthcoming operation disclosed some rather marked variations in Army and Marine Corps tactical thinking.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout most of 1943 reduction, and later isolation, of Rabaul continued to preoccupy the thinking of the Joint Chiefs of

⁵In January 1943 the bulk of MacArthur's Australian elements were committed to the defense of that continent leaving only four divisions—two Australian and two U. S.—for offensive operations. Seventh Fleet was created 15Mar43 and Sixth Army came under SWPA control 17Apr43. In May 1943 it required much diplomatic maneuvering to keep Sixth Army free from Australian defense plans and available for offensive campaigns.

⁶In Dec 1942 three 1st MarDiv majors were sent as liaison officers to GHQ, SWPA. They were Robert O. Bowen, G-2 section, Donald W. Fuller, G-3 section, Frederick L. Wieseman, G-4 section.

⁷Fuller.

Staff, and their concept of the western New Britain operation fitted this into the over-all strategy of extending and tightening the net around the enemy stronghold.

This concept was contained in a directive issued 29 March 1943 which visualized it as a part of a three-pronged offensive carrying the code name CARTWHEEL. To implement CARTWHEEL, the ELKTON Plan⁸ was devised for the joint employment of SWPA and SoPac forces. Its goal was seizure of bases in the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea-Solomons areas and it listed New Guinea and the Solomons as primary objectives.⁹ The final objective was New Britain and Rabaul.

Within CARTWHEEL, Operation One (CHRONICLE) was the occupation of Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands; Operation Two (POSTERN) was the capture of Lae, Salamaua, Finschhafen, Madang area and Buin-Faisi area; Operation Three (DEXTERITY) was the occupation of western New Britain and Kieta and the neutralization of Buka.¹⁰

The New Britain operation entailed certain secondary values as well. Seizure of a foothold at the western end of the island meant control of Vitiaz Strait and constituted a desirable, possibly essential preliminary to attacking the Admiralties to clear the way, in turn, for further westward advance along northern New Guinea, a required project if the SWPA was to remain in operation. Possession of the Cape Gloucester airdrome by U. S. forces would effectively sever the Japanese supply route be-

⁸The ELKTON Plan was later modified, becoming successively ELKTON II and III. "We named the campaign after that rapid marriage mart, Elkton, Md., because the plan was a get-together of Admiral Halsey and General MacArthur." Fuller.

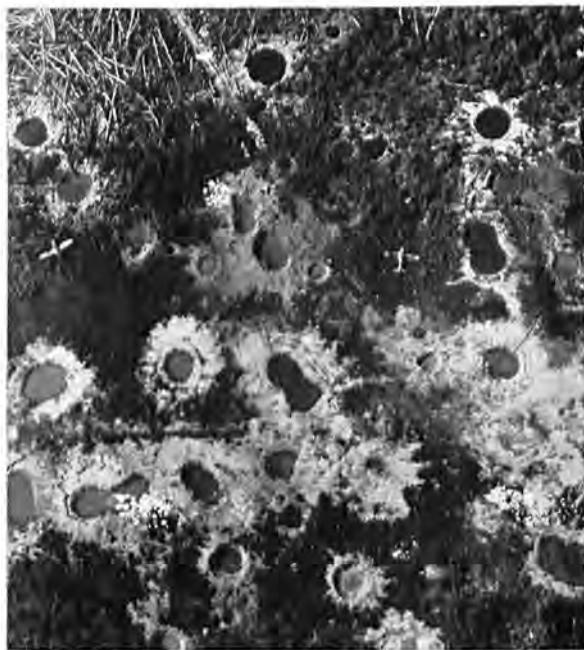
⁹The Bougainville invasion took place before New Britain plans reached full fruition. The operation against Kavieng, main enemy base on New Ireland, was subsequently cancelled as potentially too costly, the desired result achieved by seizure of undefended Emirau, to the northwest, on 20Mar44. Initial Admiralties landing took place on 29Feb44.

¹⁰GHQ, SWPA, G-3, 6May43.

tween Rabaul and New Guinea,¹¹ and conceivably provide the base necessary to a ground assault on Rabaul.¹²

General MacArthur maintained his General Headquarters as CinCSWPA¹³ at Brisbane, with a forward command post at Port Moresby, in southeastern New Guinea. General Krueger had his Sixth Army headquarters on Goodenough Island, one of the D'Entrecasteaux Group, some 20 miles north of New Guinea's eastern tip. These were the echelons under which the 1st Marine Division was destined to operate in the forthcoming campaign, and as early as June 1943, ". . . certain Division Staff Officers were ordered to GHQ at Brisbane to collaborate in the formation of the initial plans."¹⁴

On 15 July General MacArthur's headquarters circulated the MARFA plan for the occupation of western New Britain to include the general line Gasmata-Talasea.¹⁵ No units were mentioned, but the plan noted, "This operation must be economically conducted in order to conserve forces for the assault on Rabaul . . ." It called for one regimental combat team to "neutralize" Gasmata, followed by an attack in force on Cape



THE MARFA PLAN scheduled Combat Team A to land at Gasmata, and the airstrip there was pounded by Beauforts, Bostons and Beaufighters of the Allied Air Forces. (AF Photo)

Gloucester and then moving eastward to Talasea in a series of shore-to-shore operations. The scheme of maneuver for Cape Gloucester provided that one regiment would land east and west of the airstrip, while artillery landed further westward to establish fire support and a parachute regiment "will be launched onto the airdrome." Target date for D-Day was 15 November, the Gasmata landing preceding that by seven days.

This was followed by MARFA Plan II, dated 26 August, which directed the ALAMO Force to "seize the Cape Gloucester area and neutralize Gasmata . . . and establish control over Western New Britain to include the general line Talasea-Gasmata, the Vitu Islands and Long Island." It also ordered ALAMO Force to prepare to participate "in over-seas landing operations to capture Rabaul."¹⁶

By 31 August, this planning had progressed to the point where the 1st Marine Division was alerted for movement north-

¹¹ Japanese forces in western New Guinea were supplied more directly from the homeland via the Philippines and Palaus, but the Japanese Eighteenth Army, operating east of Wewak, remained under command of, and drew the bulk of its supplies from Eighth Area Army headquarters at Rabaul. See Chap IV.

¹² Indicative of the strategic thinking then prevailing, the operational plan issued by ALAMO Force G-3 stipulated the early relief of 1stMarDiv at Cape Gloucester in order to make it available for "the final assault on Rabaul." (ALAMO Force G-3 Plan, 2.)

¹³ CinCSWesPac was the abbreviation used mostly by Navy documents. SWPA documents and, after a time, the JCS documents, use the abbreviation CinCSWPA. Moreover, MacArthur's official title (per the JCS but never used in the SWPA) was "Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area."

¹⁴ 1st MarDiv Special Action Report, Phase I, Part II, 1. Source hereinafter cited as 1st MarDiv SAR, followed by numerals indicating phase, part and page. Officers referred to were LtCols E. A. Pollock and H. W. Buse of D-3 Section, and Maj G. F. Gober of D-4.

¹⁵ ALAMO Force G-3 Journal, Operation DEXTERITY, hereinafter cited as ALAMO G-3, 15Jul43.

¹⁶ ALAMO G-3, 26Aug43.



IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE COLLINS STREET! These Marines of the 1st Division have just landed at their Milne Bay staging base after the sojourn in Melbourne.

ward to advance staging areas, in accordance with which three operational orders were issued on the above date. The division Special Action Report summarizes this complicated business succinctly as follows:

Division Operations Orders were issued forming the Amoeba Force . . . , the Lazaretto Force . . . and the Backhander Force These forces were all a part of the Alamo Force under command of Lieutenant General Krueger, U. S. Army, Commanding General, Sixth U. S. Army. The mission of the Alamo Force was to occupy western New Britain to include the general line Gasmata-Talasea and by combined airborne and overwater operations to establish airdromes therein for subsequent operations against Rabaul.¹⁷

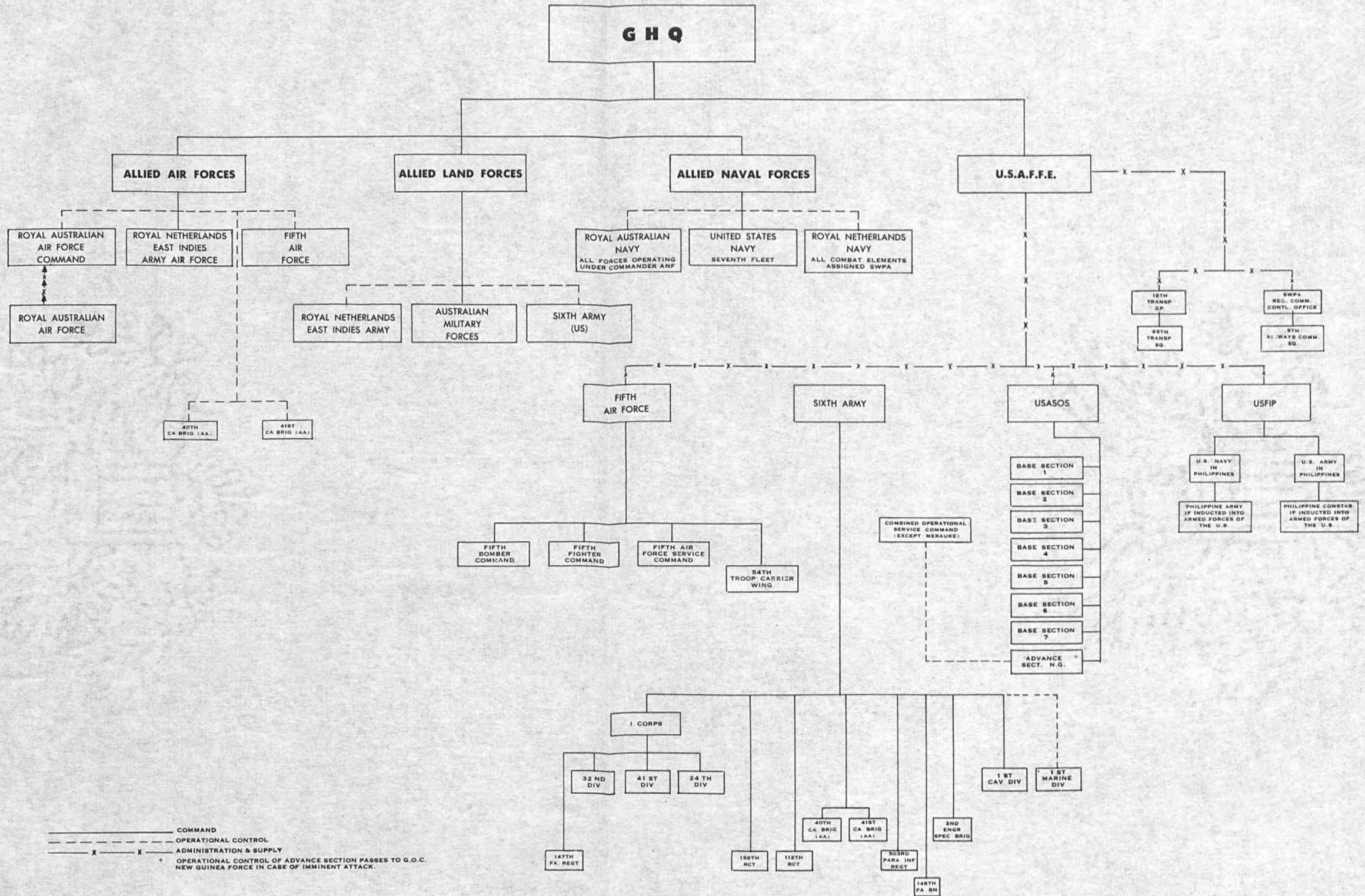
Essentially, MARFA Plan II provided that the LAZARETTO Force, composed principally of Combat Team A (5th Marines)

¹⁷ 1st MarDiv SAR, I, II, 1.

less the 3d Battalion, would land at Gasmata on D-minus 7; the BACKHANDER Force, Combat Team C (7th Marines) plus a detachment of Division Headquarters and reinforcing elements would land on Cape Gloucester on D-Day, to be followed on D-plus 7 by the 503d Parachute Regiment; the AMOEBA Force, Combat Team B (1st Marines), 3/5 and all other uncommitted elements of the division, would be in reserve, the battalion for Gasmata and the combat team for Cape Gloucester. Also included in the reserve forces was the 32d Infantry Division. Target date for D-Day remained 15 November, but was changed two weeks later to 1 December.

The plan as set forth met with objections from division officers. Primarily they felt that the BACKHANDER Force was not large enough nor well enough coordinated to

COMMAND CHANNELS SWPA



_____ COMMAND
 - - - - - OPERATIONAL CONTROL
 - - - - - ADMINISTRATION & SUPPLY
 X X X X X * OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF ADVANCE SECTION PASSES TO G.O.C. NEW GUINEA FORCE IN CASE OF IMMINENT ATTACK.

cope with the enemy they expected to meet on Cape Gloucester. In addition to a natural desire to keep the division intact, the planners argued against a three-way split on the grounds that it would not permit the landing of a sizable force against an enemy believed to be numerically equal or superior, well established and determined. These arguments having no effect, however, the division began its movement to three different staging areas.

On 4 September 1943 division issued Warning Order 2-43 relating to the movement of the combat teams. This was followed two days later by Operation Order 17-43 directing that such movement be carried out.¹⁸

As early as 19 August, however, advance echelons had started toward the staging area. On that date a detachment from H&S, 17th Marines, had departed Melbourne to be followed a few days later by the 1st and 2d Battalions. The 1st Battalion landed at Goodenough Island 1 September and began work on the advance staging camp there. The 2d Battalion proceeded by rail to Brisbane to pick up the regiment's engineer equipment and rejoined its parent organization later in the month.¹⁹

Transportation from Melbourne to New Guinea was something less than satisfactory as far as the comfort of the division was concerned. It consisted of an assortment of Army transports which were Liberty ships hastily converted from cargo to troop carriers. As the 1st Marines War Diary aptly put it, "Construction of galleys and heads on deck marked the conversion."²⁰

The first major unit to embark was Combat Team C. With the 1st and 4th Battalions, 11th Marines, and other reinforcing elements, the 7th Marines began moving to Melbourne's docks on 7 September and embarked 19 September. The convoy of

three ships arrived at Cape Sudest, New Guinea, on 2 October, to be followed a week later by a second echelon.

On 8 October Combat Team A and reinforcing units headed by Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Assistant Division Commander, reached its Milne Bay base at New Guinea's eastern extremity. Combat Team B (1st Marines, Reinforced), designated division reserve at this period, based at Goodenough Island (together with 1st Division, 11th Marines and 17th Marines command posts and miscellaneous elements), and completed the division forward movement on 24 October.

TACTICAL PLANNING

The advance echelon of division headquarters set up on Goodenough Island on 9 October. There the commanding general received ALAMO Force Field Order No. 4, dated 18 October 1943.

Although attaching Combat Team A to the Cape Gloucester Task Force, this order left much to be desired from the Marine point of view. It retained the essentials of the initial concept:²¹ the operation against Gasmata and the employment of a single RCT at Cape Gloucester, supported by one parachute regiment. The mission of neutralizing Gasmata was turned over to the 126th Regimental Combat Team, 32d Infantry Division,²² but instead of placing Combat Team A under direct division control, this fine assault unit was lumped in with the supporting garrison elements for Cape Gloucester, most of them specialist groups with the mission of exploiting the ground gained. Worst of all, from division's viewpoint, Combat Team C was split into two separate assault forces.

²¹ Conspicuous by its absence was any reference in the order to a future assault on Rabaul. All previous orders, directives and plans had referred to such a possibility.

²² 5th Marines War Diary, Oct43, notes that the LAZARETTO Force was dissolved 20Oct43 in accordance with oral orders of the Commanding General, 1st MarDiv. The designation, "LAZARETTO Force," actually was transferred to the 126th RCT until the Gasmata project was cancelled.

¹⁸ 1st MarDiv War Diary, Oct43, Annexes C and D. Hereinafter cited as 1st MarDiv WD.

¹⁹ Col R. G. Ballance, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Ballance*.

²⁰ 1st Marines War Diary, Oct43, 3.



OFFICES OF 1st MARINE DIVISION HEADQUARTERS on Goodenough Island looked like this during the planning and preparation stage.

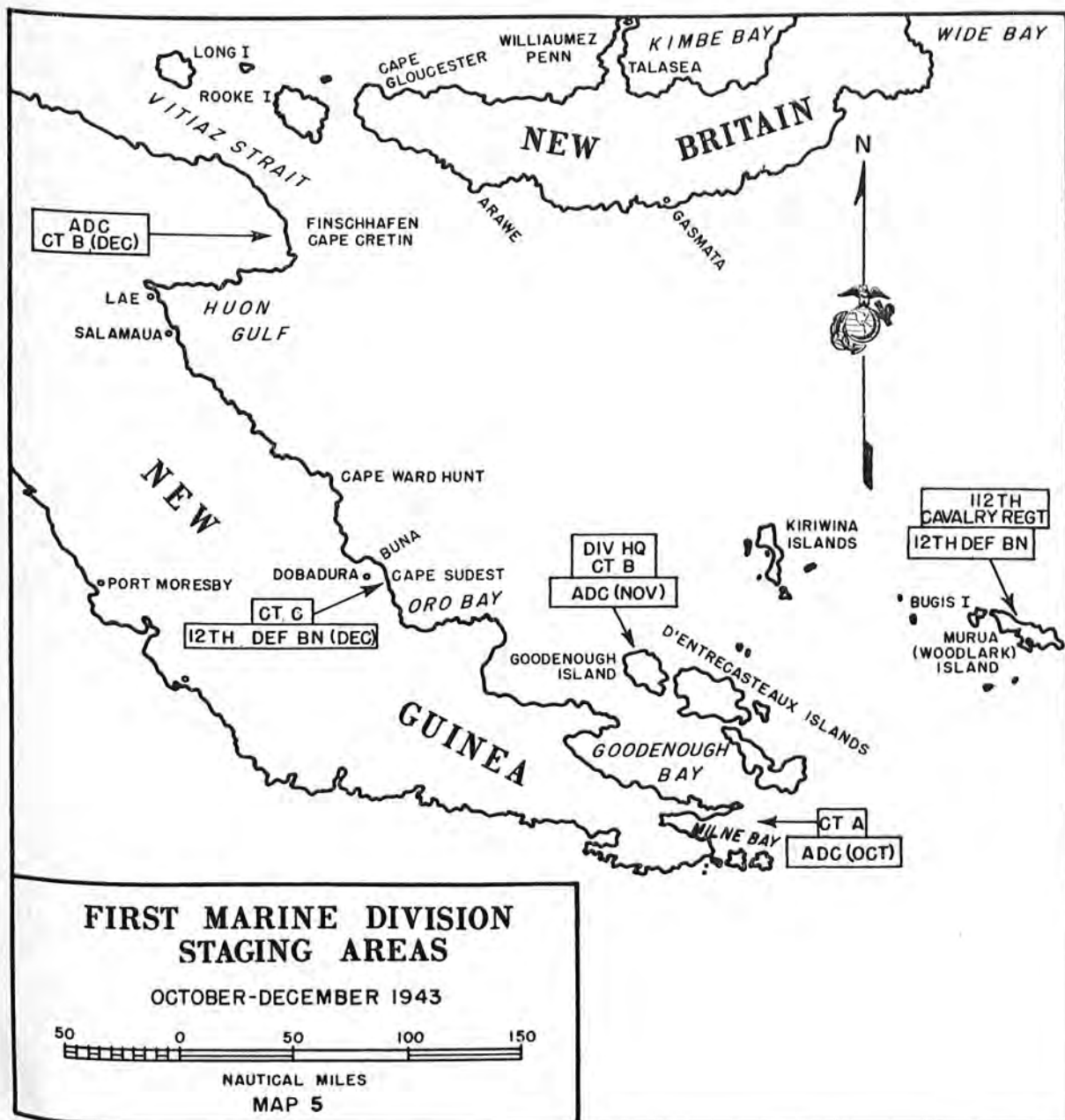
The scheme of maneuver²³ directed that Combat Team C, less one battalion landing team, land at Cape Gloucester on D-Day (tentatively set for 20 November 1943), to be followed by the 503d Parachute Regiment on call of Commander, BACKHANDER Task Force. The lone battalion landing team remaining would land at Tauali and march rapidly north to the airdrome, sending a reconnaissance group via Aipati-Agulupella-Natamo. Combat Team B would move to Finschhafen on D-minus 6 prepared to land

²³ "Sixth Army Headquarters had a tendency to specify schemes of maneuver for its subordinate units, a departure from established Army practice." Ltr Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept of the Army, to CMC 28Apr52, hereinafter cited as *CHIS*.

(less one BLT) in support of Combat Team C. That other battalion landing team would be ready to seize Rooke and Long Islands or to reinforce the Gloucester units on order of CG, Alamo Force. Combat Team A would remain at Milne Bay until ordered to move by the ALAMO Force commander.²⁴

From the outset, 1st Division planners had visualized Cape Gloucester as the key to the entire situation, because of its large airdrome, suitable to further enlarging, and its strategic location at the northwestern tip of the island. Their concern increased as new intelligence indicated that the Japanese held the same view and were building up their

²⁴ *ALAMO G-3*, 180ct43.



forces in that area to what might prove several times the maximum figure of 1,500 previously estimated;²⁵ enough to jeopardize success of the whole expedition as currently conceived. This concern was conveyed to General Krueger on 3 November when Gen-

²⁵ For Development of intelligence, see Chap III of this monograph; for what the Japanese were actually doing, see Chap IV.

eral Rupertus wrote his superior, urging that Combat Team C not be split. As alternatives, he suggested using elements from either the parachute regiment or Combat Team B for the Tauali landing while permitting Combat Team C to land as an entity in the eastern sector of Cape Gloucester.²⁶

The Gasmata project had been instigated

²⁶ ALAMO G-3, 3Nov43.



GENERALS KRUEGER, RUPERTUS AND MACARTHUR discuss the proposed scheme of maneuver for Cape Gloucester at the 1st Marine Division CP, 14 December 1943.

by General Kenney in order to establish an air base on New Britain's south coast.²⁷ The Navy also wanted it for a PT boat base in order to intercept barge traffic passing that way. But Gasmata was closer to Rabaul than to Dobadura and there was increasing evidence that it was a poor place for an airdrome. By early November, therefore, General Kenney and his deputy, Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, cooled on the idea,²⁸ and on 21 November a conference between Generals Krueger and Kenney, Admiral Barbey and Major General S. J. Chamberlin, MacArthur's G-3, recommended that Arawe be substituted as equally suitable for a PT base.

On 22 November GHQ Annex 15 to Operation Instructions 38 made the substitution and eight days later CG ESCALATOR issued

²⁷ Ltr MajGen C. D. Eddleman to Maj J. A. Crown, 28Apr52, hereinafter cited as *Eddleman*.

²⁸ Kenney, *op. cit.*, 326, 327.

Field Order No. 5 (superceding FO No. 4), cancelling the Gasmata plan²⁹ at long last and activating a new task force (coded DIRECTOR), built around the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team, to undertake the attack on Arawe in order to "seize and defend a suitable location for the establishment of light naval facilities." Tentative landing dates were set as 15 December (Z-Day) for Arawe and 26 December (D-Day) for Cape Gloucester.

While this order conceded the main objections of the Marines, i. e., splitting Combat Team C, the division staff remained less than happy and continued to look with jaundiced eye on the proposed scheme of maneuver. This called for landing one regimental combat team (7th Marines) east of the airdrome, one battalion landing team (2d Battalion, 1st Marines)³⁰ west of it, and dropping the 503d Parachute Infantry in a large kunai grass patch some thousands of yards to the southeast, the three elements to converge on the target.³¹ Drawn on an operations map with neat blue arrows, this maneuver might look most impressive to students of tactics who had never seen the mountains, swamps and rain forest jungle of the Southwest Pacific. But it did not impress jungle-conscious 1st Division officers, only too aware of the difficulties of coordinating the movements of three widely dispersed forces in such terrain against an enemy probably outnumbering any one of them; and the danger inherent in such forces converging on each other under circumstances which made quick recognition of friendly troops virtually impossible.

And in early December the division re-

²⁹ "Actually, the plans for all of the western New Britain operations were prepared in quite a bit of detail by the GHQ (SWPA) staff . . . the Alamo Force was merely an agency of GHQ and did not schedule or cancel any of these operations." *Eddleman*.

³⁰ 1st Mar (less 2/1) was designated task force reserve at this stage of planning.

³¹ Three alternative variations of the scheme were offered, but all boiled down to the same thing: initial dispersion, followed by conversion by forces out of physical contact through strange, heavily jungled country.

ceived unexpected support, if for not quite identical reasons, from an influential quarter. In a memorandum³² to General Chamberlin, General Kenney voiced his opposition to the use of paratroops in the operation. He argued that it was intended to use piecemeal paratroop drops instead of a mass drop; that piecemeal drops would require innumerable flights of troop carriers; that these flights would be required at a time dangerously approaching enemy air reaction, and he questioned whether alternate drop sites had been selected. In conclusion he declared, "Commander, Allied Air Forces, does not desire to participate in the planned employment of paratroops for Dexterity."

Thus matters stood on 14 December when General MacArthur paid a ceremonial (more or less) visit to the 1st Marine Division command post. Accompanied by General Krueger and members of both their staffs, he stood by a large table on which the operational maps were displayed while Colonel E. A. Pollock, Marine D-3, described the scheme of maneuver. The general watched with close attention, and when the demonstration was over inquired conversationally how the division liked the plan.

There was an instant of silence. Then Colonel Pollock took the bit in his teeth and, ignoring both of his immediate superiors, told the area commander bluntly that the Marines did not like any part of it.

This seeming violation of protocol apparently took General MacArthur somewhat aback, for after another perfunctory remark or two he strode from the meeting. That the incident made an impression on him soon became evident, however. General Chamberlain noted on the bottom of General Kenney's objections: "As a result of conference held by CINC at Goodenough on 14 December, decision was made to eliminate paratroops from Backhander operation." More material was the issuance of Amendment 1 to ESCALATOR Field Order No. 5, dated 15 December 1943, conceding at last all, or nearly all,

³² GHQ, SWPA, G-3 *Journal*, 8Dec43.



COLONEL POLLOCK, D-3, VOICED HIS OPPOSITION to the original Gloucester attack plan.

of the points for which the Marines had contended.³³

The scheme of maneuver stemming from these amendments had as its core the concentration of strength for a potentially decisive stroke, rather than dispersal of forces as converging blue arrows drawn on a map. In place of the cancelled paratroop operation, Combat Team B (less BLT 21), removed from task reserve, would land immediately behind the assault force (Combat Team C) on the eastern beaches, pass through the

³³ "General Douglas MacArthur, USA, ComSoWes Pac, made an inspection of the Division C.P. Proposed changes in operation plan for Backhander force, necessitating re-writing of certain portions of the Operation Order." (1st MarDiv D-2 Record of Events, entry of 14Dec43. Source cited hereinafter as D-2 *RofE*.)

newly established beachhead line, and attack westward toward the airdrome. The new scheme retained the secondary landing on the western shore of New Britain by BLT 21, but the mission of this unit became strictly defensive: to block reinforcement of the airdrome area from the south and cut off retreat of the garrison in that direction, rather than participating in any converging movement on the target.

Perhaps equally important from the division's point of view, Combat Team A was designated task force reserve, to be brought forward from Milne Bay to Cape Sudest where two battalions would be transshipped preparatory to quick reinforcement of opera-

tions on Cape Gloucester upon request of the division commander.³¹

Thus, what proved to be the final plan became effective only 11 days prior to the scheduled landing date, and on the very day that the newly conceived Arawe operation began.³² Details will be discussed in Chapter III.

³¹ At this stage one BLT (3/5) of CT-A was designated for a special mission: seizure of Long Island and Rooke (Umboi) Island in Vitiav Strait, still thought to constitute a threat to the main operation.

³² In order to maintain continuity of the Cape Gloucester action, treatment of the Arawe operation is deferred to Chap IX.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER III

Final Preparations

TRAINING AND REEQUIPMENT

While in Australia, the 1st Marine Division had undergone a systematic and comprehensive training program concurrently with its necessary rehabilitation program.¹ This began simply with disciplinary drills and small unit exercises, intensifying and expanding as the physical condition of the troops improved. During the third period (April-June), tactical training was progressive and culminated in large scale landing team and combat team exercises, using live ammunition for all weapons.² A period of review followed, building up to a series of field problems of as much as ten days duration, with supporting overhead fires augmenting the rifles, machine guns and mortars of the infantry.

Thus when the time came, the division returned to the tropics refreshed physically, mentally and militarily: possessing all the jungle know-how so painfully acquired at Guadalcanal, plus the good health, energy and high morale which had been so depleted on that long-contested island.

¹ So poor was the physical condition of the troops following Guadalcanal that at one time shortly after its arrival at Melbourne the division had about 7,500 hospital and rest camp cases caused by recurrent malaria. (Col J. E. Linch, comments on preliminary script, hereinafter cited as *Linch*.)

² 1st MarDiv SAR, I, 2.

Training continued in the advance areas, becoming increasingly realistic with the use of terrain closely resembling the target, something impossible to simulate convincingly in the temperate climate around Melbourne. Emphasis was laid on shore-to-shore operations, employing the new or improved equipment now beginning to reach the Pacific in quantity. Few 1st Division Marines until then had so much as seen an LST, LCI or DUKW, and even the smaller landing craft now in use made their predecessors of the early days appear somewhat primitive by comparison.

Wide dispersion of the major elements limited these exercises to battalion or regimental scale, and the enemy attempted, rather futilely, to hamper them further. Attrition steadily reduced Japanese air power in the New Guinea-Bismarcks region, but planes displaying the Rising Sun, less politely known as the "meatball," continued in evidence. Places as far removed from enemy bases as Milne Bay sounded alerts, while the staging areas at Cape Sudest and Goodenough Island suffered a number of actual attacks during the Marines' occupancy which caused casualties and material damage, though not to the Marines.³

³ The Army authorized a battle star for troops in these areas during this period, but the Navy did not recognize this officially until some years after the war.

Reequipment of the division began in Australia shortly after its arrival. The major step in this direction, issue of the M-1 rifle to replace the familiar 03 (Springfield) used at Guadalcanal, occurred in April. Before the time for departing Australia arrived, all hands who were to carry it had gone through range qualification with this new (to them) weapon and satisfied themselves, more or less, regarding its combat capabilities.

Two other significant steps in reequipment had to do with tanks and amphibian tractors.

Heretofore the division's 1st Tank Battalion had operated only 16-ton light tanks (model M3-A1). It was decided to equip

Company A with 35-ton General Sherman mediums (model M4-A1), mounting 75mm guns in place of the light tanks' 37mm. Twenty-four of these, the first to arrive in the SWPA, were received by the Army in Melbourne during May 1943 and turned over to the Marine company.' Thus there was ample time to permit the crews to become thoroughly acquainted with the unfamiliar machines.

Virtually alone, the Marine Corps had foreseen the possibilities of the amphibian tractor (LVT) and developed it into a mili-

'Ltr to the author from Capt H. R. Taylor, Jr., 6Jul51, hereinafter cited as *Taylor*.



CAPE GLOUCESTER AIRDROME as a Liberator saw it during pre-invasion bombing. Strip No. 1 to the left of the stream is barely discernible. (AF Photo)

tary vehicle. The early model Alligator (LVT-1) had received its baptism of fire at Guadalcanal as an organic component of the 1st Division, where it proved its versatility and usefulness but had also demonstrated certain unfortunate frailties. These latter had been largely remedied in an improved model known as the Buffalo (LVT-2) now rolling off U. S. production lines. Although Sixth Army had only a few available at this time, on 5 December General Krueger donated several^a to Company A, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion which he planned to use in the Arawe landing 10 days later. The company performed this mission without personnel loss, the crews thereby gaining experience valuable in their subsequent operation at Cape Gloucester.^b

Another innovation was the jungle hammock, designed to protect the occupant against wetness and mosquitoes at night. In New Britain, however, it displayed a proclivity for catching and holding rain water. Efforts to solve this by cutting holes in the bottom usually resulted in the canvas splitting in the night, depositing the Marine on the deck. The mosquito net, too, proved a definite obstacle whenever the air raid alarm sounded, the zipper having a tendency to stick at that particular time. The hammocks were valueless in a kunai patch and one had to have faith in the reliability of trees, but despite these shortcomings a majority of the division found them somewhat more comfortable than curling up on a poncho in the mud.

^a ALAMO Force assigned to the battalion 15 of a lightly armored model then known as the LVT(A)-2. In addition, on D-minus 10 the battalion received six LVT-2's, the first of 50 of that type being shipped to the division. (1st MarDiv SAR, Annex D, 1.)

^b Because of the logistical situation after Arawe, Company A was sent to Finschhafen where all of the tractors and about one-half of the personnel sat out the Gloucester landing. Company A was normally attached to Combat Team A and therefore a composite company had to be formed from personnel in H&S and a portion of the marooned company at Finschhafen. "The combat efficiency of this detachment was consequently impaired." *Ibid.*, 2.

Reequipment also included employment of Army-furnished signal equipment such as the SCR 300 and SCR 610, as well as many minor considerations reaching from top to bottom. Because of certain variations in Marine Corps and Army specifications and standards, the division wound up in a somewhat polyglot condition, but it was all set and ready to go by the time the planners reached a final decision on exactly where its various components would go and what they would do when they got there.

INTELLIGENCE PLANNING

As related in Chapter I, at the outbreak of war New Britain, except for the region immediately adjacent to Rabaul, remained to a great extent an island of mystery. Immediately the Australians set about remedying the situation, handicapped by a dearth of sources. The best off-shore charts dated from the German occupation, terminated in 1914, as did many of such ground surveys as existed. To supplement these, intelligence officers systematically interviewed all persons they could find who had ever lived on the island or cruised its waters: planters, missionaries, district officers, even a few native police boys. None of these individuals was familiar with more than a limited area, but by dint of exhaustive compiling and screening of information gained, a fragmentary picture began to take form.

Staff of the U. S. Sixth Army carried on the effort, and Allied Air Forces continued the current aerial photographic survey until the day of the assault. Mosaics compiled from material obtained on successive reconnaissance missions proved invaluable in many respects, especially along the shores: providing accurate views of beach and reef conditions, and some enemy activities and installations. Because of the size of the island and uncertainty regarding the nature of the forthcoming campaign, much effort was inevitably wasted on localities which subsequently proved of no tactical importance, but by mid-August, 1943, Sixth Army had obtained sufficient material to issue a local-

ized terrain estimate of the most critical area of Western New Britain.⁷

This is an extraordinary document in many respects, and represents a prodigious amount of keen intelligence work. It contains aerial photographs (vertical and oblique), mosaics and early maps, together with detailed descriptions of natural features pertinent to military operations, and enemy activities as these could be observed up to that time. Its shortcomings resulted from the inability of the camera lens to penetrate the dense jungle that cloaked most villages and trails, lesser terrain contours, and many of the easily and cleverly camouflaged Japanese installations; deficiencies which necessitated application of shrewd deduction from scanty information obtained from men who had been on the ground years before. That these deductions necessarily lacked detail and sometimes derived from inaccurate information caused a certain amount of grief to troops who operated there subsequently. But the remarkable feature of this study is that it proved as accurate as it did under the circumstances, and provided, together with additional surveys that continued to pour in,⁸ the basis on which the maps used in planning the campaign were compiled.

These maps occurred in three principal series, all issued in October, 1943, under supervision of Chief Engineer, SWPA, and reproduced by Base Map Plant, U. S. Army, SWPA. Largest, and for that reason most important, was Provisional Map, Western New Britain, scale 1:20,000, with 1,000-meter grid superimposed and aerial photo-

⁷ *Terrain Estimate Cape Gloucester Area*, 15 August 1943, prepared by ACofS, G-2, Hq Sixth Army; hereinafter cited *Terrain Est.* This embraced region west of mouths of Gurissu and Itni Rivers. Copy (No. 42) in HQMC files carries annotations as of 5Sep43. Also available in *ALAMO G-3*.

⁸ Especially *Objective Folder 75*, issued by Directorate of Intelligence, Allied Air Forces, SWPA, 1Sep43: a comprehensive series of aerial obliques, tied in with keyed sketch maps, covering the New Britain shore from east of Borgen Bay, around the west coast, and extended along the south coast to include Arawe.

map of the area printed on reverse. Despite its bulkiness (seven sheets required to show the critical area), this map was used extensively on shore during the operation because of the possibilities it offered for pinpointing positions by coordinates, and became known as the "battle map." Special Map, Mt. Talawe-Cape Bach (covering same area with two sheets) had the advantage of easier handling at the expense of some loss of detail: scale, 1:63,360 (1 inch to 1 mile), also with 1,000-meter grid. Provisional Map, New Britain, covered the entire island with three large sheets, a single sheet embracing the area from Cape Gloucester eastward beyond Talasea, on scale 1:253,440, with 10,000-meter grid.⁹

Division officers were better able to visualize the Cape Gloucester terrain after viewing relief maps skillfully constructed by the D-2 section's Relief Map Unit, headed by Captain Richmond I. Kelsey.¹⁰ While in Australia the unit had built a relief map of the Dromana Bay area where the 5th and 7th Marines held maneuvers. For the Cape Gloucester operation four different maps were created: A 1:15,000 scale map of the Gloucester combat area; the immediate combat area from Tauali to the Target Hill area, scaled at 1:5,000 and divided into four sections; Yellow Beaches and three nearby kunai patches with a scale of 1:2,500 and in two sections, and a 1:1,750 scale of the Green Beach area. Copies of the original relief maps were easily moulded and distributed to the Army and lower echelons of the division.

The effort to observe conditions ashore at first hand gave rise to a program of amphib-

⁹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex A, 33-34. Last two maps mentioned were final revisions of earlier ones by Australian agencies and Allied Geographical Section, SWPA, beginning early in 1942. Note that the above were not the only maps and terrain studies used, but the most complete and up-to-date available during the planning phase.

¹⁰ Because several members of the map unit had worked as civilians for the animated cartoon industry, they became known collectively as the "Mickey Mouse boys."

ious reconnaissance in which three Australian officers played parts deserving of mention.

Most familiar to the Marines was Major John V. Mather, AIF, a former labor contractor in the Solomons who had been attached to the 1st Division for the Guadalcanal operation and remained as an integral component of the D-2 Section,¹¹ where his proficiency with Pidgin English and grasp of native psychology proved most useful. Another was Sub-Lieutenant Andrew Kirkwall-Smith, RANVR, one of those versatile islanders who could turn his hand to nearly anything, and who had been a coastwatcher¹² in the Cape Gloucester region at the time the Japanese first moved in. Still more familiar with the ground and inhabitants was the Reverend William G. Wiedeman, who had operated the Anglican Mission at Sag Sag for several years prior to the war and, like Kirkwall-Smith, was commissioned a Navy lieutenant to give military status to his present activities.¹³

This perilous mission of stealing ashore in enemy-held territory was entrusted to a group known as Alamo Scouts. How diversified were these personnel is indicated by the composition of the first party to enter the region of the forthcoming campaign: an Australian naval officer, a Marine Corps lieutenant, an Army lieutenant, a Navy en-



MANY YEARS AFTER THE EVENT. Lieutenant Colonel John V. Mather, AIF, receives the Legion of Merit from Brigadier General G. C. Thomas at 1950 Reunion of 1st Marine Division Association in Washington, D. C.

sign, an Australian enlisted radio operator, and four natives.¹⁴

First Lieutenant John D. Bradbeer, chief scout of the 1st Marine Division, commanded the group, and the redoubtable Kirkwall-Smith supplied the local know-how. With their assorted companions, they set out for New Britain's western coast by PT boat on 24 September, three months before the campaign began. Near midnight, the PT cut its motors about a mile off Grass Point, and the scouts paddled in from there in an inflated rubber boat, landing on a beach at the mouth of the second stream to the south at 0100 on the 25th. After hiding their craft with great care, they proceeded inland through dense secondary jungle growth up the western slopes of Mt. Tangi.

¹⁴ Other parties of Alamo Scouts operated in the Arawe and Gasmata regions as well, and the coastwatchers cooperated by sending parties of their own into Long Island and Rooke Island. These activities are omitted here as not bearing directly on the campaign under discussion.

¹¹ So strongly did Mather feel his Marine ties that, when subsequently awarded the U. S. Legion of Merit for his services, he declined to wear the medal until it should be pinned on his chest by a former member of the division. Finding himself in England on a military mission during the summer of 1950, he flew the Atlantic in order to attend a convention of 1st MarDiv Association in Washington, D. C., where BrigGen Gerald C. Thomas performed the ceremony.

¹² Feldt, *op. cit.*, 177, 181-183.

¹³ These officers are not to be confused with members of ANGAU: Australian, New Guinea Administrative Unit, having charge of all relations with the Melanesian natives. A number of these accompanied the division throughout the subsequent campaign and played an important part in rehabilitating the natives of western New Britain after the Japanese had been driven out.



JAPANESE "PERSONNEL" AND "GUN" EMPLACEMENTS guard the Cape Gloucester Airdrome. This view was from a low-flying plane in October 1943. (AF Photo)

The party's first objective was to find a southern track that was supposed to circle Mt. Tangi and terminate in the saddle between that height and Mt. Talawe. This the patrol failed to do, but it did locate what it reported as three 6-inch coast defense guns in the vicinity of Aisega. These later proved to be 75mm.

Turning northward, the group made its way through heavy foliage to the upper Gima River and there interrogated the inhabitants. Natives had been excluded from the airdrome area and the coast since the previous July, the scouts learned, but they had some information to impart. A motor road connected Ongaia and the airdrome, and 12 to 14 AA guns were emplaced between these two points; radio stations were located at Aisega, the airdrome, Sakar Island and Rooke Island; barge traffic was heavy on the Itni River and along the coast. Relations between the native population and the Japanese had deteriorated to a low level, although a few quislings still operated in the area. The

natives related that the enemy expected an invasion of the Cape Gloucester region.¹⁵

Concluding nine days of reconnaissance and queries on the enemy-held island, the patrol retraced its steps southward and found the rubber boat intact at the landing beach. Attempted radio communication with the PT boat failed dismally, however, and as the scouts waited restlessly on the beach a new problem presented itself.

Bradbeer had taken all possible precautions to keep his presence a secret from the Japanese, going so far as to have a native detailed to hide the patrol's footprints. But the enemy had gotten wind of it somehow and now natives brought news to the men that a large Japanese patrol was searching for them.

The party must depart New Britain at once, even if it meant paddling to a small island in Dampier Strait, Bradbeer resolved.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise cited, accounts of the pre-D-Day patrols are drawn from 1st MarDiv Recon Patrols, G-2 Reports.



WHAT THE "GUARDIANS" OF THE AIRDROME really looked like. (See picture on opposite page). The two Marines add some life to the installation.

As a last gesture he attempted to make radio contact with the PT boat once more, and this time a reply crackled back.¹⁶ In the early morning hours of 6 October the Alamo Scouts climbed on board the waiting torpedo boat and returned to Goodenough Island to make their report.¹⁷

Two other amphibious patrols to western New Britain and one to Rooke Island were completed prior to D-Day. On the night of 14 October Captain W. A. Money, AIF, two other Australians, a Marine sergeant and six natives went ashore about one mile south of Higgins Point on Rooke and remained

¹⁶ George McMillan, *The Old Breed: A History of the First Marine Division in World War II*, (Washington, 1949), 166-167.

¹⁷ Division recommended Bradbeer for the Silver Star on the strength of this exploit. But because of his success in evading the enemy throughout his perilous mission, ALAMO Force reasoned that he had not been in combat and sealed this down to the

there until the early hours of 26 October. Captain Money reported there were few Japanese on the island, which doubtless influenced the later decision to defer a landing there.

Shortly before midnight on 20 November two PT boats throttled down to a halt just south of Dorf Point on New Britain's west coast. Eleven men aboard had the general mission of reconnoitering the beach for an offensive landing, but more specifically they were to study beach approaches, beach conditions and inland terrain between Potni and Sumeru. Over-all commander was Major Mather, the stand-by officer in one PT boat. His second in command, radio operator and stand-by assistant in the other boat was Lieutenant Bradbeer.

Soldiers Medal, leading him to remark, "Now people will think I saved a WAC from drowning by diving off a pier in Atlantic City."

Assigned to study conditions ashore for 24 hours were Lieutenant Robert B. Firm, 5th Marines assistant R-2, a naval ensign, two men from the D-2 section and two natives. Three other men were to assist with the rubber boats and act as reserves in the event replacements were needed. With plans carefully laid the men stealthily made their way ashore, but luck under such conditions could not always hold up, and the Japanese became aware of the patrol's presence almost as soon as it reached the beach. Thirty minutes after leaving the PT boats Lieutenant Firm and his group were back on board, but in that time they had obtained enough information to declare the beach unfavorable for a landing operation.¹⁸

The last pre-D-Day amphibious patrol, accomplished on the night of 21 December, had as its mission the study of two beaches at Tauali. Once again Major Mather acted as over-all commander and stand-by officer. Once again Lieutenant Bradbeer went along, but this time he scouted ashore. Splitting the patrol into two seven-man groups, Bradbeer took the first on a reconnaissance of "South Beach" while First Lieutenant Joseph A. Fournier of the 1st Marines took the other for a look at "North Beach." The patrol recommended the latter as the more favorable of the two for a landing. It was duly labeled Green Beach, and 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, made its D-Day amphibious operation there.

With the exception of the Green Beach selection, the amphibious patrols by the Alamo Scouts prior to D-Day were helpful mainly in a negative manner. They clearly demonstrated where not to land and therefore played an important—if reverse—part in the final selection of the beaches. That those selections were fortunate ones will be seen subsequently.

By the middle of December the Marines had some fairly definite ideas (not necessarily accurate) concerning enemy strength and dispositions in western New Britain.¹⁹

¹⁸ 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex A, 1-2.

¹⁹ 1st MarDiv, D-2 Weekly Reports, 13Dec43.

In the Gloucester area—west of Kokopo, through Borgen Bay, the airdrome area, Aisega and Cape Bushing—were thought to be 10,788 Japanese troops. This total comprised the 65th Division (later found to be a brigade), commanded by Major General Iwao Matsuda, including its component 141st and 142d (not there) Infantry Regiments. Also identified were the 53d Infantry and 24 lesser units.

On Rooke Island and the Witu group were thought to be 2,000 Japanese; 500 at Rein Bay; 2,000 at Talasea-Cape Hoskins; 200 at Cape Raoult; 500 at Arawe; 3,955 at Gasmata and between 74,530 and 87,031 at Rabaul.²⁰

Over-all strength of the Japanese on New Britain was estimated at 91,486 after making percentage deductions for bombing casualties and sickness.

To facilitate prisoner interrogation, Sixth Army loaned the division 10 enlisted men, all Nisei (American-born Japanese). The accommodation was accepted somewhat reluctantly by the Marines who feared for the safety of any Japanese under combat conditions, regardless of citizenship or uniform. Plans called for the Nisei to handle translations while eight officer-interpreters questioned prisoners. Despite the original hesitancy, relations between the Marines and the Nisei were friendly and improved with time. The soldiers proved of inestimable value in the D-2 section and won the following accolade:

" . . . the experience of the 1st Marine Division is that any combat force in the Pacific area seriously handicaps itself by not using Nisei . . . it is recommended that even if the 1st Marine Division reverts to the Navy [sic], an arrangement be made with the Army whereby a supply of Nisei translators be made to the Division."²¹

NAVAL AND AIR PARTICIPATION

The Seventh Fleet (sometimes called "MacArthur's Navy") under Vice Admiral

²⁰ For actual Japanese strength and dispositions see Chap IV.

²¹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex A, 18, 24.



EVIDENCE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AIR ATTACKS on barge hideouts on Western New Britain was found by the Marines after they landed.

Kinkaid was assigned naval responsibility for the Gloucester landing, but more specifically Task Forces 74 and 76 and Task Group 70.1 participated directly in the operation.²²

Formerly operating as the Southwest Pacific Force, a collection of Australian and U. S. craft, the Seventh Fleet was created 15 March 1943. It was designed to support General MacArthur's advance and operated under his strategic control within his theater, although remaining under the administrative control of Commander in Chief, United States Fleet.

²² Task Force 76, Operation Plan 3B-43, 3, 20Dec 43. Hereinafter cited as *TF 76*.

Seven task forces comprised the fleet,²³ each force made up of specific type craft for a specific job. There were to be found PT boats, submarines, a fleet air wing, seaplane tenders, a survey vessel, mincraft and escort vessels. Most important from the Marine viewpoint, however, were the cruisers and destroyers (Task Force 74) and the amphibious force (Task Force 76).

For the purposes of the operation Rear Admiral Daniel E. Barbey's Task Force 76 was composed of his headquarters ship, USS *Conyngham*, 10 APD's, 16 LCI's, 12 destroyers, three minesweepers and 24 LST's.²⁴ In

²³ Naval Confidential Newsletter, 20Nov43.

²⁴ *TF 76*, 1.



STRIP NO. 2 OF THE CAPE GLOUCESTER AIRDROME gets the softening treatment during the preparatory stage of the New Britain campaign. (AF Photo)

addition, he allotted for Beach Green two destroyers, 14 LCM's, 12 LCT's and two rocket DUKW's. Cover for the convoy as well as landing security and bombardment of the enemy area was left primarily to Task Force 74, commanded by British Rear Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, RN. With a force of four cruisers,²⁸ eight destroyers and two rocket LCI's²⁹ the force commander was to

²⁸ HMAS *Australia* and *Shropshire*, USS *Nashville* and *Phoenix*. (Reports of Commander Seventh Amphibious Force to COMINCH, U. S. Fleet, 7, dtd 3Feb44.)

²⁹ Only one rocket LCI fired during the landing. (*Ibid.*, 9.)

begin his preliminary bombardment at 0600 on D-Day (H-Hour was 0745) off New Britain's north coast. Although in the light of later amphibious operations this seems meager, it was adequate for the landing as will be seen subsequently.

Additional protection during the landing would be provided by Task Group 70.1, a group of PT boats from Task Force 70. Its mission was to cover the left flank of the amphibious force by patrolling Vitiaz and Dampier Straits.

Air preparations for the operation began in mid-November and continued on a steadily ascending scale, with the First Air Task Force (FATF), Fifth Air Force, flying missions.²⁷ At this time General Kenney's command consisted of Advance Headquarters (ADVON) at Port Moresby and three air task forces located north of the Owen Stanley Mountains. Based at Dobadura and commanded by Brigadier General Frederic H. Smith, Jr., FATF contained about one-third of all the squadrons in the Allied Air Force. It had flown fighter and bomber missions for all ground operations except those in the Ramu Valley, and to it, as a matter of course, fell the job of air preparation and support for BACKHANDER.

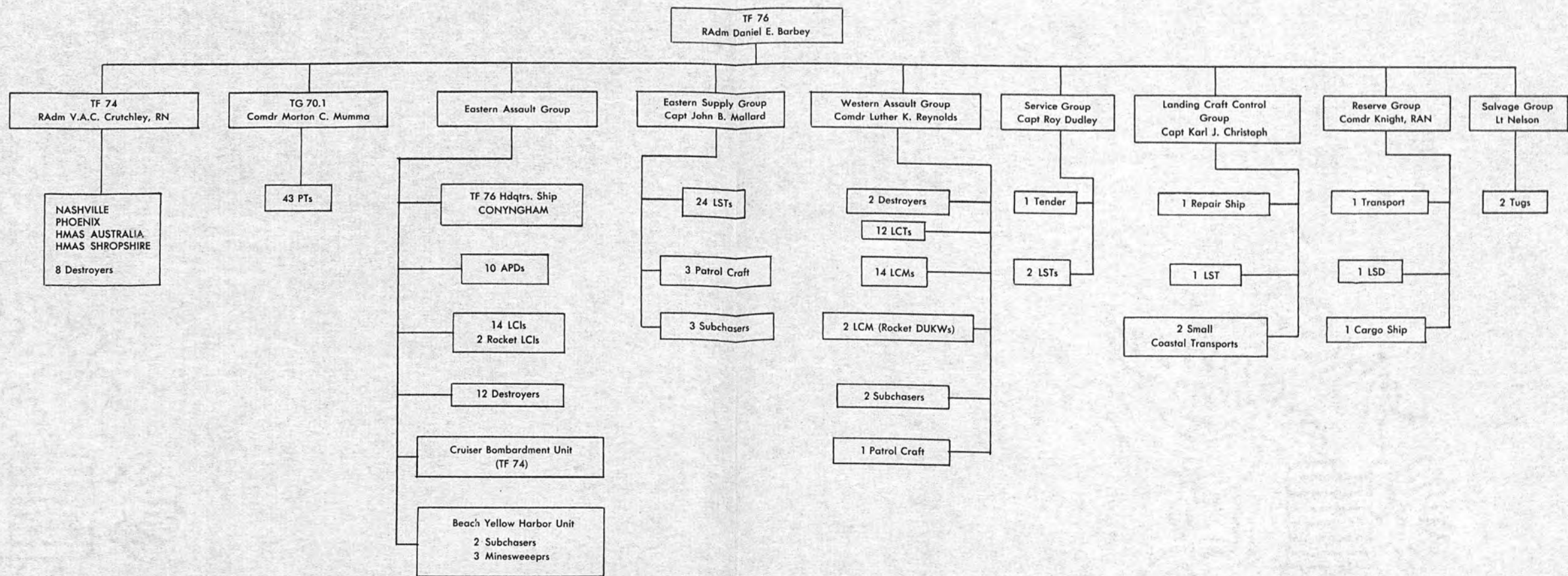
In October FATF was principally concerned with Rabaul and New Guinea, but it found time occasionally to send over one to eight planes to attack airdromes, supply dumps and barge hideouts in western New Britain. By mid-November, however, with plans for DEXTERITY beginning to firm, serious air preparations for the Gloucester and Arawe operations got under way. Between 19 November and 13 December 1,241 tons of bombs fell on the Japanese occupying the Borgen Bay area.

In the 11-day interval between the Arawe and Cape Gloucester landings, FATF intensified its daylight bombardments and simul-

²⁷ This account of air preparation draws principally upon an official but unpublished manuscript: Army Air Forces Historical Studies No. 43, *The Fifth Air Force in the Conquest of the Bismarck Archipelago*, hereinafter cited as AAF No. 43.

COMMAND ORGANIZATION OF TASK FORCE 76

26 December 1943





NATAMO POINT IS BLASTED BY FIFTH AIR FORCE BOMBERS as aerial preparations for the landing are intensified. Target Hill and Silimati Point in background. (AF Photo.)

taneously introduced harassing night tactics to keep the enemy under an additional mental strain. Between 15 and 25 December FATF flew 1,207 bomber sorties, dropping more than 2,684 tons of bombs. And as the Japanese tried to sleep at night their rest was interrupted at irregular intervals by B-24's dribbling bombs, grenades and beer bottles over the bivouac areas.

During this period of air preparation, bombers and fighters attacked targets of opportunity as well as scheduled ones. The favored point of attack was Target Hill because it was so easily discerned. Gun positions at the airstrip were also given attention, 80 2,000-lb. bombs being dropped on 17 December "with fairly satisfactory re-

sults." A few direct hits were claimed on gun positions.²⁸

Bunkers and supply dumps, protected from view by the lush jungle growth, were fairly safe from air attacks,²⁹ but the lines of supply suffered heavily.³⁰

²⁸ The Fifth Air Force considered the pre-invasion bombing so intense that the term "Gloucesterizing" was used thereafter by it to describe the obliteration of a target. (*AAF in WWII*, 344.)

²⁹ "Our bombs, bursting throughout the [target] area, started no fires and it seems doubtful that anything of value was destroyed. For sheer tree-splitting, however, the mission was magnificent." *Ibid.*, 334.

³⁰ "The unspectacular strafing and bombing of barge routes from Rabaul caused such destruction that troops in western New Britain were placed on half rations." *AAF No. 43*.

Air cover for the amphibious force convoy on D-Day would be maintained by a series of fighter squadrons hovering over it for 12 hours, beginning at 0630. One attack group of five attack squadrons and nine bomber squadrons, was earmarked for air support.³¹

The attack group would bomb and strafe Yellow Beaches 1 and 2 for 15 minutes before the first wave went ashore, one squadron bombing and smoking Target Hill with white phosphorous. One of the five attack squadrons would support the Green Beach landing by bombing and strafing for 10 minutes before troops got ashore. The remaining four squadrons would attack targets along the coast north and east of Dorf Point beginning at H-plus one hour and 45 minutes.

³¹ This account of air cover and support plans is taken from 1st MarDiv SAR, I, Annex, G, Air Support Plan.

These missions accomplished, the attack planes would refuel and rearm. Four squadrons would then fly second missions against targets picked out by division, and four others would be on call.

The bombing squadrons were assigned missions to Target Hill, the 7th Marines area and Natamo Point beginning at H-minus 45 minutes and continued for two hours. After that the bombers would refuel, rearm and attack secondary targets selected by division.

LOGISTICS

The problem of moving and supplying the division in the BACKHANDER operation was accentuated by the location of different groups at different staging points and the movement of units from one point to another. Initially Combat Team A and the ADC Group were at Milne Bay; Combat Team C was training at Cape Sudest in the Oro Bay area; Combat Team B at Goodenough Island with



LOADING ABOARD LCI's, these Marines will land on Beach Yellow 2 on D-Day.



ELEMENTS OF COMBAT TEAM C go aboard LST's at Cape Sudest, Gloucester bound.

Division Headquarters and the remaining elements of the division.

As the original plans for DEXTERITY changed, however, there was a general shifting. In late October General Shepherd's ADC Group moved to Goodenough. Six weeks later a detachment of Combat Team B moved to Finschhafen, to be followed shortly thereafter by the ADC Group, the remainder of Combat Team B, a detachment of 16th Signal Operations Battalion, and both H&S and 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Meanwhile, reinforcing units were joining Combat Team C at Cape Sudest, and all elements at Goodenough, with the exception of Rear Echelon, Division Headquarters, had moved there by 18 December.²²

Another complication from a logistical viewpoint was the necessity of using ships no larger than an LST. New Britain coastal

waters presented an interesting contrast: at Rabaul on the eastern tip of the island was one of the finest harbors in the Southwest Pacific, but the waters en route to Cape Gloucester were narrow, shallow and treacherous. Japanese air at this point was still a factor to be considered, and the Navy had an understandable reluctance to risk larger craft²³ in the approach straits and the reef-filled waters off Yellow Beaches 1 and 2. Such conditions, as a matter of course, limited the amount of cargo the division could carry and intensified the problems of transport and supply planning.

Admiral Barbey allotted five LCI's, 12 LCT's, and 14 LCM's to transport the troops, equipment and supplies of Battalion Landing Team 21 from Finschhafen to Green

²³ Navy was reluctant to risk even LST's. (Ltr LtCol R. M. Wismer to CMC, 7Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Wismer*.)

²² 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 1.



AS THE ADC GROUP AND THE 1st MARINES loaded at Finschhafen for Cape Gloucester, General Krueger was on hand to wish General Shepherd good luck. (Army Photo)

Beach. For the H-Hour, D-Day landing on Yellow Beaches 1 and 2 there were nine APD's, 14 LCI's, and seven LST's for Combat Team C (less detachments) and Battalion Landing Team 31. The remainder of the BACKHANDER Task Force (less Combat Team A) was expected to land on D-Day afternoon and on D-plus 1. Sixteen LST's were at the disposal of these elements for the movement.³¹ General Rupertus would accompany the admiral on his flagship, USS *Conyngham*, while General Shepherd was to make the overnight trip via LST.

Combat Team A, held in reserve, was to move from Milne Bay to Cape Sudest on D-minus 1 on board one Australian and three U. S. troop transports. From that point, if released by General Krueger, the unit (less Battalion Landing Team 35) was to proceed via APD's and LST's to Gloucester. The remaining landing team was tentatively scheduled for the seizure of Rooke and Long Islands.

³¹ 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex C, 2.

Division directed all units to take into Gloucester only that equipment necessary to live and fight. There were to be no cots or camp equipment. Tentage was limited to tarpaulins and requirements for hospitals and communications. The assault forces were instructed to land with 20 days Class I-IV supplies and three units of fire, but limited shipping in some cases reduced this to 10 or 15 days. Resupply was to be accomplished principally by LST's, and in anticipation of this a month's supplies were stockpiled at Oro Bay prior to 16 December.³⁵

All LST space would be utilized on the Gloucester trip. Tank decks were crowded with bulldozers, trucks and jeeps. The Marines were attempting the highest degree of mobile loading and had borrowed 500 two-and-one-half ton trucks from the Army. These were fully loaded, the plan being that they would roll ashore and directly to the dumps to discharge their cargo, then withdraw on board the second echelon of LST's that afternoon.

Plans made by Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Ballance, Shore Party commander, called for the dispersal of over-lapping ration, ammunition and miscellaneous supply dumps just off Yellow Beaches 1 and 2. These were overlapping only insofar as the LST's were concerned. According to the scheme three lines should operate out of each LST simultaneously, each one travelling between the ship and a supply dump. The objective was to keep traffic flowing smoothly and rapidly between the two points without crossing other lanes. Unfortunately the dump sites had to be tentatively selected from New Britain maps, later necessitating on-the-spot changes because of unforeseen terrain conditions. The division administrative order³⁶ allowed three hours as the time required to unload an LST, a limit that was to prove over optimistic initially. Elements of the 17th Marines, which comprised the shore party, were prepared to construct sandbag piers out to the LST's in the event the craft could

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁶ 1st MarDiv SAR, I, Adm Or 2-43, 5, 14Nov43.

not reach the beach proper, and roller runways were to be utilized as well.³⁷

LOADING OUT

On D-minus 5 a final rehearsal was held by the assault elements at Cape Sudest. Three days later, Christmas Eve afternoon, the ships assigned to Combat Team C and accompanying units loaded troops and rendezvoused in Buna Harbor.

At 0600³⁸ on D-minus 1 the convoy began moving northward. The weather was not that generally associated with Christmas. The heat was intense, particularly below decks, and the ships were loaded beyond normal capacity with troops, vehicles and equipment because of the comparatively short run.³⁹ Men tried to sleep topside and climbed atop trucks and jeeps which were spread six abreast across the tank decks. Jungle hammocks were slung between vehicles. But sleep was difficult.

A submarine had been reported off Cape Ward Hunt the previous evening, but a search conducted by a "Hunter-Killer" group proved fruitless. At 1320 on Christmas Day first contact was made with the enemy when a Japanese reconnaissance plane spotted the convoy. It was shot down, but there was no way of telling whether it had reported its find.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, at Cape Cretin the ADC group and Combat Team B, less BLT 21, had completed loading and prepared to join the main convoy on its way from Buna. The lat-



CHRISTMAS DAY ON BOARD an LST. These Marines pass the time in accustomed manner as they head toward a landing at Cape Gloucester.

ter landing team, slated for the solo assault on Green Beach at Tauuli, departed at 1600 and proceeded to its objective with its own miniature convoy via Dampier Strait.

The Buna and Cape Cretin contingents bound for the main landing joined forces slightly after 1600⁴¹ and proceeded toward their mutual destination without incident.

There was one final ironic touch—ironic in light of later weather developments. General Krueger, mindful of eventualities, notified the naval and air commanders that in the event it became necessary to cancel the Gloucester operation between embarkation time and landing, the code word would be "rain" repeated four times in the clear.⁴²

³⁷ See Appendix IV this monograph for more complete description of Shore Party operations.

³⁸ 1st MarDiv SAR gives the time as 0300. Admiral Barbey, however, gives the time used above and as task force commander he should know best. Report of Commander, 7th Amphibious Force, to COMINCH, U. S. Fleet, 6, 3Feb.44.

³⁹ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 2.

⁴⁰ It had. See Chap V.

⁴¹ 1st MarDiv, SAR, II, 2 and ADC War Diary, 3, 25Dec43.

⁴² ALAMO G-3, 22Dec43.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER IV

The Enemy

STRENGTH AND ORGANIZATION

Rabaul served as headquarters for the top ranking Japanese Army officer on the island: General Hitoshi Imamura, commander of the Eighth Area Army. This echelon, the rough equivalent of a U. S. field army, exercised command over the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Armies. The latter (three divisions) was operating in northern New Guinea, following the disaster encountered by its advance echelon at Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Part of the Seventeenth was on Bougainville, the rest concentrated mainly in the vicinity of Rabaul, with one of its divisions (the 17th, Lieutenant General Yasushi Sakai) responsible for defense of central and western New Britain, with headquarters at Gavuvu, on Cape Hoskins. Immediate defense of the region lying west of a line drawn from Iboki on the northern coast to Arawe on the southern was entrusted to something designated the 65th Brigade.¹

Because its original mission had been maintaining the supply line to New Guinea, this brigade was topheavy with transportation personnel, notably the 1st and 8th

¹“The 65th Brigade [was] apparently so called because there were not sixty-four others like it, nor even one.” (Fletcher Pratt: *The Marines' War* [New York, 1948,] 305.) This unit reported to 17th Division at Cape Hoskins rather than direct to Rabaul.

Shipping Engineer Regiments, 64th Line of Communications, 5th Sea Transport Battalion, and 1st Debarkation Unit. For the same reason, command had been vested in Major General Iwao Matsuda, who had achieved his high rank mainly as a transportation expert rather than as a line officer.

To set up a detailed order of battle for the 65th Brigade would be confusing and futile. In a strength report to 17th Division, dated 1 December 1943,² General Matsuda listed 41 separate components, ranging in numbers from four men to 3,365, of which in many cases only elements—sometimes very small elements—were actually present.

Units attached directly to Brigade Headquarters consisted of a staff group of 408, engineer and signal components, and a field hospital. Combat troops included parts of four battalions of field artillery, three of antiaircraft artillery, and two machine cannon companies. There was also Colonel Jiro Sato's 51st Reconnaissance Regiment, of which more will be heard later, and miscellaneous more or less orphan elements which had become separated from their parent organizations and stranded in western New Britain en route to New Guinea. Exact designations are unimportant, inasmuch as

² ATIS 788, 3.

most of these, together with labor and specialist troops, were soon reduced to the lowest common denominator and did their fighting incorporated in, or attached to, the two infantry regiments which comprised the hard core of the brigade's fighting strength.

These were the 53d Infantry, commanded by Colonel Koki Sumiya, and the 141st, Colonel Kenshiro Katayama. At the outset each consisted of only two battalions. The 3d Battalion, 53d, had been committed on Bougainville and what remained of it was far away when the invasion of New Britain began. The 141st had seen arduous service in the Philippines, losing many of its best officers and men.³ For some reason it had never had more than two battalions. This lack was rectified in mid-December, however, by formation of a new 3d Battalion under Major Asachichi Tatsumi,⁴ principally from personnel of the stranded orphan units previously mentioned⁵ and some elements of the 51st Reconnaissance Regiment.

In the 1 December report previously mentioned, General Matsuda listed the 65th Brigade's present strength as 15,018,⁶ effective strength 12,078. The latter figure included about 2,500 personnel not actually in the defense area for one reason or another (detached duty, engaged in shipping, in



LIEUTENANT GENERAL YASUSHI SAKAI, commanding general of the 17th Division, maintained his headquarters at Cape Hoskins. (Courtesy Morison History Project.)

transit, etc.). It did not include three units which had been ordered forward but had not arrived at that date: 1st Battalion 81st Infantry, 3d Battalion 23d Field Artillery, and 17th Division 2d Field Hospital. Of 9,501 effectives listed as in the region west of the Iboki-Arawe line, a total of 3,883 were in the immediate target area of the U. S. invasion: either in strong point garrisons or positions within prompt supporting distance.

TERRAIN AND DISPOSITIONS

The defense area assigned the 65th Brigade was not only extensive but most of it exceedingly difficult to traverse: the low ground swampy and jungled, the high ground rugged, cloaked by dense rain forest and interlaced by unpredictable streams. Allowing for such natural obstacles and a paucity of troops for the mission assigned him, Gen-

³ Prisoner of War Interrogation No. 191. Hereinafter such interrogations are cited POW, followed by number.

⁴ This reorganization was directed in NATSU 3 Opn Or A-7 dated 12Dec43, and reported completed in NATSU 3 Opn Or A-8, 20Dec43. ATIS 754, 6; ATIS 875,5.

⁵ *Ibid.* Principal elements were two companies of 115th Infantry, and approximately one platoon of 66th Infantry. 1st Lt Tsurujii Fukushima's 1st Provisional Co, 115th became 10th Co, 141st, but did its actual fighting with that regiment's 1st Bn at Arake (Merkus). On the other hand, some elements of the 1st Bn fought with 3/141 at Borgen Bay (Natamo). (POW 191). This may appear a confusing way of handling the command set-up, but such instances are far from unique in Japanese operations.

⁶ ATIS 788, 3. Figures quoted are those appearing in the report, but they do not check up accurately in detail.



COLONEL KENSHIRO KATAYAMA, commander of the 141st Infantry Regiment, IJA. (Courtesy Morison History Project.)

eral Matsuda made his dispositions with considerable shrewdness, leaving the small garrisons of the north coast staging points about as they were in order to concentrate his greatest strength in the more directly threatened points to the west and south.

Two large mountains constitute the dominating terrain features of westernmost New Britain. To the north, the volcanic cone of Mount Talawe rises steeply to an elevation of 6,600 feet, with the dormant⁷ crater of its eastern shoulder, 3,800-foot Mount Langla, looming as an ever-smoking landmark above the shelf of low ground containing the airdrome. South of Talawe and separated from

⁷ By technical definition, a volcano is *active* only when actually erupting, *dormant* between periods of activity and *extinct* when all activity ceases. Since Langla emitted only smoke, it fell in second category.

its by a high, broad saddle sprawls 5,600-foot Mount Tangi: less precipitous but combining to channelize north-south movement along the coast to a narrow flat traversed by a partially improved native trail. To the east, both mountains fall away into the wide, jungled valley of the Itni River, traversed by the cross-island north-south Government Trail, constructed originally by native labor under Australian supervision.

For tactical purposes the Japanese divided the northwestern sector into two areas: Tsurubu and Natamo,⁸ the line of demarcation lying a short distance west of Silimati Point (known to the Japanese as Cape Ebo-shi), where the western shore of Borgen Bay angles almost due south to form a deep indentation in the coastline.

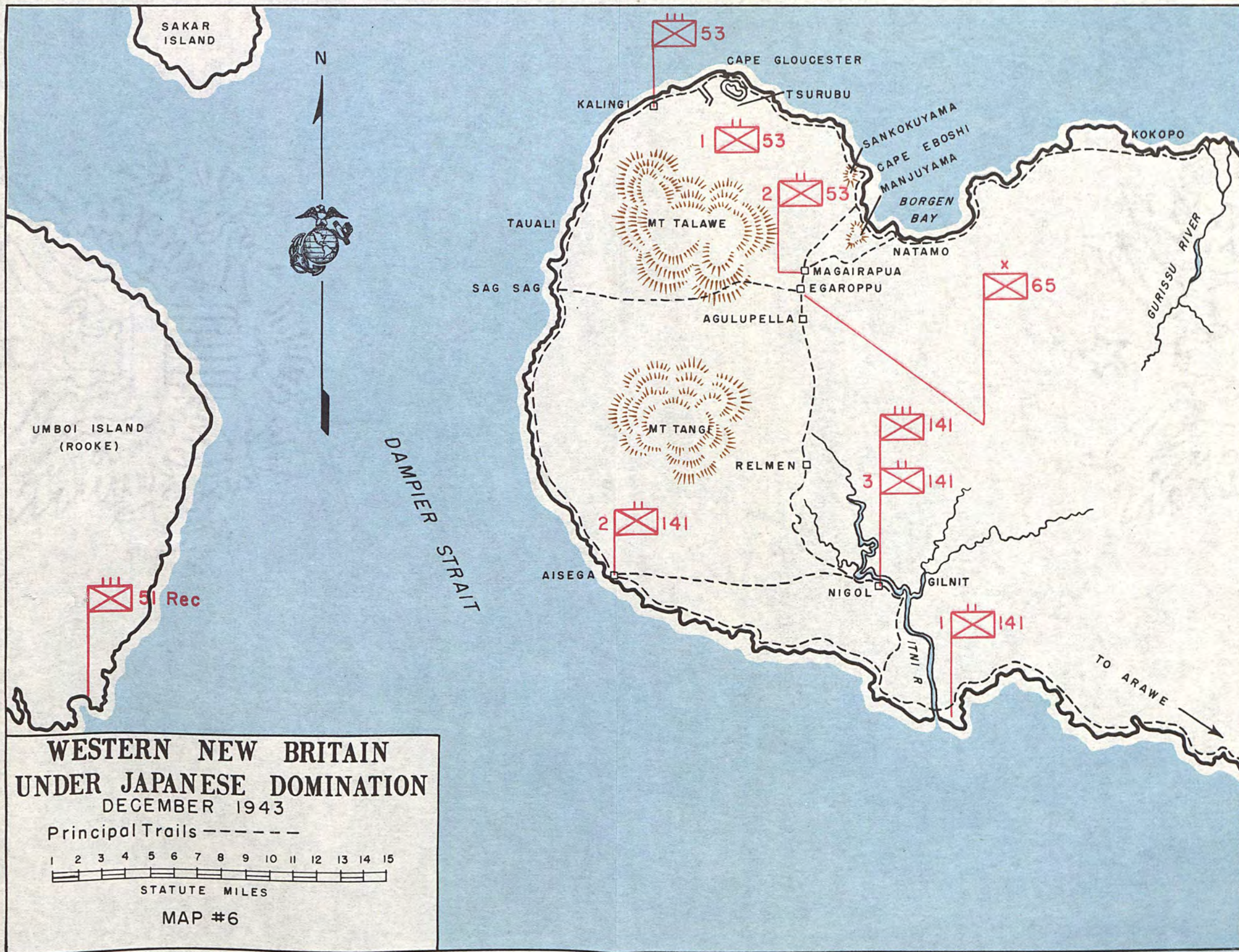
Tsurubu embraced the airdrome area and the barge staging point known to the Japanese as Kalingi,⁹ around to the southwest of Cape Gloucester proper. Although Allied bombing had knocked out the air facilities for effective operational purposes by the end of October,¹⁰ denying the use of these to his enemy remained General Matsuda's primary mission. To this end he maintained brigade headquarters near Kalingi until late November when, to facilitate communications with his outlying detachments (and possibly to escape stepped-up enemy bombing, for which the general appears to have had an acute distaste) he moved to a more centralized location at Egaroppu, inland of the Borgen Bay area. (See below.)

Responsibility for immediate defense of the airdrome rested on Colonel Sumiya, commanding officer of the 53d Infantry, who

⁸ The name Tsurubu appeared on no U. S. maps prior to the operation. Natamo occurred in such a way as to cause some confusion in interpreting the Japanese use of the term, as will be seen.

⁹ The particular locality designated Kalingi by the Japanese lay a short distance north of a group of native villages of the same name. What facilities the Japanese had there is not known, as FATF had demolished all installations beyond recognition by the time Marines arrived.

¹⁰ Two fighters were observed taking off from the No. 2 strip as late as 17Dec43. AAF No. 43.



**WESTERN NEW BRITAIN
UNDER JAPANESE DOMINATION
DECEMBER 1943**

Principal Trails - - - - -

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
STATUTE MILES

MAP #6

continued his regimental headquarters there following Matsuda's removal to quieter surroundings. The principal troop unit at his disposal was the 1st Battalion of his own regiment (Captain Tadao Nakamura), strongly reinforced with service troops, parts of two battalions of field artillery, a machine cannon company, and the dual-purpose weapons of at least one full battalion of antiaircraft artillery. He had the foresight to prepare several small road blocks¹¹ to cover his eastward approaches, but disposed the bulk of his troops and weapons in and around two main strong points.

The first of these was designed to defend a crescent-shaped bay more than 1,000 yards east of the airdrome which offered by far the best natural features for an assault landing to be found anywhere in the region.¹² Installations comprised an elaborate system of mutually supporting bunkers mounting weapons up to 75mm mountain guns, connected by a network of rifle trenches. The second fixed position, also constructed at cost of much well planned labor, lay in the broken foothills of Mount Talawe, dominating the flat from several hundred yards to the south to such effect that, even in the event of the airdrome's capture, its operation by U. S. forces would remain impossible until this formidable high ground had been secured.

A motor transport road capable of handling light traffic connected Tsurubu with the main landing point in Borgen Bay,¹³ to the eastward, traversing a narrow shelf of dry ground near the shore. This provided

¹¹ Many of the bunkers had firing apertures facing in two directions so that they could serve either as beach defenses or road blocks as necessity demanded. 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex A, 57.

¹² Designated Blue Beach on U. S. operations maps. The promontory from which these emplacements enfiladed the landing area subsequently became known as Hell's Point. See Chap VI.

¹³ The Japanese had planned to construct a motor transport road to link all the staging points in the whole area: along the coast from Iboki, around the western nose of the island to Cape Bushing on the southern shore, but owing to dearth of men and equipment, that described above was the only usable stretch of any length.



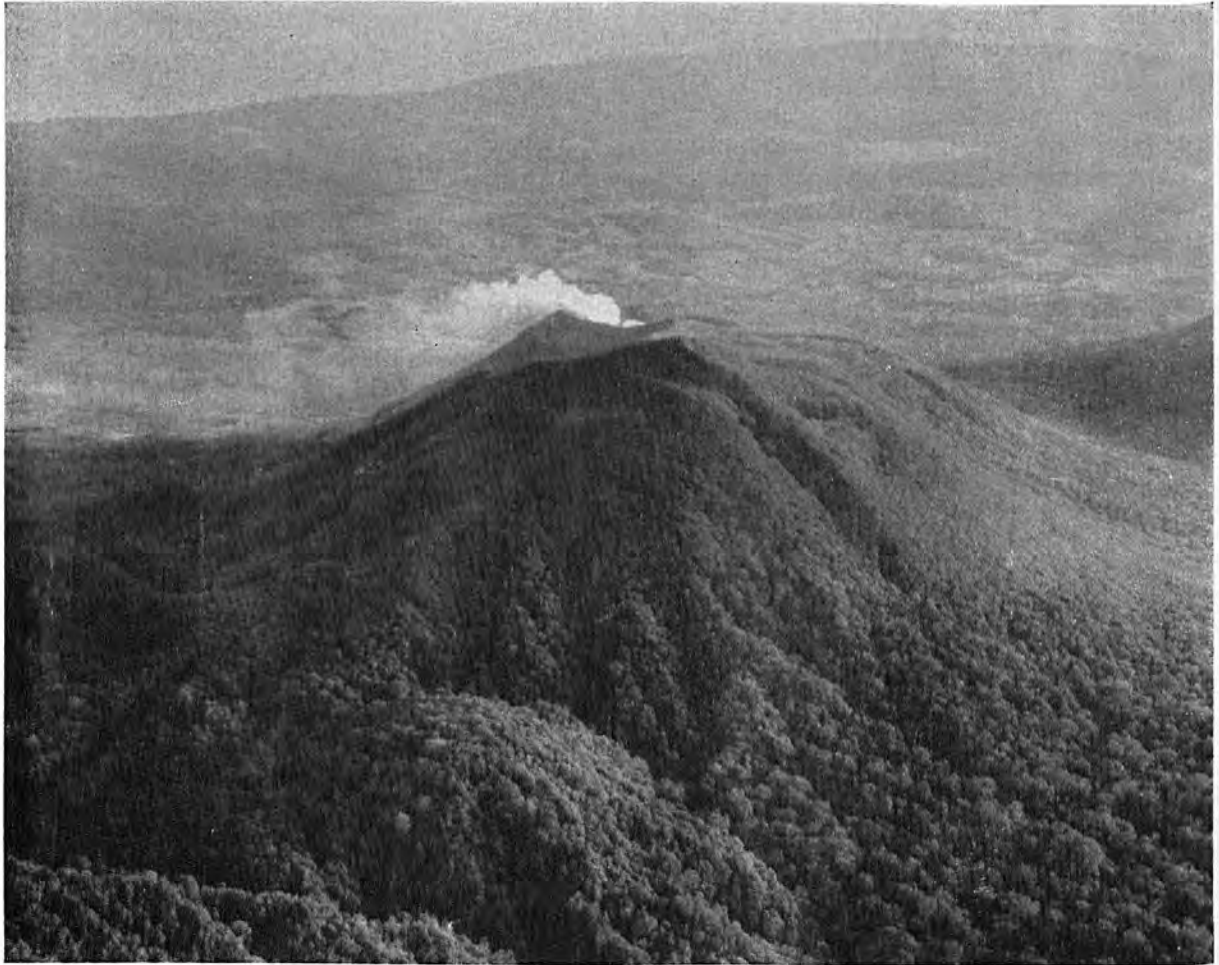
CAPTAIN TADAO NAKAMURA, commander of the 1st Battalion, 53d Infantry Regiment, as he appeared as a lieutenant in 1938. (Courtesy Morison History Project.)

an excellent route for speedy communications but was dangerously exposed to seaward, seldom running more than a hundred yards inland and in places debouching on the jungle-fringed beach itself.

The deep swamps and broken high ground lying inland of this road barred any additional thoroughfares north of Mt. Talawe. Hence, the other main route between the Tsurubu and Natamo regions was exceedingly roundabout: south along the coastal trail that skirted New Britain's western shore to Sag Sag, where a more or less improved track, sometimes called the east-west Government Trail, led in a generally easterly direction across the high saddle between Mt. Talawe and Mt. Tangi to join the north-south Government Trail at the inland village of Agulupella (prewar population, 34).¹⁴

A secondary trail short-cut this, running south from the airdrome, traversing the Mt.

¹⁴ Rpt Maj J. V. Mather, AIF to CO, Gilnit Force, 20Feb44, hereinafter cited *Mather Rpt*.



AN AERIAL VIEW OF MT. TALAWÉ looking northeast. The white volcanic smoke from Mt. Langla became a familiar sight to the Marines of the 1st Division. (AF Photo)

Langla (eastern) shoulder of Mt. Talawe and intersecting the Sag Sag trail high up in the saddle. This was too rough and steep to permit even handcarts to be drawn over it, but it was usable by men on foot and ultimately played some small part in the operations to come.¹⁵

The place name "Natamo" appeared on U. S. maps in four separate connections: two native villages (Natamo and Old Natamo), a river, and a point of land projecting from the southern shore of Borgen Bay. The Japanese applied the term inclusively to the region

embracing the entire bay area and extending an indeterminable distance inland. Under the cloaking jungle, much of the high ground here was rugged, but not mountainous in the sense of Mt. Talawe. However, two lesser elevations, rising abruptly near the shore, constituted conspicuous landmarks: Sankokuyama and Manjuyama, later known to the Marines respectively as Target Hill (or Hill 450) and Hill 660. The main Japanese sea transport landing point lay on the western shore of Borgen Bay between the two, with a secondary barge hideout situated around to the northwest beyond Silimati Point.

Target Hill, a steep-sided, grass-covered razorback ridge, rises to an elevation of 450 feet a short distance inland from Silimati

¹⁵ Ltr Maj G. M. Dawes to CMC, 13Apr52, hereinafter cited as *Dawes*.

Point. Affording a magnificent view seaward and westward all the way to the airdrome, it became the site of the main Japanese observation post, with some very fancy optical equipment installed. Hill 660, about a mile and a half to the southward and closer to the shore of Borgen Bay, is higher, larger in area, and equally steep at many points, but less conspicuous for being completely cloaked by jungle.

Egaroppu and Magairapua, site of Matsuda headquarters and principal bivouac area

respectively, were others of the many place names appearing on no U. S. maps.¹⁰ They lay three to four miles inland from Borgen Bay on high ground that afforded occasional glimpses of the sea; adjacent to, but concealed from the north-south Government Trail, and near the junction of the east-west trail that crossed the saddle behind Mount Talawe. Installations included a number of

¹⁰ Egaroppu appeared as Nakarop, a transliteration not immediately recognized. See Appendix III.



NEW BRITAIN'S COASTLINE was not particularly inviting. This is the village of Ulamaingi, slightly west of the Cape Gloucester airdrome. The northwestern slopes of Mt. Talawe are in the background. (AF Photo.)



ALLIED BOMBERS PASS HILL 660 (Manjuyama), conspicuous landmark on the Borgen Bay area. The camera is pointing south-east; Natamo Point to the left of the hill.

well constructed lumber and thatch buildings which provided living quarters, kitchens, messhalls and office facilities for brigade staff personnel, a field hospital, and supply storage for troops occupying the several bivouac areas nearby. The whole establishment was so well camouflaged under cover of standing rain forest as to escape detection from the air and resultant bombing and gunfire.

The general's own quarters were described as follows by a Marine combat correspondent who accompanied a patrol that later occupied them:

[Matsuda's] personal abode includes a bedroom, complete with double-width mattress and four-poster bed; kitchen and fancy toilet facilities; and a deep air raid shelter reached by ladder from the kitchen, containing candles, canned heat and rice bowls. . . . [The residence] is constructed about ten feet off the damp soil and is both dry and cool. The walls are made of bamboo and saplings; the roof is galvanized iron; the floors of inlaid wood. The furniture was for the most part imported, featured by a wicker easy chair. . . . Not only did General Matsuda have plenty of saki on hand, as witnessed by the empty

bottles, but he had an ample supply of Pilsen, bottled in Manila, according to the labels. We even found one Coca-Cola bottle cap. . . . Among the abandoned effects and supplies are all kinds of goods—toilet articles, stationery, canned foods, clothing—manufactured in America, Australia and England. . . . Prize booty for the occupying Marines is a Jap phonograph with records.¹⁷

The living quarters also included a small prayer room with altar window where the eminent warrior might sit cross-legged in leisurely contemplation of his navel when he could think of nothing better to do, which might have been quite often to judge by some aspects of the subsequent operation.

Immediate beach defense in the Natamo area Matsuda left in the hands of transportation troops doubling as infantry, strongly stiffened with artillery and automatic weapons units. His main striking force, the reinforced 2d Battalion, 53d Infantry (Major Takabe) he held at Magairapua as a mobile reserve: prepared to move swiftly to any threatened point in his area or in support of

¹⁷ News dispatch by MT/Sgt Samuel E. Stavisky.



NEW BRITAIN'S COAST as seen from Target Hill. This photograph was taken after the Marines had moved in.

Colonel Sumiya at the airdrome, just as he expected Sumiya to act in Takabe's support should the attack develop in Borgen Bay. That it might occur somewhere between the two seems not seriously to have entered the general's calculations, owing to the narrowness of such jungle-fringed beaches as existed and the deep swamps that hemmed them in and appeared to preclude dispersal or maneuver.¹⁸

But Matsuda's responsibility embraced a vast territory extending far beyond the primary target area, which necessitated wider dispersal of his remaining troops. Thus, Colonel Katayama's 141st Infantry, reinforced, was posted to the south, while Colonel Jiro Sato's 51st Reconnaissance Regiment (originally about battalion strength) occupied Rooke (Umboi) Island, across Dampier Strait from western New Britain, and oper-

¹⁸ A few defensive installations had been prepared in this area, but these were not manned.

ated a secondary observation post on Sakar Island, immediately to the north.

Katayama maintained his regimental command post at Nigol¹⁹ on the Itni River, where his new 3d Battalion was organized in mid-December. At this more or less central location, a network of improved trails facilitated communications with Matsuda, to the north, as well as with the remaining battalions of the 141st which held key coastal strong points and controlled the area between by means of outposts and patrols:²⁰ 1st Battal-

¹⁹ Called Nigoru by the Japanese, neither name appearing on U. S. maps. It lay not far above the native village of Gilnit, at the head of barge navigation on the Itni River.

²⁰ Patrols were especially active along the west coast, where the Japanese were well aware of the Allied reconnaissance efforts described in Chap III, either through native reports or their own observations, and tried to intercept. Additional false alarms kept them rushing off in all directions for more than two months.



MAJOR ASAYUKI TOBUSE, commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, IJA. (Courtesy Morison History Project.)

ion (Major Asyuki Tobuse) at Cape Bushing, 2d Battalion (Captain Toyoji Mukai)²¹ at Aisega (see Map 6).

These dispositions took care, after a fashion, of all the strategically important locations in western New Britain, with a single exception: the barge staging point of Arawe (known to the Japanese as Merkus)²² far to the southeast of Cape Bushing and to a great extent isolated from Katayama's forces by lack of an overland trail. The small original garrison of this place had been lightly re-

²¹ Lt Eizo Ikema, a medical officer attached to the 141st, described Mukai as a 31-year-old neurotic who belonged in an asylum rather than in the field. POW 191.

²² Another instance of confusing nomenclature. Arawe applied properly to a group of islands lying off Cape Merkus.

inforced in late October,²³ but as the war situation grew more threatening Matsuda became increasingly concerned for its safety. Thus, he dispatched to that point the first additional troops to come under his command.

This unit comprised the advance echelon of the 1st Battalion, 81st Infantry: headquarters group, two rifle companies and the machine-gun company, which landed at Iboki early in December. The battalion commander, Major Shinjiro Komori, was ordered to proceed to Arawe at once, without waiting for his remaining elements to come up, carrying all possible food and supplies, upon arrival to assume command of the entire defending group. The north-south trail which he must traverse had been reconnoitered previously²⁴ and was known to be exceedingly difficult but passable, winding through swamps and jungles, over mountains and rivers the entire width of the island, there about 40 airline miles. Nevertheless, Komori's heavily laden men had reached the inland village of Didmop, within sound of the gunfire, by 15 December when the U. S. 12th Cavalry RCT's assault was actually staged.²⁵

With invasion a reality at Arawe, Matsuda immediately dispatched Major Tobuse's 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry as further reinforcement to that trouble spot. Since no trail connected the Itni and Arawe regions, the troops traveled by landing craft from Cape Bushing to a point some miles west of their destination, thence overland to join Major Komori. They completed the movement shortly before the Marines landed in the Cape Gloucester area, thus passing out of the picture of the 65th Brigade's main action.

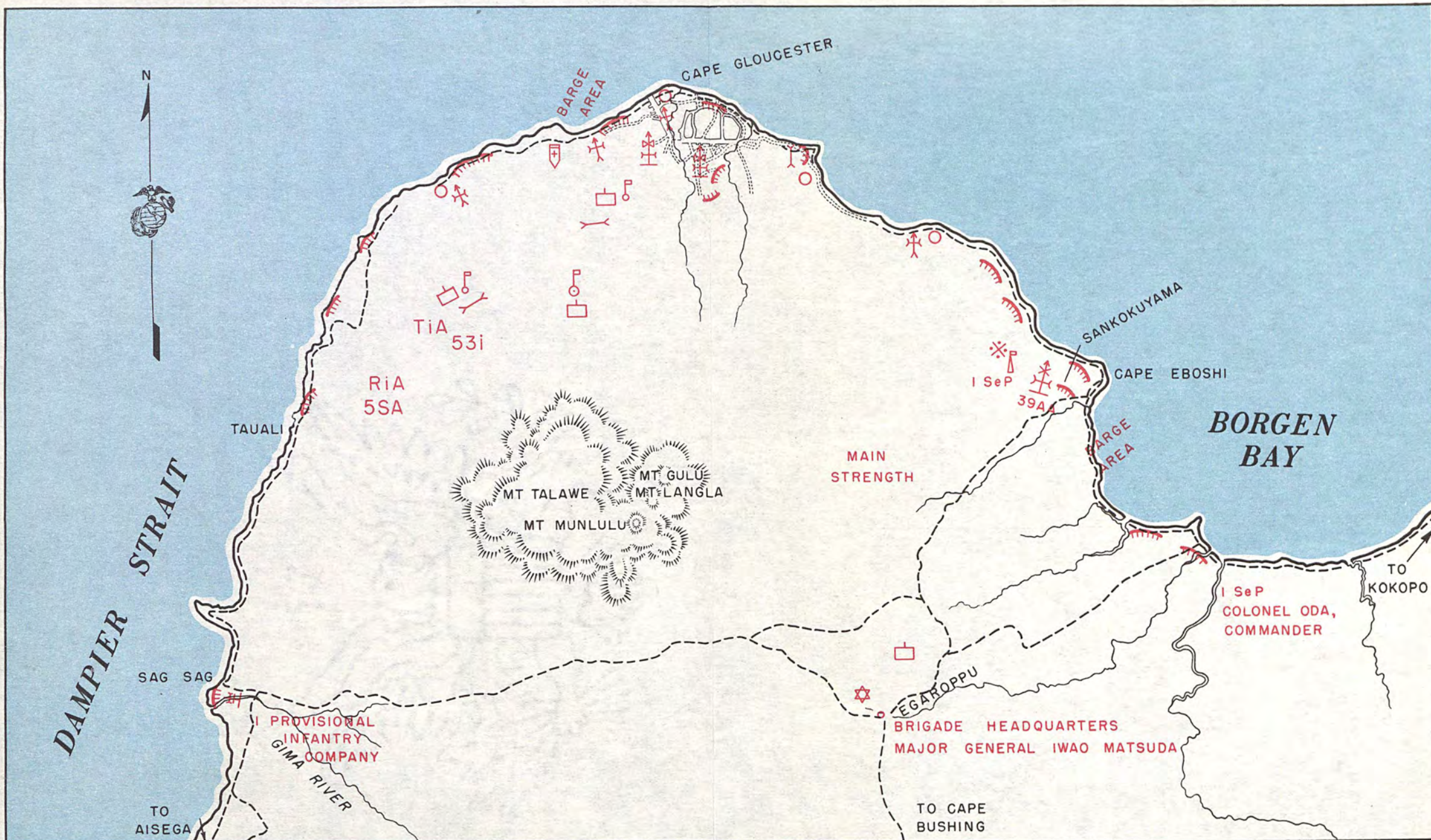
MORALE AND PHYSICAL CONDITION

In contrast to their commander and his immediate headquarters, garrison troops of

²³ By Lt Fukushima's 1st Provisional Co, 115th Infantry, later incorporated as 10th Co, 141st Infantry, and a company of 14th FA under Lt Mishina.

²⁴ ATIS 670, 5.

²⁵ Discussion of the Arawe operation with pertinent documentation appears in Chap IX.



**DISPOSITION OF THE MATSUDA DETACHMENT, 26 DEC 1943
CAPE GLOUCESTER, NEW BRITAIN**

- | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| ○ Assembly Area | ⚡ Arty Posn | ⚡ Infantry Gun | SeP Shipping Eng Regt | RiA Infantry Regimental Gun Unit |
| ⚡ Mountain Arty Posn | □ Battalion Cp | ⚡ Antiaircraft Gun | ⚡ Ration Dump | TiA Infantry Antitank Gun Unit |
| □ Unit Assembly | □ Regiment Cp | ⚡ Defensive Posn | ⚡ Field Hospital | ☆ Brigade Headquarters |
| | | | | SA Heavy Artillery |



MAP # 7



BOMBING CAMOUFLAGED BARGE HIDEOUTS along New Britain's coast was part of the air preparation for the Cape Gloucester landings. (AF Photo)

western New Britain lived under conditions of increasing squalor and wretchedness as the sands of 1943 ran out their course.

Allied air activity along the barge routes had so curtailed that vital traffic that the men were placed on short rations before the end of November;²⁶ rations destined to become still shorter and less varied.²⁷ The stepped-up pre-invasion air attack in Decem-

ber, discussed in Chapter III, superimposed nerve strain²⁸ on hunger. The almost simultaneous arrival of the northwest monsoon brought added misery, especially in the exposed airdrome area where nearly all aboveground shelters against the torrential rains had been destroyed.

²⁶ POW 126.

²⁷ As a crowning irony, a ration dump painstakingly stockpiled with delicacies intended to afford all hands a special New Year's feast was captured by the invaders on D-Day. See Chap V.

²⁸ The effect of the incessant bombing on the defenders' nerves has probably been much exaggerated. A Japanese medical officer (POW 191) stated that neurotic cases were practically non-existent, owing mainly to the troops' psychology and indoctrination. "There are nervous troops," he said, "but no neurotics."



TENUOUS SUPPLY LINES BETWEEN RABAU AND CAPE GLOUCESTER were cut when these barges and many others like them were left in this condition by Fifth Air Force bombers.

Although casualties from the aerial bombing do not appear to have been heavy,²⁹ hunger and weather conditions increased the incidence of illness, overcrowding hospital facilities already suffering serious shortages of medicines and medical supplies because of curtailment of the barge traffic. Malaria was the greatest scourge, with dysentery (amoebic in particular) a closer second, the latter often so riddling the patient's intestines as to make treatment of the former by internal medication impossible.³⁰ Fungus infection, the ubiquitous "jungle rot" of the Marines, was practically universal, sometimes developing into crippling tropical ulcers.

²⁹ No definite figures are available, and statements of individuals differ. POW 104 stated the bombings "killed about 500 [50%] in each battalion." POW 108: "Some were killed as a result [of the bombing] but not many." Both belonged to 1/53, posted in the airdrome area.

³⁰ POW 191.

Troops stationed in the southern regions of the island did not have to endure the monsoon³¹ and suffered less from the bombing, because of the less exposed nature of their positions. But they, too, suffered from the universal shortages and had become a hungry group of soldiers when their turn came to make the long, difficult uphill march to the main scene of action.

The period of pre-landing preparation also saw the final deterioration of Japanese-native relations. The less friendly islanders had long since fled to the hills, and with the increasing supply pinch even the best intentioned officers could not deter their hungry soldiers from plundering the gardens of those who remained and reacting violently to any attempted resistance. So, these, too, began

³¹ Owing to the interposition of high mountains, New Britain's north and south coasts have different monsoon seasons, the one being wet while the other is "dry," or comparatively so. *Burcham*.

disappearing into the high jungle, thereby depriving the Japanese of what might have proved most useful allies, as they subsequently did to the Americans.³²

Most prisoner of war interrogations and some captured personal documents reflect the low morale which these several factors engendered in the defenders of the Cape Gloucester area. But morale is seldom so decisive a factor with oriental troops as it can be

³² A handful of natives remained with the Japanese after the invasion for reasons of their own, but the trustworthiness of even these few was not above suspicion. See Chap VI.

with occidentals. These men were soldiers of Japan; regardless of how badly their combat efficiency had been sapped, they would fight.³³

Thus matters stood during the dark early morning hours of 26 December 1943, when one of Colonel Sato's observers on Sakar Island, descrying blacker bulks at sea against the graying sky, began sputtering excitedly into a radio transmitter that an enemy convoy was approaching the north coast of western New Britain.

³³ POW 110.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER V

Cape Gloucester D-Day

THUNDER AT DAWN

During the early hours of 26 December, Christmas Day back home across the International Date Line, the main convoy¹ turned to starboard from Vitiaz Strait, passed around Rooke (Umboi) and Sakar Islands, and bore in toward Cape Gloucester from the northwest. First dawn paled the sky to show the brooding bulk of Mount Talawe looming off to the southward, but darkness still lay upon the water at 0600 when the cruisers and destroyers opened fire on their predetermined targets. For the next hour and a half distant thunder beat upon the eardrums, and concussion shook the air. Only one Japanese gun replied—with a single round.²

Two LCI's mounting multiple rocket launchers, a new device at this stage of the war, moved first³ through the wide opening in the barrier reef, conveniently marked by a piled-up Japanese destroyer, and took post

off the flanks of the designated beaches, with the dual function of serving as guideposts and firing in support of the assault. The APD's came next and disembarked the leading waves into landing craft which began their seemingly aimless circling prior to forming into waves at the line of departure. The troop-carrying LCI's followed, and farther out the first echelon of clumsy LST's loafed into position under bare steerageway.

First air support appeared at about 0700⁴: big B-24's of the Fifth Air Force from Dobadura, barely discernible against the clear sky that presaged a bright tropical day, the sound of their motors a remote, intermittent humming. The heavy bombers broke into several formations in order to cover the wide target assigned them, reaching all the way from Target Hill to Cape Gloucester itself, while escorting fighters hovered above to cope with any enemy attempts at air interception. Near the airdrome a fuel dump exploded suddenly in a great burst of flame,⁵

¹ The secondary landing on opposite side of the cape is treated under heading *Green Beach* in Chap VI.

² 1st MarDiv SAR. II, 3.

³ Two destroyers and two motor mine sweepers had preceded the convoy through the reef opening under cover of darkness, located shoals by means of sound gear, and marked these with buoys improvised from powder cans. Morison, *op. cit.*

⁴ Reports vary as to exact time. 1st MarDiv SAR. II, 3, states "approximately one hour after dawn." In notes made on the scene, this writer records sighting the B-24's at 0656, only a few minutes before their bombs began to fall.

⁵ The plume of grayish volcanic smoke rising continuously from the crater of Mt. Langla was mistaken at first for another exploded dump, though that seemed an odd location for one.



LANDING AREA viewed from northwest. This photo, made in 1946, shows Silimati Point jutting out into the sea at an exaggerated angle. Beach Yellow 2 is at the juncture of the point and the mainland and Beach Yellow 1 on the near side of the short jut of land that separates the two beaches. Target Hill rises to the right.

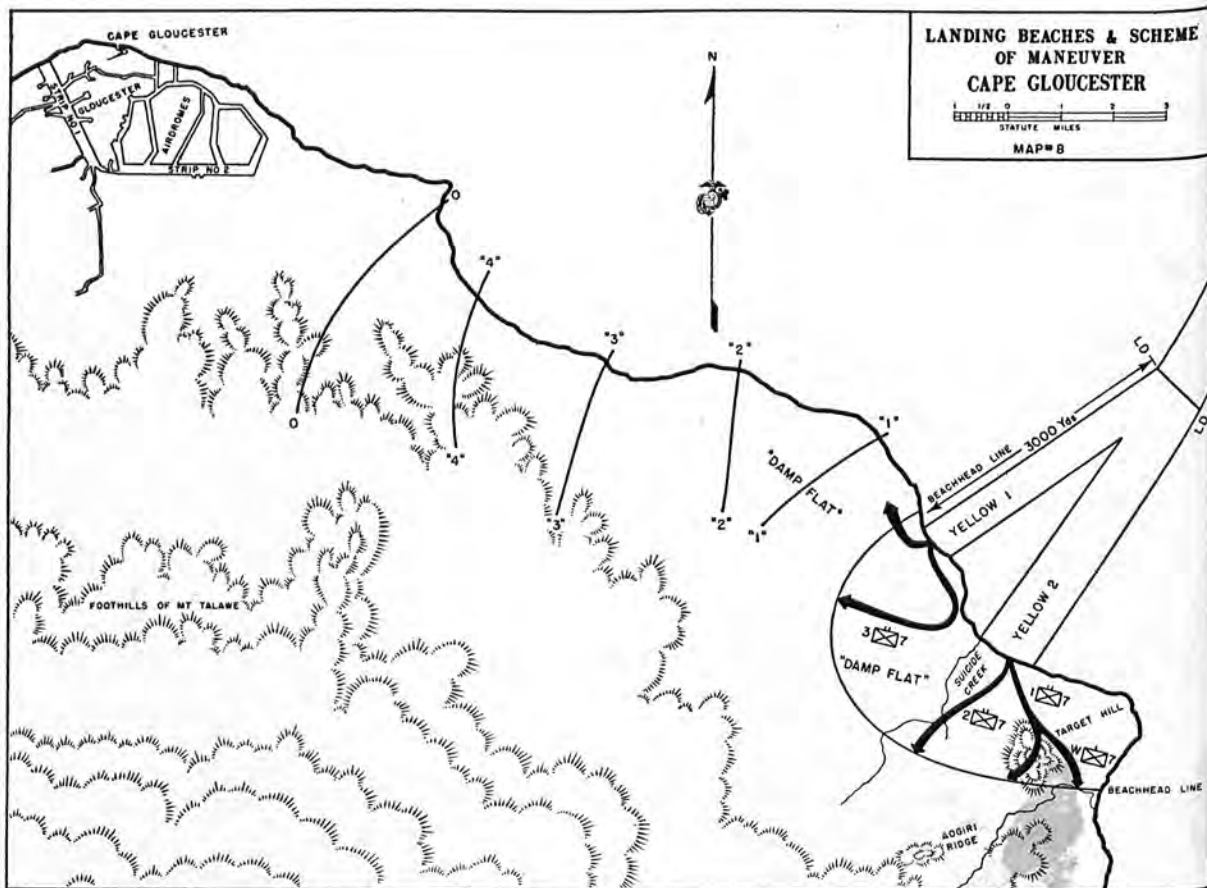
and the smoke of bursting bombs began to spot the lush green of the jungle, but the keenest eyes aboard the convoy searched the shore line in vain for anything resembling a beach.

B-25 medium bombers followed the heavies, flying lower, laying their eggs more accurately, ranging back and forth across the entire area. Then came the swift, graceful A-20's: very low, strafing suspected enemy positions and targets of opportunity. A single Japanese AA gun opened on them in the foothills behind the airfield, spitting

sparks of tracer bullets, only to be silenced in what appeared a matter of seconds.

As H-Hour (0730) drew near, the B-25's began dropping white phosphorous smoke bombs on Target Hill to screen observation from that key elevation. The A-20's turned their attention to the immediate landing area, continuing their strafing runs on the beaches until the first wave was within 500 yards. Naval gunfire, meanwhile, shifted inland and to the flanks.

That not a shot of any sort greeted the onrushing assault waves testifies to the suc-



cess of this support, and probably accounts for certain odd delusions suffered by the Japanese then and later. But at the moment all the effects were not on the credit side. For a vagrant breeze carried the smoke screen seaward across the entire area, blotting out the shore line⁶ and the few landmarks the coxswains had to guide on, with the result that many craft lost direction in the murk and put their troops ashore on the wrong beach. Indeed, one group carrying elements of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines missed the beaches altogether and hit the shore some 300 yards to the west, where the troops shortly became involved in a brisk

⁶ CG, 1st MarDiv had foreseen this possibility and wished to dispense with smoke screen altogether, believing that smoke and dust from naval gunfire would be sufficient to cover the approach. CG, Fifth AF disagreed and proposed originally to smoke the beaches themselves. They compromised on Target Hill. (MajGen E. A. Pollock, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Pollock*.)

fire fight, the only opposition of this kind encountered during the initial landing phase.⁷

It might be argued with considerable conviction that no higher degree of tactical surprise was achieved by U. S. forces in any Pacific landing. Yet his failure to be prepared to defend this sector should not necessarily imply stupidity on General Matsuda's part. Considering foreseeable contingencies and the limited resources at his disposal, he had made his dispositions with no little shrewdness. That he was taken by surprise and his force cut in two at a single stroke is better attributed to the fortunes of war: a daring invasion plan abetted, ironically, by a shortcoming in U. S. advance intelligence. For, had the planners of the invasion known as much about the terrain as did Matsuda,

⁷ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 4, 5. 7th Mar SAR and WD gives the distance as 650 yards. Opposition came from the same road block that gave K/1 a rough time a little later. See below.



LST'S MOVING IN as smoke screens Target Hill and spreads along the beaches.

there is a good possibility that the landing would not have been made where it was; hence, that the whole operation would have followed a very different course.

THE "DAMP FLAT"

The beaches themselves were excellent—what there was of them: a firm underfooting of black sand, almost entirely free of coral and shelving just sharply enough to permit even a large LST to ground within a dozen yards of dry land in many places.⁸ But they were so shallow as to warrant the title

⁸ Owing to reluctance of Navy commanders to beach their LST's forcefully, personnel and vehicles often had to debark in shoulder-deep water. As early as possible the Shore Party constructed sand-bag piers out to the individual vessels to facilitate unloading. (LtCol Nathaniel Morgenthal, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Morgenthal*.)

"beach" mainly by courtesy. As one commentator put it: "A tall man could lie with his head under the cover of the vegetation line and his feet out in the water."

Beach Yellow 1, the westernmost, was about 500 yards long, bounded on the east by a 1,000-yard stretch of rocky shore line where jungle grew out over the water to provide a secondary barge hideout that serviced what aerial observers had spotted as a small supply dump and bivouac area immediately inland. Beyond this tangle lay Beach Yellow 2: approximately 700 yards long and terminating some 1,200 yards west of the tip of Silimati Point.

The 7th Marines (Colonel Julian N. Frisbie), in initial assault, had the mission of setting up a beachhead perimeter as quickly

⁹ Pratt, *op. cit.*



THE MARINES kept their weapons dry as they waded ashore.

and firmly as possible. The first wave of the 3d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel William R. Williams) landed on Yellow 1 at 0746, the 1st Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel John E. Weber) on Yellow 2 two minutes later, both in landing craft from the APD's. Charging down the lowered ramps of their LCVP's, the Marines found themselves brought up short by a wall of clotted jungle so dense as to be impenetrable even to the eye for more than a few feet. This they attacked with machetes and came presently upon a system of shallow rifle trenches and log-and-earth

bunkers, all unmanned, and two dual-purpose 75mm guns standing abandoned. Beyond these, at varying distances, lay the motor transport road connecting the airdrome with Borgen Bay. The only live Japanese encountered were a handful of scared shipping engineers personnel cowering in dugouts, too stunned by bombing and gunfire either to fight or to flee. The assault troops gave these only cursory treatment, leaving mopping-up to support elements.

Pressing on beyond the road, they soon crossed the narrow shelf of dry ground and



ASSAULTING MARINES found a solid wall of jungle extending along the water's edge.

entered the region which U. S. map makers, with a degree of optimism seldom exceeded in military annals, had labeled "Damp Flat."¹⁰

"It was 'damp' up to your neck," one disgusted participant declared later. Said an-

¹⁰ "There was ample evidence of [the terrain's] true nature of aerial photographs taken before the landing. . . . Oblique photographs taken during pre-landing bombing strikes . . . showed hundreds of bomb craters full of water. Since these craters showed virtually no rim shadow, it indicated a water table almost at ground level. During a number of briefing sessions with various officers I personally pointed out these facts." *Burcham*. Australian Major Mather also predicted swamps during the planning phase, apparently two voices crying in the wilderness.

other: "Time and again members of our column would fall into waist-high sink holes and have to be pulled out. A slip meant a broken or wrenched leg."¹¹

This was, as Matsuda well knew, swamp forest, some of the most treacherous terrain that exists. Forward momentum petered out as the men floundered through the mud, tore loose from the vines that gripped their bodies. In places water lay hip-deep above the earth; in other places, what appeared to be solid ground would give way under a man's weight, dropping him up to his thighs in the muck and holding him there helpless until his companions could extricate him.

¹¹ *McMillan, op. cit., 173.*



THIS IS what a mapmaker calls "damp flat."

And the trees began to fall: great forest giants, rotten to the core and further weakened by bombing and shell fire, crashed at the slightest provocation.¹² The first fatality suffered by the troops ashore was caused by a falling tree.

The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, with Company A and two platoons of Company C in the first wave, landed on the eastern beach (Yellow 2) and drove immediately toward Target Hill and Silimati Point. The men brushed aside some minor opposition,¹³ and Company B seized the key elevation by noon, held back more by the terrain than by the

¹² Of course, many trees had fallen previously, adding complications to the already almost impassable tangle. Numbers of unexploded aerial bombs did not help matters, either. (LtCol O. M. Conoley, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Conoley*.)

¹³ Notably two fortified positions on Silimati Point. One of these contained a 75mm gun pointing seaward, but so emplaced that its crew was unable to traverse it sufficiently to the left to fire on the invading boats. Both were knocked out by the 1st Platoon of Company A. (LtCol M. W. Moore, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Moore*.)

Japanese. The 2d Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Odell M. Conley) came in behind the 1st from beached LCI's and drove straight inland, 900 yards through mud and water, to set up the center of the beachhead perimeter on dry ground beyond.

To the 3d Battalion fell responsibility for securing the right flank. As previously noted, some elements landed out of position, to the west of Yellow 1, and did not rejoin their parent unit until the second phase of the operation was under way.

This second phase consisted of a drive on the airdrome by the 1st Marines (less 2d Battalion). Forward elements of the 3d Battalion of that regiment came in on LCI's behind 3/7 on Yellow 1 at 0815, passed through that unit, and not long thereafter ran up against one of Colonel Sumiya's road blocks: four strong bunkers armed with as many machine guns, together with a system of rifle trenches.

The action that ensued was brisk—and deadly. Company K, in assault, lost its commander and executive officer¹⁴ in a matter of minutes. For a while everything seemed to go wrong. Bazooka rockets refused to detonate in the soft earth that covered the bunkers. Flame throwers failed through mechanical malfunction.¹⁵ An LVT carrying ammunition appeared and attempted to double as a tank, only to become wedged between two trees. At this juncture, excitement got the better of the Japanese and they rushed from the shelter of their bunkers to swarm over the hapless amtrack. They killed the two men manning the machine guns. But the driver refused to lose his head. He skillfully extricated his vehicle and caved in the nearest bunker by driving over it, whereupon the infantry closed with small arms and grenades to wipe out the position.

¹⁴ Capts Joseph A. Terzi and Phillip A. Wilheit. Command devolved temporarily on Lieut Hoyt C. Duncan, Jr., as it would once more. See Chap VI.

¹⁵ History of First Marine Regiment, hereinafter cited as *1st Mar His.*; pp. 6-7. This source gives Marine losses as five killed, five wounded, evidently not including the two LVT men killed. Twenty-five Japanese died in this action.

A participant relates an interesting sidelight to the road block clash:

A German shepherd dog serving as a sentry for the Japanese died with his master in this encounter. I noticed our own scout dog smelling his dead contemporary as we passed through "K" Company. These scout dogs had been loaned to the Marines from the Sixth Army. The dog handlers were Army personnel.¹⁶

This vicious little fight marked the strongest Japanese resistance on D-Day. But more significant to the over-all picture was the expedition with which the entire landing was handled. So well scheduled was this movement that the big LST's began dropping their ramps on the beaches 40 minutes after the first assault waves landed; had unloaded and

¹⁶ Ltr Maj W. W. Wright to CMC, 15Feb52, hereinafter cited *Wright*.

cleared the area to make way for the second echelon¹⁷ by 1300. In anticipation of jungle difficulties, several of the leading LST's carried bulldozers forward on their tank decks, plus LVT's to tow them in immediately through the shallow water. Once ashore, they began cutting traffic lanes from beach to road, subsequently moving on to widen the road and clear dispersal areas for the wheeled vehicles which poured in under their own power.

However, close encroachment of the "damp flat" greatly curtailed the area available for dump dispersal and necessitated some hur-

¹⁷ Each "flight" consisted of 7 LST's: 3 on Yellow 1, 4 on Yellow 2. So tight was the movement schedule that they were obliged to retract before complete unloading of bulk cargo stowed farthest aft. As a result, several carried the same cargo back and forth on successive trips. *Morgenthal*.



A COMBAT-LOADED LST moves toward Yellow Beaches. Target Hill looms in the background.

ried improvising by the Shore Party. The official Army observer had some unkind comments to make regarding the resultant congestion,¹⁸ apparently without having grasped the major contributing factor. The peculiar reasons which caused an excellently conceived unloading plan to go awry are described as follows by an officer of the 1st Motor Transport Battalion:

The true cause of the traffic congestion can be attributed directly to Army personnel who manned

¹⁸ AGF Rpt by Army Liaison Officer, 8.

150 odd 6x6 trucks with preloaded cargo. These drivers had been scraped up from an artillery regiment in New Guinea and supplied with salvaged trucks into which had been loaded practically all the LANFOR supplies. The trucks theoretically were to discharge their cargo at the dumps, return to the LST they had debarked from and return to New Guinea for the second load. The trucks were considered expendable if they only completed one trip. The plan failed in one respect, as there were no immediate dump areas to unload the trucks in due to the "Damp Flat." It was decided to leave the cargo in the trucks until dump areas were established. This caused consternation in the ranks of the Army drivers, who consequently abandoned their trucks in an effort to get back on the LST. The drivers did not



THE LVT was the only answer to Cape Gloucester's mud.



THE 1st BATTALION, 7TH MARINES seized Target Hill and dug in.

have sufficient officers or NCO's to control them and what few they did have joined the mass exodus. This naturally left 150 trucks stranded on the beach exits for quite a time. Eventually the trucks were unloaded by Marines and proved to be a big aid to transportation starved organizations. Finally most of them were recovered some 35 days later by the Army. Even as late as Pavuvu those derelict trucks which the Army couldn't find, continued to appear, jealously hoarded by Marines.¹⁹

The commanding general, having made the trip in Admiral Barbey's flagship, destroyer USS *Conyngham*, had landed by 1015,²⁰ and

the division command post was in operation ashore within the hour.²¹

The scheme of maneuver committed two battalions of the 1st Marines to seizure of the airdrome, anticipating that these would move abreast across a wide front with the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines extending the perimeter behind them. This did not work out as planned, however. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines landed at 1400 and attempted to go into position on the left of 3/1, only to sprawl

²¹ Reliable wire communications did not become a reality for 48 hours, owing to terrain difficulties encountered by the wire crews and their uncertainty regarding CP locations. Radio was barely adequate, though communications with Sixth Army were generally excellent. *Wisner*. Throughout the assault phase, crews were kept busy splicing ground-laid wire to forward positions because it was constantly being chewed up by the treads of the ubiquitous amtracks.

¹⁹ Maj G. J. DeBell, comments on prelim script.

²⁰ General Rupertus was ashore at the time Company K, 1st Marines, became embroiled with the road block. He ordered tanks landed immediately and moved forward in support. The position had been reduced by the time they arrived, but they remained with the assault elements and played an important, often crucial, part throughout the drive on the airdrome.

into that same "damp flat" which bogged down everybody who ventured any distance south of the coastal road.

However, the swamp also afforded flank protection of a sort. In view of this, the plan was quickly changed to move the 3d Battalion in column along the narrow shelf of firm ground, with the 1st Battalion echeloned to the left rear, thus greatly speeding forward progress. But no sooner did the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines move out to extend the perimeter westward in pace with the advance than a small group of Japanese infiltrated the gap thus created. Thereupon the commanding general ordered 3/7 back to the main beachhead line, and took advantage of the incident to send an urgent dispatch to Sixth Army requesting immediate use of the long wanted division reserve: 5th Marines, reinforced, which, in process of displacing from Milne Bay to Cape Sudest, could not arrive for several days. So the two battalions of the 1st Marines, continuing their advance, set up their own perimeter for the night with both flanks on the beach, a technique they repeated each evening until the airdrome was taken.

Meanwhile, as previously noted, the strong eastward surge of 1/7 had secured Target Hill against minor opposition. The Japanese had used this elevation mainly as an observation post rather than a defensive position, and the observers had moved off to escape the intensive bombing and shelling,²³ attempting to reoccupy it only after the Marines were in full possession. This capture anchored the

²³ It had been standard procedure for Japanese observers to quit their exposed positions on Target Hill when brought under heavy attack, leaving their equipment there against their early return. On 26 December, however, when it became clear that a major landing was in the making, Matsuda issued orders instructing the men posted there to remain in their positions at all costs. (POW No. 1,000.) Whether they did not receive the word, or simply chose to ignore it, is not clear. In any event, the Marines captured the best observation point in the area, together with some fine optical equipment, without a struggle worthy of the name, and thenceforth the Japanese command fought mainly in darkness.

line firmly on the left. In the center the 2d Battalion passed through an enemy supply dump and by late afternoon had struggled through the entire width of the swamp, against stiffening opposition, to firm ground beyond. There the men dug in and prepared to meet the counterattacks which experience had taught them could be expected once the Japanese had time to react. Although this battalion was not tied in with the elements on either flank, and could be supplied only by amphibian tractor, the perimeter could be deemed reasonably secure, with several batteries of the 11th Marines in position and registered to the front. (See Map 9.)

THE GUNNERS HAD THEIR PROBLEMS

While the "damp flat" required certain changes in the infantry's tactical plans, it posed special problems for the artillery, which had to move through the swamp with its heavy equipment. Faced with the necessity of improvisation, the howitzer crews fell back on amphibian tractors and used the LVT's for the first time as prime movers in negotiating dense forest and deep swamps on a compass course.²⁴

The 1st and 4th Battalions, 11th Marines, assigned to close support of the 7th and 1st Marines respectively, began landing from LST's on Yellow Beaches 1 and 2 at 0900. In pre-D-Day planning a large kunai patch had been optimistically picked from aerial photographs as a likely spot for 4/11 to set up its 105mm howitzers. Now ashore and moving toward the proposed area, the battalion was jarred suddenly to find that a 400-yard swamp lay between it and its objective. Since Lieutenant Colonel T. B. Hughes' artillerymen had to clear the beach and get into position to support the drive toward the airdrome, the only course was to plunge in and get across by any means possible.²⁴

²⁴ Ltr LtCol Dale H. Heely to CMC, 1Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Heely*.

²⁴ "One of the guns and its TD-9 tractor bogged down while crossing the swamp and all that remained above the mud was five inches of the gun shield and

Truck tires and wheels had been mounted beside the howitzer wheels to provide a dual surface in anticipation of some such contingency.²⁵ LVT's were used to clear the way and tow some of the weapons, while TD-9 tractors equipped with bulldozer blades towed others in the wake of the powerful LVT's. In some cases it was necessary to team tractors in tandem to drag the artillery pieces and their trailers through the worst areas. The battalion Record of Events describes it:

the driver's seat, exhaust pipe and a few levers of the prime mover." Ltr LtCol Hoyt U. Bookhart, Jr., to CMC, 25Feb52, hereinafter cited as *Bookhart*.

²⁵ Ltr LtCol Joe B. Russell to CMC, 14Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Russell*.

The battalion moved into position through almost impassable jungle and mud thigh deep. Battalion hacked road through jungle aided very ably by amphib.

The first battery was in position and ready to fire at 1330 D-Day and the remainder of the unit completed the move prior to darkness.²⁶ The 4th Battalion remained in this kunai patch until its departure from New Britain.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines was experiencing a similar surprise in its assigned area. The LVT's transporting the dismantled 75mm pack howitzers had difficulty on the coast trail from trees felled by naval gunfire and bombing. This necessitated a beach line route to Silimati

²⁶ *Heely*.



THE 1ST BATTALION, 11TH MARINES, fires in support of the 7th Marines.



AS THE LANDING PROGRESSED, the wounded began filtering back to the aid stations.

Point where the pieces were to be set up. Here the battalion found what had been identified on aerial photographs as "scattered trees" in reality was a swamp. Lieutenant Colonel Lewis J. Fields, battalion commander, ordered the howitzers set up on the beach edge of the swamp and by H-plus 4 they were ready for assigned missions.

But an afternoon of misfortune lay before these artillerymen, when friendly aircraft mistakenly strafed and bombed the 1st Battalion positions, killing one officer and wounding 14 enlisted (see sub-chapter following). This was followed by an attack on the unit by a small group of enemy troops that had been by-passed or overlooked in the infantry's advance. One Marine officer and five enlisted were killed during the ensuing fight.²⁷ These incidents did not hamper the battalion's fire delivery, however, and it remained in the area for the duration of the campaign.

At 1325 the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines landed in support of the 1st Marines' drive to the airdrome. While experiencing some difficulty with the terrain, as did everyone landing on New Britain, the battalion had no

²⁷ *Bookhart.*

such "damp flat" difficulties as had faced the two other units. It was able to displace forward twice in direct support of the infantry regiment.²⁸

NEVER A DULL MOMENT

The Japanese air arm, still a factor to be reckoned with at this stage of the war, contributed a few fireworks to enliven D-Day. First alert came at about 0900, reporting 80-odd assorted fighters and bombers from Rabaul headed in the general direction of the landing area. FATF fighter cover squared away to intercept, and was somewhat puzzled when the flight failed to materialize.

As it turned out, an enemy coastwatcher on New Guinea had spotted the convoy the previous day, and snoopers had trailed it just far enough to deceive themselves regarding its destination. A Japanese writer describes the result:

Before receiving news of this development [Cape Gloucester landing], however, our air force, having reached the tentative conclusion that the enemy movement was an operation to reinforce MERKUS [Arawe], had sent 63 Zero fighters and 25 carrier bombers to the Merkus area. . . . The air force commander had issued orders changing the attack target to the enemy landing force at Tuluvu [Gloucester] but because of a delay in transmission the change was not accomplished.²⁹

These 88 aircraft comprised the bulk of the Japanese effective striking force, and they had to return to base to refuel and

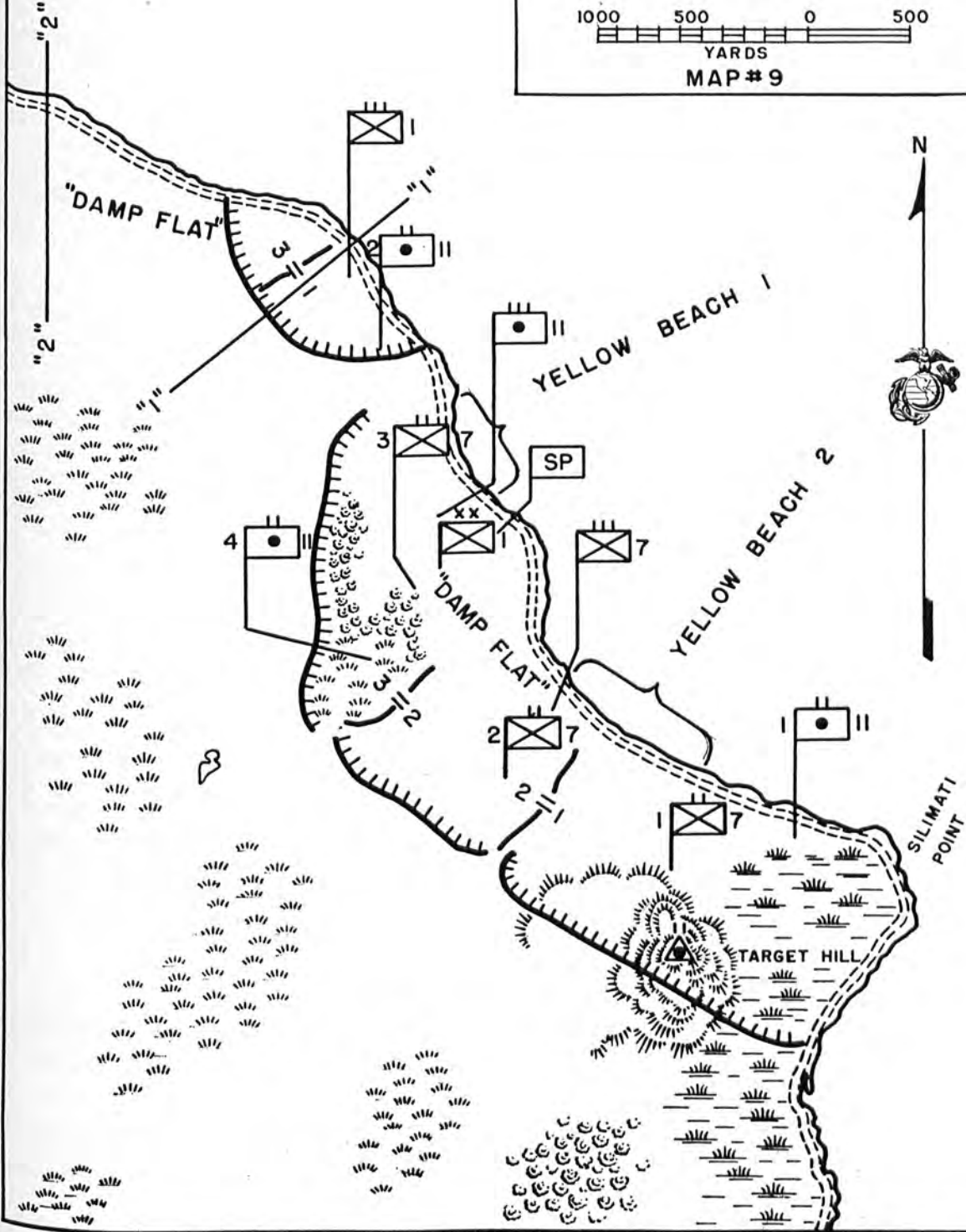
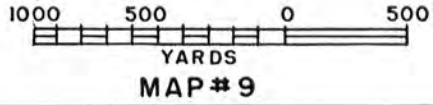
²⁸ 2/11 set up at the airdrome where it remained until 23Feb44 when it joined the 5th Marines in the eastward advance to Iboki and Talasea.

5/11 landed with the 5th Marines 30Dec43, set up halfway between Yellow Beach 1 and the airdrome and later moved to the airdrome where it remained.

3/11, except for Battery H, remained in New Guinea, joining the Division 19Feb44 and going into position at the airdrome. H/11 landed at Tauali with 2/1 and after conclusion of the Green Beach operation came under control of 2/11 until the arrival of its parent battalion.

²⁹ *Southeast Area Naval Operations*, Part 3; Document No. 40429; Microfilm 851-102 at Division of Naval Records and History (Op 29), Office of CNO. Japanese side of the story herein derives from this source.

YELLOW BEACHES D-DAY



rearm before Rabaul could do much to dispute operations at Cape Gloucester. This they did, appearing over the landing area at about 1430, almost simultaneously with the arrival of the second echelon of LST's. Although radar picked them up 60 miles out, most U. S. fighter cover was escorting the retiring convoy of the first echelon and thus was unable to intercept over the shore target.

There are almost as many versions of what happened next as there were eyewitnesses.³⁰ The Japanese came in low and fast to bomb and strafe the beaches and shipping. Spitting machine guns, blending with the roar of diving motors, showered branches, bark and miscellaneous pieces of tree on the Marines crouching below. Bombs exploded all over the area, and air bursts and tracers stippled the sky as the LST's and a few hurriedly emplaced pieces of the 12th Defense Battalion let go with everything they had. Considering the volume of fire by both sides, Marine casualties were amazingly light and material damage negligible,³¹ while the Japanese suffered no confirmed loss at all.

All this shooting brought about what one correspondent describes as the most inexcusable small scale blunder of the war."³² A formation of F4U's, coming in at treetop level, suddenly found themselves snarled up with the Japanese flight almost directly over the beach. In the excitement, two were shot down by friendly fire and two seriously damaged before the gunners aboard the LST's could cool their trigger fingers.³³ Possibly because they wanted to jettison

³⁰ Accounts covering various phases were submitted to Historical Branch, G-3 by the following officers: Cols F. H. Cooper and Robert McGlashan; Lt Cols H. F. Noyes, Jr., A. D. Swift, Jr., Elliott Wilson and W. W. Worden; Maj P. S. Parish, and CWO S. J. Fishel. Many Marines, including the author, were in the jungle at the time and witnessed virtually nothing.

³¹ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 5.

³² Ltr LtCol H. F. Noyes, Jr., to CMC, 19Feb52.

³³ "The other ships recognized our planes & stopped shooting but trees obscured the planes from No. 26 & they continued shooting getting the two." Lt Col A. D. Swift, Jr., comments on prelim script.

their explosives, or possibly because they mistook their target, the B-25's then proceeded to bomb and strafe the Silimati point position occupied by 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, killing one officer and wounding 14 enlisted Marines.

All of these events took place in a matter of a few swift minutes.³⁴ The enemy pilots then turned seaward to attack the convoy of the first echelon, returning empty to New Guinea. There they tangled with the U. S. fighter cover and the AA guns of their intended victims, but succeeded in sinking one destroyer and damaging three others and two LST's before being driven off.

In recounting the results of this action, both sides resorted to those astronomical figures for which combat flyers the world over seem to have a predilection. Fifth Air Force claimed 22 of the 25 Japanese dive bombers ("VALS") destroyed and "probably more than twenty-four of their fighters," against a loss of only seven U. S. aircraft, three of these to friendly fire, in addition to the shipping loss and damage listed above.³⁵

The previously cited Japanese source listed a bit more modestly two U. S. cruisers and two transports sunk, three transports damaged, and 20 fighter planes shot down, while reporting their own losses as 13 bombers and four ZEROES.

However, even that admitted loss must have loomed large in their steadily weakening position, for never again during the entire operation did the Japanese attempt a daylight attack on a comparable scale, though sneak raiders stole in occasionally through a low overcast to drop a random bomb or two.

But nights were a different matter.

THE MONSOON

"In the early morning hours of December 27," records the Division Special Action

³⁴ As an indication of how confusing those few minutes were, many Marines saw no Japanese planes at all and believed the bombing and strafing done entirely by the B-25's.

³⁵ AAF in WWII, Vol IV, 341.

Report,²⁰ "a terrific storm struck the Cape Gloucester area."

This seemingly strong observation is by way of being an understatement. No one who has not endured it can have more than the faintest comprehension of what the north-west monsoon was like at Cape Gloucester. The first of the expected rains arrived on the afternoon of D-Day: what appeared a solid wall of water such as, seen rarely and briefly in the U. S., is called a cloudburst. Only there was nothing brief or rare about this: It lasted for hours and recurred at least once nearly every day for the next three months. The division had landed light, without tentage. Men in front line fox holes were soon up to their necks in water, those in jungle hammocks farther back not much better off.²⁷

This sort of thing became routine soon enough, but the storm previously mentioned was something of a special feature, though by no means unique. The wind roared in from the Bismarck Sea at hurricane velocity, bringing down giant trees with rending, splintering crashes. Lightning, striking close by, blinded men, and deafening thunder drowned out the noise of gunfire: where the Japanese were counterattacking the center perimeter (see below) and Marine artillery fired over the defensive positions. In the midst of the elemental confusion, a Japanese plane dropped two flares into the area. Marines, recalling the Japanese signal for naval gunfire at Guadalcanal, promptly dove for their flooded fox holes. But no fire came from the sea, and the foul weather precluded further aerial activity, so the meaning of this futile gesture remains a mystery.

All in all, it was quite a night. The only thing lacking to make pandemonium complete was to have volcanic Mt. Langla burst into eruption, with accompanying earthquake—and an earthquake actually occurred a few days later.

That the sheer volume of rainfall proved

a limiting factor on ground operations puts the case mildly. Marines had been disgruntled no end to discover the true meaning of that term, "damp flat," but from this point on dry ground of any sort became a mere nostalgic memory. The Japanese had built their coastal road for the use of light vehicles under favorable weather conditions, not to accommodate Sherman tanks, prime movers, big trucks and all the equipment necessary to handle logistics for a unit the size of a reinforced division during the monsoon season. Concentrated efforts of the engineers²⁸ were necessary to keep it operative at all, and sometimes even these failed.

As the division report put it:

Rains continued for the next five days causing the ground to become a sea of mud. Water backed up in the swamps in the rear of the shore-line making them impassible for wheeled and track vehicles. Amphibian tractors were the only vehicles able to transport ammunition and food to troops in the forward areas. The many streams that emptied into the sea in the beachhead area and along the route of the advance toward the airfield, became raging torrents and increased the difficulties of transportation. Troops were soaked to the skin and their clothes never dried out during the entire operation.²⁹

The Japanese, of course, suffered from the same elements that hampered the Marines; to a lesser degree, perhaps, in that they were more familiar with the terrain and less dependent on mechanical transport; to a greater degree in that they had been on short rations for a long time with consequent impairment of their general health. But regardless of difficulties and discomforts, they counterattacked on D-Day night, as expected: savagely and tenaciously, if not very cleverly.

THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF MATSUDA

Major General Iwao Matsuda, IJA, safe in his snug quarters some miles from the scene

²⁰ 3/17 (Seabees) which would later take over principal responsibility for maintaining the coastal road and bridging the streams, did not arrive until late on D-plus 1. Since 2/17 was mostly engaged with shore party activities, the bulk of the burden fell on the 1st Bn on D-Day.

²⁸ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 6.

²⁰ 1stMarDiv SAR, II, 6.

²⁷ "On at least one occasion I had six to eight inches of water collected in the lowest portion of my hammock while I was attempting to sleep in it." Wismer.

of action, must have found the first few hours following the landing highly confusing. Certainly he acted confused. From a study of captured Japanese documents and prisoner of war interrogations, he emerges as an officer capable of making sound plans, then bungling them egregiously in the execution.

Once satisfied that a major assault was in the making, he immediately dispatched orders to Colonel Katayama of the 141st Infantry, to the southward, to call in all his patrols, leave only token garrisons at his strong points (Aisega, Nigol and Cape Bushing) and march at once with all available troops to Magairapua. But, having thus arranged to concentrate more distant forces, he proceeded to dispose his own on the immediate scene in a manner which could accomplish nothing except their defeat in detail.⁴⁰

For Matsuda was guilty of one of the worst errors possible to a military man: underestimating his enemy's strength and capabilities. In the dispatch above cited, he informed Colonel Katayama that the attacking force numbered only approximately 2,500 men.

How the 65th Brigade staff managed to arrive at this extraordinary figure remains a matter for speculation. Perhaps willful deception, wishful self-deception, or plain stupid intelligence methods; the Japanese had already proved adept at all three. Yet an apologist for the general might plead extenuating circumstances on several counts.

The smoke screen placed early on Target Hill had deprived the Japanese of first-hand

observation of the initial landing, and the subsequent U. S. capture of that key elevation had limited their later estimates of the situation to the fragmentary reports of jungle-bound patrols. True, the Marines had achieved tactical surprise by landing on undefended beaches; but Matsuda knew that very shortly thereafter they had also landed in swamps so dense and deep as to deny maneuver to a force of any formidable size, even bog down seriously a mere 2,500. In short, it was not unreasonable to assume that the invaders had outsmarted themselves into a neat trap where they must remain immobilized awaiting the kill, which should not be too difficult once the arrival of Katayama with the 141st Infantry brought Japanese numbers to nearly three times what he supposed his enemy's to be.

And events of D-Day appeared to bear out this supposition. Aside from inconveniently seizing Target Hill and pushing a perimeter of sorts across the swamps inland of the beach, the Marines had accomplished little that was visible to such eyes as Matsuda still possessed. The only fight of note had been the brief affair at the road block where the invaders, instead of throwing infantry frontally against powerful bunkers in the glorious *banzai* manner, had awaited supporting weapons to knock out the position. To the Japanese mind, this spelled weakness or timidity, or both.

Whatever his reasoning, Matsuda made no move to reinforce Colonel Sumiya at the airdrome, even though his own basic defense concept envisaged mutual support between their two forces; something he could have done in ample time via the inland trails behind Mt. Talawe, despite the invaders having cut the more direct coastal route. Nor did he attempt withdrawal of the airdrome troops for a concerted stand in the less valuable but more defensible Borgen Bay area. He did not even wait for Katayama to bring up the 141st from the south. Instead, either oblivious to or contemptuous of Marine beachhead defense principles, and obsessed by the then-current Japanese doctrine of "annihilate-at-the-water's-edge," he ordered his own major assault unit, 2d Battalion, 53d

⁴⁰ ATIS 754, 7. Further details regarding subsequent actions of Matsuda and Katayama occur in Chap VII.

⁴¹ A characteristic sample of Japanese intelligence ineptness appears in a diary entry of an officer engaged at Arawe on the southern coast about this time. After fighting for two weeks in complete ignorance of their opponents' strength and intentions—or even identity—his unit finally captured a prisoner. Instead of making even an attempt at extracting valuable information: "He was killed right away by 1stLt Kaji." ATIS No. 789, 1.



TRUCKS, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, bogged down in the mire.

Infantry, hurled in an all-out attack against the center of the invaders' perimeter.

This proved a fruitless and bloody business. The attack struck the sector held by the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines and lasted, with intermittent lulls, from about 0300 until after 0700. Thanks, perhaps, to the fury of the storm, together with the confusing nature of the jungle terrain in pitch darkness, the Japanese failed to find the gaps existing on each side of the battalion's flanks. Three separate times the firing rose to a new crescendo as howling fanatics hurled themselves frontally against positions well dug in and partially wired, though under monsoon conditions "dug in" does not necessarily imply security. As the battalion commander describes the situation:

Rain filled up the foxholes and the men were forced to get on top of the ground. It was a choice of drowning or getting shot, the choice being a personal one. Rifles refused to work on account of the water and mud, as did numerous other weapons. 81 and 60mm mortar fire through the tree tops layed "by guess and by God" was invaluable in these attacks.⁴²

The gap on the right,⁴³ between 2/7 and 3/7, was partially plugged at about 0700 by Battery D, 1st Special Weapons Battalion,

⁴² Conoley.

⁴³ The 500-yard gap on the left, between 2/7 and 1/7, was closed during the afternoon of D-plus 1 by extending 1/7 thinly over a front of 2700 yards. Regimental Wpns Co was placed under 1st Bn command at this time with mission of protecting coastal road and perimeter left flank. (Col J. E. Weber, comments on prelim draft, hereinafter cited as *Weber*.)

fighting as infantry. This unit had been ordered forward at 2000 but became lost in the same stormy darkness that confused the Japanese. It arrived just in time to play an important part in repulsing the final enemy attack, as a result of which it sustained several casualties, and its personnel received five individual decorations.⁴⁴

When the surviving Japanese finally slunk away, they carried their wounded with them. But they left more than 200 dead on the scene. Although the 7th Marines would be aware of pressure for several days to come, the enemy 2d Battalion, 53d Infantry would need plenty of replacements from other branches before it could constitute a major assault threat again.

SUMMING UP

In estimating enemy capabilities, U. S. pre-invasion intelligence shrewdly gave precedence to these two lines of action:

(1) To attempt holding the airdrome, using prepared positions built into a defense in depth.

(2) To counterattack strongly from the Borgen Bay area.⁴⁵

As has been noted, General Matsuda attempted to do both these things, while concentrating his full strength on neither. But we know this partially through hindsight; it was not entirely clear to those on the scene at the end of D-Day.

What the Marines did know was that they had effected a remarkably efficient landing on terrain described by their commanding general as "the most difficult that I have ever encountered in landing operations."⁴⁶

Establishment of the beachhead perimeter and commencement of the drive on the airdrome had cost the division 21 killed in action and 23 wounded. The next day enemy counteraction added eight killed and 45

wounded to the D-Day figures.⁴⁷ Estimated Japanese casualties approached the 300 mark.⁴⁸

Although the terrain had proved worse than the planners had anticipated, and the weather worse than the uninitiated could have imagined, Japanese ground resistance had been less severe than expected, their air resistance impotent. All troops were ashore safely, together with their equipment, including rolling stock, tanks and artillery. Dump dispersal had failed to measure up to optimistic advance plans owing to proximity of the island swamps; yet in addition to assault landing craft, 14 LST's had been completely unloaded of their vehicles and 55% of their combined bulk cargo,⁴⁹ and the difficult shore party problem momentarily solved. The main perimeter stood firm, and a substantial start had been made on the airdrome drive, even if not exactly in the manner planned.

Altogether, the division had reason to be pleased with itself. Only one aspect caused the command post real uneasiness: the impossibility of establishing direct communication with the group (LT 21)⁵⁰ which had made the secondary landing to the west and south in an area that turned out to be a "dead spot"⁵¹ for radio communication with division. And even this concern was relaxed during the evening when the landing team commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel James M. Masters, Sr., succeeded in getting through to Sixth Army headquarters, which relayed the word that his landing had been unopposed and that his force was in position to carry out its mission.

⁴⁷ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 5.

⁴⁸ An estimated 50 Japanese were killed during the day and two taken prisoner; no wounded were found. (1st MarDiv SAR, II, 5.) Estimates of those killed in the attack on 2/7 range from 200 to 235. Continued enemy activity after daylight made an accurate count impossible, and it was believed that the Japanese succeeded in carrying off many of their dead subsequently. 7th Mar WD.

⁴⁹ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 5.

⁵⁰ See Chap VI.

⁵¹ LtCol Robert Hall, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Hall*.

⁴⁴ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 6; LtCol W. J. Dickinson, comments on prelim script.

⁴⁵ Annex "A" to Operation Order No. 43, 3-4.

⁴⁶ Ltr MajGen W. H. Rupertus to Gen Walter Krueger, USA, 6Jan44, hereinafter cited as *Rupertus*.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER VI

Seizure of the Airdrome

ADVANCE OF THE 1ST MARINES ¹

As rain-washed daylight relieved the stormy dawn of 27 December (D-plus 1), planes of the Fifth Air Force came over from New Guinea to bomb and strafe to the northwest of the Marine positions, and at 0730 ² the two battalions of the 1st Marines resumed their drive on the airdrome.

Once more that "damp flat" to the south made a mockery of the original plan to advance on a 500-yard front. As elements on the left continued to bog down, Colonel William J. Whaling, regimental CO, called a halt after about a mile and reformed his entire command in column of companies on the

¹ Except as otherwise noted, the account of operations of this regiment draws mainly on *1st Mar Hist*. This excellent and comprehensive document covers the period 15Dec42-30Apr44, and includes a brief over-all account of operations together with more detailed accounts by each of the three battalions plus Regimental H&S and Weapons Companies.

² An example of discrepancy cited in previous footnote: jump-off hour given by 1st MarDiv SAR and *Ruptertus* is 0800, evidently derived in both cases from D-2 *Journal*. Time quoted above is that reported by 3/1 which, being the lead unit, ought to be in the best position to know exactly when the movement began.

road. Thereafter he relied for flank security on a succession of small patrols which probed successively as far as practicable into the swamp, then fell back in turn on the rear of the column.³

In this formation, Company I led the attack with support of a platoon of medium tanks ⁴ the 1st Battalion following the 3d and echeloned to the left rear as far as readily traversable ground permitted. Combing dense jungle and prepared enemy positions in the continuing heavy rain remained a slow, laborious task, even though no resistance was encountered all day.⁵ Nevertheless, the 2-2 and 3-3 phase lines were passed, and the regiment halted on the 4-4 phase line at 1615 to dig in a perimeter for the night: an advance of more than 5,000 yards or approximately three miles.

Aerial observers had previously spotted Colonel Sumiya's main strong point: the

³ Flank patrol system described in interview with Maj J. N. Rentz, 4Jan51.

⁴ 3d Plat, Co A, 1st Tank Bn, operating General Shermans.

⁵ Other reports describe various types of resistance, but not the units supposed to have encountered it. Several minor prepared road block-beach defense positions were found abandoned and three dual-purpose 75mm guns captured.



COLONEL WHALING (left) gets an intelligence report from Captain Hunt (center) and Lieutenant Watts as the 1st Marines move toward the airdrome.

system of prepared defensive positions on the point of land that flanked a crescent-shaped beach more than 1,000 yards east of the airdrome (see Chapter IV). They had also noted increased enemy activity along a low kunai grass-covered ridge extending inland, and the phase line designated 0-0 had been set in accordance with these terrain features. This now lay approximately 2,500 yards in advance of the 1st Marines' new perimeter, and all hands anticipated a hard fight the following day. However, patrols failed to discover any Japanese short of 0-0, and the two battalions spent a quiet night, lulled by the reassuring rumble of their own artillery's harassing fire passing overhead en route to the enemy.

Lack of resistance throughout the 27th indicated that the Japanese had withdrawn, abandoning minor prepared road-block positions in order to concentrate their strength on ground most favorable to themselves. Since intelligence estimates of this period indicated that there might be two full battalions defending the airdrome area,⁶ time was taken for adequate preparation. Marine

⁶ Actually there was only one full infantry battalion (1/53) in the area, but personnel of attached units brought the total Japanese strength very close to the estimated figure. See Chap IV.

artillery increased its rate of fire, and between 0900 and 1000 on D-plus 2 planes of the Fifth Air Force came over to bomb and strafe actual and suspected strong points to the front.

The infantry attack was not ordered until 1100,⁷ to permit two additional platoons of medium tanks to be brought laboriously forward over the now badly chewed-up road (see below).

The advance moved in column again, with Company I still in the lead, followed by Company L and Company K in that order. The "damp flat" was at last giving way to firmer ground, and Company A consequently was placed inland to protect the left flanks, with Company C following and the rest of the 1st Battalion on the road behind the 3d.

About 1200 Company I received scattered small-arms fire from the front, and a few moments later the Japanese began throwing 75mm shells along the road, wounding a few Marines but failing perceptibly to slow down the forward movement. At 1215, however, leading elements came up against the first of the enemy prepared positions. Captain Carl E. Conron, Jr., CO of Company I, began deploying his entire unit, extending to the left, and brought the tanks forward to bear directly on the enemy emplacements.

The Japanese strong point consisted of a system of mutually supporting bunkers and rifle trenches, well armed and adequately manned, supported by antitank guns and 75mm pieces of the regimental gun type, the approaches obstructed with land mines and wire. Designed originally to defend the beach against an amphibious assault, they were not ideally sited to cope with attack by land, though this shortcoming had been partially remedied by improvisation since the landing two days before had indicated the invaders' intentions. They enjoyed an added advantage in the heavy jungle lying a short distance inland which limited the tanks'

⁷ Hour quoted by regiment and division report, evidently meaning time order was issued. 3/1, the unit actually in assault, states attack jumped off at 1130.

**POSITIONS OF THE
FIRST MARINE DIVISION
(LESS COMBAT TEAM A)**
27 DECEMBER 1943
1000 500 0 500 1000
YARDS
MAP # 10





THE TANKS protected the infantry and the infantry protected the tanks as the 1st Marines kept the airdrome drive going.

field of maneuver to the comparatively narrow area directly to their front, facing the flank of the Japanese position which thus became, in effect, a defense in depth for the entire extent of its east-west length: approximately 300 yards.

While the fight was developing at the main Japanese strong point, Company A, advancing on the left of the 3d Battalion, debouched into a large kunai grass patch some 500 yards inland. Here the men came under fire of an enemy force estimated at reinforced company strength,^{*} supported by mortars and heavy machine guns, posted in the woods on the opposite side of the clearing. Although fighting from improvised positions, the enemy enjoyed excellent cover and had prepared interlocking fire lanes through the tall grass. The ensuing fire fight lasted for four hours. Although unable to advance farther

themselves, the Marines easily broke up two Japanese frontal assaults and one attempt to turn their flank.

With ammunition running low, Company A commenced withdrawal toward the beach at about 1545, covered by artillery fire and one of its rifle platoons. The forward observer and his party from the 11th Marines remained on the scene and continued to call down fire on the enemy position. Next morning this was found abandoned, together with 41 Japanese dead. Marine losses in this skirmish were eight dead and 16 wounded.

How the action developed in the 3d Battalion's zone is narrated by Company K's commanding officer:

When I-3-1 encountered opposition . . . they were extended to the left away from the road. There was a gap of about fifty yards from I-3-1 to the beach. Lieutenant Colonel Jos F. Hankins ordered Captain Barry . . . to fill this gap with a platoon of K Company. While doing this Captain Barry was wounded and I again assumed command. . . . Up to this time

^{*} Identified in *1st Mar Hist* as 1st Co, 53d Infantry. 1/1 account gives hour of contact as 1145.

the battalion . . . had run up against only one bunker and one 75mm emplacement. I was given three tanks (the other two were out of action, one with engine trouble and one with a jammed breech of its 75) to accomplish this mission. I put one squad of the Second Platoon behind each tank and deployed the Third Platoon to set up a skirmish line behind the tanks. We encountered twelve huge bunkers with a minimum of twenty Japs in each. The tanks would fire point blank into the bunkers, if the Japs stayed in the bunkers they were annihilated, if they escaped out the back entrance (actually the front as they were built to defend the beach) the infantry would swarm over the bunker and kill them with rifle fire and grenades. By the time we had knocked out twelve bunkers the Second Platoon . . . were out of ammunition and had been replaced by the Third Platoon and they too were out or down to a clip of ammunition per man. I called a halt and sent for the First Platoon. By the time the First Platoon arrived and ammunition was resupplied forty-five minutes had elapsed. We continued the attack and found two more bunkers but the enemy had in the meantime escaped.⁹

The enemy 75's concentrated on the tanks, but as the guns were poorly emplaced they were quickly knocked out in turn, their crews either joining their friends in the bunkers or scuttling off into the jungle on their own. The singular ineffectiveness of these guns is difficult to explain. Actually they fired very few rounds. One shell exploded against a tank's nose casting without penetrating,

⁹ Ltr Maj Hoyt C. Duncan, Jr., to CMC, 14Mar52.



IT TOOK A LOT of work to get the roads in condition.

though fragmentation did some minor damage, whereupon the gun and its screaming crew were run down and crushed. The others were captured, their almost intact ammunition stacked beside them.

Atrocious weather conditions prevailed throughout the action, with heavy rain bogging down the infantry and greatly hampering the vision of the tank crews. However, by 1700 the 1st Marines, less 2d Battalion, began digging in on a perimeter that embraced the entire defense system and extended 200 yards beyond.

Apart from destroying the last effective defenses of the airdrome, this notable victory resulted in capture of quantities of ammunition and weapons of many types. The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, had lost only nine killed and 36 wounded, thanks to taking ample time in order to insure maximum tank-infantry cooperation. Subsequently they counted 266 dead Japanese there in an area less than 300 yards square.¹⁰

This locality was dubbed Hell's Point at the time. Later the commanding general ordered it officially renamed Terzi Point in honor of Company K's commanding officer who was killed in action on D-Day.

SUPPLY AND PERIMETER PROBLEMS

Engineers of the 17th Marines followed in the wake of the infantry, widening the Japanese coastal road and trying to maintain it in serviceable condition against the damage inflicted by incessant rain and the churning of wheeled and tracked vehicles. Seabees of the 3d Battalion¹¹ especially performed prodigies in this work, but the long advance of the 1st Marines on D-plus 1 inevitably left

¹⁰ Figure from *1st Mar His*. One witness disagrees emphatically. "I counted every dead Japanese in the area and counted only 68." *Wright*.

¹¹ Basically designated 19th Naval Construction Bn, but carried on the T/O then current as 3/17. On drive to the airdrome, B/17 provided close engineer support for 1st Marines while the 3d Bn followed, further improving the road and building the many bridges necessary to get heavy vehicles and tanks across the intersecting streams. (Interview, Cdr. T. A. Woods, 14Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Woods*; Col H. H. Crockett, comments on prelim script.)

them far behind. For by now the torrential monsoon downpours had flooded the numerous streams that intersected the road, playing havoc with the bridges 3/17 was building, thereby necessitating some elaborate improvisations.¹² By D-plus 2 (28 December) the problem of getting food and ammunition forward and bringing the wounded back had become very acute indeed. Fortunately, the capture of the fortified point late that afternoon opened a usable beach (designated Blue Beach), making possible the forwarding of supplies by water in landing craft and amphibian tractors, a method which continued in use for several days.

But no such expedient was possible in reaching those sectors of the beachhead perimeter lying beyond the "damp flat." Here only amtracks sufficed, and these had to beat, bull and cut their own routes through swamp and jungle. The extraordinary capabilities of these versatile machines had certainly not entered Japanese calculations regarding the invaders' ability to maintain a beachhead in that region, and the part played by the LVT's during this crucial phase would be difficult to overestimate.

Illustrative of the difficulties encountered by both sides were the activities of a Japanese armed with a Nambu light machine gun¹³ who ensconced himself high in a huge tree that afforded fields of fire on both the division command post and an amtrack route that passed nearby. Conceivably, had he chosen to sell his life dearly, he might have picked off a considerable portion of the division staff, possibly the commanding general. Instead, he reserved his fire for the LVT's, peppering them liberally whenever favorable opportunities presented themselves. Yet so difficult is accurate marksmanship in such jungle that in two days shooting he succeeded



A JET OF AIR AND WATER helped the Seabees place bridge pilings in New Britain streams.

in wounding only three men, none seriously. In view of his ineffectiveness, blasting him out at the risk of hitting friendly troops in the region was not considered worth while, and he was still on his lofty perch whanging away at the amtracks when the command post displaced forward on the 28th.

This movement had as its purpose maintaining closer contact with the 1st Marines' drive on the airdrome. It entailed a calculated risk in that it carried the commanding general and his staff out beyond the main perimeter, necessitating the establishment of an exceptionally strong security guard. The bulk of this duty fell to the division band,¹⁴

¹² As a matter of practicality, the Seabees utilized the timber most readily available. Their proclivity for appropriating telephone poles previously prepared by signal personnel caused frequent complaints. *Wismer*.

¹³ The Nambu combines features of light machine gun and automatic rifle and is frequently used as a shoulder weapon.

¹⁴ During the two nights that the CP occupied this second position, the bandsmen were supplemented by the Public Relations Section, manning what was probably one of the most expensive two-man security posts on record: two captains, a master sergeant, two technical sergeants and a civilian newspaper correspondent standing four-hour watches. The Japanese proclivity for shooting everybody in sight eliminated the noncombatant from the Pacific war; doctors, medical corpsmen, civilians, even chaplains carried weapons—and used them.



JUNGLE HAMMOCKS were tied to whatever trees were available. This is the Division CP area during an early phase of the operation.

as did most of the dirty work around the command post. That versatile organization, trained under the direction of Major Leon Brusiloff, had won wide acclaim and much good will for the division in Australia. But it had put its instruments aside and was currently doubling in Tommy guns and manning stretchers, thereby winning a very different type of acclaim.

Meanwhile, Japanese pressure continued against the 7th Marines on the beachhead perimeter, still concentrated mainly on the 2d Battalion, in the center. On the morning of D-plus 1, this unit advanced its line some 300 yards in order to rectify the front, attempt to close the gaps existing on either flank, and obtain a more favorable defensive position. This movement brought it to the bank of a small stream, later to earn the dubious name of Suicide Creek, where the men dug in. There they withstood several

short, sharp thrusts on the 27th, followed by two major counterattacks under cover of a tropical storm during the dark hours of the next morning. Artillery accurately registered to the front collaborated with mortar and small-arms fire in beating these off, and at dawn the enemy tide receded, having failed anywhere to penetrate the position.

The attacking force was still the 2d Battalion, 53d Infantry, which General Matsuda had moved into the area on D-Day, reinforced by a miscellany of service and supporting elements. The complete frustration of these operations seems to have enabled Major Takabe, its commanding officer, to convince his chief of the futility of destroy-at-the-water's edge tactics, and thereafter he kept to his own side of the stream.

Here his people labored mightily at the construction of defensive positions: bunkers, trenches, rifle pits, all the field fortifications

at which the Japanese are so adept,¹⁵ not bothering to conceal from their opponents what they were up to. The U. S. plans called for an eventual attack in this direction, but the division command did not want to begin this until the airdrome had been secured. So the men of 2/7 crouched immobile in their fox holes, listening to the Japanese preparing systematically for their reception but powerless to interfere, their only consolation being the harassing fire from the 11th Marines' 105's.

Also on the morning of D-plus 1, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines was withdrawn from the western sector of the perimeter and assembled near the division command post in beachhead reserve. As on the previous day, a few Japanese attempted to infiltrate, causing the commanding general to order the unit back into the line. Again he seized on an excuse for a dispatch to Sixth Army¹⁶ citing the "imperative" need for the division reserve. To close the still existing gap of 200 yards between the 2d and 3d Battalions, he committed Battery D, 1st Special Weapons Battalion, serving as infantry. Thereafter all elements on the perimeter remained static in their positions until the opening of the next phase of the operation on 2 January 1944.

¹⁵ A LtCol Nomura, field fortification expert from 8th Area Army, was attached to Matsuda's headquarters and is believed responsible for the well-planned series of prepared positions constructed in depth during this period from Suicide Creek to Aogiri Ridge. 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex A, 57. See Chap VII.

¹⁶ The above dispatch was the fourth such request filed by the 1st MarDiv with Sixth Army and was sent only an hour and half after Sixth Army had notified division that CT A was being sent to Gloucester. General Rupertus filed his first request at 1700 D-Day. At 0710 on D-plus 1 a second request was sent and at 0745 a third via CTF-76. At 0900 on D-plus 1 division received a message from Sixth Army that CT A would arrive at 0615 December 28. (1st MarDiv D-3 *Journal*.) Gen Krueger kept his word, but failure of his orders to reach the combat team commander promptly delayed arrival until the 29th. (Ltr BrigGen J. T. Selden to author, 27Jan51, hereinafter cited as *Selden*.)

The 12th Defense Battalion contributed its share to the security of the invading troops. Advance elements of this unit had landed on D-Day and had automatic weapons emplaced and firing 30 minutes after getting ashore when Japanese planes attacked. The remainder of the battalion continued to come ashore as additional sites became available for their anti-aircraft facilities and coast defense guns. Japanese naval impotency in this area limited the usefulness of the latter¹⁷ to a little long range shelling of enemy supply dumps and barges attempting to enter Borgen Bay, putting an end to that traffic once and for all. But Japanese air attacks persisted as a minor nuisance if something less than a major menace. Here the battalion's radar furnished many valuable warnings (and more false alarms) of approaching planes, and its anti-aircraft batteries and searchlights put on a brave and diverting display whenever the enemy showed up, and sometimes when they did not.

ENTER THE 5TH MARINES

During the fighting at Hell's Point on 28 December, a curious misadventure befell Corporal Kashida Shigeto, 1st Machine Gun Company, 53d Infantry, Imperial Japanese Army. The trench in which he was endeavoring to give his life for his Emperor suddenly caved in, burying him helpless up to the neck.

An astonished Marine, observing Shigeto's apparently disembodied head blinking at him, paused to debate whether to shoot or shovel, which dilemma was resolved by the arrival of an intelligence officer who ordered the corporal disinterred and made prisoner.

Although wounded in the shoulder and in considerable pain, Shigeto was willing, even eager to talk, especially when the barbaric

¹⁷ As this condition became common throughout the Pacific, Marine defense battalions were reorganized to omit coast defense weapons and redesignated anti-aircraft artillery battalions, though retaining their original numerical designations. Thus, following the New Britain operation the unit under discussion became 12th AAA Bn, though retaining most of the same personnel.



CORPORAL SHIGETO literally had to be dug out of his position.

Americans, instead of torturing him in the honorable *Bushido* manner, handed him a K-Ration and a cigarette. He painted a gloomy picture of his battalion's situation, but he mentioned the original plan for the 2d Battalion to reinforce the 1st, something that might still be accomplished; also the presence somewhere in the vicinity of the 141st and 142d Regiments,¹⁹ possibly within striking distance.

Since Colonel Sumiya had conducted withdrawals following every action to date, it could be presumed that a good part of his force remained intact. Hence, the possibility now presented itself of the Japanese being capable of appearing in the airdrome area in greater strength than previously estimated. The final drive on 29 December (D-plus 3) was delayed, therefore, until the newly arrived 5th Marines could move into position to augment the attack and, by a circling movement from the south, cut off the enemy retreat in that direction.

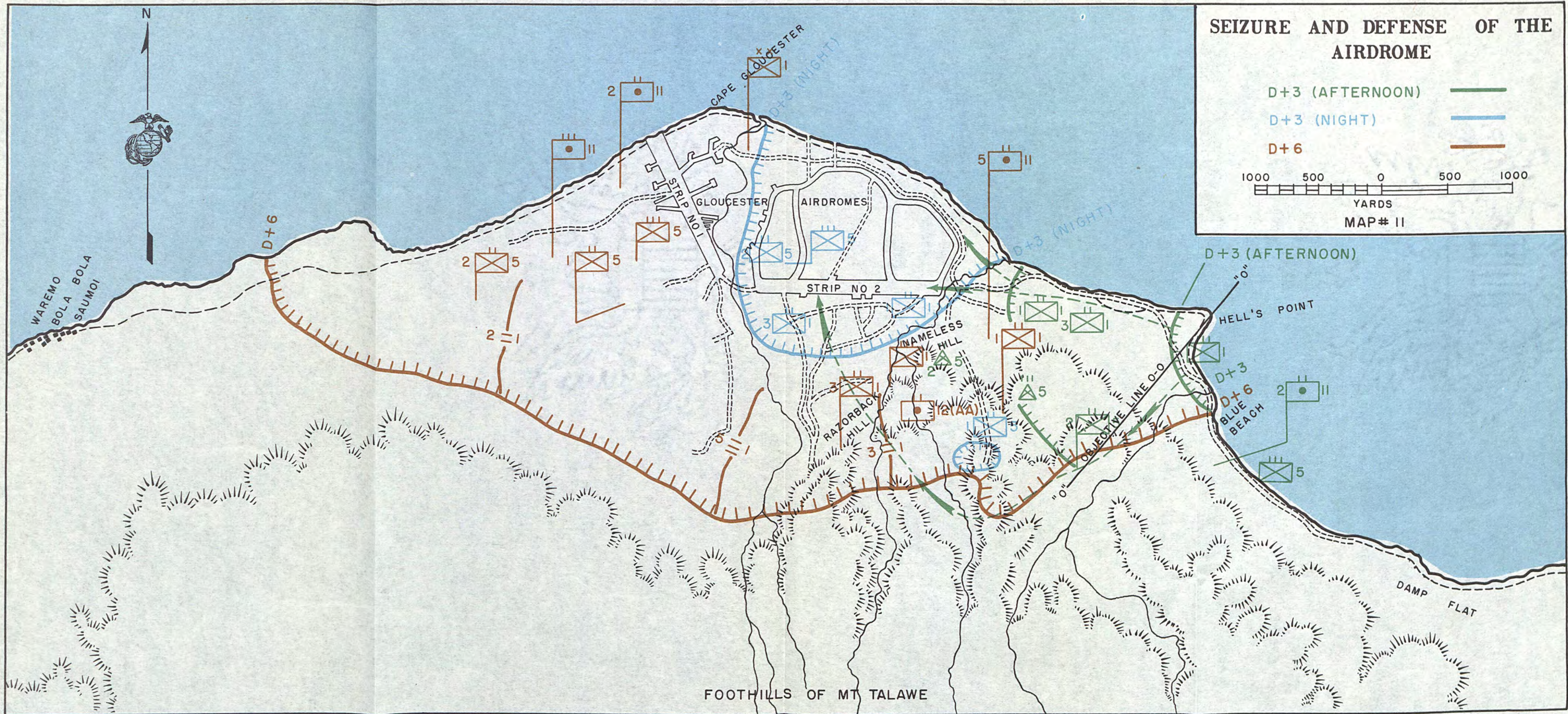
Following cancellation of its proposed attack on Gasmata, Combat Team A had been tentatively earmarked for several more or

¹⁹ POW 104. This was misinformation, of course. The 142d was not even on New Britain, and the 141st, ordered up from its positions to the south, was still far beyond striking distance.

less extraneous missions, such as the seizure of Rooke and Long Islands in Vitiaz Strait. Upon receipt of General Rupertus' dispatches of 26-27 December, however, these excursions were cancelled in turn and the entire 5th Marines, Reinforced, was made available to the division, as requested. The 1st and 2d Battalions, hurriedly embarked with an advance echelon of Regimental headquarters in nine APD's at Cape Sudest, arrived off the Gloucester beaches early on the morning of the 29th. The remainder of the regiment and its reinforcing elements loaded aboard six LST's to follow. One of the craft, however, had difficulty retracting from the beach and the convoy sailed without it. Eventually the tardy ship, with half of the 3d Battalion (reinforced) aboard, made its lonesome way to Gloucester.

In its repeated requests to Sixth Army for Combat Team A, division headquarters had directed that it land on Yellow Beaches 1 and 2. By the time the APD's containing the advance echelon arrived, however, Blue Beach had been set up as a landing area much closer to the regiment's proposed zone of action. Division, therefore, sought to change the landing orders as the troops disembarked, with the result that some elements received notice of the change while others did not. Confusion, aided and abetted by bad weather, caused portions of the 1st and 2d Battalions to land on Yellow Beach 2, while the remainder of the two units with Colonel John T. Selden, CO of the 5th, landed on Blue Beach.²⁰ Those landing at Yellow Beach 2 were directed to the Blue Beach area where they proceeded by a combination of truck and foot.

²⁰ Accounts differ as to actual time of the landing. The 2d Battalion Record of Events gives the time of landing at Yellow Beach 2 as 0730, while LtCol W. H. Barba, CO of the 1st Battalion, agrees with Division SAR in setting landing time as 0800. Col Selden estimates it as between 0700 and 0800, but "closer to 0700." LtCol L. W. Walt, CO of the 2d Battalion, who landed at Blue Beach, states that his unit landed "from 0830 to 1030." Above statements appear in correspondence with these officers early in 1951 on file at Historical Branch, G-3, HQMC.



SEIZURE AND DEFENSE OF THE AIRDROME

D+3 (AFTERNOON) —

D+3 (NIGHT) —

D+6 —

1000 500 0 500 1000
YARDS
MAP# 11

Shortly after his arrival at Blue Beach, Colonel Selden conferred with General Rupertus, Colonel Pollock and Colonel Whaling at the 1st Marines' command post, where it was decided that the 1st should continue its attack along the road toward the airfield while the 5th made a wide sweep on the left flank to cut off enemy withdrawal in that direction, then pressed the attack to No. 2 airstrip through an area believed to contain prepared Japanese defensive positions.

Colonel Selden established his regimental command post in what had apparently been a small Japanese bivouac area some distance short of the enemy strong point captured the previous day by the 1st Marines. Then he, personally, joined Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt, whose 2d Battalion moved to Hell's Point and thence inland along the low kunai ridge on the 0-0 phase line where Company A, 1st Marines had had its fire fight the afternoon preceding. In arriving at the line of

departure, approximately 1,200 yards²⁰ from the coastal road, 2/5 had to make its way through a rain forest and an unexpectedly deep swamp²¹ that seriously impeded progress.

The battalion jumped off at 1500 in column of companies, with Company F in assault, simultaneously with the attack of the 1st Marines along the coast road and ground immediately inland. It encountered no resistance, but alternating patches of jungle and

²⁰ Figure derives from the recorded coordinates of Col Walt's CP at the time of the jump off. 2/5 *RofE*, 29Dec43; 11th Mar *Observers Report*.

²¹ "The swamp which Whaling had informed me was only a few inches deep turned out to be anything but. Advancing with Walt at the head of his Bn, we soon found that it was a sizeable body of water, which slowed our advance considerably, the water varying in depth from a few inches to 4 and 5 feet, making it quite hard for some of the youngsters who were not much more than 5 feet in height." *Selden*.



REINFORCEMENTS moved up to keep the advance going.

high kunai grass, ridges and streams, continued to make progress slow and difficult. The expected prepared positions materialized but had been abandoned, leading to the belief that the enemy had staged total evacuation of the area. After combing the broken terrain thoroughly, 2/5 reached the center of Airstrip No. 2, the larger and more important, at 1925.

At this time Major William H. Barba's 1st Battalion was just struggling out of the swamp and jungle near the line of departure. The original plan called for 1/5 to follow 2/5 in the attack, responsibility for contact resting with the former. The unexpected terrain difficulties, however, kept the plan from being carried out.²² Both battalions sent out patrols in an effort to establish contact, but a combination of darkness and unfamiliar territory prevented positive results. Major Barba, therefore, set up his own perimeter defense where his unit stood.

THE FIRST GETS THERE FIRST

In the 1st Marines' zone of action, Lieutenant Colonel Walker A. Reaves' 1st Battalion passed through the 3/1 and left the line of departure simultaneously with the forward movement of the 5th Marines, preceded by a brief artillery preparation and a spectacular air strike.²³ With Companies B and C in assault,²⁴ the battalion, supported by tanks and elements of the Regimental Weapons Company, swept across a long narrowing kunai patch and the jungle that flanked it on the left, bringing up presently in front of a dense stand of rain forest. Again theartil-

²² "It was nightfall before the last elements of the 1st Battalion cleared the swamp and the rain forest. In other words, had the 2d Battalion waited for the 1st Battalion to . . . get into position for a coordinated attack, it would have been nightfall before such an attack could have jumped off." (Written statement Col W. H. Barba to HistDiv. HQMC, 24 Mar51.)

²³ "This show of air might was a great sight to behold and added a boost to the attackers' morale, if it accomplished nothing more." *Wright*.

²⁴ Co C was on right, Co B echeloned to left rear. (LtCol N. S. Stevenson, comments on prelim script.)

lery was called on in preparation for the advance. The Japanese offered only token resistance by small groups of riflemen.

While the infantry combed these woods, the tanks filed off along the shore road that flanked them on the right. After keeping pace for 300 or 400 yards, they debouched into a much larger kunai patch, beyond which, over slightly rising ground, lay the eastern end of Strip No. 2.

Now there developed a spectacle rare in jungle operations: the massed panoply of modern war, attacking over open ground in plain view of all observers. The ubiquitous rain had ceased for the moment; sunlight even broke briefly through the overcast.

The tanks wheeled left across the front and deployed in a widely intervalled line along the edge of the kunai, where the infantry, emerging from the cleared-out woods, formed in combat groups about them. Artillery shells rumbled overhead, to detonate with a reassuring roar on suspected enemy positions to the front. Nearer at hand sounded the coughing bark of mortars, and tracer bullets from machine guns ricocheted crazily from the rain forest trees on the left of the clearing. An Army crew drove up in a DUKW mounting a multiple rocket launcher. This was a new weapon to the Marines, who observed it with lively interest. To those unable to see the devastating pattern of the rockets' burst, the "whooshing" sound of the discharge sounded rather ridiculous, and everybody laughed, to the considerable mortification of the crew.

The attack formed without haste. On the left, Company A relieved Company B in assault, the latter unit passing into battalion reserve. Then, on signal, the tanks moved out at a footpace, blazing away with their 75's and machine guns to the front and into the flanking jungle. The infantry clustered protectively about them and deployed across the intervals between, the men partially hidden by the coarse waist-to-shoulder-high grass that impeded their progress. The impressiveness of this mighty military spectacle was jarred somewhat by the sudden appearance of a German shepherd dog, evi-



MOMENTARY PAUSE in the Airdrome drive.

dently a Japanese deserter, who took over as "point" and led the advance, leaping and cavorting happily ahead of the line, to the amusement of the troops who, sensing victory as a *fait accompli*, were now in high spirits.

The 1st Battalion reached the eastern end of Strip No. 2 at 1755 and commenced setting up a defensive perimeter at once. By then the drenching rain had begun again, accelerating the approach of early dusk. The 3d Battalion had followed the 1st, extended to the left in a futile effort to maintain contact with the sweeping movement of the 5th Marines. Now it moved to the airdrome in turn, extending the perimeter to the westward some 500 yards beyond the strip's center. When the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, arrived at 1925 (see above), it was ordered still farther to the west to bend the perimeter around Strip No. 1 (running roughly north-south) all the way to the beach.

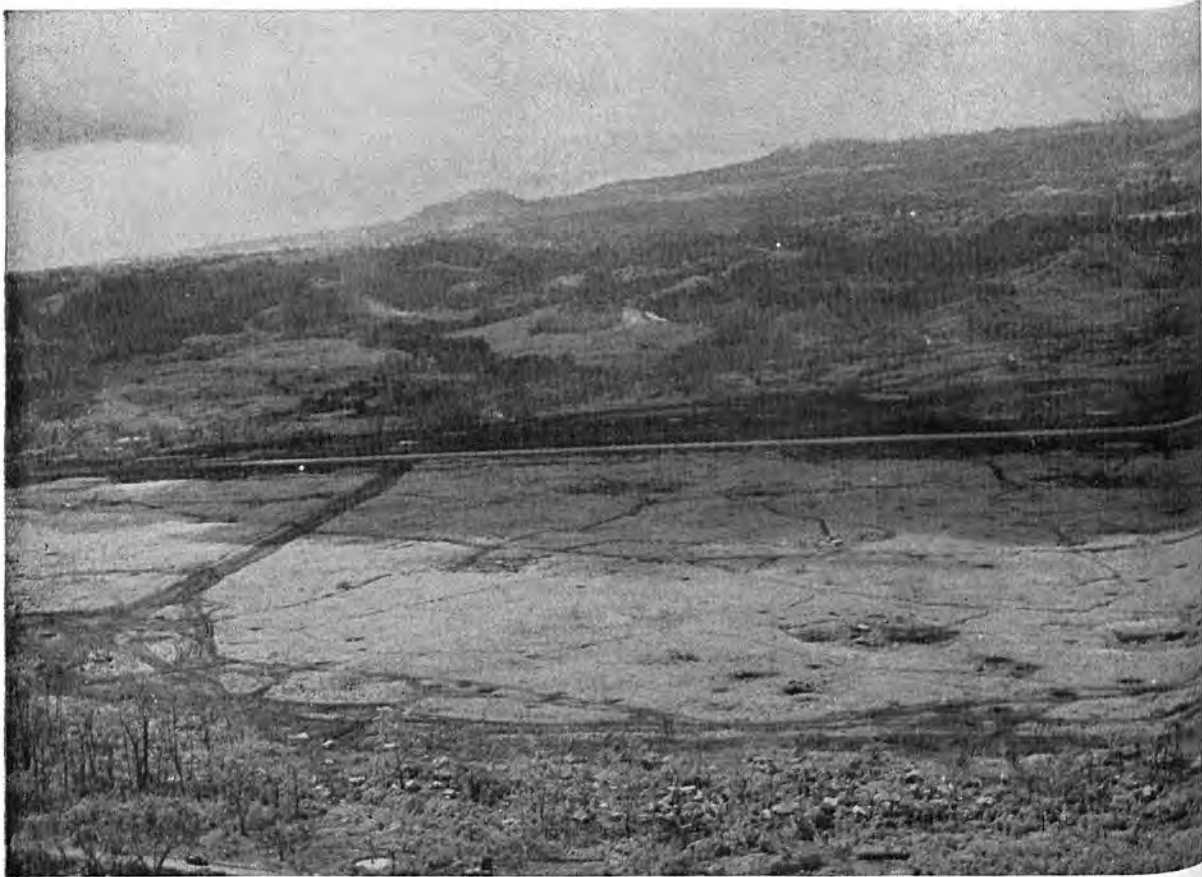
What had become of the Japanese remained a matter for speculation throughout that night. The attack had received only

ineffective random fire. A patrol from Company C, scouring the jungle that fringed the beach, flushed a small group of enemy riflemen and destroyed them in a brief fire fight. These, together with two cut-off stragglers killed later trying to break their way out, were the only Japanese actually encountered in the flesh. The day's important gains had cost the assault battalion of the 1st Marines only three men wounded, one of whom subsequently died.

The one thing certain was that the airdrome, major objective of the entire operation, had been secured at amazingly low cost. As a matter of routine the men on the new perimeter were alerted for counterattacks during the night. But none occurred.

BEHIND THE AIRDROME

No information gleaned from captured documents or prisoner of war interrogations casts any clear light on what Colonel Sumiya had on his mind that day, or even whether



AN AERIAL VIEW of the airdrome area, looking southeast. Strip No. 2 is in the background and Razorback Ridge is beyond it to the right. (AF Photo.)

he was still alive at this point.²⁵ In view of subsequent events, the best guess is that the colonel, or whoever was then in command, realized the futility of attempting to defend open ground against armor and withdrew his surviving elements to the safest spot in the area for redeployment: probably on or near Razorback Hill.²⁶

The name is descriptive: Razorback Hill, a high, narrow ridgelike formation, its steep slopes grass-covered, constituted the most

conspicuous terrain feature²⁷ in the area short of Mt. Talawe. It rose about 1,500 yards behind the airfield some distance west of the 5th Marines main sweep. Patrols from 2d Battalion had explored the lower portion of Razorback on the afternoon of the 29th, where they found enemy positions, but no enemy.²⁸

The morning of 30 December brought quick disillusionment, however, to those Marines who believed that the Japanese had

²⁵ No evidence has turned up to indicate that Sumiya played any part commensurate with his rank in subsequent operations, and prisoners of war disagreed as to his survival. However, some captured documents continued to designate the surviving elements of the airdrome garrison the "Sumiya Butai."

²⁶ ATIS 754, 7: Matsuda Det Staff Telegram No. 220.

²⁷ This elevation was not conspicuous from the air, however, appearing in the photographs as a small kunai patch. For this reason it was not accurately plotted on the contour maps issued to the assault troops.

²⁸ Col L. W. Walt, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Walt*.

withdrawn altogether.²⁰ At about 0730 scattered reports sounded from the Talawe foothills, and mortar and light artillery shells began falling in the airdrome area. Two scouts sent out in an effort to locate and guide in the missing 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, encountered 12 Japanese²¹ at the edge of the prepared defense area which the 2d Battalion had found abandoned the previous afternoon, and discreetly retired after an exchange of shots.

These scouts had moved out from Company F, 5th Marines which had remained in reserve near the eastern end of Strip No. 2. Thinking that they had met merely an outpost or a group of stragglers, they picked up that unit's 3d Platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Henry W. Stankus (brother of the scout lieutenant), and returned to the scene. There they were brought under fire near the top of a small grassy knoll on the edge of dense jungle that cloaked a ravine containing a small stream. Efforts to advance under this cover served only to disclose additional Japanese, while still more appeared to the front. Presently these swarmed out of their protective emplacements and came storming up the knoll, yelling and screaming in their own inimitable manner; repulsed, they crawled back into their holes and commenced shelling the position with mortars, knee mortars and a 75mm battalion field piece.

The Marines, somewhat astonished by such goings-on, called²¹ for mortar and artillery

support of their own. They reported that, according to their best estimates, the enemy had reoccupied the defenses in at least full company strength. The 2d Platoon arrived to reinforce the 3d, and the remainder of Company F moved up within supporting distance.

Captain John B. Doyle, Jr., company CO, now assumed command. He ordered the 2d Platoon into the jungle and across the stream on the left of the position in order to prevent encirclement. Weapons of his machine gun and mortar platoon were put to good use, but the formidability of the enemy bunker system indicated clearly that any substantial advance would require tank support. This was promptly requested. It was not as promptly forthcoming, however, and the Japanese took advantage of the lull to stage another futile *banzai* charge before retiring underground once more to fight to the death.

By this time Lieutenant Stankus' platoon, which had borne the brunt of the fighting, had lost about half of its effective strength.²² Nevertheless, it attacked behind the first tank that finally arrived, while Lieutenant Edward S. Rust's 2d Platoon attacked from the left of the knoll. Together they swept forward for 300 yards through a prepared defense in depth, methodically knocking out 30 to 40²³ bunkers, one containing as many as 13 Japanese, along with their covering foxholes and trenches, mopping up with grenades and automatic weapons.

At about 1130, the fighting ceased in this sector almost as abruptly as it had begun at 0745 in the morning. No more enemy remained to the front; the fortified area had been completely overrun, and Company F set

²⁰ The following version of this action derives mainly from report by CO 2/5 to R-3, 5th Mar, hereinafter cited *Walt Rpt*, copy appearing in 2/5 *RofE*. This has been supplemented and amended by comments on preliminary draft submitted to CMC by Maj H. W. Stankus, Maj J. S. Stankus and Maj J. B. Doyle, cited thus herein.

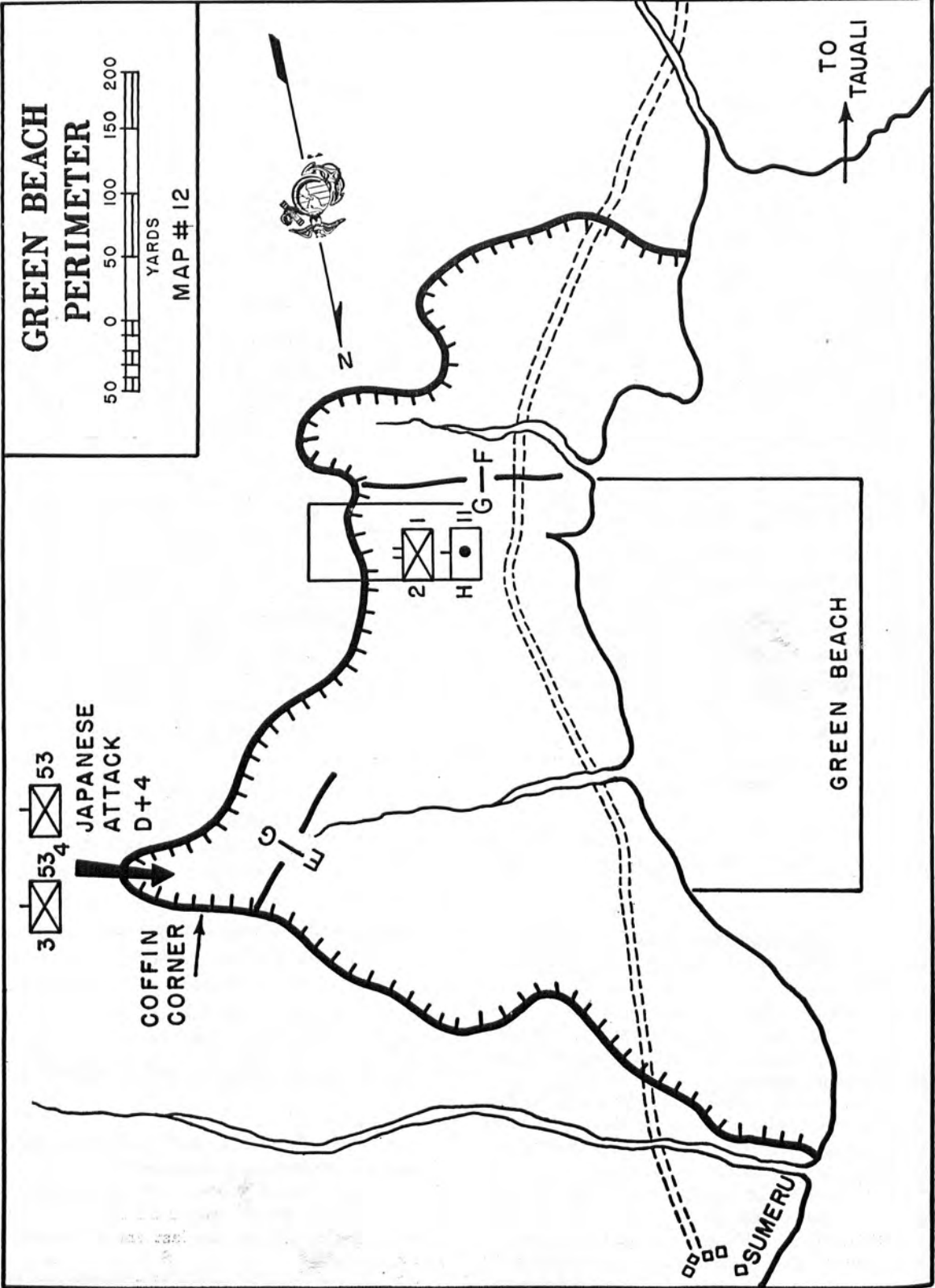
²¹ "Stankus and Kubash walked right into the Jap bivouac and surprised a group of Japs who were just getting up out of the grass and dusting out ponchos." J. S. Stankus.

²² PISgt Clark Kaltenbaugh of the R-2 Section had accompanied the patrol on impulse, bringing with him an SCR 636 portable radio familiarly known as a "spam can." This proved invaluable in obtaining quick support, for the platoon's heaviest weapons, bazookas, proved ineffective against bunkers of the

sort encountered owing to the failure of the shells to detonate in the soft earthen cover.

²³ "The 3d Platoon was down to about 50% effective, while the newly arrived 2d Platoon received several casualties from the last enemy onslaught." H. W. Stankus.

²⁴ *Walt Rpt*. Doyle revises this downward to 10 to 15.



up a defensive perimeter beyond it.³⁴ Thus ended the small unit action which came to be known as Nameless Hill.³⁵ The Marines had lost 13 killed and 19 wounded, H. W. Stankus being among the latter. Counted Japanese dead exceeded 150.³⁶

In point of fact, Company F was not so wholly unsupported during this action as the foregoing account might imply. The "lost" 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, search for which had precipitated the fight initially, moved out in column of companies that 30 December morning after futilely attempting to communicate with the regimental command post and 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. It promptly ran into the occupied Japanese positions and just as promptly lost four men killed and six wounded. A fire fight ensued, involving Companies A and B. The entire action cost the 1st Battalion six dead and 12 wounded.

Meanwhile elements of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines had been committed south of the airdrome as early as 1000. There the first to move out was Captain Carl E. Conron, Jr's, Company I in an effort to flank from the west those Japanese to the front of the 5th Marines. It encountered still more reoccupied enemy positions, especially in another wooded ravine. Company K went to Company I's assistance, and by 1400 Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Hankins, battalion CO, had three companies committed across a wide front. With the timely aid of tanks, these overwhelmed the enemy in their area, the survivors withdrawing up the ravine toward Razorback Hill. Vigorous pursuit reached that position before the badly shaken Japanese could consolidate,³⁷ and the attackers'

³⁴ Co F was relieved in this position by 1st Marine elements about 1400 and rejoined its parent regiment west of the airdrome.

³⁵ From a widely published press dispatch by a Marine combat correspondent, TSgt Asa Bordages, who was himself among the wounded.

³⁶ Doyle estimates 60 to 70.

³⁷ Company K's fight up Razorback Hill was supported by machine gun fire from 1/5's Company A, the guns firing on the retreating Japanese as they made their way up the hill. (Maj Richard Nellson, written statement to Historical Division, HQMC, 17 Apr51.)

impetus carried them to the summit, thereby capturing a key terrain feature upon which a new and greatly extended perimeter could be oriented.³⁸ This valuable acquisition had cost the battalion only one killed and four wounded.

By 1800 enemy resistance had deteriorated into random sniper fire. In the new enlarged perimeter 1/5 went into position between 3d Battalion, 1st Marines and 2d Battalion, 5th, which had now pushed well forward of Strip No. 1. Whatever doubt might have existed regarding security of the airdrome vanished now. Their prepared defenses overrun, most of their weapons and ammunition captured or destroyed, such Japanese as survived in this area could offer no more than empty gestures. And following the actions of 30 December, they did not even gesture.

GREEN BEACH

As has been noted in passing, an element of the division had effected a secondary landing according to plan on Green Beach, between the native villages of Tauali and Sumeru, some miles to the southwest of the airdrome. There, being in a radio dead spot, the commanding officer had been unable to establish direct communication with the division CP throughout D-Day, though able to relay indirect reports by radio via Sixth Army that night.

According to terminology then in use, this force was designated Landing Team 21 (2d Battalion, 1st Marines, Reinforced), coded STONEFACE Group,³⁹ commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James M. Masters, Sr. Its mission was a limited one: to cut the main coastal track, here skirting the western foot of Mt. Talawe, in order to prevent southward withdrawal of the airdrome garrison or its reinforcement by enemy elements known to

³⁸ "I arrived on the top of Razor Back with artillery FO Team at about 1700 and was able to bring some fire to bear on the retreating Japanese." LtCol G. E. Bowdoin, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Bowdoin*.

³⁹ For details of composition of STONEFACE Group, see Appendix VII.

be to the east and south; by intensive patrolling to discover and control important subsidiary trails; to create a diversion; and, of course, to destroy any Japanese encountered in the region.

In many respects the initial phases of the Green Beach landing might be compared to those on the Yellow Beaches, scaled down to miniature dimensions. LT 21 carried 20 days rations and six units of fire, embarked in five LCP's, 12 LCT's and 14 LCM's. This rather less than imposing flotilla proceeded apart from the main convoy from Finschhafen through Dampier Strait, escorted by two destroyers and two patrol craft, arriving off Tauai shortly after dawn on 26 December.⁴⁰

At 0730 the escort vessels opened a pre-landing bombardment that lasted 10 to 15 minutes, following which planes from Fifth Air Force strafed the area in advance of the approaching landing craft. The leading assault wave, with Companies E and F in line (left to right), hit the beach⁴¹ without encountering any opposition en route or ashore. Moving expeditiously, the landing team had a beachhead established by 0835, and by 1000 had secured all objectives on the proposed perimeter line.

As described in one official report:

The terrain along this part of the west coast of New Britain is quite rugged rising precipitously from the shore line to the peaks of Mt. Talawe, 6,600 feet in height. Steep ravines descend to the sea with frequent small streams along the coast line. The main North and South track follows the coast line but a network of native trails exists throughout the area. The beachhead line selected for defense was about 1,200 yards in length and ran generally along a ridge line covering approaches to the beach and intercepting the coastal track.⁴²

An overlay drawn at the time shows a maximum depth of approximately 500 yards

⁴⁰ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 1. Except as otherwise cited, the following account derives from this source, plus *1st Mar Hist*.

⁴¹ This was the more northerly of the two beaches scouted by Lts Bradbeer and Fournier on 21 December as described in Chap III. (1stMarDiv Recon Patrols G-2 Reports; 1st MarDiv SAR, Annex A.)

⁴² 1st MarDiv SAR, II, II, 1, 2.

achieved by a narrow salient driven inland along a gorge near the perimeter's northern extremity. (See Map # 12.) Defensive positions had been thoroughly dug in and wired and mortars emplaced well before evening.

But if the Marines encountered no Japanese in the flesh, they discovered plenty of evidence of the enemy's recent presence: unoccupied beach positions, facing seaward, contained abandoned rifles, ammunition, packs and supplies. Guessing that the supposed defenders had taken to the hills in face of the bombardment, Colonel Masters ordered patrols out in all directions in an effort to locate them. But the only contact made that day was with a small group "about 1,000 yards north of the beachhead near the village of Sumeru,"⁴³ where a brief fire fight ensued.

Intensive patrolling during the next three days failed to locate any formidable Japanese concentrations but turned up increasing evidence that the enemy was still active in the area and evidently up to something. A patrol operating to the southward made contact on 27 December and again on the 28th, both times engaging in fire fights. On the latter date, two Japanese were surprised and killed on high ground to the east. An investigating patrol discovered both to be officers, equipped with maps and binoculars and evidently engaged in reconnoitering the position.⁴⁴ Accordingly the troops were alerted for an early attack.

All three rifle companies now manned the perimeter: Company E on the left holding the northern face of the deepest inland salient, Company G in the center holding the nose and southern face of the salient, and Company F on the right. Battery H 11th Marines, unable to emplace its 75mm pack howitzers satisfactorily in the rugged, jungled terrain, had been reorganized as three platoons of infantry, one posted in mobile

⁴³ *Ibid*. Location given is puzzling, as overlay shows Sumeru a scant 100 yards beyond north flank of perimeter across a small stream. *1st Mar Hist* makes no mention of this incident.

⁴⁴ Maj T. R. Galysh, comments on preliminary script, hereinafter cited as *Galysh*.

reserve behind each front line rifle company.⁴⁶

In an effort to establish communication with the division command post, a detail with a radio jeep boarded an LCM and moved northward by sea, but was driven off by artillery or mortar fire from Dorf Point before being able to complete its mission. Later, however, LT 21 headquarters discovered it possible to get through direct simply by posting the LCM some 200 yards offshore, and communications operated on a schedule by this method thenceforth.⁴⁶

Whatever they were up to, the Japanese continued to manifest an almost incongruous lack of security consciousness. On the 28th a three-man Marine patrol operating in front of Company E's sector discovered two of the enemy fast asleep, but almost simultaneously observed the approach of a patrol estimated at about 40 men. The Marines fired into both groups and retired hurriedly toward their own lines, only to stumble a few moments later on an entire Japanese platoon peacefully sleeping beside the trail. Again they fired before resuming their withdrawal, losing one man but killing four of the enemy who were found later buried on the scene. And the following morning another patrol encountered a group of 24 Japanese south of Tauali who, though more or less awake, were advancing with rifles slung and no point or other security measures. In the ensuing rout, the Marines killed three and doubtless wounded many others with no loss to themselves.

This clash proved the last actual contact made during 29 December, the day when the remainder of the 1st Marines and two battalions of the 5th were closing on the airdrome, to the northeast. However, a growing volume of small-arms fire into the Green Beach perimeter indicated that the Japanese at least were beginning to overcome their drowsiness, and no one was much surprised by the attack that developed during the hours of darkness the following morning.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Maj Galysh, then captain, commanded H/11 at this time.

⁴⁶ *Hall.*

This engagement went down in the records as the Battle of Coffin Corner. It began at 0155 on 30 December under cover of the pitch blackness of one of the heavy tropical rainstorms characteristic of that region and season. By means of excellent reconnaissance, the Japanese had discovered the one practicable approach to the defensive positions, and one which permitted employment of their favorite tactic: concentration of force in order to exert maximum pressure against a narrow sector, in this case the nose of the salient in Company G's zone of action. As one participant describes the situation:

The perimeter defense was located on top of steep ridges, the approaches to which were almost perpendicular. But at Coffin Corner, a natural causeway connected the defended ridges with the opposing ridges and the defense line at that particular location came to a point and consequently the defense was handicapped since a rounded front could not be presented.⁴⁷

The Japanese supported their assault with mortar, machine-gun and small-arms fire, and the Marines replied in kind, at one stage calling down mortar fire 15 yards in advance of the wire. The fighting, though limited in scope, developed to great intensity, the sheer impetus of the enemy's second attack carrying one machine-gun position. Lieutenant Jim G. Paulos led elements of Company G in a savage counterattack that ousted the intruders, supported by Lieutenant James R. Mallon's improvised platoon of H/11, which remained to help man the casualty-depleted line.

Conspicuous throughout the fighting was Gunnery Sergeant Guiseppe Guilano, Jr., of Company H, who hurried about the contact area supplying mobile fire power where most needed by means of a light machine gun cradled in his arms⁴⁸ and fired from the hip. This gave rise to a possibly apocryphal story which cannot be documented but which many men on the scene will swear is true. Sensing his value, Marines began calling for Guliano

⁴⁷ *Galysh.*

⁴⁸ "The following morning I saw Guilano's arms taped up as a result of burns received while carrying a hot machine gun around." *Ibid.*



COFFIN CORNER after the battle. (Army Photo.)

by name whenever the pressure became particularly heavy. The imitative Japanese, hearing this somewhat exotic name shouted above the din of battle, apparently concluded that they had discovered a new rallying cry, a sort of American equivalent of "banzai!" Perhaps in an effort to deceive their opponents, or perhaps just for the hell of it, they began prefacing each new assault by screaming at the top of their lungs, "Guilano! Guilano!" thereby bringing the sergeant on the double to the precise point most threatened at the moment without the Marines having to waste their breath.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ "[Guilano] fired for about ten minutes until I pulled him down—he was a perfect target and I needed him . . . [Japs] made four attacks. They were in our front position in the second." (Lt J. J. Paulos, comments on prelim script.)

The volume of enemy fire commenced to slacken with the approach of dawn, and by 0700 it had ceased altogether. Patrols sent out to mop up any remnants counted 89 dead Japanese in and in front of the lines, six of them officers, and brought in five prisoners. Marine losses were six killed, including one warrant officer, and 17 wounded.

Who were these particular Japanese, and how many did they number? Probably no definite answers will ever be forthcoming.

Interrogation of the prisoners led to identification of elements of the 3d and 4th Companies, 1st Battalion, 53d Infantry. A Japanese probationary officer who surrendered voluntarily a little later estimated the total number of attackers as a mere 116 men, of

whom 50 belonged to the 3d Company, 66 to the 4th.⁵⁰

Official Japanese sources tend to confirm the supposition that the attackers comprised a conglomerate unit, probably thrown together in an impromptu manner and commanded by the senior officer who had survived up to this point. According to Matsuda Detachment Staff Telegram No. 220:⁵¹ "One

section of Tsurubu Sector Unit (14th Artillery and 2 Infantry companies) under 1st Lt. Takeda (provisional force formed from Infantry Gun Unit and 1 artillery battery) is attacking the enemy at Tawale [sic] from the area along the Aipati—Laut Road."

The two infantry companies referred to would be the 3d and 4th of the 53d Regiment as identified above, but neither could have been there in its entirety as another source⁵² definitely places portions of both as fighting in the vicinity of Razorback Hill (called by the Japanese *Eboshi Yama*) on the same day. Presence of elements of the 14th Field

⁵⁰ POW 112. This man had been suffering a severe attack of malaria for several days and was too ill to participate in the assault, for which reason he lacked accurate on-the-scene knowledge.

⁵¹ Contained in ATIS 754, 7. Copy of document found is undated, but internal evidence indicates that it was issued on 30 December.

⁵² POW 110.



LVT's were used for supply in all sorts of terrain.

Artillery, also part of the "Tsurubu [air-drome] Sector Unit," might be borne out by the shelling subsequently received by the Green Beach position.

If the Japanese attacking force did indeed form along the Aipati—Laut road, this would indicate either that the elements from the airdrome had by-passed the Green Beach perimeter successfully despite all precautions, or that those occupying the Tauali—Sumeru area had fled southward in the first place in face of the invasion.⁶⁴ In any event, such Japanese as survived the Coffin Corner fight clearly had access to the main east-west trail, and no doubt most of them withdrew at leisure to rejoin the vestigial remnants of the "Sumiya Butai" and play their part in the ensuing operations to the eastward (see Chapter VII, footnote 64).

The rest of the Green Beach story can be told quite simply. The Japanese made no further major efforts against the perimeter. On 31 December they maneuvered a field piece into position two or three thousand yards away and shelled the beachhead with singular inaccuracy, most of the rounds landing several hundred yards out in the sea. This caused Colonel Masters to order Battery H, 11th Marines, to get its howitzers into action with all dispatch. By means of block and tackle and much back-breaking labor, this unit hauled its 75's up an incline of almost clifflike steepness and emplaced them on the small plateau above. Counterbattery fire silenced the enemy piece the following day, and thereafter H/11 fired support missions for patrols operating beyond the perimeter.

Patrols continued to effect minor contacts throughout the ensuing week. On one or two occasions natives were seen in company with the Japanese, leading to the suspicion that they were aiding the enemy. Thus, when a patrol encountered opposition in the village of Laut, on the main inland trail, the place

⁶⁴ Belief prevailed among the Marines at the time that the enemy force was that assigned to man the prepared beach defenses in the first place but had been caught absent on other business by the landing; hence, was forced to attack in order to carry out its original mission. *Galysh*.

was first shelled, then burned to the ground, an unfortunate incident since the suspicions later proved unfounded, at least on any considerable scale.

This affair took place on 7 January, and that night a small group of Japanese opened fire on the perimeter in Company F's sector, without important results. These proved the last contacts made by LT 21 which, its basic mission completed, began loading gear and supplies preparatory to evacuation to join the rest of the division.

First physical contact between LT 21 and the main body took place 2 January when Company E, 5th Marines, led by Major C. R. Baker, met a patrol from the STONEFACE Group at Dorf Point. The 2/5 patrol, acting under orders to communicate with Colonel Masters, proceeded to the LT 21 perimeter where it spent the night, returning to the airfield area the next day.

Patrol activity continued through the Green Beach occupation, but efforts to locate and explore the main inland trails proved not wholly successful. In such dense jungle, this was necessarily a groping, fumbling business, and LT 21 learned early what the rest of the division was to experience on a much broader scale. For the natives' custom of abandoning garden patches for new ones as the soil played out led to a plethora of trails running off in all directions, most of them coming to a dead end in weed-grown clearings, each of which had to be reconnoitered painstakingly in turn before its value could be determined. Thus the Japanese, forearmed with this knowledge, could keep ahead of their pursuers almost at will.

Heavy seas whipped up by the monsoon winds hampered evacuation by water of the wounded and heavy equipment. However, this was completed on 11 January, and the remainder of LT 21 set out on foot for the airdrome area on that date. After spending a rainy night in a kunai patch near the airdrome, the long absent battalion rejoined its parent command, going into position on the inland side of the airfield on the 13th.

The value of the Green Beach operation is difficult to appraise, since the Japanese never

put its mission to a test. Possibly their knowledge of the mere presence of LT 21 deterred them from attempting to reinforce the airdrome from the south, but a study of captured Japanese documents indicates that General Matsuda had no such idea in mind but instead ordered the 141st Infantry direct to the Natamo area on the very day of the U. S. landing. Nor did this road block on the coastal track greatly hamper successful withdrawal of the survivors of the airdrome garrison, because of the shorter, if more difficult, trail that skirted the east rather than west shoulder of Mt. Talawe, of which U. S. intelligence knew nothing.

In the final analysis, the men of LT 21 did precisely what was required of them, efficiently and without fuss or wasted energy. And, like so many of those multiple-pronged operations for which General MacArthur's planners seemed to have a penchant, the Green Beach operation looked fine on paper.

"HAPPY NEW YEAR"

With the airdrome secured and a strong defensive perimeter established a safe distance beyond it, General Rupertus raised the U. S. flag on an improvised staff above the main strip with simple ceremonies on 31 December. Then, with justifiable pride, he radioed Commanding General, Sixth Army:

First Marine Division presents to you as an early New Year gift the complete airdrome of Cape Gloucester. Situation well in hand due to fighting spirit of troops, the usual Marine luck and the help of God . . . Rupertus grinning to Krueger.⁵⁴

Much had been accomplished more quickly and at smaller cost than anyone would have dared to predict in advance, and the bouquets flew thick and fast. General Krueger expressed himself as "delighted." At his advance headquarters at Port Moresby General Douglas MacArthur, in somewhat more elegant language, presented the airdrome to the people of the United States with his compliments and sent Rupertus the following dispatch:

I extend my heartiest congratulations to your officers and men. I am filled with pride and gratitude

⁵⁴ 1st MarDiv SAR, II, 13.



THE FLAG was raised over the airdrome on 31 December 1943 against a backdrop of rain.

by their resourceful determination in capturing Cape Gloucester. Your gallant Division has maintained the immortal record of the Marine Corps and covered itself with glory.⁵⁵

However, when the Marines took the time to evaluate what they had gained, they found less cause for exuberance. The airdrome was in wretched condition, deeply and profusely cratered from the incessant bombing and shelling, and littered with the remains of 16 wrecked Japanese planes.⁵⁶ Strip No. 1, the

⁵⁵ D-3 *Journal*, 31Dec43, 2.

⁵⁶ The planes included 3 NICKS, a type of 2-place fighter which had never before been captured; 3 SONIA dive bombers; 2 BETTY medium bombers; 1 HELEN medium bomber; 1 VAL dive bomber; 1 HAMP fighter; 2 NELL medium bombers, and 3 OSCAR fighters. A 17th plane, well hidden in the jungle's edge, escaped damage and was captured in operational condition. This was a new and superior type of fighter known as a TONY, the first such to be taken and hence of great intelligence value. Owing to the unserviceable condition of the strips, it could not be flown out and was disassembled for shipment.

prewar commercial landing field, had been abandoned to all practical purposes to tall kunai grass.

Personnel of the Army's 1913th Aviation Engineer Battalion began work on the field on 3 January and on the 13th were augmented by the 864th Aviation Engineer Battalion. Using excellent heavy engineering equipment, they started scraping and filling the more promising Strip No. 2, but their early efforts succeeded only in churning up a sea of mud under the incessant torrential rains. The more they scraped, the deeper the level of the strip sank, until it began to assume the aspect of a man-made valley.

The aviation engineers worked energetically in shifts on a 24-hour schedule, but progress was discouraging.⁵⁷ The Japanese did nothing to help. They still possessed planes on several operational airfields within range, and these came over almost nightly in all but the very worst weather to bomb the captured area. They never attacked in great strength, and the damage and casualties they inflicted were comparatively minor. But sig-

⁵⁷ Early in January amphibian tractors were used to crush the kunai grass on Strip No. 1 sufficiently to permit operation of the commanding general's light Beechcraft and the division's little Cub observation planes.

nal of Condition Red necessitated a complete blackout and the knocking-off of all work. And often the alert sounded as many as five or six times in a single night.⁵⁸

Thus, the happy day when the field would become operational still lay in the remote future when the Japanese ushered in the critical year 1944 with still another air raid, and the AA gunners of the 12th Defense Battalion responded with an elegant display of fireworks. Meanwhile, the bombs fell and the rain fell and the shell-shattered trees fell, alike on the just and the unjust. The civilian press correspondents who had accompanied the expedition gratefully poured the water out of their typewriters and caught the first available LST for more hospitable shores.

But in the region of the old Yellow Beach perimeter, Marines and Japanese gathered their strength for the new and most bitter phase of the fighting both knew to be coming.

⁵⁸ Elaborate plans of the aviation engineers appeared unrealistic in view of local conditions. Offer of the Seabees (3/17) to contribute their know-how to the enterprise was declined. *Woods*. The field did not become serviceable until the arrival of steel matting and discovery of a rich deposit of red volcanic scoria that proved excellent surfacing material. It did not become fully operational until shortly before the Japanese evacuated their air strength from Rabaul, and played no important part in the operation.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER VII

Drive To the Southeast

THE ADC COMMAND GROUP

Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Assistant Division Commander, had landed on the morning of D-Day and spent the first two days ashore at the division command post. However, when the latter displaced forward on 28 December in the wake of the 1st Marines drive on the airdrome, General Shepherd and his staff moved toward the shore and set up their own command post a short distance inland between the Yellow Beaches.¹ There, on the next day, the ADC was assigned the following mission by the Commanding General:

To protect the Backhander Task Force Beachhead and coordinate shore party activities within the beachhead area; coincident therewith to conduct operations to the Southeast in order to extend the beachhead perimeter and clear the enemy from the Borgen Bay area.²

In short, General Shepherd assumed a semi-independent command, necessitated by the wide dispersal of 1st Marine Division forces as a result of seizure of the airdrome and engagement on two separate fronts separated by five to six miles of road kept usable only by herculean efforts. Because

all of the various ramifications of planning had contemplated some such division of responsibilities, the general and his staff were especially well prepared for the function which now devolved upon them.

For implementation of this double-barrelled mission, two major components passed under ADC control. First, was the Shore Party operating on the Yellow Beaches, consisting of the 2d Battalion, 17th Marines (pioneer:) plus C/17, supplemented by a recently arrived replacement draft, and elements of the 1st Motor Transport Battalion and 1st Service Battalion. For assault troops, General Shepherd had Combat Team C (7th Marines, reinforced), still in position on the old perimeter line, to which was added Landing Team 35 (3d Battalion, 5th Marines, reinforced). This unit arrived in two echelons on 30 and 31 December and was designated group reserve. It moved initially into position behind the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines and sent some elements forward to reinforce that depleted unit, which it shortly relieved.

Final composition of the ADC Command Group at the time it assumed the offensive was as follows:

¹ ADC-2 *Journal*, hereinafter cited as ADC-2.

² 1st MarDiv SAR, III, 1.

Attack Group

7th Mar (less 2d Bn)

Attached:

- 3d Bn, 5th Mar
- Co C 1st Amph Trac Bn
- 3d Plat Ord Co 1st Serv Bn
- Det H&S Co 1st Serv Bn

Shore Party Group

- 2d Bn 17th Mar
- Co C 17th Mar
- Co C 1st MT Bn
- Co C 1st Med Bn
- Co E 1st Med Bn
- Det 1st Serv Bn
- Det 1st Signal Co

Artillery Group

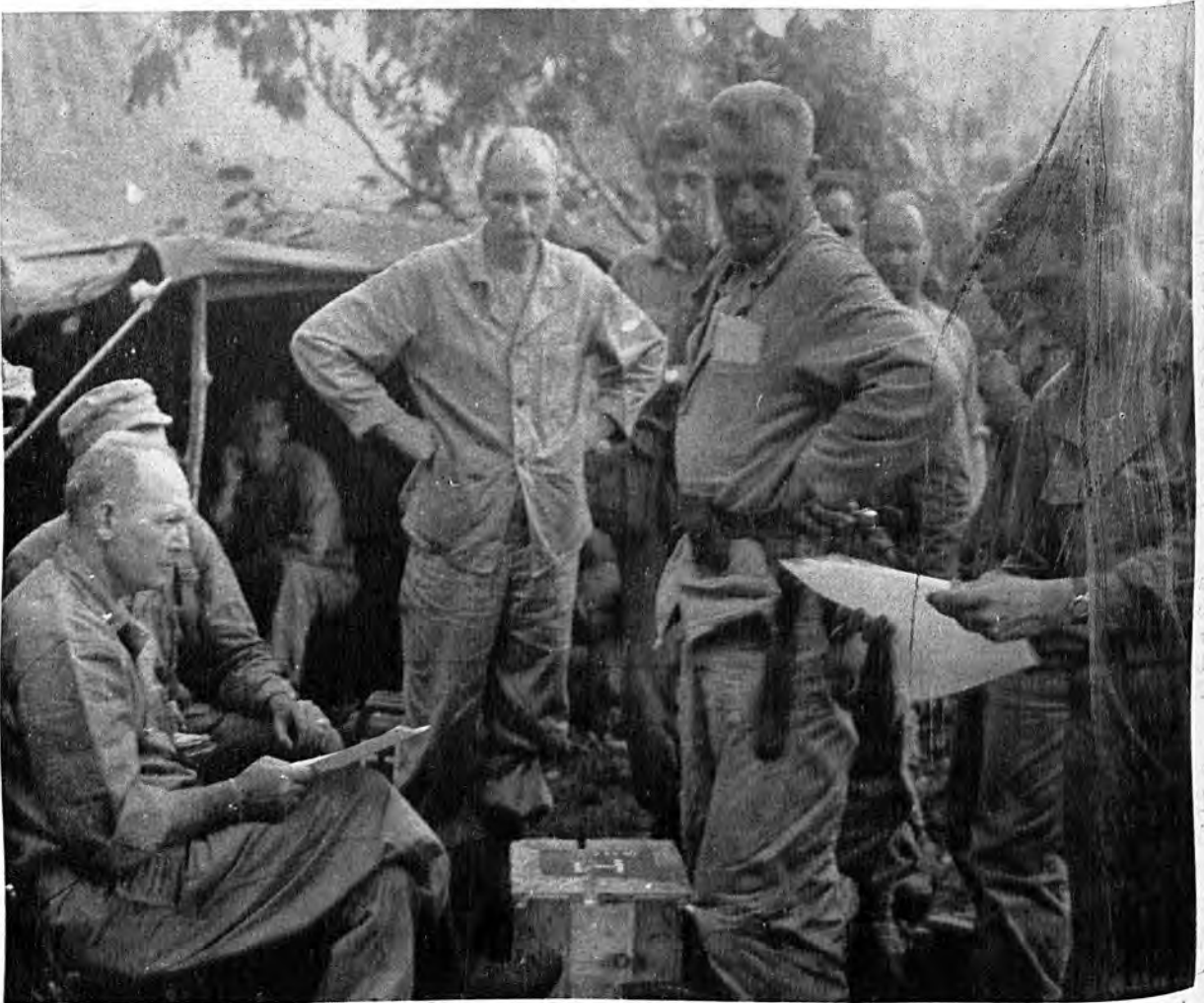
- 1st Bn 11th Mar
- 4th Bn 11th Mar
- Det H&S Btry 11th Mar
- 2d Bn 7th Mar
- Btry D 1st Spl Wpn Bn
- One (1) Plat Co C 1st Tk Bn

Group Reserve

The basic tactical situation was essentially clear and simple. By now the ineffectual nature of the Japanese defense of the air-drome had convinced the Marine command that General Matsuda had retained his

major strength in the Borgen Bay area without attempting to support Colonel Sumiya. Obviously, this force must be destroyed or driven off before the advantages gained could be fully exploited. But its exact composition and disposition remained undetermined in light of such specific information as has been obtained up to this time.

Only one major combat unit had been definitely identified in this area: 2d Battalion, 53d Infantry, with which 2/7 had been in contact since the night of D-Day. Advance intelligence indicated a sizable conglomeration of miscellaneous units under Matsuda's command, but the Japanese proclivity for retaining unit designations for detachments



COMMAND CONFERENCE during the drive to the southeast. Left to right are General Shepherd, Lieutenant Colonel Luckey and Colonel Frisbie.

of varying size provided no reliable rule of thumb for calculating total numbers. A captured dispatch indicated that at least one battalion of the 141st Infantry (2/141) could be expected in the area by 1 January, and Marine intelligence officers did not underestimate the enemy's capacity for further reinforcement.³ In fact, they rather overestimated this, largely on the strength of Corporal Shigeto's statement that the 142d Infantry, a regiment heretofore not reckoned with, was somewhere in the vicinity.⁴

The terrain over which the attack must move remained equally a mystery. The most prominent feature—indeed, the only one of any real prominence—was Hill 660, lying close to the shore of Borgen Bay some 2,000 yards almost due south of Target Hill. Between the two, a lower, narrower ridge, designated Hill 150, lay athwart the left sector of the line of advance. Two sizable kunai patches occurred farther inland (westward), but otherwise dense vegetation blurred the contours and masked such features as swamps, streams, trails, troop concentrations and command posts, including Matsuda's own brigade headquarters, which prisoners spoke of vaguely as being located on rising ground several miles in from the bay.

Thus, the Marines remained as much in the dark as rain forest jungle and atrocious weather could render them on New Year's Day when General Shepherd issued his first order for the attack, tentatively setting the jump-off time at 0800 the following morning.⁵

COLONEL KATAYAMA GUESSES WRONG

The Japanese possessed a tremendous advantage in their greater familiarity with

the terrain; otherwise, the same factors that obscured the opponents' strength and intentions from one another operated against them to an even greater extent than against the Marines, owing to their rudimentary intelligence facilities and primitive methods. As long as they remained strictly on the defensive, this disadvantage was minimized, and during the later stages, when the campaign developed into a sort of gigantic game of hide-and-go-seek, it lost any importance whatever. But it had led General Matsuda into some curious aberrations during the days immediately following the landing, and these carried over into the opening moves of the phase under discussion here.⁶

Immediately upon receipt of his superior's orders of 26 December,⁷ Colonel Kenshiro Katayama, commanding officer of the 141st Infantry, issued explicit orders of his own for the movement of the remaining elements of his command to the Natamo area.⁸ This done, the energetic colonel set out at once from Nigol with his staff and a small security guard over the trans-island Government Trail, reporting to Matsuda at Egaroppu⁹ on the 30th. The next day, presumably following a serious conference with the general and the 65th Brigade staff, he moved for-

³ The reader is reminded that this monograph is written with the perspective of years, after study of material pertaining to each side of which the other side was in total ignorance at time of the actions described.

⁷ Although Col Katayama set his organization in motion immediately upon receipt of the 26Dec order, Matsuda on 27Dec issued two more separate orders directing Katayama to join him in person at once. In addition, Matsuda filed an order with the IJA 17th Div, Eighth Area Army and Fourth Air Army informing them of what he had in mind. ATIS 721, 2 & 5; ATIS 754, 7.

⁸ ATIS 721, 2. Orders issued at this time provided for leaving skeletonized garrisons at the strong points of Nigol, Aisega and Cape Bushing, but subsequently even these were ordered up to the scene of the fighting.

⁹ This was the place that appeared on U. S. maps as Nakarop, though the Marines were unaware of the fact at this time. See discussion of place names in Appendix III.

³ D-2 Weekly Report No. 1. This document also cited a captured ration statement indicating that a total of 5,374 troops drew on the Natamo supply depot on 7Dec43, but did not attempt to estimate how many of these were actually in the immediate area.

⁴ POW No. 104, previously cited in Chap VI.

⁵ ADC Group Opn Or No. 1-44.

ward to Magairapua, where he set up his own command post and assumed command of all the Japanese combat troops in the Natamo (Borgen Bay) zone of action.

Just why Matsuda, a major general, chose to pass over full responsibility for a command of such size does not appear on the record.¹⁰ As pointed out previously, he was essentially a transportation expert rather than a combat leader, and quite possibly his dismal bungling to date convinced him of his own ineptitude. In any event, Katayama issued the tactical orders from this point onward, leading to the most stubborn and bloody fighting the operation produced, and which might have been even worse for the Marines had not Matsuda passed along his faulty intelligence as well, thereby causing the colonel to open this phase of the campaign with a costly blunder.

The over-all command the colonel designated after himself: Katayama Butai (Group).¹¹ Under this were three main smaller units, each based on an infantry battalion strongly reinforced with miscellaneous elements fighting as infantry¹² and named after the battalion commander: Takabe Shitai (2/53—Major Shinichi Takabe), which was already on the scene; Mukai Shitai (2/141—Captain Toyoji Mukai), which reached Magairapua from Aisega on 1 January; and Tatsumi Shitai (newly formed 3/141—Major Asaschichi Tatsumi) which at this stage was still en route from

¹⁰ Months later the 1st MarDiv encountered a similar Japanese command situation at Peleliu, where U. S. officers were not even aware of a major general's presence on the island until the operation was virtually over.

¹¹ Evidently a tactical on-the-scene designation, as the 65th Brigade, as such, continued to be referred to as the Matsuda Butai in 17th Division orders.

¹² Members of a number of units were identified among the infantry in the subsequent fighting: artillerymen who had lost their guns, shipping engineers without ships, etc. However, the extent to which the battalions were thus reinforced is nowhere clear.

Nigol and Cape Bushing.¹³ Such of the Sumiya Butai as had survived the airdrome action retained its corporate identity, but was operating behind Mt. Talawe on the western approaches to 65th Brigade headquarters and apparently did not come under Katayama's orders at this time. (See Chapter VIII.)

Newly arrived on the scene, Colonel Katayama perforce accepted the 65th Brigade Staff's estimate of the invaders' strength: that curious 2,500 figure which kept cropping up in Japanese documents throughout the first week of the operation, even as arrival of additional troops brought American strength to nearly ten times that number. On this basis, he determined to assume the offensive in force, a plan in which he persisted even after the sudden, violent coming-to-life of the hitherto quiescent inland sector of the Marine perimeter on 2 January might have awakened him to the true situation.

As initial objective, he decided on the recapture of Target Hill (Sankokuyama), both for its value as an observation post and to clear the way for anchoring his right flank in a favorable position on the shore. This mission he assigned to the Mukai Group, spearheaded by 1st Lieutenant Shinichi Abe's¹⁴ 5th Company, 141st. Simultaneously, Major Takabe was to hurl his group in a strong attack against the Marine perimeter on the low ground a short distance to the west in order to confuse the Americans and prevent reinforcement of the hill which, because of its narrowness and open nature, was lightly held. Date of the assault was set originally for shortly before dawn of 2 January, later postponed until the 3d to

¹³ An example of the Japanese proclivity for making the simple complicated: one company of 3/141 had accompanied that regiment's 1st Battalion to Arawe, while one 1st Battalion company and part of another were attached to Tatsumi's group during the Borgen Bay fighting.

¹⁴ Lt Abe has been described as one of the best liked and most capable company officers in the 65th Brigade, and his subsequent death as a severe loss to the Mukai Group. POW 191.



A COMMUNICATOR'S LIFE in the dense jungle was not a happy one.

allow more time to rest the newly arrived battalion and to coordinate preparatory fires.

For this was to be no haphazard affair, cooked up on the spur of the moment, as documents brought along by the commander and others made clear. Orders were issued in elaborate detail, and unit commanders corresponded at length to insure the utmost in cooperation from all the artillery, mortars and automatic cannon in the area.¹⁵ Under cover of darkness, assault troops and engineers hacked steps into the steep lower slopes of the hill to facilitate scaling.

At this time Target Hill lay in the 1st

Battalion, 7th Marines' zone of action, more particularly in the sector held by Company A. This unit was deployed with its 1st Platoon defending the area on the left between the beach and swamp, the 2d Platoon holding a series of strong points on such dry ground as could be found in the swamp itself, and only the 3d Platoon on the hill proper, though Captain Marshall W. Moore, the company commander, had his command post there.¹⁶

As so often happened when the Japanese made elaborate plans, they became careless over one detail or another: in this case, adequate reconnaissance. Owing to the ex-

¹⁵ ATIS 719, 2.

¹⁶ Moore.



COMMAND POST of 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel John E. Weber talks on the telephone, his map on his knees.

tensive zone assigned it, 1/7 was spread very thin in places, with the result that a gap of some 200 yards existed between the 3d Platoon and the next element on the low ground to its right. This lay in a natural avenue of approach, exploitation of which would have enabled the Japanese to infiltrate in force and flank the hill. Instead, through either ignorance or misconception, they chose to ignore the gap altogether and spent some hours of backbreaking labor cutting their steps straight up the forward nose of the hill into the very face of Captain Moore's strongest positions.¹⁷

The Japanese placed mortar fire on the hill to cover their step-digging activities, but they made so much noise at the work that by about midnight the 12 Marines posted on the forward nose had a pretty good idea of what was going on. Then, as the attack was launched, the enemy added fire from artillery and 20mm machine can-

¹⁷ Col J. E. Weber, comments on prelim script and ltr to the author, hereinafter cited as *Weber*. The colonel goes on to say in possible extenuation of the enemy: "The Japs apparently figured that this [gap] was well defended; such conclusions [could be] drawn from observation of much Marine activity in there the day before which in reality was the passage of Marines carrying in supplies for our somewhat extended front lines."

non, plus knee mortars and machine guns below the hill.

But again their seemingly congenital inability to mass fires successfully frustrated their intentions. Most of the artillery missed the hill altogether, and the effect of the little 20mm shells was something less than devastating. Company D's mortars replied from their positions behind the hill, but the high angle of fire precluded effective damage to the advance enemy elements which had actually worked their way to positions about 20 feet from the Marines' front emplacements by then.¹⁸

Lieutenant Abe led the assault with great bravery and determination, but the combination of steep terrain, inadequate support and a determined and well alerted enemy proved too much for him.¹⁹ As Company A's commander describes the action:

The first mortar shell landed in the light machine gun position, killing the assistant gunner and Gunner Sgt Deckrow who was there at the time. The machine gunner stayed with his gun for some time before we could get to him. He was directly in the path of the assault and played a very important part in stopping this attack.²⁰ Before the attack was over, 20 belts of ammunition were run through this gun.²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.* The Japanese also dug lateral trenches for shelter when getting into position to assault.

¹⁹ Still another possible contributing factor is described by an officer who searched Lt Abe's body after the fight: "He appeared to have all of his worldly possessions with him. As well as I can remember he had on two pairs of pants, two or three shirts, a raincoat, and was carrying a heavy pack with a coat strapped to the pack. This was in addition to his sword, pistol and entrenching tool. He carried all this equipment while leading the attack up this steep hill." *Moore*.

²⁰ "It was just about 10 feet or so below his position that I found Lieutenant Abe. . . . I search his body . . . and turned the papers mentioned over to Capt Gregg—ADC interpreter. I have Lt Abe's field glasses (his name is lettered on the case) & wallet containing receipt for purchase of a sweater in Manila." CWO S. J. Fishel, comments on prelim script and ltr to author, 29Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Fishel*.

²¹ *Moore*.

A further comment by Lieutenant Colonel (then Captain) Moore provides a possible clue to the part played by Colonel Katayama of the 141st Infantry, who planned and ordered this attack:

We were under the impression that this attack was under a LtCol. We felt that his death stopped the assault. There was an officer other than Lt Abe driving the men on. He was screaming and yelling at the top of his lungs. He was off to the right of the assaulting troops in heavy jungle. . . . We located this officer's position (approximate) and poured heavy fire into this area. His screams ceased and then the attack stopped. After the battle we searched this area but found nothing. If he was killed they must have carried him away.²²

The fury of the assault died out about dawn, though shooting of one sort or another continued well into the morning. Thus the 5th Company, 141st Infantry had been virtually destroyed and other elements of the 2d Battalion roughly handled, to no purpose whatsoever. Although only 40-odd dead (and no wounded) were found immediately in front of the 3d Platoon's position, conditions farther back caused the Marines to revise their estimate of enemy casualties upward to the neighborhood of 200.²³

To the west of Target Hill's base, Major Takabe's battalion had achieved no more and suffered almost as heavily. As an ironic commentary, few Marines except those at the point of contact realized that the division had been subject to a supposedly major attack until the finding of Abe's body with its interesting assortment of documents.²⁴

²² Ibid. There are at least two witnesses who reported that Katayama survived the entire campaign: POW 191, POW 1000. Or the "screaming" officer might have been Capt (or Maj) Mukai, CO of 2/141, also reported to have survived.

²³ Col Katayama reported this action with characteristic Japanese lack of realism: "By the desperate struggle of the officers and men of the Regiment, Sankoku Yama had been captured and the enemy were forced to the water's edge, but, owing to the enemy counter-attack with superior forces, we have relinquished it again with much regret." ATIS 733, 4.

²⁴ "The ones of us on the hill realized the seriousness of the situation but it took some time to convince



MARINES CROUCH in the New Britain jungle awaiting the signal to move on.

For by this time General Shepherd had issued his operation order, and his men were more concerned with their own attack, even now developing some distance farther inland.

SUICIDE CREEK

General Shepherd issued ADC Group Operation Order No. 1-44 on 1 January, and the resultant attack that jumped off at 1000 the following morning might have served warning on Colonel Katayama that he was up against a force of considerably greater magnitude than General Matsuda's extraordinary optimism had led him to expect. However, the fact that the Marines' gains on 2 January were something less than spectacular, and the movement largely concealed by the jungle, may have contributed to his continued self-deception. At any rate, he carried through the fruitless and costly operations aimed at regaining Target Hill, as described in the previous sub-chapter, apparently quite unaware of the situation developing on his left.

Battalion Hqs that we were doing other than shooting at shadows." *Moore.*



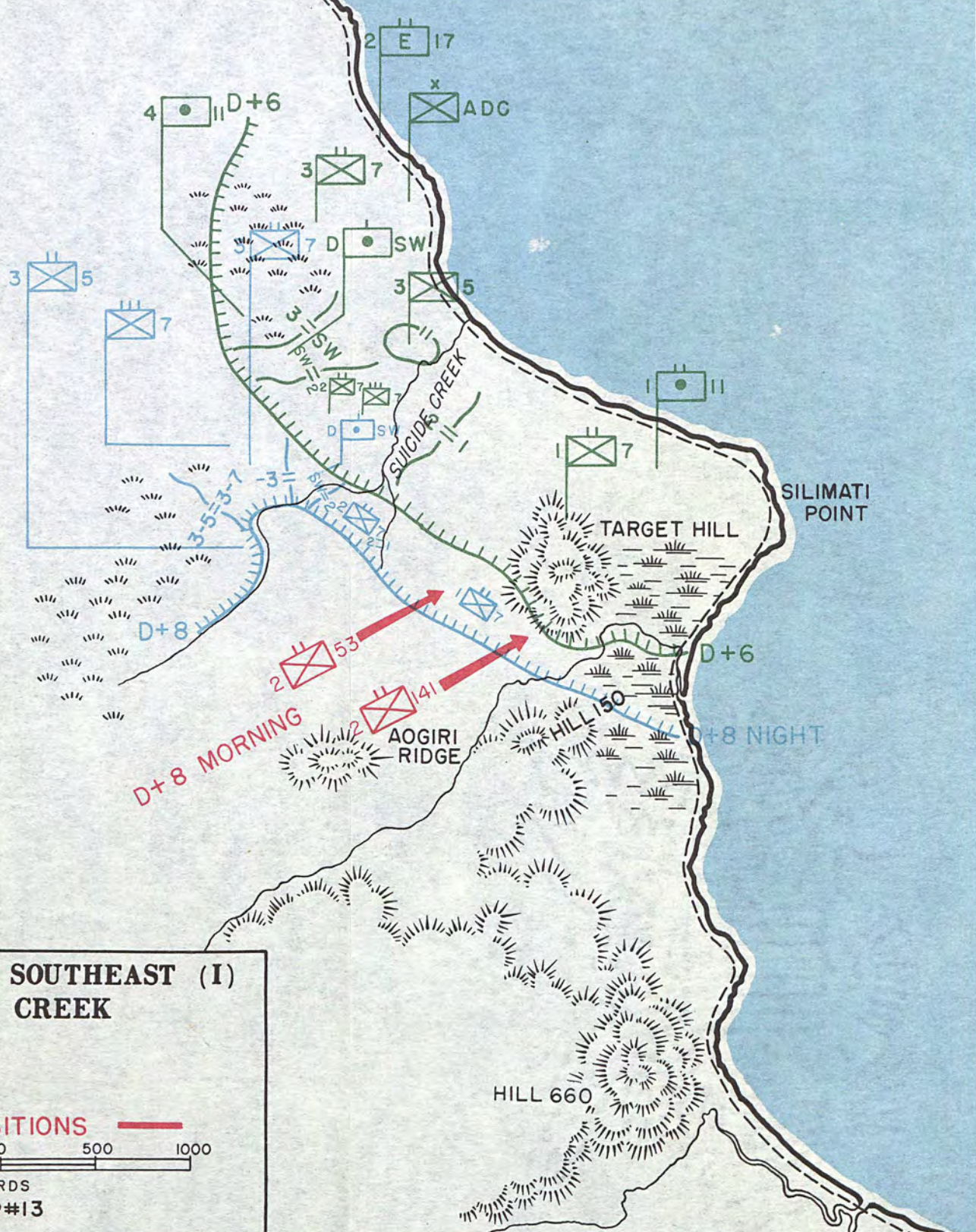
WOUNDED WERE TAKEN out in tractors and then transferred to trucks for the trip to the evacuation hospital.

General Shepherd employed an unusual and interesting scheme of maneuver,²⁵ though "maneuver" is a sanguine term to apply to movement in that sort of country. Briefly, he proposed to hold fast on the left and center of the beachhead perimeter, while the right of that line re-deployed and attacked generally to the southeast on a front of 1,000 yards. Because of the orientation of the old perimeter, such a move would cause the line of advance to lie straight across the front of 2/7, which for the past several days

²⁵ One modern writer has likened this scheme to that employed by General Sherman against the fortified approaches to Atlanta in 1864. Pratt, *op. cit.*, 314.

had been holding the center along the shore of a small stream across which the Japanese had been industriously digging in. (See Map 13.)

To effect this movement, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, which had been holding the right of the perimeter facing generally to the northwest, moved deeper into the jungle and deployed to face southeast with Companies L and K in line (left to right). The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines came up and extended still farther to the right with Companies K, L and I in line. The plan called for the two battalions to advance abreast across the entire front of 2/7 to a phase line designated O-1, thereby pinching out that

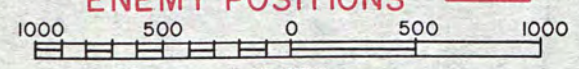


**DRIVE TO THE SOUTHEAST (I)
SUICIDE CREEK**

D+6 ———

D+8 ———

ENEMY POSITIONS ———



YARDS
MAP#13

unit and tying-in the left of 3/7 with the right of 1/7. The drive would then enter its second phase, changing direction more to the south.

No one discounted the difficulties imposed by both the terrain and the enemy. The men of 3/7 hacked their way laboriously through the jungle for a distance of about 300 yards, where they came up against the prepared positions that the Japanese had been constructing for the past week in front of 2/7, and had their forward progress rudely halted by a heavy volume of rifle and automatic weapons fire. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, with a greater distance to travel, encountered less resistance during the early phases. Patrols working well off the right were encouraged to discover no signs of the enemy in that direction. But when they attempted an encircling movement from the west, the assault troops soon encountered the face of the same Japanese pocket that was holding up 3/7 and were halted in turn. As a result, the attacking lines on the night of 2 January, and throughout 3 January, resembled a huge letter "U", with the enemy strong point contained on three sides, as shown on accompanying map.

Liaison between the battalions in assault presented special problems owing to the denseness of the jungle, and contact was frequently lost. This situation was not simplified by the presence of the previously mentioned stream, now richly earning its name of Suicide Creek, which wound its way in a generally north-south direction across the front of 2/7, intersecting the line of advance of 3/7 and 3/5. Recognizing this as a major obstacle, the enemy had sited their positions skillfully to cover it. Time after time Marines forced a crossing, only to be obliged to withdraw owing to their inability to dislodge their stubborn and all but invisible opponents.

The consummate skill of the Japanese in construction of field fortifications needs no elaboration here, save that several peculiar features of this particular region served especially to their advantage. The jungle

both curtailed their attackers' freedom of movement and enhanced their own concealment: Marines had to get within a few feet of the emplacements in order to locate them, by which time few were left alive to spot them for others. A man cannot hit what he cannot see, especially when he himself is wholly vulnerable.

Even their lack of fortification materials—cement and steel reinforcing—reacted in favor of the Japanese, for the earth-and-log bunkers which they improvised perforce were too soft-surfaced to detonate bazooka rockets, the heaviest weapons the infantry was capable of bringing to the point of contact. To support these bunkers, they had dug deep fox holes between and under the flaring buttress roots of the giant trees characteristic of the region, camouflaging them with foliage and cutting cunningly interlocking fire lanes. Artillery and mortar shells and air bombs were all but useless in reaching these positions, owing to the fantastically high forest cover that usually caused tree bursts, to which the deeply dug-in enemy was virtually invulnerable.

So for two days the assault battalions fought what amounted to a stalemate, paying a high price in casualties for negligible gains, while engineers of Company C, 17th Marines labored mightily to build a corduroy causeway across the coastal swamp to enable tanks to reach the scene of action. A betting man might have obtained good odds that it could not be done;²⁰ but during the afternoon of 3 January, three General Sherman mediums lumbered up to the near bank of Suicide Creek, looking reassuringly big and formidable to the hitherto unsupported infantrymen.

Getting the tanks across the stream, here about 15 yards wide, imposed still another problem. The water was not dangerously

²⁰The ingenuity and perserverance displayed throughout the Cape Gloucester campaign to bring tanks into action through terrain in which they were never designed to operate proved a source of wonder to many people. See VI Army Observer's Report.

deep, but the 12-foot banks were too high and steep to permit traverse.²⁷ The engineers solved this problem by ordering up a bulldozer, which promptly went to work cutting away the jungle and pushing the near bank down into the stream bed to form a usable approach. The Japanese hit the driver in a few minutes, but another volunteered for his place. He, too, was hit, despite the Marines' efforts to reduce the enemy fire by increasing their own. A third managed to complete the difficult and dangerous mission by rather novel means: keeping on the ground in the lee of the moving vehicle rather than in the exposed driver's seat and operating the controls with a shovel and an axe handle.

The job was finished by nightfall. At 0800 on the morning of 4 January, following a 15-minute artillery preparation, the first tank commenced a gingerly negotiation of the improvised ramp, wallowed through the shallow water and successfully mounted the opposite bank, infantrymen clustered around it in close support. Two Japanese, evidently forewarned, hesitated just too long in attempting to apply the explosive charges they carried.

From that point onward, everything proceeded much more simply. The other tanks followed their leader, and their murderous 75's made short work of the Japanese emplacements at point-blank range, the supporting infantry disposing of those of the enemy who attempted flight. Pausing to reorganize, the two assault battalions surged forward across their whole front, encountering no further opposition than that provided by the jungle and reaching the O-1 phase line shortly after noon.

Encouraged by this victory and the apparent death or withdrawal of all Japanese in contact to the immediate front, General Shepherd ordered the advance continued, changing direction to south-southeast, to Phase Line O-2, which was secured late that afternoon. Meanwhile, the 2d Battalion, 7th

Marines, pinched out by the successful sweep of its former front and the tying-in of 3/7 with 1/7 on the left, executed a wide swing inland, made contact with the right of 3/5 and extended the line westward. Battery D, 1st Special Weapons Battalion, operationally attached in group reserve, moved out also to protect the extreme right flank in case of enemy attack from that direction.

Thus, the ADC Group dug in for the night of 4 January along a four-battalion front as shown in Map No. 14: from left to right, 1/7, 3/7, 3/5 and 2/7. And here the troops rested throughout the following day, while patrols probed to their front and officers of the staff sought to analyze a piece of puzzling and disconcerting intelligence recently come into their possession.

AOGIRI RIDGE

In making arrangements for the attack on Target Hill, to be spearheaded by his company, Lieutenant Abe had occasion to send a field dispatch to Warrant Officer Kiyoshi Yamaguchi, one of his platoon leaders. In addition to discussing command post locations, hour of attack, etc., he appended an admonition which has been translated thus: "It is essential that we conceal the intention that we are maintaining positions on Aogiri Ridge. Concerning the occupation of this position, it is necessary that Aogiri Yama is maintained."²⁸

Despite this admonition, Yamaguchi, with that seemingly incredible indifference to basic security which the Japanese so often demonstrated, simply stuck the dispatch in his pocket and carried it with him to the assault. Marines found it on his body the following morning, thereby gaining their first inkling of the existence of a terrain feature which appeared as such on none of their maps but upon which the Japanese appeared to place great importance, for reasons not yet clear.

Where was this "Aogiri Ridge?" A rough sketch on Abe's dispatch indicated that it

²⁷ 7th Mar R-2 Journal.

²⁸ 1stMarDiv File of Captured Documents.



FIRST TANK across Suicide Creek.

lay generally south of Target Hill. This would appear to identify it with Hill 150, and the ADC command determined upon immediate seizure of this elevation.²⁹

During the pause on 5 January, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines was pulled back from the line into reserve behind the center, the resultant gap being closed by 1/7 and 3/5 extending toward one another and tying-in their flanks. The Weapons Company, 7th Marines took over the extreme left, along the shore, operationally attached to the 1st Battalion, and in this formation the attack jumped off once more at 1100 on 6 January: Wps/7, 1/7, 3/5 and 2/7. Tanks moved up to support the left, where patrols had dis-

²⁹ The Japanese themselves appeared confused on this point, two crudely printed maps of theirs showing Aogiri Ridge in as many different locations: where Hill 150 stood, and approximately where the ridge was discovered to be. *Ibid.*

covered an enemy road block along the coastal trail the previous day, and artillery placed 15 minutes preparatory fire on Hill 150.

By 1130 Company A, 7th Marines had crossed a sandspit at the mouth of a fairly wide stream flowing into Borgen Bay a short distance below Target Hill. Some 200 yards farther on, the advance elements encountered the strong road block previously spotted and were promptly pinned down by heavy automatic weapons and machine cannon fire. Tanks, moving up in support for just this contingency, hesitated³⁰ at the bank of the stream for fear of bogging down should they attempt the crossing. Colonel Herman H. Hanneken, ADC chief of staff, alive to the seriousness of the situation, ordered them

³⁰ While waiting for the tanks to come up, Co A's CO called for artillery fire, which was delivered with extreme accuracy. *Moore.*



MARINE MACHINE-GUN position on Cape Gloucester.

forward, regardless. Captain Joseph E. Buckley, commanding officer of the Weapons Company, plunged ahead with a half-track and negotiated the stream successfully. With this example before them, the tanks followed and with the aid of the infantry made short work of the road block positions. The advance surged on across increasingly swampy ground against no further resistance, crossed still another stream (designated on some maps River # 5) and seized a sector of what appeared an important east-west trail now impassible as a result of the heavy rains, digging in beyond it at 1654.³¹

³¹ This later proved to be the coastal terminus of the vital supply route from Japanese headquarters to the Borgen Bay dumps and landing points. (See below). The trail was well defined, with a bridge in excellent condition crossing the swamp inland of the beach area. *Ibid.*

The center of 1/7 enjoyed equal success, and Company B secured Hill 150 against surprisingly weak resistance. On the battalion's right, however, the situation developed differently. Company C, attempting to keep pace, was soon stopped by heavy fire from the lower ground southwest of the hill. The left of 3/5, adjoining to the west, encountered a similar experience, and the two battalions dug in for the night with their flanks bent back in front of what gave every indication of being the strongest center of Japanese resistance yet encountered. During the fighting a gap had opened between them, but this was covered effectively by elements of the reserve battalion (3/7).³²

The day's fighting convinced the Marines

³² ADC and 1st MarDiv reports both state that all assault elements reached the O-3 phase line that evening.

that Hill 150 was definitely not the Japanese Aogiri Ridge. But no further intelligence of value turned up to help locate that key position, and no other marked elevation could be discerned in the region because of the dense cloaking jungle. Speculation ran rife, most deductions placing it tentatively from 1,000 to 2,000 yards to the southwest of the present scene of major action.³³ This made good sense, as the ground rose in that direction and a strong point there would possess great tactical value in defending the approaches to Magairapua, now known to be the location of the 141st Infantry's command post and to be near Matsuda's own brigade headquarters. This caused some concern for the security of the attackers' right. As a result, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, advanced only its left company in order to conform with the progress of 3/5, so that its line that night described a wide arc spanning the jungle between two large kunai patches.³⁴ Battery D, 1st Special Weapons Battalion, still in group reserve, remained in position to furnish flank protection.

The front showed little change throughout the next two days. The inability of the Marines' center to make progress against the enemy position necessitated the flanks holding fast. Fighting progressed largely according to the pattern of the previous affair at Suicide Creek, with the Japanese in greater force holding even more thoroughly prepared positions. Again, the nature of the terrain prevented effective flanking of the pocket, and tall rain forest largely nullified supporting fire. And again engineers and pioneers of the 17th Marines worked day and night to build a log causeway capable of bearing tanks across the intervening swamp from the coastal road.

³³ Most reports covering this period give coordinates for the tentative location of Aogiri Ridge, all of them much farther to the southwest than proved to be the case.

³⁴ The easternmost of these kunai patches was designated No. 6, the other and larger No. 3. D/Spl Wpns was emplaced along the near edge of the latter directly behind 2/7, forming in effect a refused flank.



DRY FEET were only a memory during December and January.

Lieutenant Colonel David S. McDougal, commanding officer of 3/5, was wounded at about noon on 7 January, and at approximately 1700 a similar fate befell Major Joseph Skoczylas, executive officer who had taken over. Command of the hard-hit battalion was temporarily assumed by Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. Puller, also commanding 3/7 at this time, pending the arrival of a replacement from the 5th Marines.³⁵

The following morning Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt, recently elevated to executive officer of the 5th Marines, took command of 3/5 and resumed the seemingly fruitless attack.³⁶ As his men inched forward under heavy enemy fire through the densest jungle yet encountered, they began to notice the ground under their feet rising with increas-

³⁵ LtCol Puller, 7th Mar executive officer, had assumed temporary command of 3/7, on 4 Jan upon the relief of the original battalion commander. He exercised simultaneous command of the two battalions until the next morning, but retained control of 3/7 until 9 Jan when LtCol H. W. Buse, Jr., formerly assistant D-3, arrived to relieve him. 7th Mar *R-2 Journal*.

³⁶ Two days earlier LtCol W. K. Enright, executive officer of the 5th, became assistant D-3 of the 1st Division and was succeeded in his regimental assignment by LtCol Walt. Thereupon command of 2/5 fell to Maj G. D. Gayle, formerly R-3.



LIEUTENANT COLONEL WALT led the attack on Aogiri Ridge.

ing steepness. This feature, combined with the unremitting fury of Japanese resistance, struck Walt as significant, and although the unit fell back to its morning positions to dig in for the night, he was convinced that he had discovered the true Aogiri Ridge.

The night passed in comparative quiet, as had all night heretofore since the beginning of the southward drive. The Japanese confined themselves to random small arms and mortar fire, occasional short, sharp thrusts or minor infiltration attempts, rather than frittering away their strength in serious counterattacks.

The assault battalions resumed the attack on the morning of 9 January in the wake of heavy artillery concentrations placed both in front of Hill 150 and on what Walt believed to be Aogiri Ridge. In an attempt to flank the Japanese position from the northeast, elements from Company C of 1/7 succeeded in knocking out two enemy bunkers with white phosphorous grenades but could get no

farther, while the battalion's attempts at frontal assault made no progress whatever.

A short distance to the west, 3/5 resumed its tortured advance over the sharply rising ground, materially assisted by a 37mm gun which, after repeated requests and much insistence on the part of Colonel Walt, had been brought forward the previous evening. A week of heavy fighting in the teeming rain and torrid heat had debilitated the men and depleted their ranks. General Shepherd, who had visited the ridge area and appreciated the gravity of the situation, sent up reinforcements in the form of Companies K and L from the reserve (3/7).³⁷ With these Walt attempted to envelop the ridge from the southeast, but progress continued excruciatingly slow and finally stopped dead. What then developed is described with some eloquence in the Division *Special Action Report*:

The undergrowth was so thick that men could not see ten yards in front of them. The Jap machine guns had been cleverly concealed among the roots of trees and were well protected by snipers. At dusk the forward elements were almost to the top of one end of the ridge. The situation was desperate. The assault elements had reached the limit of their physical endurance and morale was low. It was a question whether or not they could hold their hard-earned gains. It was then that Lieutenant Colonel Walt's leadership and courage turned the tide of battle. Calling forward the 37mm gun he put his shoulder to the wheel and with the assistance of a volunteer crew³⁸ pushed the gun foot by foot up Aogiri Ridge. Every few feet a volley of cannister would be fired. As members of the crew were killed or wounded others ran forward to take their places. By superhuman effort the gun was finally manhandled up the steep slope and into position to sweep the ridge. The Marine and Jap lines were only ten yards apart in

³⁷ Col L. W. Walt, correspondence with the author and comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Walt II*.

³⁸ "Walt called for volunteers; there were none forthcoming. He then grabbed the 37 himself and attempted to push it up the ridge. In going so, he pulled both arms out of their shoulder sockets. . . . Immediately on seeing their new battalion commander and his orderly (runner) on the gun, Walt had plenty of volunteers." Ltr MajGen J. T. Selden to author, 7Mar52.



THE 4TH BATTALION, 11TH MARINES, providing fire support from its kunai patch.

places. As night came on the Marines dug in where they were.³⁹

The Japanese first line of defense consisted of a chain of 37 log and earth bunkers extending about 200 yards along the ridge's military crest. These were liberally equipped with automatic weapons and in many cases connected by underground tunnels. Thus, Marines would destroy the enemy in one bunker only to have replacements crawl in from elsewhere and resume the fight, making it necessary for Walt's men actually to occupy each position in turn.

³⁹ 1st MarDiv SAR, III, 10. "Colonel Walt practically carried the battalion on his shoulders, himself lugging forward a 37 to the edges of the ridge." Pratt, *op. cit.*, 317. The elevation became "Walt's Ridge" thereafter by order of Gen Shepherd.

So the Marines had a foothold on the crest of Aogiri Ridge. But so did the Japanese; both farther along the first line of bunkers and in a second line on the reverse slope. As the rainy night wore on, sounds of increasing activity from the latter direction indicated that they were receiving reinforcements and preparing for the inevitable counterattack. Colonel Walt got all available weapons into position to hold, including the 37mm, and all available men, including battalion headquarters personnel.⁴⁰ Then he called for mortars and two battalions of artillery to register to his front.

⁴⁰ "It was a desperate measure taken against overwhelming odds. Bn Hq consisted of one runner and myself." *Walt II.*

At 0115 on the morning of 10 January the first counterattack came screaming and howling⁴¹ up the reverse slope. The battle-hardened Marines held their fire till the crucial moment—and the shattered waves receded. Five times in all the Japanese assaulted Walt's precarious positions on Aogiri Ridge with a fury and persistence unparalleled in the campaign. On the fourth try a Japanese major⁴² and two company officers succeeded in knifing through the Marine cordon almost to Colonel Walt's fox hole, 50 yards behind the front line. At that instant one of two short rounds in a 60-round artillery barrage burst in a tall tree almost directly overhead, and the major died

⁴¹"For at least one hour during this period the Japs were *clearly* chanting 'Marines prepare to die.'" *Walt II*. Gen Shepherd corroborates this curious incident in interview with the author 22May 52.

⁴²Presumably Maj Asachichi Tatsumi, CO of 3/141, although one Japanese source (POW No. 191) reports him as surviving the campaign. Same source describes him as reserve officer of 50 but highly regarded as a sound military man.



AN 81mm MORTAR lobbing shells into the Japanese positions.

there, sword in one hand and a pistol in the other.⁴³

As the fifth Japanese charge began, Colonel Walt coolly directed his forward artillery observer to call down fire at successively reduced ranges, until the 105mm shells from 4/11 were hitting a scant 50 yards in advance of his lines.⁴⁴ His small-arms ammunition was dangerously low following the fourth *banzai*, but a battalion command post detail rushed a resupply to the lines in time to repulse the final attempt, with exactly four minutes to spare.⁴⁵ This fifth charge, though furious, had been blunted by artillery fire⁴⁶ and now it broke before the determined stand of the Marines.

The Marines were glassy-eyed with weariness when dawn arrived. But the Japanese, for all practical purposes, were through so far as concerned the Cape Gloucester campaign. Ordered to hold Aogiri Ridge at all costs, they had committed their only effective reserve⁴⁷ to this end, and it had not been enough. Now they had no ridge and no reserve. As events would prove, they had shot their bolt.

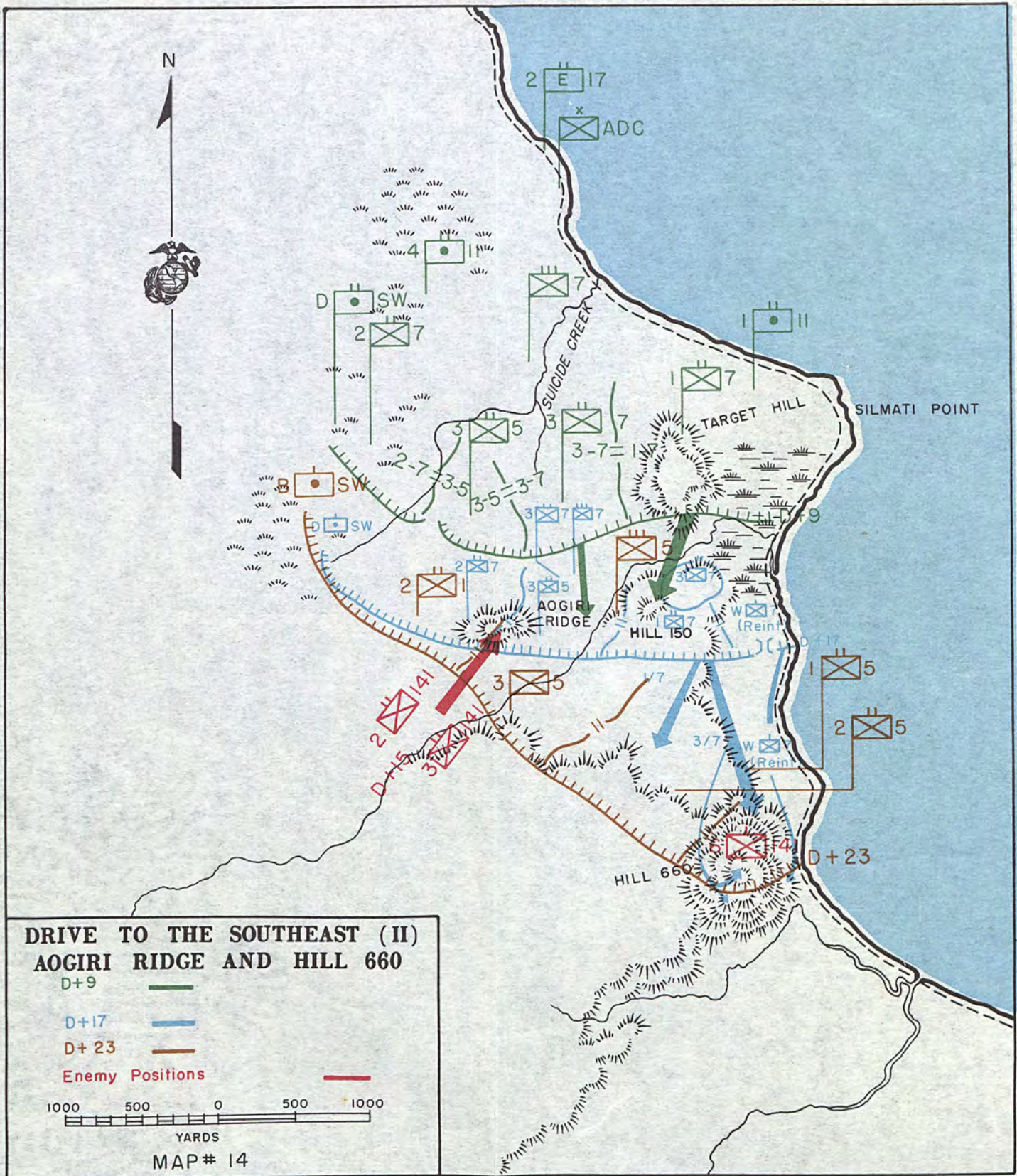
⁴³Ltr Col L. W. Walt to author, 24Apr52. This source adds: "The Jap major . . . was about 50 yrs of age and medium build . . . He actually died three paces from where I was crouched 45 in hand waiting for him."

⁴⁴Maj A. M. Roebuck, comments on prelim script. "At 0300 I was in the fire direction centre of the 4th Battalion 11th Marines. . . . I recall Major Joe Russell and I objecting vigorously as the range kept on being reduced until we were practically firing on our own troops." *Bowdoin*.

⁴⁵1st MarDiv SAR, II. Japanese infiltrators attempting to cut the Marines' supply line, killed one of this detail and wounded two.

⁴⁶"The following morning a captured enemy related how this arty barrage caught the reserve company in a mass formation just ready to make the 5th assault. This was evidenced by a count of better than 150 mangled bodies in that immediate area the following day." *Walt II*.

⁴⁷3/141 (Tatsumi Shitai), newly arrived in the region and not previously committed. ATIS 754, 4, lists both this unit and 2/141 as in this action. A prisoner taken on 10Jan verified this, but apparently he died before his testimony could be formally transcribed as no record of its existence can be found in the interrogations file for the operation.





INFANTRY-SUPPORTED light tanks finally got into the Japanese pocket between Hill 150 and Aogiri Ridge.

At 0800 on 10 January 3/5 moved out to secure the entire area and quickly discovered why the enemy had attached so much importance to the ridge. Advancing with five companies abreast toward the next high ground, the Marines soon found themselves crossing a wide, firm, much used trail that showed on none of their maps,⁴⁸ leading inland in the general direction of Magairapua. Clearly the Japanese had constructed this during their occupancy as the main supply route connecting their headquarters and principal bivouac areas with the Borgen Bay dumps and landing points, camouflaging it so

⁴⁸ The coastal terminus of this trail had been secured two days earlier by A/7, but that stretch had been reduced to such bad condition that its importance was not immediately recognized.

cleverly as to defy aerial observation. To realize that retaining control of it was vital to the Japanese position required no profound insight. The fact that possession of Aogiri Ridge afforded such control had made that elevation the key factor in enemy tactical thinking from the moment the Marines had begun their drive to the southeast.

But all of these factors could not be appreciated at once. More hard fighting would occur, though on a smaller scale, before the Borgen Bay area could be called secure.

THE FINAL OBJECTIVE

The capture of Aogiri Ridge did not cause the immediate collapse of the enemy strong point still facing the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, though it did have the effect of par-



PATROL MOVES OUT against background of shell-shattered jungle.

tially pocketing this in the saddle between the ridge and Hill 150. Throughout 10 January the battalion maintained pressure, but without heavier weapons and some armor the terribly vulnerable attackers were unable to make headway against the well dug-in Japanese.

But the handwriting was on the wall. The engineers had completed their corduroy causeway across the swamp as far as the base of Hill 150, and further labors brought a platoon of light tanks and two half-tracks to the scene of action during the morning of 11 January. But pinching out the pocket remained a grim business, nonetheless. Company B came down again from the high ground, again fell back before the murderous

fire of concealed weapons. Company C attacked in its turn, with the same result. Even after the guns and armor got in, crushing the last organized resistance required four hours of systematic slaughter.

But crush it they did, tanks, half-tracks and infantry working as a team, and during the afternoon 1/7 surged forward against only scattered sniper fire to consolidate the entire front along the 0-4 phase line.

The Marines now held the improved trail from the shore to a point some distance beyond Aogiri Ridge. Its importance to the enemy was emphasized further by discovery that the strong point overcome with so much difficulty protected their main supply dump

in the area,⁴⁰ loss of which must prove a severe blow to a force already short of almost everything.

What had become of the Japanese, however, remained a moot question. Clearly, they had been able to withdraw at least some troops from both Aogiri Ridge and from the pocket, and no contact with the 2d Battalion, 53d Infantry had been reported for several days. Enemy troops numbering between 2,000 and 3,500⁴¹ were estimated to be still active in the region; yet Marine patrols operated 1,500 yards southwest along the trail without discovering anything of interest,⁴² while others working southward found no enemy short of Hill 660.

The Marines spent all of 12 January resting and reorganizing preparatory to assault on what had been designated the final objective: that conspicuous landmark, Hill 660, securing of which would deprive the Japanese of their last vantage point from which to interfere with operations on the landing beaches. The enemy occupied the position (the only position they were now definitely known to occupy) in strength estimated at one reinforced company⁴³ supported by a number of weapons of the 30th Machine Cannon Company and one 75mm gun.

To make the main assault, General Shepherd selected the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines which, having been in reserve for the past several days, was in comparatively fresh condition. The plan called for 3/5 to continue mopping up Aogiri Ridge and consolidate that position, while 2/7 on the right,

⁴⁰ Probably this pocket also contained the CP of 2/141 (Capt Mukai). POW interrogation had located this near the base of Aogiri Ridge which prior to this time was believed to lie much farther to the Southwest. (POW No. 109.)

⁴¹ D-2 Weekly Report No. 3.

⁴² Had patrols moved farther in the direction of Magairapua, the closing phases of the campaign might have turned out much differently. However, no one had any very clear idea of where Magairapua lay, which was probably fortunate in the light of subsequent developments. See Chap VIII.

⁴³ Subsequently identified as 6th Co, 2d Bn, 141st Infantry. 1st MarDiv D-2 weekly Reports.

occupying what had been determined on as the Force Beachhead Line, dug in more firmly and improved the defense by setting up barbed wire. The 1st Battalion assumed the mission of extending the perimeter southward by maintaining contact with the right of the 3d Battalion. (See Map 14.)

Designated to cooperate with the main effort was a secondary force of rather odd and interesting composition, headed by Captain Buckley of the Weapons Company, 7th Marines and based on elements of his own unit: two half-tracks, two light tanks and a 37mm gun platoon.⁴⁴ To these he added a rocket DUKW, two platoons of infantry from 1/7 and a platoon of pioneers from the shore party, who brought along a bulldozer. This group had as its mission to advance along the coastal track and establish a strong road block between the eastern base of Hill 660 and the shore of Borgen Bay, thereby flanking the position and cutting the defenders' most practical route of retreat. Since this movement required an advance of approximately 1,700 yards through what was technically enemy territory and the setting up of a perimeter in the lee of a dominating Japanese-held elevation, it entailed very definite but calculated risks.

The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines had a new commanding officer: Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Buse, Jr., formerly Assistant D-3, who had relieved Colonel Puller to return to his post of regimental executive officer on 9 January. At 0800 on 13 January, after artillery, mortars and the Fifth Air Force had given the target area thorough preparation, Colonel Buse moved his unit out from the 0-4 phase line in column of companies

⁴⁴ This somewhat conglomerate force included an Army sergeant who had gone AWOL from his service unit in New Guinea and stowed away on an LST in order to get to the scene of combat. Since the Marine Corps has never been noted for spurning men who really want to fight, Capt Buckley assigned the sergeant a position in the little perimeter, where he acquitted himself creditably during the ensuing action. He rejoined his own unit subsequently, where, according to rumors reaching the island, his reception was somewhat less cordial.

and arrived in assaulting position an hour and a half later without encountering any resistance.

The terrain here was especially difficult. The rising ground of the approach dropped sharply to the northern base of the hill proper, thus forming a deep gulch, both slopes cluttered with trees and jungle undergrowth, and strewn with boulders. The colonel set up his command post on the near lip of this ravine, while his assault elements descended the first slope and started up the second.

So steep was the grade that in many places the men were obliged to sling their weapons and claw their way upward on all fours. The ascent of this face of Hill 660 would have constituted something of a feat under the best of circumstances. When the Japanese chose to dispute it, further progress became impossible.

This they did from a system of small arms and automatic weapons positions about one-third of the way to the summit, pinning down Company I, the leading element. Company L, attempting to swing to the right, soon met

a similar fate. The Japanese had still another machine gun farther along in that direction capable of enfilading the line of advance sufficiently to prevent withdrawal. As the day wore on and those elements still retaining mobility continued probing to the right in search of a soft spot or a flank, engineers worked a light tank forward far enough to place fire across the gorge on the more troublesome enemy weapons. By late afternoon this, together with artillery supporting fire,⁶⁴ made possible extrication of the pinned-down companies, which thereupon withdrew to tenable defensive positions for the night, having accomplished nothing of note.

In the meanwhile, Captain Buckley's group enjoyed greater success on its less difficult mission. Constant rain had reduced the

⁶⁴ "The top and rear of Hill 660 could have been plastered with our artillery, but . . . our overs were disturbing Capt Buckley. We switched to high-angle fire; but Capt Buckley, by that time was too far around the hill, prohibiting further artillery support." *Russell*.



A PORTION OF Captain Buckley's Weapons Company in position at the foot of Hill 660.



WATERPROOFED TENTS were not prepared for this sort of thing.

coastal trail to a sad state, but the bulldozer proved of great help in getting the heavy equipment through. By 1030 the captain had skirted the eastern base of the hill and set up an all-around perimeter on the narrow (about 100 yards) flat to the southeast, between the shore and a swamp lying below the hill's souther approaches. There he dug in his men and weapons and cleared fields of fire for about 60 yards to both north and south, placing his half-tracks and tanks in supporting positions. During the afternoon communications personnel ran through a field telephone line connecting him with the division net, and he took advantage of this to order forward a truckload of hot food for his troops.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ This proved to be quite a complicated operation. Capt Buckley had to use his bulldozer to push the truck through one particularly muddy stretch of road, and fire from his tanks and half-tracks to silence Japanese guns on top of the hill. See below.

The only opposition he encountered during the advance was furnished by two Japanese machine guns and "something heavier"⁶⁶ which were emplaced near the summit of the hill to fire at the coastal trail down a draw in the northeastern slope. The most troublesome of these automatic weapons was sited sufficiently in defilade so that Captain Buckley was unable to score on it directly from his road block position, yet could place accurate 75mm half-track fire sufficiently close to silence it temporarily almost at will. It remained a nuisance and threat to communications during the two days that this

Nevertheless, he contrived to get his men one hot meal a day during the several days he occupied the position.

⁶⁶ Capt Buckley's report to regimental headquarters, 7th Marines *R-2 Journal*. "Something heavier" was either one of the several 20mm machine cannon or the 75mm gun subsequently found on the hill.



THIS MACHINE GUNNER has just been relieved at Hill 660.

unusual and apparently bloodless duel continued.

The night passed quietly on both fronts, and at 0900 on 14 January the 3d Battalion resumed the attack.⁵⁷ Again the companies probed around to their right, gradually working their way upward, while tanks were brought forward laboriously in support. By midafternoon the leading elements had more than half circled the hill and found themselves ascending its southern face, where two deep ravines finally brought the tanks to a stop.

Hours of climbing and fighting had greatly wearied the men, and the going was getting no better. Nevertheless, they continued forcing their grim way upward and at last found the apparent soft spot in the defenses for which they had probed for the past two days. One strong combat group reached almost to the crest before coming under fire

⁵⁷ "The heaviest artillery preparation of the entire operation signalled the attack on the morning of 14 Jan." 7th Mar WD.

of a machine cannon and heavy machine guns, of which the enemy had a number in this particular area. Reaching a position where they could bring 60mm mortars to bear, the Marines soon silenced the weapons, and a final surge carried them across the summit.⁵⁸ The Japanese, falling back over the crest toward the east, came into the line of fire of the Weapons Company below and were scattered in confusion.⁵⁹

A few evidently escaped to the safety of the swamp at the hill's southeastern base. One group estimated to number upward of 30 fled down the northeastern slope into the pocket formed by the Weapons Company's road block, where they made things lively for Buckley's people during the night by trying to break through or around the position.⁶⁰ A rain-soaked dawn showed many of them dodging through the jungle beyond the cleared field of fire, attempting to reach the same swamp by skirting the perimeter. They found the telephone wire and cut it,⁶¹ to the captain's considerable annoyance. Again a few of them appear to have escaped, as only two dead, one of them a lieutenant, were found directly in front of the position.

The 3d Battalion gained the crest of Hill 660 at about 1830 on 14 January, just in time

⁵⁸ Companies E and F of 2/7 were moved into the line with the 3d Bn on Hill 660 just about dark, but with the successful assault on the hill completed they saw no action that night. 7th Mar R-1 Journal.

⁵⁹ 1st MarDiv SAR, III, 14, makes this statement. Actually, it was true only to a limited extent, as Buckley had to keep his fire below the military crest for fear of hitting men of the 3d Bn. These were hampered in turn by his presence and some of their fire did fall within the Wpns Co lines.

⁶⁰ Four Japanese wearing what appeared to be American helmets were mistaken for a Marine patrol and got to safety along the beach in the darkness. Four others were killed wading through the shallow water offshore in an effort to bypass the block. The pioneer platoon mowed down another group of eight, also attempting the beach, with such devastating effect that they fell in perfect column of twos formation.

⁶¹ Capt Buckley maintained his CP in a half-track facing the area where the Japanese were cut off. The wire was quickly repaired as soon as the enemy were eliminated.

to signal their achievement to the Weapons Company below before the breaking of a furious rainstorm accelerated the onrush of dusk to eliminate visibility. The exhausted men dug in as best they could among the dead Japanese, but the storm lasted all night and no counterattack occurred; which was just as well, as the Marines were in no condition to give the best account of themselves. The weather cleared the following day, bringing some rest to the weary and additional automatic weapons to consolidate the captured position. Continued mopping-up operations netted a few stragglers but revealed no formidable enemy forces.

Not until 0530 on the morning of 16 January did the Japanese make any real effort to dispute possession of Hill 660. This took

the form of a *banzai* assault in the traditional manner, howling fanatics to the strength of approximately two companies⁶² swarming up the southern slope. For a while the fighting was close and vicious, but as soon as he could obtain sufficient space, Colonel Buse devised an ingenious and lethal method of destroying those of the enemy who had survived to that point: blanketing their front with 60mm mortar fire, and their rear with 81mm and artillery. Ranges closed gradually on each other, with devastating

⁶² Identified by intelligence officers as 6th Co (or what remained of it) of 141st Infantry, and 11th Co of that regiment's 3d Bn. Japanese sources mention both battalions participating but do not designate elements. ATIS No. 754, 4.



THE STRAIN AND FATIGUE of 23 days on the line at Cape Gloucester is clearly shown in the faces of these men of the 7th Marines.

effect. After daylight, mopping-up patrols found 110 fresh dead in the area.⁶³

Simultaneously, Captain Buckley's group repulsed a weaker attack on the coastal flat without much difficulty, killing 48 more of the enemy. Somewhat earlier the same morning a platoon of 30 men and one officer⁶⁴ made an infiltration attempt against the lines of the 1st Battalion, 7 Marines, but these several occurrences constituted the last gasp of the Japanese in this area.

With accomplishment of this phase of the ADC Group's mission, extensive reorganization became the order of the day. The 7th Marines as a regiment, together with 3/5 and their various supporting elements, had carried the burden of the campaign's heaviest fighting: a sustained drive of two weeks duration, moving cross-compartment through some of the most difficult jungle territory in the world, enduring some of the worst weather in which troops were ever required to operate.

⁶³ 1st MarDiv SAR, III, 15.

⁶⁴ A vestigial remnant of the 3d Co, 1st Bn, 53d Infantry. This identification provided the first conclusive evidence that any units of the airdrome garrison had withdrawn successfully to the Borgen Bay region.

The first relief took place on 15 January, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, recently in from Green Beach, taking over the right flank sector from 2/7 (less Company G), which moved to the airdrome area. The following day the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines relieved 1/7 (plus Company G), on the line, and that regiment's commanding officer, Colonel John T. Selden, took over command of the area from Colonel Julian N. Frisbie, of the 7th. But not until the 18th was relief effected for the 3d Battalion and the Weapons Company (by 1/5 and Wpns/5 respectively), whereupon Combat Team C reassembled as a unit on the now quiet airdrome perimeter for rest and rehabilitation.⁶⁵ Some indication of how badly the men needed this is indicated in the accompanying photograph on page 111, taken on the scene.

So, for all tactical purposes, the Cape Gloucester operation was over, and the southern perimeter as finally set up appeared as shown in Map 14.

But what had become of the Japanese?

⁶⁵ CT C was earmarked for a special mission at this time: support of General MacArthur's seizure of the Admiralty Islands. The reinforced regiment stood by, prepared to embark and move in on short notice, until the Army's surprisingly easy landing on 29 Feb made clear that its services would not be needed.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER VIII

Flight and Pursuit

THE VANISHING ENEMY

In order to understand the seeming ease with which the Japanese could make and break contact with their opponents at will, the reader should have some comprehension of the extent to which western New Britain remained *terra incognita* to the U. S. invaders.

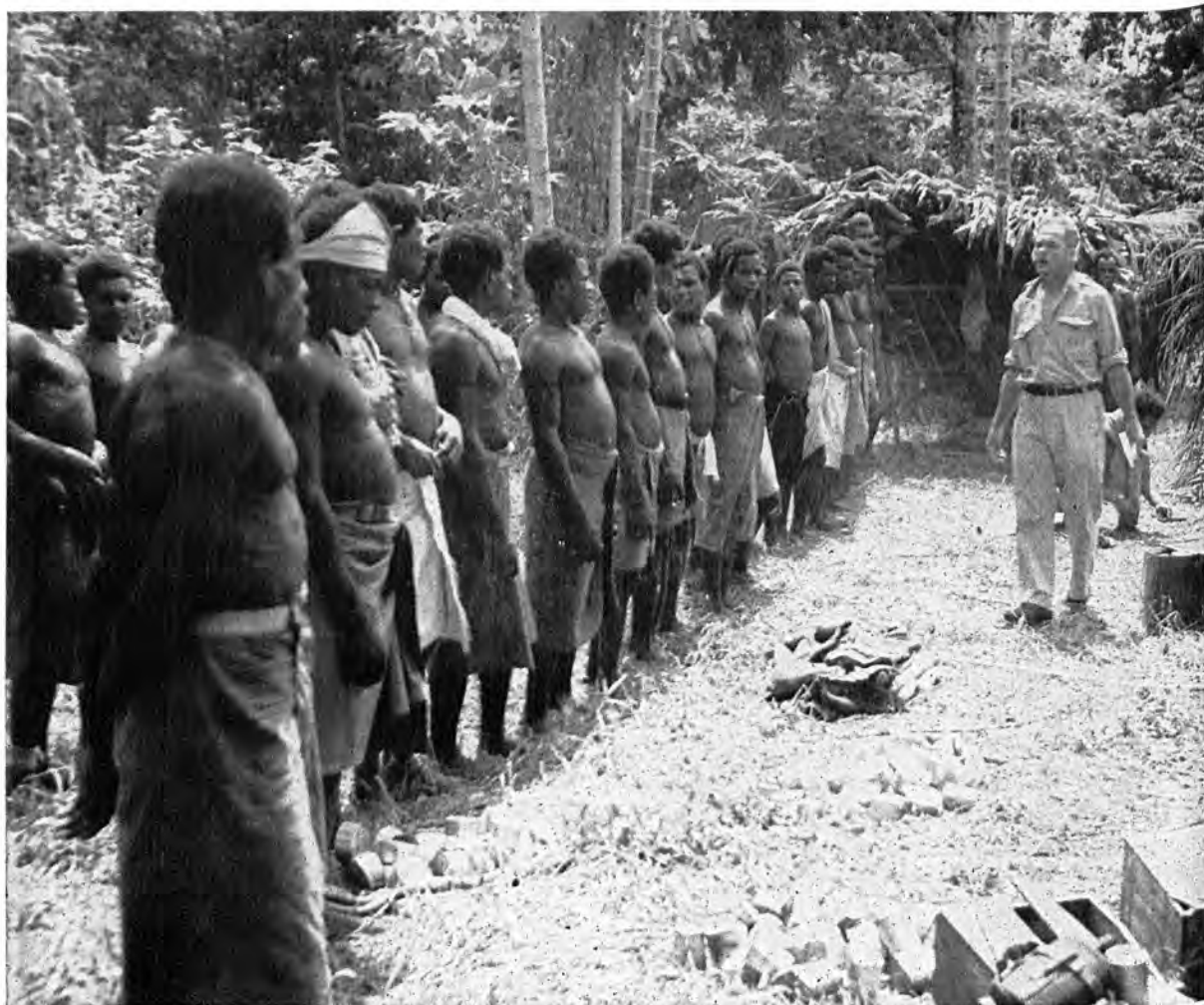
Maps attempted to show only the approximate routes of only the most important trails, none of them visible to aerial observation, and gave no indication of the maze of secondary trails that angled off in all directions to serve the gardens, or former gardens, of the local inhabitants. Place names of native villages were spotted liberally, and guides became increasingly available, but seldom did any two authorities agree as to village locations or even which village boasted which usually unpronounceable name. For these reasons localities shown on the accompanying maps are more indicative than actual.

What ensued after the capture of Hill 660 developed many aspects of a gigantic game of blindman's buff, with the Marines "it." Familiarity with the country gave the Japanese the inestimable advantage of being able to choose their ground, whether to fight or to withdraw. Their opponents, on the other hand, must painstakingly explore dozens of

false leads in order to orient themselves, and this in jungled, mountainous, swampy terrain where the incredibly dense rain forest hid landmarks so thoroughly that a patrol might pass within a few yards of its objective without ever discovering it.

And after 21 January the Japanese enjoyed still a further advantage: they knew what they were going to do and how they were going to do it, while their pursuers could only guess.

Patrol activity in western New Britain took many forms and was practiced on an extremely wide scale. In addition to such normal functions as maintaining security and obtaining intelligence, patrols had an important responsibility in searching out and bringing in Melanesian natives of the region who had fled into the hills to escape the Japanese. In all, some hundreds of sick, emaciated refugees came into the U. S. lines for rehabilitation as a result of these humanitarian efforts: to serve as guides, carriers and laborers (thereby depriving the Japanese of their similar services) and to be repatriated to their villages as soon as practicable. Such results were highly gratifying, and the natives showed proper appreciation. However, inasmuch as these activities were essentially non-military in nature and performed under



AS THE JAPANESE RETREATED the natives returned to their villages. Here an ANGAU representative recruits laborers for the Marines.

direction of Australian officers¹ sent along for the purpose, they are better omitted from a tactical account of the operation.

Following the capture of Hill 660 and subsequent loss of contact with the enemy, patrol operations assumed a new pattern and a new importance: to seek out and destroy, or at least drive off, the vanished Japanese preparatory to completing the division's sec-

¹ An active and important exception was Maj Guy Richards, Asst R-2, 5th Marines, a former newspaper man who had worked previously in Melanesia and was well versed in pidgin English and native psychology. Australians included in addition to Maj Mather and SubLt Wiedeman several ANGAU officers formerly stationed in the region.

ond major mission—seizure of the line Bor-gen Bay-Itni River.²

This took the essential form of a two-pronged probe, converging on the region where General Matsuda's headquarters were known to be, or to have been. These movements occurred simultaneously but in the interests of clarity will be taken up in turn.

OPERATIONS IN THE HIGH GROUND

Patrols had been active in front of the airdrome perimeter ever since its establish-

² See Chap II. It may be noted that the division's orders did not specifically stipulate destruction of the enemy force, but this was obviously desirable if not essential to completion of the mission.

ment, but owing to the maze of native tracks and cross tracks the Marines were some time in locating definitely the main route over which the Japanese survivors had escaped the region: an ascending trail that skirted the eastern flank of Mt. Talawe. On 19 January a strong three-day patrol made up of personnel of Company L, 1st Marines, followed this upward past Mts. Gulu, Langla (the volcano) and Munlulu, then down to the high saddle north of Mt. Tangi. There, at a trail junction,⁴ they surprised a group of some 20 Japanese and eight armed natives, who fled eastward after losing six of the Japanese killed.

Four abandoned bunkers guarded the junction, indicating its importance in the minds of the Japanese, and discarded enemy packs, equipment and medical supplies were found in the vicinity. The patrol scouted the east-west trail that formed the junction for 300 yards in each direction, making no further contacts but discovering a Japanese telephone wire, which was cut. The trail itself proved exceptional for that region: wide enough to accommodate a jeep along many stretches and showing signs of considerable recent use.

The report of the patrol leader, Captain Ronald J. Slay, CO of Company L, served to convince the division command that he had found precisely what he had set out to find: the east-west Government Trail which the maps showed as running inland from Sag Sag to join the main north-south trail at a village called Agulupella, a native name no more unpronounceable than many thereabouts, which was to figure prominently in orders and reports for some time to come. Plans were immediately made to exploit the discovery.

On 22 January two patrols, each consisting of a reinforced company, set out from the airdrome perimeter with the mission of converging from two directions at the trail junction found on the 19th. A composite

⁴ This junction lay at coordinates 62.2-84.2, by which terms it is referred to in reports and orders occurring during the next several days.

force⁴ of about company strength made up of elements of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, under Captain Nikolai S. Stevenson, followed Captain Slay's route southward over the steep mountain trail and reached the vicinity of Mt. Gulu, northernmost of the projecting shoulders of Mt. Talawe, where the patrol set up an ambush for the night.

Simultaneously Captain Preston S. Parish embarked a similar composite company of the 7th Marines in landing craft and proceeded to Sag Sag, terminus of the East-West Government Trail, near the Anglican mission where the Reverend Sub-Lieutenant Wiedeman, who accompanied the patrol, had held forth some years before the war. The men bivouacked about one and a half miles inland of that place and moved on to Ajpati on the 24th. Neither patrol made contact with the Japanese, but Parish gained intelligence in nearby native villages⁵ indicating the recent presence of several small parties.

The next day, however, told a different story for the Stevenson patrol. Hardly had the men got off to a good start along their difficult route than a hidden machine gun opened on the point at a range of about 30 yards near Mt. Langla. Only a small volume of rifle fire supported it, leading to the belief that no more than six or seven Japanese had set the ambush. The advance guard deployed and drove these off in a brief fire

⁴ Two rifle platoons, 1 LMG section and miscellaneous personnel, including 2 representatives of ANG-AU, 2 war dog teams and a radio team from 11th Marines. *Daves.*

⁵ A few natives of this region had allied themselves with the Japanese, making the loyalty of all suspect. This gave rise to an unusual incident when Capt Parish was obliged to convene a military court consisting of himself, Maj Mather and SubLt Wiedeman to try a native named Karol, formerly employed by the enemy as a boss boy, whom some of his compatriots accused of leading a patrol into an ambush. Karol was acquitted largely on testimony of two Marine members of the patrol in question. (D-2 *RofE*, 27Jan44, *Addendum*.) Capt Parish continued to employ Karol as a scout and found him wholly trustworthy. (Maj P. J. Parish, comments on preliminary script, hereinafter cited as *Parish*.)

fight, without loss to the Marines, nor to their opponents so far as they could tell.

The patrol proceeded more cautiously after that, but was ambushed again at about 1500 in almost precisely the same manner, and quite likely by precisely the same Japanese. This time the advance guard reacted more quickly and killed two of the enemy before the rest took to their heels.⁶ With his men tired and short of water, Stevenson did not attempt to pursue but selected favorable terrain and set up an ambush of his own for the night.

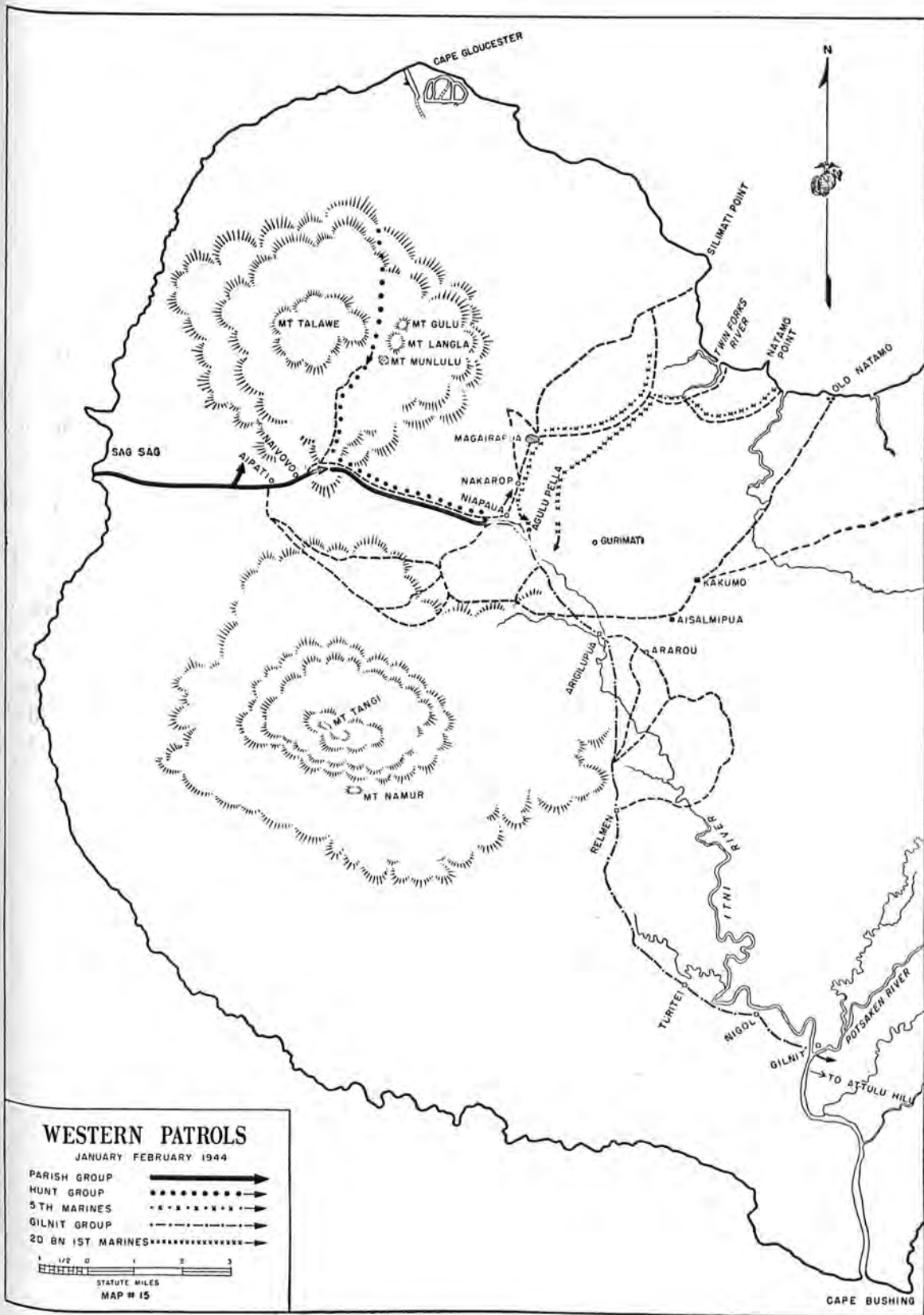
⁶ *Dawes*. 1st MarDiv SAR, IV, 1, states merely that the patrol received sniper fire in the vicinity of Mt. Langla and automatic weapons fire from the ridges of Mt. Munlulu, a short distance beyond it.

On 24 January the patrol pushed on to a point about 1,500 yards south of Mt. Munlulu, where it was suddenly pinned down before a strongly situated enemy force estimated at platoon strength, stiffened with two heavy machine guns. Unable to neutralize this fire, and unable to close with—or even see—the Japanese positions in that rugged terrain, Stevenson finally managed to break contact and fell back to more favorable territory in hopes that his opponents, encouraged by their success, might feel optimistic enough to attack him.⁷

⁷ *Dawes*. This source estimated enemy strength at 2–3 platoons, with 3–4 machine guns. The patrol suffered no casualties in this action.



THE PARISH PATROL embarks for Sag Sag.





A MARINE PATROL gingerly uses a log to cross a stream.

In light of Captain Slay's experience a few days before, this resistance came as a rude surprise. The three fire fights had seriously depleted Stevenson's ammunition, he was short of food,⁸ and more than five miles of most difficult mountain country now separated him from his base. Prudently he drew back to Mt. Gulu on the 25th, where he and his patrol were relieved the following day by a fresh group from the 1st Marines: Captain George P. Hunt's Company K.⁹

Meanwhile the Parish patrol had been working its way eastward, combing the country thoroughly and keeping the trail open to the rear as the most practicable supply route. It encountered no Japanese west of the trail junction, and intelligence obtained from natives convinced the commanding officer that the enemy had withdrawn from the area. He learned of Stevenson's pre-

⁸ Forty native bearers carrying rations accompanied the patrol, but these rations proved to be more than 50% spoiled. *Ibid.*

⁹ Co K, less Wpns Plt and rear echelon units, plus arty liaison party and Regt'l Scouts; total, 118. 3/1 *Hist*, App A.

dicament and moved to his assistance but was unable to make contact.¹⁰ However, on the morning of 27 January Captain Hunt broke through the now abandoned position that had held up his predecessor and reached the junction, where he found a group of Parish's force in occupancy.

Here he learned that a small patrol reconnoitering to the east had been ambushed the previous day short of the village of Niapaua, near the junction of the important government trails. Borrowing a machine gun platoon from Parish, Hunt set off in that direction. Some distance farther on his advance scouts discovered an estimated 50 Japanese in position on the far side of a stream that cut across the trail. As nightfall was approaching, he set up a perimeter 700 yards short of that point and prepared to attack in the morning.

This attack began at 0700 on the 28th and soon drove off the Japanese previously discovered. However, these proved to constitute only an outpost line, and presently the advancing Marines came upon an enemy force estimated to number at least one reinforced company armed with both light and heavy machine guns and mortars " . . . strongly entrenched in pillboxes on cliffs commanding all areas of approach . . . Terrain precipitous and very dense jungle which hampers visibility."¹¹ Unable to maneuver, Hunt engaged in a fruitless fire fight for three hours, during which his group suffered 15 casualties,¹² then decided to pull back beyond mortar range. The Japanese, mistaking the motives of this withdrawal, swarmed out of their positions and attempted to pursue, only to be stopped by strong rear guard action, thus completing the temporary stalemate.

¹⁰ Owing to communications failure, Parish did not learn that Stevenson had broken contact with the Japanese. *Parish*.

¹¹ D-2 *Journal*.

¹² The wounded had to be evacuated over the long and difficult supply route that proved a hampering factor throughout these patrol operations: via east-west trail to Sag Sag, thence by water to the air-drome area. Two died of their wounds in the process.

The remainder of the Parish patrol joined Hunt in bivouac the following day. Major William J. Piper, Jr., executive officer of 3/7, had brought up reinforcements to Parish the previous evening and now assumed command of the combined group. Resuming the advance on the morning of 30 January, the Marines found the strong Japanese positions abandoned and pressed on without further incident to Niapaua and Agulupella where Piper had orders to stand by to form part of a larger force, designated the Gilnit Group (see below).

There they joined company with a strong patrol from the 5th Marines, which had worked its way inland from the Borgen Bay area, and learned that once more, save for a few wretched stragglers, the entire Japanese 65th Brigade had vanished into thin air.

EASTERN AREA PATROLS

As with their compatriots on the airdrome perimeter, the principal interest of Marines operating inland of Borgen Bay and along its shores lay in consolidating their defense positions. At first their patrols worked about 1,000 yards in front of the lines, primarily for security purposes, with the result that they made no important contact with the vanished Japanese until 20 January.

Hindsight shows that greater aggressiveness might have prevented the tactically successful withdrawal of the enemy,¹³ but the reason this was not employed should require little explanation. The Backhander Force had accomplished its basic mission quickly

¹³ Tactically successful but strategically disastrous. See below.



THIS PATROL is scouting Japanese positions in the Natamo area. A few moments after the picture was made an enemy machine gun opened fire, killing two of the Marines and wounding several others.



GENERAL SHEPHERD AND COLONEL SELDEN discuss the fighting at Natamo. (Army Photo.)

and economically; its secondary mission—seizure of the line Borgen Bay-Itni River—would better await consolidation and reorganization. Further acquisitions of terrain could have no possible value; and the difficult nature of this terrain made it far more practicable for defense than for attack, as the Marines had discovered in their advance to Hill 660. Estimates indicated presence of the Japanese in sufficient strength to cause plenty of trouble: troops as familiar with the features of the region as the Marines were ignorant. Nothing in U. S. plans or orders stipulated pursuit of the enemy beyond boundaries already gained, and to attempt this under the circumstances prevailing would risk further loss of life to no useful end.

The contact on 20 January occurred when a patrol¹⁴ from 1/5, probing along the south-

¹⁴ Patrol led by Lt J. S. Stankus of R-2 Section and consisted of 6 R-2 scouts, an Army sergeant handling a scout dog, an artillery spotting team, a demolitions man, 2 officer observers, 2 rifle platoons and the machine gun and 60mm mortar sections of Co A.

ern shore of Borgen Bay, drew heavy automatic-weapons fire from Natamo Point. The patrol immediately deployed along the western bank of a small estuary partially separating the base of the point from the mainland and engaged the enemy in a two-hour fire fight. With mortar shells expended and machine-gun ammunition running low, the leader radioed a request that artillery fire be placed on the point. Under cover of this, the patrol withdrew without casualties and returned to the perimeter, on the way destroying two enemy dual purpose 75mm guns, evidently abandoned by the Japanese in order to consolidate their strength on the point.¹⁵

It so happened that a map of the point had been captured on 3 January that showed numerous light and heavy machine-gun positions and indicated that it would be defended by approximately one platoon. Accordingly a reinforced company prepared to attack and made contact again on the 22d but found opposition too strong to permit crossing the estuary. When two days working over by artillery and Fifth Air Force A-20's failed to destroy the indicated positions or produce any perceptible diminution in the volume of fire returned, first estimate of enemy strength was revised upward to company level, armed with 20mm automatic cannon and at least one 37mm and one 75mm as well as the machine guns previously spotted.

On 23 January another company of the 1st Battalion, reinforced by medium tanks, crossed Borgen Bay by boat and landed on the east bank of the Twin Fork River. With the further support of artillery and a rocket-launching DUKW, Companies C and D, under Major H. T. A. Richmond, battalion executive officer, captured the point that afternoon.

The following day, in a series of short, sharp skirmishes, they secured a stretch of shore line extending 500 yards eastward to the left bank of the wide, deep Natamo River. The Japanese held the opposite bank in sufficient strength to repulse all attempts

¹⁵ J. S. Stankus.

to cross near the mouth for the next four days, even with support of half-tracks and the rocket DUKW, and they succeeded in bringing an artillery piece to bear on the beach positions and landing craft supporting the operation. Meanwhile Marine patrols explored upstream in an attempt to find a practicable ford, but not until 28 January, with all of 1/5 operating in the area, did the battalion manage to gain a firm hold east of the river.

During the same period, patrols had been working cautiously inland as well. On 23 January, a platoon from 2/1, attached to 5th Marines¹⁶ and holding the right of the eastern perimeter, followed the main trail to within 1,000 yards of Magairapua, known to have contained the headquarters of Colonel Katayama's 141st Infantry. Here it got diverted onto a secondary trail where it encountered a Japanese force of estimated equal strength, killing four and driving off the rest. However, the next day a three-man reconnaissance patrol from 2/5 succeeded in entering the village, only to find a large bivouac area evacuated by the Japanese in apparently good order.

These events, combined with those taking place simultaneously behind Mt. Talawe, convinced division intelligence officers that they were facing no isolated pockets of resistance, but integral components of a single well planned operation: that the force in the Natamo region and that in front of the Hunt-Parish patrols had been placed where they were deliberately to fight holding actions in order to cover the withdrawal of the Japanese main body.¹⁷

But whither that body had withdrawn remained a mystery. Its most direct and obvious route lay along the north coast trail

toward Talasea and Cape Hoskins, and the fight in the Natamo region might well be a covering action for such a move. But several alternatives existed. The Japanese might head due south over the Government Trail to Cape Bushing, known to have been strongly garrisoned at one time, on the slim hope of being evacuated by sea. Or they might join the force still operating against Arawe. Or they might go on along the south coast to Gasmata where an overland trail connected with Talasea and Cape Hoskins well beyond reach of American interception. That those groups detected withdrawing invariably retired to the southward led to considerable speculation that they had chosen one of the three latter courses.

The division command determined, therefore, to push the pursuit more vigorously. The plan called for troops moving inland from the eastern perimeter to join the Hunt-Parish group in the vicinity of the trail junction village of Agulupella. If they could cut off any Japanese in the process, all the better, but the main purpose was to form the combined forces into a super-patrol and move southward across New Britain to Gilnit on the Itni River, thereby completing the operation's secondary mission.¹⁸

Accordingly, on 27 January 1/5 dispatched a combat patrol to the southwest over a wide unmapped corduroyed trail which the battalion had found some 500 yards east of Natamo Point. Moving inland, these Marines found a number of recently used bivouac areas and some abandoned equipment, leading to the belief that they had discovered the enemy withdrawal route from this region. This belief appeared confirmed when, about 3,200 yards from the beach, they got into a vigor-

¹⁶ These units now comprised the ADC Group, Gen Shepherd continuing to exercise command in the Bor-gen Bay area until 9 Feb.

¹⁷ Indications to this effect had already appeared in captured documents and prisoner of war interrogations, but the Marines did not learn the full Japanese plan until discovery of Gen Matsuda's headquarters many days later than events related here.

¹⁸ "The enemy's route of withdrawal . . . was first discovered on 26 January, and thereafter the ADC Gp was eager to pursue and intercept the enemy along the North coast. Division had other plans however, was preoccupied with the junket of Puller's armed forces (the 'Itni Patrol'), and only later undertook the leapfrogging operations in the direction of Rein Bay, when the ADC Group was disbanded." Ltr Maj Frederic Peachy to CMC, 25Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Peachy*.

ous fire fight with a force estimated to number 100, which they took to be the rear guard of a larger force. While they were attempting to break contact, the Japanese observed a machine gunner leave his piece and tried to rush it. The assistant gunner, however, was still in position and mowed down 15 of the attackers, whereat the patrol returned to its parent unit.

At the same time Company E, reinforced, advanced from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines perimeter toward Magairapua. This patrol made two contacts with the enemy, who retired southward in both cases, and the company bivouacked that night 200 yards short of Colonel Katayama's former command post.

On the 28th, the day that Captain Hunt had his vicious three-hour fire fight west of

Niapaua, Major William H. Barba started out to his assistance with 1/5 reinforced, less one company,¹⁹ over the corduroyed trail. This unit encountered only trifling resistance and went on past the scene of the previous day's fire fight, but was held up by mortar and machine-gun fire some distance beyond. The Japanese withdrew, again toward the south, and the battalion bivouacked on the scene with six casualties, reaching Nakarop the following day without incident.²⁰

¹⁹ Company B, which remained in occupancy of the Natamo positions.

²⁰ "During this day, 1-5 received an air drop of communication wire from a Piper-Cub plane. Rations were delivered by a carrying party from B-1-5 from Natamo Point. Several small ammunition dumps were discovered and destroyed." (Col W. H. Barba, comments on prelim script, hereinafter cited as *Barba*.)



MATSUDA'S COMMAND POST yielded boxes of documents and clothing.

There the 1st Battalion joined Company E, which had arrived earlier, and was joined in turn by a group designated the ADC patrol. This consisted of Company G, 5th Marines, strongly reinforced with supporting weapons and accompanied by a number of native bearers, under command of Major Charles R. Baker, 2d Battalion executive officer. It had started out that morning and reached the scene over Government Trail via Magairapua.²¹ Patrols from Nakarop made contact with the Hunt-Parish group (now commanded by Major Piper), and the two groups rendezvoused at Agulupella on 30 January, as previously mentioned.

Nakarop turned out to be the place name which Allied translators had transliterated from Japanese sources as "Egaroppu," nerve center of 65th Brigade operations. Tents still stood in abandoned bivouac areas, and the village contained both native and Japanese-built structures. The largest of the latter carried a sign translated: "Matsuda Butai Army Command Principal Place."²² It showed traces of elaborate radio installations recently removed and contained an American-made telephone switchboard labeled "Glory Division." But of the former occupants there were no live traces at all.

This combination of patrols, now grown to sizable proportions, was designated the Gilit Group and ordered to stand by in the Agulupella neighborhood preparatory to executing its cross-island mission to the Itni River. As a result of an on-the-scene investigation, its acting commanding officer informed Division Headquarters as follows: "Natives report Japs left Agulupella area 28Jan in mass evacuation (possibly 700) and



GENERAL MATSUDA'S HEADQUARTERS following discovery and occupation by the Marines. (Army Photo.)

followed Aisalmipua-Kakumo Road toward Borgen Bay and Cape Gauffre. Many sick and wounded; extreme poverty, reduced to eating native dogs and looting native gardens."²³ Another patrol the same day reported native intelligence indicating that the enemy's immediate objective was Kokopo, just east of Cape Gauffre.

This convincing evidence of the general direction of the withdrawal was shortly confirmed by capture of the actual withdrawal order issued to General Matsuda by 17th Division headquarters, and Matsuda's own order directing withdrawal in four echelons via the Aisalmipua-Kakumo trail toward Kopopo.²⁴ But the immediate value of this

²¹ As shown on Map 15. The Government Trail and so-called Corduroyed Trail (actually corduroyed only a short distance inland) join a little north of Nakarop.

²² D-2, 31Jan44. This building evidently served as a communications center and staff headquarters. Matsuda's personal quarters were located off the main trail roughly midway between Magairapua and Nakarop, its approaches so skillfully concealed that patrols did not find it until several days later. Well camouflaged bivouac areas infested this entire region.

²³ D-2 *Journal*, 1Feb44.

²⁴ For some peculiar reason, Matsuda's staff did not destroy its papers but merely threw them in a slit trench and buried them. The Marines had little difficulty in finding them and digging them up, thus acquiring virtually the complete 65th Brigade office files, including copies of a citation the brigade had received for its action on Bataan.



IN A SERIES of shore-to-shore operations the 5th Marines jumped from Natamo to Iboki Plantation.

information was not so great as might appear on the surface. Nobody knew where Aisalmipua and Kakumo might be, since they were spotted at widely separated points on different maps, and even the natives could not agree which was which. So again the dispatch with which the pursuit was pressed left something to be desired.

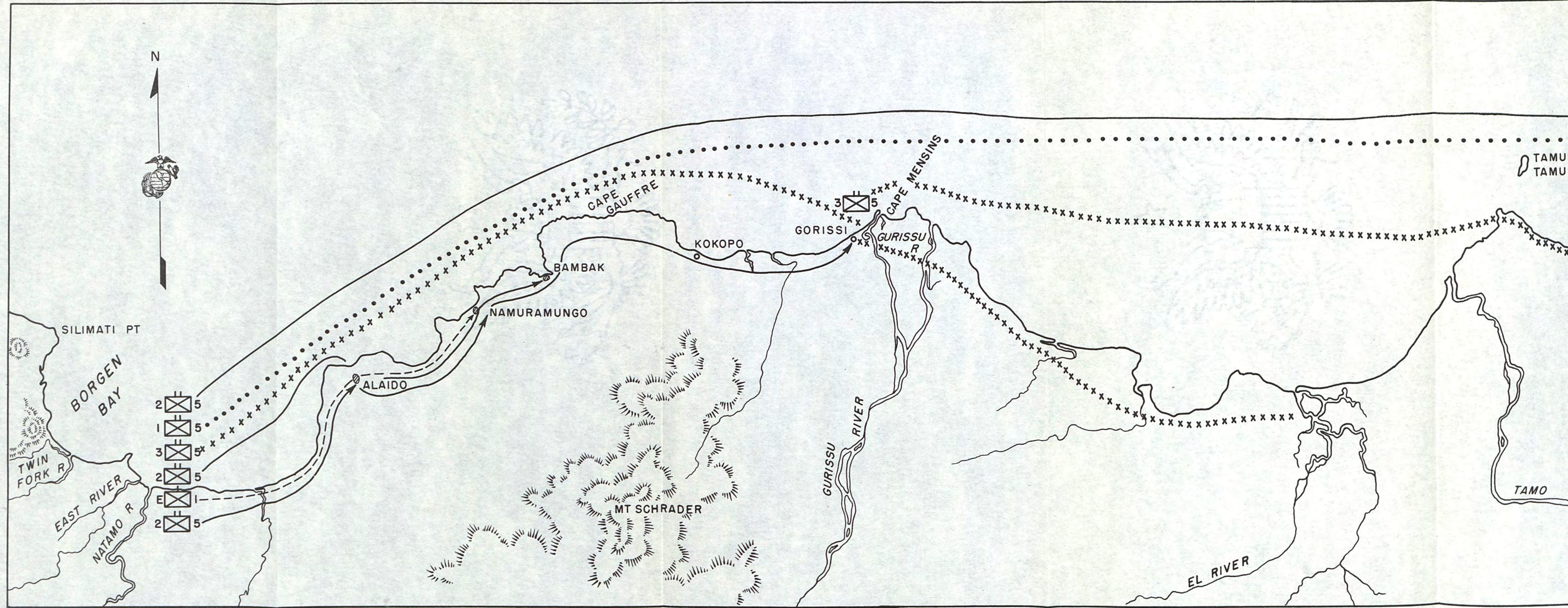
A patrol from Company E, 1st Marines, operating out of Old Natamo, explored the coastal track northward along the eastern shore of Borgen Bay, reaching Alaido on 1 February and Namuramuga the following day.²⁵ It reported evidence of some Japanese having passed this way, but so few as to indicate that the main withdrawal route lay elsewhere. So two other patrols probed inland simultaneously through the jungle in an

effort to locate this and intercept as many of the retiring enemy as possible. On 2 February they reached the trail in question at widely separated points, to the east and southwest of Old Natamo. Discarded gear, abandoned weapons and bloody bandages verified the nature of their find. But they encountered only 19 Japanese stragglers, sick, wounded and dying.²⁶

Clearly, such cohesive fighting units as General Matsuda still possessed had gained a substantial head start, how substantial no one could be certain. Accordingly, with his opposite number's intentions and course now clear, the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, ordered vigorous pursuit as far as Iboki, designated in the captured orders as rallying point for the withdrawing force.

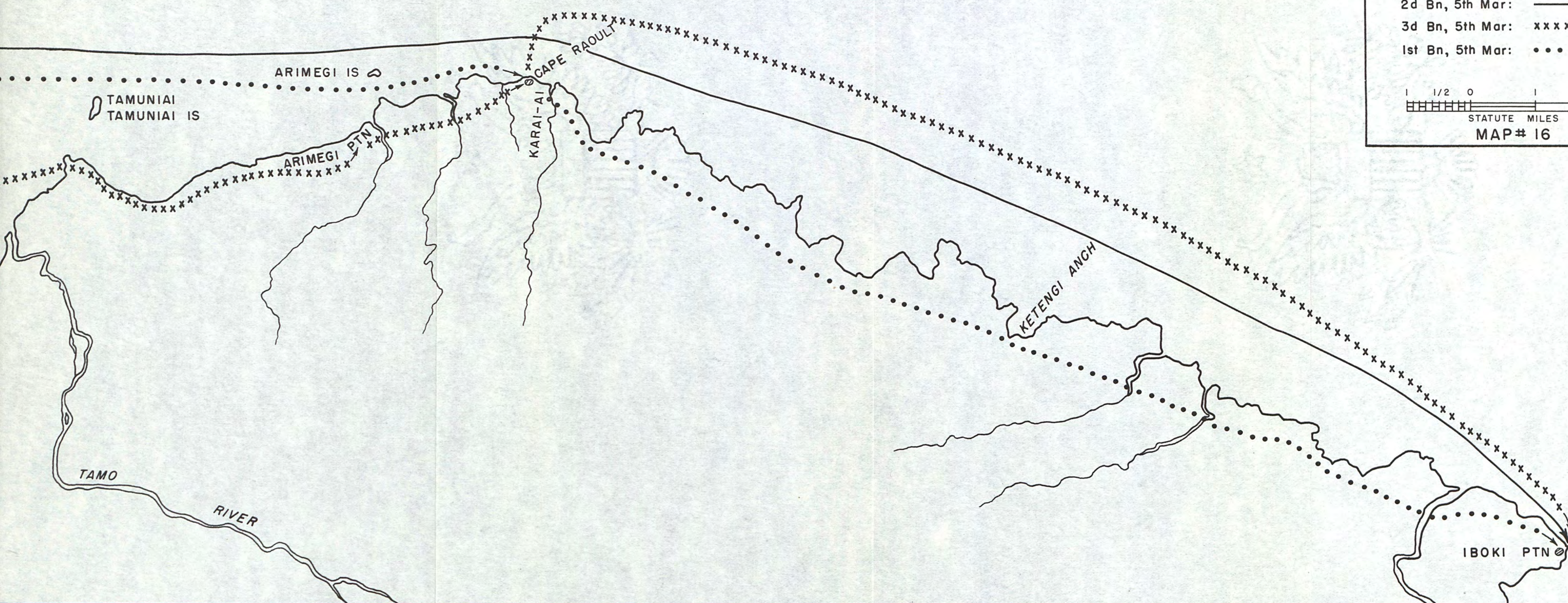
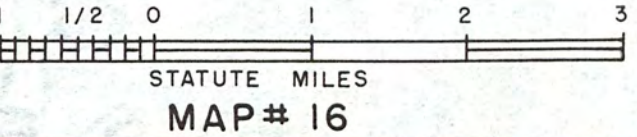
²⁵ 1st MarDiv SAR, IV, 9.

²⁶ D-2 Journal, 3Sep44.



PATROLS EASTWARD TO IBOKI

- 2d Bn, 1st Mar: ----->
- 2d Bn, 5th Mar: —————>
- 3d Bn, 5th Mar: xxxxxxxxxxxx->
- 1st Bn, 5th Mar:>



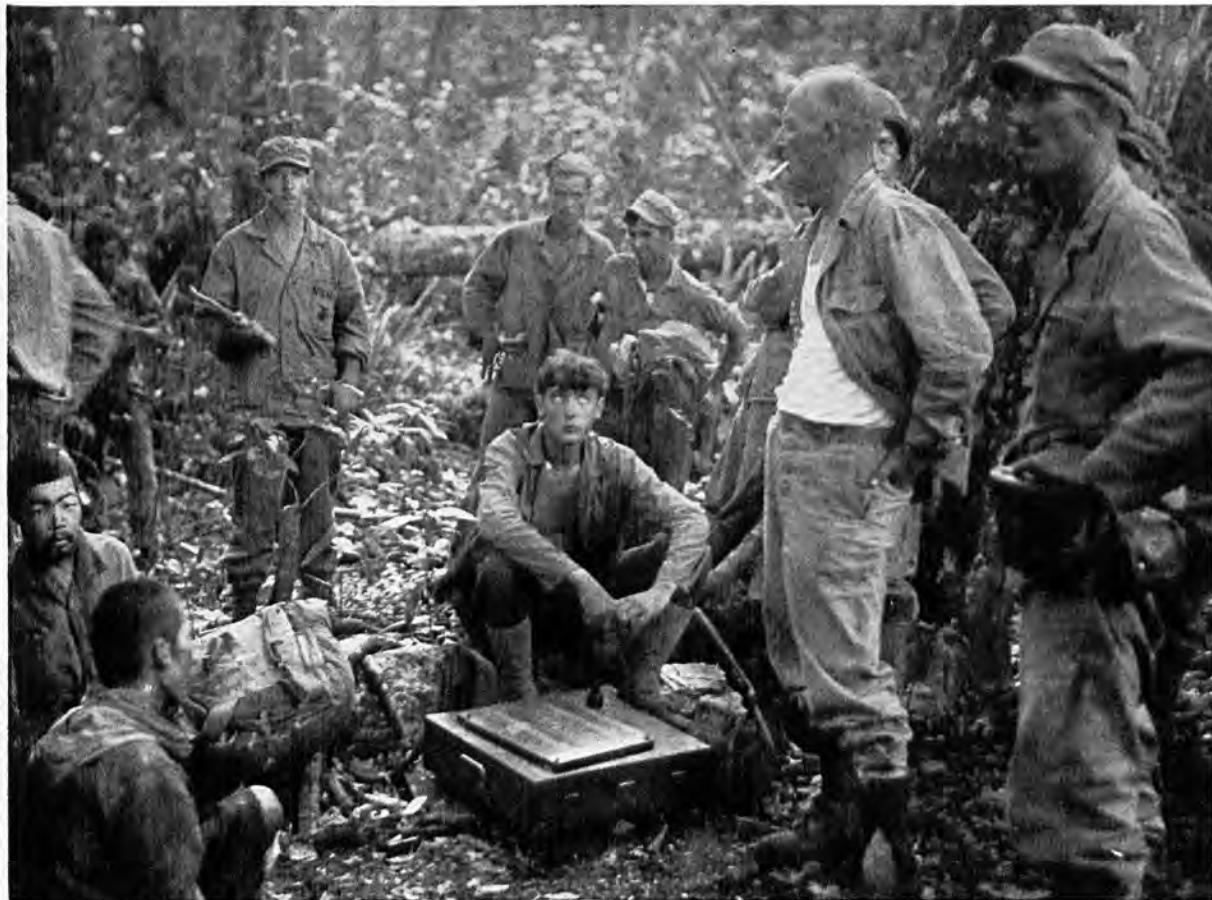
The 5th Marines assumed this mission, relieving the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines to rejoin its parent regiment in the airdrome area. Further attempts at interception would be made by means of a series of leapfrogging amphibious landings: placing detachments of Marines ashore at successive points along the north coast to commence patrol operations from there. Landing craft operated by the Boat Battalion, 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, of the Army's 2d Engineer Special Brigade²⁷ were made available to

²⁷ Specially trained to handle landing craft in Army amphibious operations, units of this brigade served with high efficiency throughout the Southwest Pacific Theater and Philippines. Personnel who served in the Cape Gloucester campaign came to regard themselves more as Marines than soldiers; after the war one reserve officer of field rank attempted to effect his actual transfer to the Corps. (Statement of BrigGen J. T. Selden, 5May49.)

carry out the amphibious phase, and the division's little Cub artillery spotter planes for observation and liaison.

High seas frustrated the first landing attempt: at Namuramunga on 4 February. In consequence, two patrols from 2/5 proceeded overland from Old Natamo, via the coastal track and main withdrawal route respectively, with orders to reach Kokopo, where recently captured Japanese indicated the fleeing remnants expected to pick up supplies. The coastal patrol got as far as Mambak, killing eight stragglers and taking three prisoners, but both patrols were ordered back to the perimeter on 6 February without reaching their destination.

The following day a patrol from 2/5 landed successfully at Aliado with orders to follow the coastal track to the mouth of the Gurissu River through Kokopo and Gorissi. A Cub



COLONEL SELDEN AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL BARBA look over the latest catch of Japanese prisoners at Iboki Plantation.

plane observer reported Marines in the first named place on 8 February.²⁸ But whatever supplies had existed at either village had been either carried off or destroyed by retiring elements farther forward, and the only Japanese encountered were either dead or in various stages of dying of starvation or disease, or a combination of the two. The patrol completed its mission on the 10th, killing 16 stragglers and bringing six prisoners back to the Borgen Bay perimeter. It also brought back an unverifiable native report that General Matsuda and at least some troops had been evacuated by barge ten or twelve days before.

The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines (less Com-

²⁸ D-2 *Journal*, 10Feb44.

pany I) moved into Gorissi by boat on 12 February and set up a radar station. A patrol from this battalion reached the El River on the 16th but found it impassible. A second patrol, therefore, leapfrogged the first by sea, landing beyond the next river to the east and arriving at Arimega Plantation on the 19th. Karai-ai, key Japanese supply point west of Iboki, now lay only a short jump ahead, and 3/5 seized it by a combined overland and overwater operation on 21 February.²⁹

²⁹ 1st MarDiv *SAR APPEASE*, 1. This source describes the technique developed as follows: "The plan employed was that of pushing a succession of fresh platoons along the coastal track and then landing a company from LCM's at strategic points en route after the platoons had secured them."



IBOKI BEACHHEAD, February 1944.

At this point 1/5 leapfrogged 3/5. In the words of the battalion commander:

Our mission was to advance and patrol the area to a native village just west of Iboki Plantation. 2-5 would then leapfrog 1-5 and seize Iboki Plantation. We had 2 LCM's to assist us in the move. We accomplished the mission by sending a platoon size patrol along the coastal trail to a designated landing beach, while other patrols ranged inland from the battalion bivouac. In the afternoon, we would move 1 to 2 companies by LCM to the landing beach designated as the coastal patrol's objective and set up a perimeter defense for the night. The next morning fresh patrols would be sent forward and the LCM's used to bring forward the remainder of the battalion.³⁰

Patrols headed by the R-2 scouts reached Ketenge Anchorage on 22 February and pressed on. Trouble was anticipated at Iboki as captured enemy orders named it as the main supply base and rallying point for the retiring Japanese. However, both the 1/5 coastal patrol and two companies proceeding by water mistook Iboki for the designated battalion objective and arrived there simultaneously on the 24th in advance of 2/5, to find the supplies systematically evacuated and the place deserted save for a handful of stragglers.³¹ By the 27th the regimental command post and all remaining elements of the 5th Marines, reinforced, were firmly established in the immediate area and patrolling in all directions.

Summarizing these operations, the division reported:

For the first time in the history of the 1st Mar Div a reinforced regiment had conducted a shore-to-shore operation along the coast of enemy-held territory. Using only 10 LCM's and jungle trails they had transported and marched 5000 men with their attendant supplies and equipment, for a distance of 60 miles around and over some of the worst jungle terrain in the world.³²

What made this accomplishment the more remarkable was the somewhat impromptu manner in which it was undertaken initially. Colonel John T. Selden, 5th Marines com-

manding officer, had no inkling that any such move impended and had hiked across the island to join Colonel Puller's Itni patrol (see second sub-chapter following). As he tells the story:

... was one day's march from my CP on the return trip when [J. S.] Stankus came dashing in with a message . . . that something was up that would affect the 5th . . . Arrived at Division CP at eight or nine o'clock [in the evening] to receive orders to put my show on the road. That was all the advance notice I had. The next morning, we were on the move. To have accomplished my march four days prior to the deadline without loss or even having a man wounded was, in our estimation, quite a feat.³³

However, owing to the long delay in its execution, the move failed to catch Matsuda or to intercept any organized remnants of his force. To understand the extent to which this delay played into the enemy's hands, it will be well to see what the Japanese were doing all this time.

THE KATABASIS " OF JIRO SATO

Capture of the 65th Brigade files brought Marine intelligence officers their first intimation of the presence of an officer and a unit not previously identified as being in western New Britain: Colonel Jiro Sato and his 51st Reconnaissance Regiment.³⁴

Initially this unit had not been integral to the brigade. Matsuda fell heir to it when it became stranded in western New Britain en route to join its parent organization: the 51st Division, then operating on New Guinea. The general used it to occupy Rooke Island, to the west across Dampier Strait, in which

³⁰ Ltr MajGen J. T. Selden to author, 7Mar52.

³¹ "Katabasis. Literally, a going down; specif., the return march to the sea of the Greek auxiliaries of the Anabasis; hence, any similar retreat." Webster's New International Dictionary, 2d Edition.

³² Except as otherwise noted, detail concerning Sato's operations derives from a diary captured subsequently. The writer was never identified, but internal evidence indicates that he must have been an officer very close to the Colonel, or possibly Sato himself. Translation used as reference appears in ATIS 939, 1.

³⁰ *Barba*.

³¹ *Ibid*. For change in Japanese plans see sub-chapter following, also Chap XI.

³² 1st MarDiv SAR, IV, 10.

capacity the "regiment" numbered approximately 500 officers and men. On 6 December, however, about half of this strength was shipped to the Cape Bushing area where most of the personnel were incorporated into the newly formed 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry, on 12 December³⁶ (See Chapter IV).

On 7 January, with the Japanese needing every man for the Borgen Bay fighting, Colonel Sato embarked the remainder of his command and set out to join the main body. His route lay via Cape Bushing, up the Itni River to Nigol, thence northward on foot over the Government Trail to Nakarop. He arrived to find his compatriots hard pressed, his own the only even comparatively fresh unit on the scene.

But despite the heavy pressure, General Matsuda did not commit this final reinforcement to the main fighting, then rolling inexorably toward Aogiri Ridge and Hill 660. Instead, on 12 January, Sato led his command off in the opposite direction on a special mission: defense of the western approaches to headquarters against Marine patrols now beginning to operate in the wide saddle behind Mt. Talawe. There, as related earlier, various elements gave Captain Stevenson's patrol a bad time in the Mt. Munulu region on the 23rd and 24th, and stopped Captain Hunt's force short of Niapaua on the 28th.

By then, although the Marines had yet to find it out, the withdrawal of the Japanese main body had been under way for nearly a week, with the advance elements already beyond range of immediate interception. This withdrawal was specifically directed by 17th Division orders dated 21 January 1944, at Gavuvu.³⁷ These instructed the entire 65th Brigade to retire along the north coast where the survivors could obtain supplies at various barge staging points and possibly be evacuated by sea. Other orders directed other elements to do everything possible to aid and

expedite the movement, especially shipping engineers and medical personnel. The division commander directed reassembly of what remained of the Matsuda Butai at Iboki preparatory to establishment of a new defensive position along the line Talasea-Gasmata to check further incursions in the direction of Rabaul. Altogether, it was anything but the haphazard enterprise certain of its aspects might have led observers to believe.

The task thus imposed would have been a prodigious one under the best conditions. And the conditions faced by the Japanese could scarcely have been much worse. The troops, on short rations even before the campaign began, were now seriously weakened physically; also demoralized by defeat and riddled by disease as a result of three weeks of jungle fighting in monsoon rains. Iboki lay some 60 miles away, the Talasea-Gasmata line more than another 60 miles beyond that. And these wretched men, many with feet so infested with fungus infection that they walked with difficulty, must cover this distance afoot over jungle trails, carrying with them everything they needed to live and fight: weapons, ammunition, packs and at least enough food to last until they reached the first designated ration dump where they could replenish. They even tried to bring off their remaining machine guns, automatic cannon and artillery—at first.

The services of natives as guides and carriers would have been priceless at this time, and the Japanese impressed all such unfortunates as fell into their hands. But callous treatment had alienated the Melanesians long since, and now the spectacle of their late overlords in defeat began turning latent hatred into overt hostility. Thus, a potential resource became an added menace.

Despite the difficulties that lay ahead, Matsuda lost no time in putting behind him the scene of his military failure. In anticipation of the withdrawal order, he had already broken contact with the invaders and laid his own plans. Now he started his main body toward the north coast in successive echelons, sick and wounded first, artillery in the rear, over the unmapped inland trail to

³⁶ POW 151.

³⁷ Specifically TSUKI Op Or-A-No. 84, 21Jan44, modified and expanded by several supplementary orders. Translated in ATIS 883, 3.



MAIL CALL was always popular. Here it goes for some of the 5th Marines. (Army Photo.)

Kokopo which the groping Marines did not find until nearly two weeks later. To insure the movement against enemy interference, he left behind two covering forces: Colonel Sato's unit in the high ground to protect his rear, and what was designated the Hanahara Group³⁸ in the Natamo region along the southern shore of Borgen Bay, the direction from which interception could be most feared.

³⁸ Lt Hanahara had commanded the Machine Gun Co of 2/141, but this suicidal group that held off the 5th Marines for so long appears to have been a composite of men from many units, as were most Japanese groups by this time.

As things turned out, Matsuda's plans revealed excellent foresight and good judgment. Be it remembered, the general had sat out the war and the weather in a snug house, with plenty of food and medical care, and apparently he craved some more of the same. In any event, he placed himself and his headquarters group in the second echelon,³⁹ with

³⁹ Monograph No. 128, (Army) Southeast Area Operations Record Part IV, Supplement 1. This work was prepared under U. S. auspices in July, 1949 by ex-LtCol Isamu Murayama, IJA, 17th Div opns officer on New Britain; hereinafter cited as *Murayama*. Because its author remained far from the fighting, he is highly untrustworthy on opera-

what remained of the 141st Infantry, thereby gaining protection of the strongest cohesive unit and enjoying the security of both advance and rear guards. Superior Private Toshio Herotsune, a medical corpsman in 1/53, encountered him at the point where the withdrawal trail crossed the headwaters of the Natamo River and later reported him in excellent health and spirits, passing along the cheering word that strong reinforcements had landed at Iboki and were marching to the brigade's relief.⁴⁰

All the cohesive echelons of the main body had cleared the area by 27 January, on which date Colonel Sato received orders to fall back in turn, still covering the rear of the brigade. However, one of his units remained engaged with the Hunt Patrol west of Nakarop during the morning of the 28th until the Marines broke contact. Thereupon it retired quickly to the designated rendezvous point: the village of Gurimati, some two miles east of Agulupella, thereby neatly sidestepping the several patrols from the Borgen Bay region that were converging on the later place, as previously related.

After pausing to reorganize and assay the situation, Sato struck eastward again and reached the main escape route at Kakumo. Following this in a generally northeasterly direction over some rugged high ground, he arrived without incident at Kokopo on 2 February, the same day that the Marines finally discovered the trail many miles in his rear.

The coastal track presented an increasingly gruesome sight as the withdrawal continued. Obviously, if any cohesion were to be retained among the fleeing remnants, able-bodied troops could not be further hampered by invalids. Men unable to continue must

tional matters, merely perpetuating the errors and outright fiction contained in reports reaching 17th Div Hq. However, he appears to have been an excellent staff officer, and his comments on matters known to him at first hand shed much light on Japanese activities. Probably they are as reliable as his memory and the scanty sources available to him permit.

⁴⁰ POW 121.

shift for themselves. Such unfortunates were provided with hand grenades and instructed to blow themselves up at the approach of the enemy. Many did not prolong their agony to that extent. Some begged their officers to shoot them.⁴¹ Many others died of illness or sheer starvation before the Marines came up with them. The stench of death hung over New Britain's north coast like a miasma.

But there was little Sato could do for the stragglers if he were to carry out his mission. So he pressed on, to such good effect that he reached Karai-ai early on 12 February, the day that the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, belatedly aware of the Japanese course, set up an advance base at Gorissi. More than 20 miles now separated the rearmost organized element of the Japanese from the foremost of their pursuers.

Karai-ai was still operating as an active base. Here Sato placed nine of his sick in the small hospital run by the 1st Shipping Engineers, in hopes of their eventual evacuation in one of the scarce barges that still ventured in under cover of darkness. Then he drew five days rations for the rest of his force and set out the following day for his next destination: Iboki Plantation, which he reached on the afternoon of 16 February, while the Marines were still trying to find a way across the swollen El River, 30 miles behind.

In the original withdrawal orders, the Commanding General, 17th Division, had designated Iboki as rallying point for the 65th Brigade, but at some time in the interim the plan had been changed. The advance echelon, 2d Battalion, 53d Infantry and some sick and wounded had been evacuated by sea,⁴² and such other units as remained in command control were plunging

⁴¹ POW 131.

⁴² A Japanese diary captured at Talasea describes the passage of this unit through that place on 21Feb 44. ATIS 906,5. A map in *Murayama* indicates evacuation of 2/53 from Aria River to Volupai on 7Feb, but this appears improbable in view of date of departure from Borgen Bay and arrival at Talasea.

through the jungle beyond with Cape Hoskins as their destination. At Iboki the main escape route swung widely inland to avoid a series of deep river mouths and broad swamps, and Sato had to travel some miles⁴³ south in order to report to Matsuda Butai headquarters, located at a village called Upmadung.

There he found not only the general but Colonels Katayama and Sumiya,⁴⁴ all of whom had dropped out of the Americans' ken since the beginning of the withdrawal. There, too, Sato drew a modification of his original assignment. As translated from the 17 February entry in the journal that furnished most of the material on the 51st Reconnaissance Regiment contained herein: "Received orders that this Regt will be SATO Det, occupy key positions at ARIA River mouth area, supply KOMORI Det (T. N. 1 Bn, 81 Inf Regt) by land, and gather intelligence."⁴⁵

But he was not destined to enjoy the company of these officers for long. On 23 February Matsuda embarked his headquarters and as many hospital patients as possible in such few barges as could reach the scene and departed the Aria River for Cape Hoskins where, after circling Wilaumez Peninsula, he reported in to 17th Division Headquarters on the 25th.⁴⁶ Shortly thereafter Sumiya and Katayama in turn set out for the same destination overland⁴⁷ and disappeared into the all-enveloping jungle, leav-



THE COMMANDER AND EXECUTIVE OFFICER of the Gilnit Patrol, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller and Major W. J. Piper.

ing Sato very much on his own. With characteristic vigor he set about evacuating the stores remaining at Iboki to Upmadung and rehabilitating such stragglers as he could while awaiting further orders.

THE ITNI PATROL

In the meanwhile, quite indifferent to the grisly game of hare and hounds taking place along the north coast, a patrol group of formidable proportions assembled at Agulupella for the trek southward across the island. Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. Puller arrived on the scene 30 January to take charge. For the first time since the patrols started operations in this general area, they were united in one place under one command and assigned one mission.

Designated the Gilnit Group after the native village that was its destination, Colonel Puller's unit was directed to clear out the enemy to the line Borgen Bay-Itni River, thus securing all of western New Britain and completing the secondary mission assigned the division. The organization included: The Uncle Group, composed of three reinforced rifle companies—K/1 (former Hunt Patrol), G/5, and a composite company from the 7th Marines (former Parish Patrol); the Natamo Task Force composed of 1/5 less one reinforced company, and E/5 (reinforced); plus a headquarters

⁴³ This portion of New Britain remained unexplored inland of the coast. Villages and trails known to exist were located mainly by guesswork on the maps prepared for the opposition and often appear in different places on different maps, in one case in different locations on the same map. Those shown on Map 20 represent the best approximations possible by comparison of existing maps with Japanese descriptions and U. S. patrol reports. That the two often used different names for identical places does not help.

⁴⁴ POW 1000.

⁴⁵ ATIS 939, 1. At this time Maj Komor! was still operating in front of Arawe on the island's southern coast. See Chaps IV, IX.

⁴⁶ *Murayama*.

⁴⁷ POW 1000.



THE GILNIT PATROL puts out aircraft panels at Arigilupua (pre-war population 31). (Army Photo.)

detachment made up of intelligence personnel from regimental and division levels. These units mustered a combined strength of 1,398 and were augmented by three Australians: Major Mather, Lieutenant Gray and Sub-Lieutenant Wiedeman, who were accompanied by 150 native carriers.

Upon his arrival, Colonel Puller dispatched patrols south and southeast Agulupella to feel out the enemy, but it became readily apparent that any effective Japanese aggregation which might offer a fight had departed in the general eastward movement. The group commander radioed division that the only living sign of the enemy "was a police dog seen dashing through the village of Niapaua."⁴⁸

Supply for a patrol of such size posed exceedingly difficult problems. Originally it

had been planned to handle this by LCM from Gloucester to Sag Sag and thence overland to Agulupella, but Colonel Puller labeled this impracticable. The trails leading into Agulupella were no different from others of Cape Gloucester, and under a combination of constant rain and heavier use than that for which they were designed, they quickly turned into mire. Native carriers were utilized to bring in supplies from the 5th Marines' perimeter, but that was at best a stopgap measure.

Combining the problem of supply with the obvious evacuation of the area by the Japanese, division decided to reduce the size of the Gilnit Group and supply the remainder with what was then the novel method of plane-drops.⁴⁹ This was ambitiously begun with B-17's from Dobodura, but it was

⁴⁸ D-3 *Journal*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

quickly and painfully learned that the bombers had to fly so high that their drops were scattered over a huge area, a portion of their deliveries sometimes landing within the patrol itself and causing casualties. Small cub planes were then resorted to, and they proved effective for the duration of the Gilnit patrol.⁵⁰

While the main force readied itself at Agulupella, Captain Hunt's Company K, 1st Marines, moved on to Arigilupua to protect engineers engaged in bridging a river near that village. Bored by the necessity of waiting, Hunt requested permission to patrol southward, which Puller granted.⁵¹ He thereupon departed toward the Itni with 11 men, several from each platoon. The combination of a small force lightly armed, a well-marked trail and no living signs of the enemy⁵² put the group at Nigol on the Itni at dusk and there it spent the night.

The next morning Hunt sent a runner back to Colonel Puller with information of his location and a request that rations be air-dropped. Japanese craft found on the river bank were not considered adequate for crossing to Gilnit, however, so the patrol continued southward until stopped by a large swamp, whereat it turned back and spent a second night at Nigol.

Shortly after dawn a native runner from Puller met the patrol with an order that Captain Hunt place himself under arrest for exceeding his orders and that the next senior member take charge and bring back the patrol at once.

Meanwhile, construction of the bridge at Arigilupua and sufficient stockpiling of supplies, the primary hindrances to the patrol's movement to the Itni River, were accom-

plished by 6 February, and the Gilnit Group, much reduced in size, moved southward from Agulupella in echelons. The force now contained a composite reinforced company from the 7th Marines, I/5 (reinforced) which had replaced G/5 a few days earlier, and elements of the 11th Marines,⁵³ 17th Marines and division headquarters. In addition to the Australians and native carriers, the group now numbered 384 Marines.

Profiting by earlier experiences in following New Britain trails, Coloner Puller and his second in command, Major W. J. Piper, Jr., resolved to keep the group split in two sections under their respective commands. The patrol was carried out with leapfrog tactics, one group exploring side trails while the other proceeded on the main trail. Per-

⁵⁰ Although the group was much reduced, it still contained some personnel who thought that they were extraneous to the operation and were not enthusiastic over their presence. One of these, a chunky artillery lieutenant, was ordered along by Puller because the patrol commander thought the walk would do the artilleryman's girth some good. The patrol was well beyond any assistance that could be rendered by artillery.



MAJOR JOHN V. MATHER, AIF, right, served on division staff throughout the campaign.

⁵⁰ Actually cub planes were tried before the B-17's but proved inadequate to supply the big Gilnit Group as originally set up. (Ltr Col W. J. Piper to CMC, 19Feb52.) An account of the many uses the small cub planes were put to and their effectiveness during the Gloucester operation appears in Appendix V.

⁵¹ Interview with Maj George P. Hunt, 21Feb52.

⁵² The patrol encountered one sick Japanese soldier who was sent back to Puller at Agulupella.

sonnel in the two groups were not static, but were changed from day to day.

The main Puller patrol and the group headed by Captain Hunt met on the trail shortly after Colonel Puller had departed Arigilupua. Hunt then learned that his company had been ordered from Arigilupua back to Agulupella and that he and his 11 men were to accompany the larger force on its trek to the Itni. The captain spent the remaining patrol time in "confinement" under the surveillance of a lieutenant appointed for the task⁵⁴ while his men acted in the dual capacity of scouts and ammunition carriers.

⁵⁴ By the time the Gilnit Group returned to the perimeter Col Puller dropped the arrest charges against Capt Hunt, but the latter was admonished to

Following advance patrols, the group made its way rapidly over the tortuous trail southward, climbing in and out of deep gullies and wading through numerous streams. Ammunition carriers for the 81mm mortars found it particularly difficult going and frequent reliefs had to be arranged. No relief could be found from the rain, however, which continued to pelt downward, adding slippery mud to the natural difficulties of the march and making everyone uncomfortable. Despite the hardships imposed by the narrow trail, progress met with approval of Colonel

watch his aggressiveness in the future. In the Peleliu operation later in 1944 Puller was Hunt's regimental commander and recommended him for a Navy Cross for his actions there, which was duly forthcoming.



COCONUTS were rather a novelty in the immediate Cape Gloucester area. This patrol found some in a native village.

Puller, who later said he liked the Gilnit patrol because "everything's on two feet."⁵⁵

Early in its operations the patrol found that the map of the southern area was as incorrect as that of Cape Gloucester. Native villages shown were either named or located erroneously, and it became an important task of intelligence personnel to correct the trail net and village names on the map to correspond with reality.

Following the general route of Agulupella to Arigilupua to Relmen to Turitei to Nigol to Gilnit, the group came across abandoned bivouac areas, supply dumps and occasional enemy stragglers. One bivouac area, filled with the derlict debris of a retreating force, yielded further evidence of the Japanese 141st Infantry's participation in the Philippines campaign: one discarded pack containing a large and dirty U. S. flag.

Supply drops by cub planes were planned for and effected at Arigilupua, Relmen and Turitei. Because of the nature of delivery as well as the absence of field kitchens, food-stuffs for the Marines were limited to K rations, which as a steady diet for several weeks became boring.⁵⁶ The standard menu for native carriers was rice and corned beef which was provided only for them. Not a few of the Marines watched enviously as the natives ate their hot meals, using palm fronds for plates.

Not all of the drops had to do with food, however. As one officer responsible for supply recalls a novel incident that caused some bewilderment at the time:

One of the requests for a cub airdrop from Col Puller of mosquito lotion. Since it was marked urgent, the delivery was made within a few hours although there were those in the Division CP who privately wondered why the Colonel, who had often expressed some contempt for what he considered the luxuries of campaigning, had changed his mind about

⁵⁵ McMillan, *op. cit.*, 214.

⁵⁶ The bulk of the K rations received contained off-brand cigarettes which the Marines tried to utilize as barter with the natives. After a few puffs the natives, who clamored for better-known brands, refused the smokes, even as gifts. This confirmed the Marines' already dim view of the off-brands.

mosquito lotion. A patrol member queried at a later date was somewhat amused. "Hell, the Colonel knew what he was about. We were always soaked and everything we owned was likewise, and that lotion made the best damn stuff to start a fire with that you ever saw."⁵⁷

Advance elements of the Gilnit Group reached the patrol objective 9 February and the remainder of the Puller force moved in the following day. Nigol, the last village before reaching Gilnit, they found to be one of those rare garden spots which were occasionally seen on New Britain.⁵⁸ A small coconut plantation located on a grassy hill with a gentle slope down to a bend in the Itni River, a lazy appearing (but actually deep and swift) brownish-green waterway about 100 yards across. The Japanese had utilized Nigol as a supply base and the enemy tents still standing contained blankets, numerous documents, quantities of ammunition, weapons ranging from 75mm guns to .25 caliber rifles, cases of seaweed and sacks of rice, barley and soy bean flour.⁵⁹ The documents were sent back to division, but the remainder of the enemy supplies, with the exception of the blankets and 22 sacks of rice, were either burned or dumped into the Itni.⁶⁰ The salvaged blankets and rice were turned over to ANGAU.

Proceeding southeast a short distance from Nigol and remaining on the Itni's west bank, Colonel Puller bivouacked his forces directly across the river from Gilnit and sent a small patrol over to the village in one of the numerous boats found there by his forces.⁶¹ Upon the group's return from the

⁵⁷ LtCol J. S. Day, comments on prelim script.

⁵⁸ Col Katayama's CP had been located at Nigol prior to his movement northward, and 3/141 had been activated there. See Chap IV.

⁵⁹ Report by LtCol Puller to MajGen Rupertus, 1st MarDiv SAR, IV, Annex H, hereinafter cited as *Puller Report*.

⁶⁰ Some of the Marines took the opportunity to sample the seaweed before it was destroyed inasmuch as they had often heard it was a Japanese staple. It did not, however, meet with enthusiasm. Interview with Col W. J. Piper, Jr., 18Jan52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*



THE GILNIT PATROL passed through many native villages and all of them looked the same.

objective Puller informed division that Gilnit was abandoned and presented no signs of enemy occupation for the past year. He radioed that he had found a total of 34 barges and boats in the Nigol-Gilnit area, as well as quantities of weapons and ammunition, but that all signs of the Japanese were at least a month old.⁶²

⁶² *Puller Report; D-3 Journal.*

A patrol of platoon strength was then dispatched to Cape Bushing, but it returned the same day with the information that it had found indications that the enemy had been there but no evidence that they were still in occupancy.

Under orders to remain at Gilnit 48 hours and then retrace his steps, Puller reported the destruction of enemy supplies and equipment and headed back toward the perimeter.

At Turitei, however, he received instructions to return to Gilnit. In order to insure that western New Britain was secure, Sixth Army proposed sending a patrol from the Army units at Arawe to contact the Gilnit Group. Army notified division that the Arawe patrol was making its way toward Gilnit when it was held up by enemy action at Attulu Hill, a short distance east of the Itni. It became Puller's job to send a reconnaissance patrol there.⁶³

Basing half his force at Turitei and the remainder in the bivouac area across from Gilnit, Colonel Puller had a Japanese boat repaired⁶⁴ and dispatched first natives and then Marines to Attulu Hill.⁶⁵ They brought back identical reports: no indications of Japanese occupancy for at least a month.

To establish its own western contact with the Gilnit Group, as well as to augment that organization's supplies, division meanwhile ordered a rifle platoon from 1/7 to proceed by water around the western tip of New Britain and up the Itni. Two LCM's were utilized for the journey. The platoon left Cape Gloucester on 13 February, spent the night at Aisega and arrived at Puller's bivouac area the next day. It returned to Cape Gloucester two days later.

Leaving one rifle platoon in the area across from Gilnit to wait for the Army patrol, Colonel Puller on 16 February began his march back to the perimeter. He sent a

message to division in which he declared that in his opinion there had been no enemy forces in the Attulu Hill section for at least two months and that no effective enemy forces existed west of the Runglo River. A few hours after his departure he was followed by the remaining platoon, the Army patrol having established contact by sending a detachment in boats up the Itni.⁶⁶

The Gilnit Group returned to the lines 18 February with the exception of I/5 which was ordered to garrison Agulupella and protect a radar unit which was being installed. That company was relieved a few days later by L/1 and returned to its battalion, now well on its way toward Iboki.

Although it had met no effective enemy forces, the Gilnit Group had accomplished the secondary mission of the division: clearing western New Britain of the enemy from Borgen Bay to the Itni. It had also demonstrated how a large group of men could carry on effective operations supplied only by air drops. The group had also rehabilitated 1,700 natives, killed 75 Japanese, captured one prisoner and destroyed extensive quantities of enemy weapons and equipment.⁶⁷

With western New Britain secure, the division could now concentrate on the pursuit of the enemy eastward.

ROOKE ISLAND

Rooke (Umboi) Island, lying off the Western tip of New Britain, was close enough to Cape Gloucester to constitute a nuisance as long as there was a possibility that any enemy troops remained there. Division was reasonably sure that some 300 Japanese had been on the island but believed that they had evacuated prior to 1 February. On 5 February Sixth Army warned the 1st Division that it would shortly be required to take over surveillance of Rooke, preparatory to which HMAS *Benalla* would begin a survey of the island's coasts on 8 February.⁶⁸

⁶³ Puller Report.

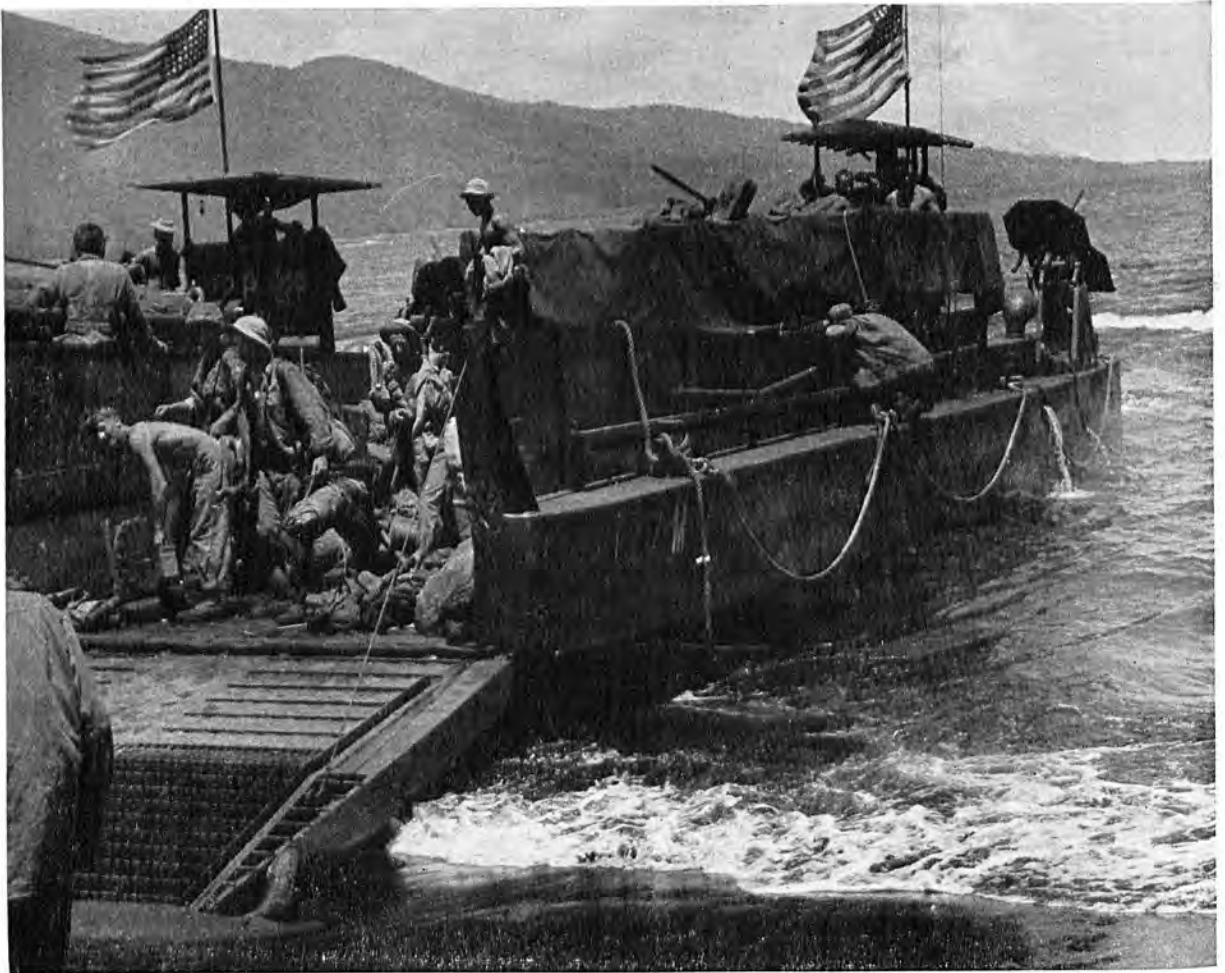
⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ D-3 Journal.

⁶³ D-3 Journal.

⁶⁴ Puller argued with division that he had no way to cross the Itni because he had destroyed the 34 boats and barges. A survey of the "destroyed" craft, however, produced one which was easily repairable and was utilized for the crossing. That tends to raise some question as to the extent of destruction of the remaining 33.

⁶⁵ This hill, a short distance inland of Cape Bushing, had evidently been location of 1/141 headquarters prior to that unit's departure for Arawe. See Chaps IV & IX. As described by one visitor: "Attulu Hill had apparently accommodated a sizable force at one time. Permanent huts, a hospital of sorts, and considerable evidence of captured U. S. supplies (from the Philippines) were found. But no sign of recent activity." Parish.



THE ROOKE ISLAND landing was unopposed.

Company B, 1st Marines was selected as the landing force for Rooke Island and departed Gloucester at 0900 on 12 February in six LCM's. Its mission was to reconnoiter the island, set up a defense for a proposed radar installation and recruit native labor crews. Landing was without incident, as was, in fact, the entire eight-day vigil the company spent on Rooke. A camp was established at Gizarum Plantation on the west coast, but the patrol's inability to maintain radio contact with division caused a transfer to Aupwell on the east coast.

Personnel of Company B enjoyed fresh fruit that abounded on the island and engaged in extensive patrolling to the north-

west and southwest, visiting native villages that bore such names as Gom, Goxom, Aropot, Arot, Maramu and Kabib. Many scattered machine-gun emplacements, abandoned bivouac areas and some remnants of medical supplies provided obvious signs that the Japanese had once occupied Rooke, but patrols found no live trace of the enemy. Off the northwest coast was a Japanese plane that had crashed on a reef prior to the company's landing, and a unit from the Fifth Air Force journeyed over to salvage what it could.

It was not the intention of higher echelons to establish a permanent garrison on Rooke. Therefore, on 17 February the company

was notified that it would be returned to Gloucester on the 20th. After guiding a group of Army signal officers to Gizarum

Plantation, the Marine patrol embarked in LCM's and rejoined its parent unit, bringing 40 native labor recruits along.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER IX

Flashback: Action at Arawe

CONCEPT OF MISSION

The Arawe operation began eleven days before the Marines' initial landing at Cape Gloucester, and lasted until long after the last Japanese had been cleared out of the northern portion of western New Britain. It took place at all only as a sort of make-shift afterthought on the part of ALAMO Force planners; yet it was conceived as an integral part of the over-all New Britain campaign and as such deserves treatment in these pages, even at risk of confusing the general chronology.

Because the operation did not add up to a great deal, strategically or tactically, and the scale of fighting was overshadowed by that which took place on the island's opposite shore, many observers tended to discount it as a sort of comic opera interlude wherein a Japanese force numbering few more than 1,000 at maximum strength check-mated more than 5,000 U. S. troops. The Japanese, on their part, regarded it as a victory; one of sufficient importance to earn their commander on the scene the signal honor of two commendations from the Emperor himself.

Both conceptions oversimplify. No operation is especially comical to the troops participating, and the Americans who fought at Arawe (more properly, Cape Merkus) per-

formed successfully every task assigned them; indeed, everything that the very limited nature of their mission permitted them to attempt. Thus, the "victory" aspect existed only in the imagination of the Japanese, since in actuality they accomplished nothing of the slightest importance. As a diversionary action, the invasion implicated one Japanese battalion¹ which otherwise could have fought at Cape Gloucester, and the Arawe landing's indirect contribution to the ultimate destruction of enemy air power in New Britain would be difficult to over-estimate.

As brought out in discussion of planning for the New Britain operation, the Gasmata phase had been cancelled and the target shifted to Arawe as less formidable, yet possessing the sheltered waters that the Navy wanted for development of a PT boat base. That Arawe also boasted an airstrip of sorts was a coincidence destined to have some curious repercussions: making a Japanese hero of Major Shinjiro Komori, and causing considerable embarrassment to General MacArthur's public relations staff. The

¹ 1st Bn 141st Infantry (less 1 Co) with estimated strength of about 400. Rest of Japanese troops who fought at Arawe had been committed to that area prior to the U. S. landing and were beyond reinforcing distance to Cape Gloucester.



ARAWE FROM THE AIR. U. S. main line of resistance lay across neck of hook-shaped peninsula in center. (AF Photo.)

mission assigned the task force (coded DIRECTOR) was merely to "seize and defend a suitable location for the establishment of light naval facilities;" that, and to reconnoiter westward to determine the feasibility of a supply route up the valley of the Itni River for possible use in operations against Cape Gloucester.²

ARAWE Z-DAY

Designated on 30 November³ to accomplish this simple mission was the 112th Cavalry RCT, reinforced, commanded by Brigadier General Julian W. Cunningham, USA, a unit inexperienced in combat and lacking amphibious training, with little chance for acquiring much now, Z-Day being set for 15 December. That a foul-up might occur

appeared something more than a remote possibility.

Nature contributed a few additional difficulties. Although amphibious scouts had been ashore briefly a few days before, the off-lying waters had not been explored, and there was no certainty that landing craft could reach shore through the complex of uncharted reefs known to exist. The plan, therefore, called for two smaller groups to land on subsidiary beaches in rubber boats from APD's, while the main force came in on LVT's to the western shore of Cape Merkus. These amtracks included 10 Buffaloes and 29 Alligators, manned by Company A, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 1st Marine Division, and traveled to the scene aboard USS *Carter Hall*, one of the new LSD's (landing ship, dock).

To get the terribly vulnerable rubber boats ashore, General Cunningham chose to rely on surprise rather than strength: landing under cover of darkness with no forewarn-

² DIRECTOR TF FO No. 1, 4Dec43; ALAMO G-3 No. 5, No. 6.

³ ESCALATOR FO No. 5.



SHORTLY AFTER THE ARAWA landing beach markers were erected and supply craft moved in. (AF Photo.)

ing. "Although it was considered that the moonlight might prevent surprise, the Landing Force Commander desired to attempt it without any preliminary bombardment."⁴ The group designated for nearby Pilelo Island landed successfully unopposed and destroyed a small party of the enemy. But moonlight disclosed the boats of the other group about 100 yards short of the eastern beach, where the Japanese took them under heavy, partially enfilading machine-gun and what was estimated to be 37mm fire.⁵

Destroyer USS *Shaw* lay some 3,000 yards offshore in this sector, prepared to deal with targets of opportunity, but in the uncertain light her gunners could not discern the boats against the darkly jungled shore, nor immediately spot the source of enemy fire; hence, held their own fire for many agonizing minutes until sure of not hitting friendly troops.⁶ Once she opened, *Shaw* silenced the

enemy with two salvos. By then, however, the soldiers had suffered many casualties, most of the boats had been sunk, and the survivors were intent only on getting away from there.⁷ General Cunningham, understandably irked, had some bitter comments to make regarding *Shaw's* delay in opening fire, which he declared endured for 20 minutes.⁸

He also had a few things to say about the delay in the main landing, evidently the result of a combination of factors. The amphibian tractors were launched so far from their target as to require one and a half hours for their approach, during which time the different speeds of the two types of vehicle caused the formation to become overextended and generally fouled-up.⁹ The land-

⁴ 7th Amphibious Force *Arawe Operation Report*, hereinafter cited as *7th AmF Arawe*, 5.

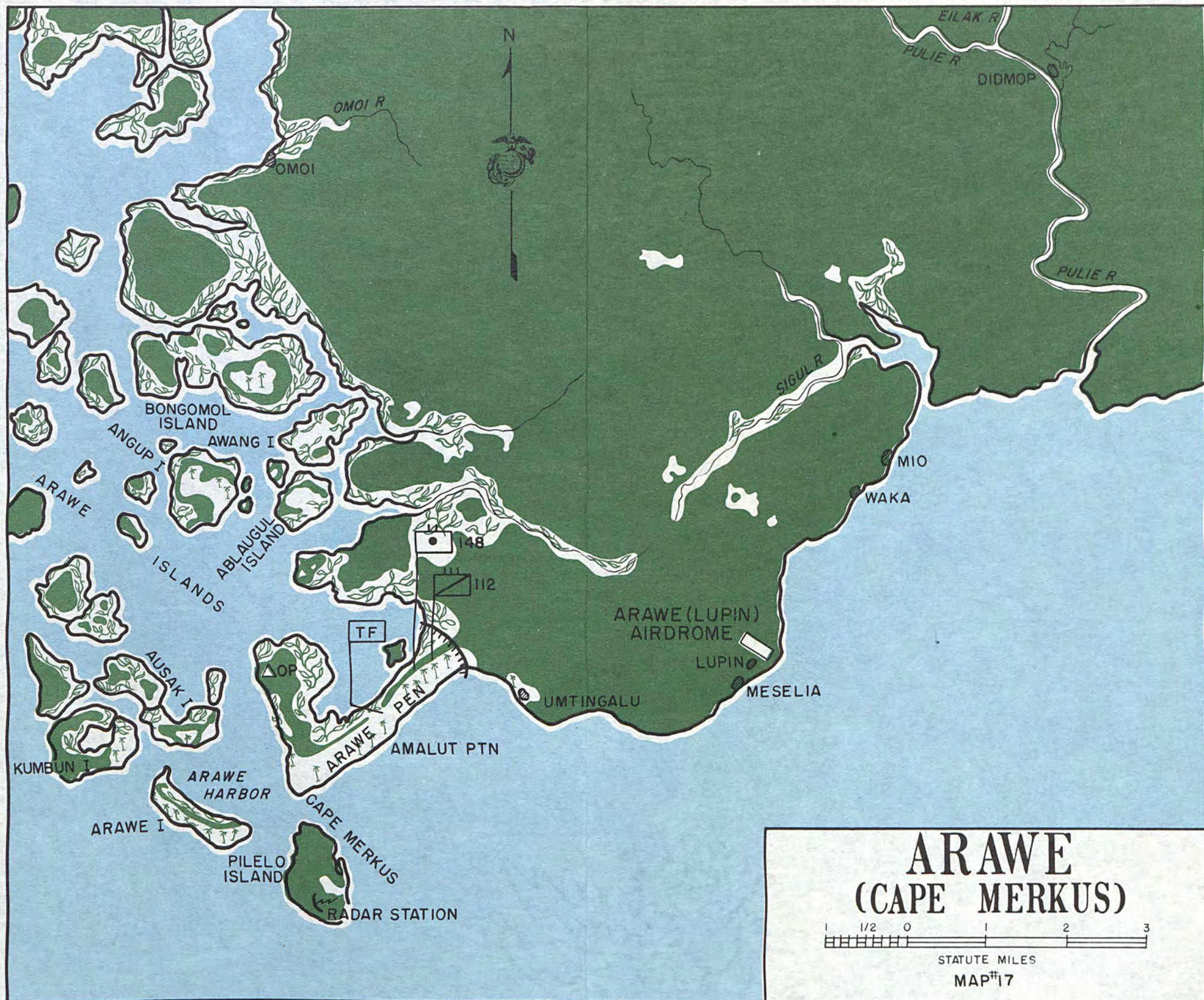
⁵ Cunningham, *Memo for Gen Krueger*, 16Dec43, hereinafter cited as *Cunningham Memo: ALAMO G-3*, No. 8.

⁶ *7th AmF Arawe*, 5.

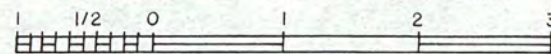
⁷ 12 of 15 boats sunk, 16 of 152 men killed or missing. *SC-699* rescued 71 from the water under fire. Morison, *op. cit.*, 375.

⁸ *Cunningham Memo*. Air Liaison Officer aboard flagship with the general estimated the delay as 8 minutes. (Report Maj A. J. Baley, *ALAMO G-3: No. 8*.)

⁹ *7th AmF Arawe*, 6.



ARAWE (CAPE MERKUS)



STATUTE MILES

MAP#17

ing was scheduled for after daybreak, to be preceded by 15 minutes of naval gunfire by the supporting destroyers. Brigadier General W. F. Heavey, commanding officer of 2d Engineer Special Brigade, was observing the operation from aboard a submarine chaser and became concerned over the possibility of the faster Buffaloes reaching the beach simultaneously with the friendly preparatory fire, so intercepted the leaders and ordered them to halt.¹⁰ This relieved the confusion not at all, and further delays ensued for which General Cunningham, evidently unaware of General Heavey's action, blamed the Navy.

But for all this unpropitious beginning, the story had a happy ending. The fire of the destroyers, though postponed, was extended in duration and proved eminently satisfactory. Air strikes and rocket barrages from close in took up where the shelling left off; whatever Japanese might have been on hand betook themselves elsewhere, and the horseless cavalymen landed unopposed.

They found themselves on a roughly crescent-shaped terrain feature terminating in Cape Merkus, which connected with the mainland via a narrow neck called Arawe¹¹ Peninsula in most of the reports (see Map 17). The soldiers reached this readily defensible ground by mid-afternoon, capturing three unemplaced mountain guns and mopping up a few stragglers along the way, and set immediately about digging positions and clearing fields of fire. With capture of off-lying islands by patrol action, this completed their main mission, as the land thus secured afforded control of the area wanted by the Navy for PT boat facilities.

¹⁰ Heavey, *Report on Landing*, 16Dec43; ALAMO G-3 No. 8. Personnel of 2d Engineer Special Brigade operated the landing craft which followed the LVT's in to the beach.

¹¹ Properly the name Arawe applied to the group of islands lying offshore, and to one of these in particular. Japanese reports refer to the region as Merkus.

THE FIRST TWELVE DAYS

But if the Japanese ground defense of Arawe appeared pretty feeble, the violence of their reaction by air exceeded all expectations. Daylight attacks on the beachhead began within a few hours of the landings and persisted with little noticeable diminution for a week, as many as 100 planes of all types coming over in a single raid:¹² far heavier opposition than the enemy had offered at Bougainville or the operations in northern New Guinea. This gave rise to some serious concern regarding their capabilities for opposing the Cape Gloucester invasion, if the seizure of a comparatively unimportant place like Arawe could rouse them to such frenzy.

Actually, considering the compact nature of the target, these attacks were almost grotesquely ineffective, the most serious loss occurring at the 29th Evacuation Hospital where two men were killed and four wounded on Z-plus 2¹³ and 18 tons of medical supplies destroyed four days later.¹⁴ But their intensity and persistence worked serious nerve strain on the men on the ground, until, like troops under almost any conditions, they began to become acclimated. Then, as fighter cover and antiaircraft fire shot down the attacking planes, and South Pacific fliers increased the effectiveness of their attacks on Rabaul airfields from the new Bougainville bases, the raids on Arawe diminished until at length they petered out altogether.

In the meanwhile, patrols of the 112th Cavalry, sometimes accompanied by ANGAU officers, explored the country beyond the defense line in an effort to contact the enemy, locate trails¹⁵ and bring in friendly natives

¹² ALAMO Force G-2 *Summary of Information* 21-22Dec43; ALAMO G-3 No. 9.

¹³ Cunningham to Krueger, 17Dec43; ALAMO G-3 No. 8.

¹⁴ Cunningham *Progress Report* to CG ALAMO, 24Dec43; ALAMO G-3, No. 12.

¹⁵ Especially the trans-island trail to Iboki, over which it was thought the Japanese might move troops and supplies from the north coast—as indeed

for rehabilitation. One such group, operating some four miles to the east, discovered the so-called Lupin Airdrome.

This was perhaps the most useless piece of real estate in the whole region. Constructed in 1937 as an emergency landing strip (600 x 60 yards) on the route between New Guinea and Rabaul, it had been used only once prior to the war, by a single light plane. When forced to evacuate New Britain, Australians had plowed deep furrows across the runway to make it unserviceable. Since it offered no possibilities for enlargement or improvement, the Japanese had not bothered to repair it, and now tall kunai grass overgrew furrows and all.¹⁹

The patrol went on about its business, monumentally unimpressed with its find, but on its return the leader naturally reported where he had been and what he had seen. Nothing in DIRECTOR Task Force orders stipulated that the useless field should be seized; even if it had been good, the commanding general would not have wanted it at this time, owing to its distance from the beachhead and the impossibility of including it within a defensive perimeter with the number of troops available. However, seizure of enemy air facilities always has news value. So some zealous public relations officer at one of the higher echelons promoted that beat-up kunai patch to the rank of "airdrome" and released word of its "capture" to newspaper and radio correspondents.

During the first week or so following the landing, U. S. patrols roamed at will through the territory to the eastward, making only rare contact with occasional stragglers. On 24 December General Cunningham reported his casualties as 25 killed in action, 71 wounded and 27 missing. In return for these losses, Americans estimated 78 Japanese

they did (see below). Existence of this trail was known from a captured document which mapped and described the entire route. G-2 Summary of Information, 20-21Dec43: ALAMO G-3, No. 8.

¹⁹ ALAMO Terrain Report, A r a w e , 26Nov43: ALAMO G-3, No. 5.

dead by the 22d.¹⁷ These were identified as personnel of the 115th Infantry and 14th Field Artillery Regiments,¹⁸ which caused some confusion and difficulty in estimating enemy's total numbers, as Allied intelligence had previously identified both units as operating in northern New Guinea.

But signs began to occur indicating that this early quiet would be short-lived. Patrol contacts to the east became more frequent. During the night of 25/26 December, an enemy force estimated to number 100 made a determined assault on the main line of resistance across the neck of the peninsula and was repulsed with some difficulty, 12 infiltrators being killed within the U. S. positions. The same night an advance observation post at Mio, near the mouth of the Sigul River, reported itself surrounded, though men and equipment successfully evacuated by water the following day.²⁰

On 27 December the task force announced that the Japanese had seized the villages of Meselia and Umtingalu, west of the airstrip, and U. S. outposts and patrols were withdrawn within the MLR. Documents captured in a clash near the latter village identified the enemy elements participating as belonging to the 1st Battalion, 81st Infantry, and the 81st Naval Defense Unit. Since the main strength of these was believed to be at Gasmata, General Cunningham drew the not illogical deduction that reinforcement were being moved into the area from that point.²⁰

¹⁷ Cunningham to CG ALAMO, *Progress Rpt*, 24 Dec43: ALAMO G-3, No. 11.

¹⁸ As noted in Chap IV, these were casual elements separated from their parent units owing to transportation difficulties and became incorporated subsequently in organizations operating on New Britain. At Arawe Japanese designated them respectively Fukushima and Mishina Units after their commanding officers, both 1stLts. (POW's 297, 299, 978, 990.) Estimates of garrison strength at time of landing varied widely, but it probably aggregated around 300. ALAMO G-3 No.'s 8-13, *passim*.

¹⁹ ALAMO G-3, No. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Especially ALAMO G-2 *Weekly Rpt* No. 21.



THE 112TH CAVALRY RCT moves through an Arawe coconut plantation. (Army Photo.)

In the meanwhile, an unexpected contact had occurred many miles to the west. An amphibious patrol of 19 men, including an ANGAU officer and four natives, proceeding in two LCVP's toward the Itni River to carry out the task force's secondary mission, was attacked suddenly at dawn of 18 December near Cape Peiho by seven armed Japanese barges packed with troops. In attempting to fight their way through the enemy formation, both landing craft ran aground and were destroyed.²¹ Observation of continued

²¹ Prov Boat Co Arawe Rpt to CG 2d ESB, 28Dec 43. Earlier reports were highly contradictory on all details of the incident, one such declaring that a native guide was the sole survivor. ALAMO G-3,

barge activity along this stretch of coast led General Cunningham to report on 27 December that the enemy were probably pouring in fresh troops from the Itni region²² as well as Gasmata. He requested reinforcements at once, and Company G, 158th Infantry arrived on 27 December, followed by the remainder of 2/158 on 5 January 1944.²³

ENTER TOBUSE AND KOMORI

As may be deduced from description of Japanese dispositions in Chapter IV, the

No.'s 8-10, *passim*. Actually the entire party escaped with only four wounded.

²² ALAMO G-3, No. 13.

²³ ALAMO G-3, No's 11-13 *passim*.

force carried in the embattled enemy barges comprised the advance echelon of Major Asyuki Tobuse's 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, hurrying from Cape Bashing to reinforce the Merkus garrison in accordance with General Matsuda's orders. And the unit operating east of the U. S. perimeter was the 1st Battalion, 81st Infantry under Major Shinjiro Komori which had moved overland via the rough and mountainous cross-island trail from Iboki on the north coast.

Komori had been en route since early in the month and arrived within earshot of the air and naval gunfire preparation for the landing on the 15th. Pressing on he reached the village of Didmop on the Pulie River some ten miles northeast of the perimeter, where he paused to reorganize and to rally the retiring survivors of the original garrison. Delayed by difficult terrain and river

crossings, he did not move into attacking position until the 25th, when he launched the abortive night assault previously mentioned. That a Japanese commander should not hesitate to hurl a single understrength battalion (less one company) against a reinforced RCT in prepared positions is in keeping with the tactical concepts of those people. That the attack "did not succeed" as Komori himself put it,²⁴ is even less surprising.

This repulse made Komori sufficiently prudent to defer further attacks until the arrival of Major Tobuse's battalion, which

²⁴ Diary of Maj Komori, ATIS 999, 5, hereinafter cited as *Komori Diary*. Except as otherwise noted, Japanese side of the Arawe operation herein related stems from this unusually interesting and very human document.



THE ARMY AT ARAWE had trouble with mud, too. (Army Photo.)

had become lost cutting its way through trackless jungle from its landing place at Omoi, some eight miles to the northwest. The two units made contact on 28 December, and Komori as senior officer assumed command of the combined force. But conferences with his fellow major decided him against any further attacks on that strongly manned MLR across the peninsula's narrow neck. Perhaps they had heard the triumphant U. S. broadcast regarding the "capture" of the "airdrome" and concluded that if the Americans thought it that important, the principal mission of the Japanese force was to prevent their enemy from using it. With this end in view, they set about preparing to contain the invaders on the narrow peninsula.

Their tactical dispositions showed considerable ingenuity. In the high ground 600 to 700 yards from the U. S. main line of resistance they established, not a single consolidated position, but a series of alternate positions from which they could place harassing mortar and automatic-weapons fire on the invaders, simply moving from one to another when spotted by the Americans.²⁵ And so cleverly did they take advantage of terrain and concealment that spotting became very difficult. Some conception of what Cunningham was up against is conveyed by the commanding general's own words:

"This is not an organized position in the accepted sense of the word, it consists apparently of shallow trenches and deep fox holes. . . . The ground is covered with a thick green mat about 12 to 18 inches in depth which makes observation absolutely impossible. . . . Officers and men . . . report that they have not seen a single Japanese and that they are unable to locate machine guns firing on them from a distance of 10 to 20 yards."²⁶

²⁵ As a later U. S. report states: "The enemy has repeatedly occupied and evacuated positions in this manner during the Arawe campaign; presumably this type of maneuver is intended to be harassing defensive tactics." ALAMO G-2 *Daily Rpt.* 9Feb44; ALAMO G-3 No. 21.

²⁶ BrigGen Cunningham, Rpt to CG ALAMO Force, 6Jan44.

For several days following Tobuse's arrival, contact was limited to random skirmishing. On 4 January Komori reported repulsing a strong attack and two days later received his first citation from the Emperor for this achievement. On the 5th he set total Japanese losses to date as 65 killed, 57 wounded and 14 missing, in addition to 10 died of illness. Meanwhile the Americans continued to shell his positions so heavily and persistently that by the 9th he confessed himself "getting a little annoyed with it."

On the opposite side of the perimeter, General Cunningham, on his part, was getting more than a little annoyed with Komori. Understanding his mission to be essentially defensive now that its primary object had been achieved, it never occurred to him that he was facing a "victorious" opponent (by Imperial accolade). Instead, he regarded the Japanese as no more than an unmitigated nuisance so long as they remained within harassing range. To put an end to this state of affairs, he attempted "three distinct sorties," but "the mission of driving the enemy out of position has *not* been accomplished and in my opinion cannot be accomplished by ground troops as now organized without prohibitive cost." He requested tanks and increased air support for his next attempt.²⁷

The tank unit most readily available was Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, a component of the 1st Marine Division which had been left behind at Finschhafen because of transportation shortage and limited range for tank operations in the inhospitable terrain of the Cape Gloucester region. Accordingly, this organization was attached *in toto* to DIRECTOR Task Force on 11 January and reached Arawe via LCT the following day.²⁸

Company B was equipped with light tanks: M3A1's, mounting 37mm guns. Preparatory to the attack, officers and men spent three days in active reconnaissance and drill in tank-infantry tactics with the Army unit assigned for the mission: 2d Battalion, 158th Infantry. The plan called for two tank pla-

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Co B, 1st Tank Bn, SAR.



MARINE TANKS of Company B, 1st Tank Battalion supporting the Army advance at Arawe. (Army Photo.)

toons in assault and one in reserve, each attached to one infantry company.

Following intensive air and artillery preparation, the attack jumped off at 0800 on 16 January with ten tanks in line across a 500-yard front, each supported by approximately one squad of foot soldiers. Difficult terrain and stubborn enemy resistance slowed the advance to a crawl. Tanks bogged down in soft ground and bomb craters, while jungle undergrowth impeded progress and heightened the difficulties of tank-infantry cooperation.

Two machines were hit but soon retrieved. A section of the reserve moved out to overcome a pocket of resistance some 500-yards beyond the line of departure, and the assault elements overran all opposition, destroying the enemy's prepared positions and crushing numerous automatic weapons and one 75mm mountain gun, to reach the predetermined objective at about 1600. Since no part of the plan called for holding this exposed position with the limited force available, the attackers

withdrew at leisure to the MLR after destroying two or their own tanks which had become hopelessly bogged down, satisfied that their enemy had been dealt a staggering blow.²⁹

KOMORI MAKES A NOBLE RESOLVE

The following day the tanks of Company B's reserve platoon moved out with flamethrowers to eliminate a small pocket of resistance which the enemy had reoccupied during the night, but encountered no other trace of the Japanese.

For Komori had withdrawn his remnants in fairly good order, determined, as he radioed brigade headquarters, to "fight till the glorious end to defend the airfield." Telegraphic orders the following day made

²⁹ *Ibid.* Apart from estimating the 10 attacking tanks as "several dozen." Maj Komori's account of this action squares surprisingly well with that of his opponents, listing 2 U. S. tanks knocked out and two others hit and set afire, and one Japanese battalion gun destroyed.

this mission official, with the admonition: "... upset the enemy plan to construct an airfield." Inasmuch as the "enemy" had no such plan, action that followed partook of the nature of shadowboxing. Nevertheless, Komori's dispatches to higher headquarters for the next three weeks continued to emphasize the fact that the airfield was still in Japanese hands. In recognition of this notable achievement, he received a second Imperial citation, relayed by 17th Division headquarters, on 7 February. The U. S. press and radio, having reported capture of the field back in December, grew more and more bewildered—and said so.

The tank-infantry attack that cleared out all the Japanese within harassing range cost General Cunningham's command 20 killed and 40 wounded. He estimated enemy killed at 55 and took one prisoner of war.³⁰ Major Komori did not report his losses for this particular action but listed his total losses to date on 21 January as 116 killed and 117 wounded, which conveys some idea of the nature of the fighting here as compared with that taking place simultaneously at Cape Gloucester, where on several occasions twice that number of the enemy were killed in a single day's action.

How many men Komori commanded at any time remains problematical as no captured documents enumerated these, but it appears unlikely that their numbers ever greatly exceeded 1,000.³¹ With these he had to guard his approaches from several directions as well as handle the difficult distribution of supplies over an extensive area—when there were any supplies to distribute. Early in the operation, the force had been supplied by air drop, often in daylight within

view of the Americans, and many barges had stolen in from Gasmata under cover of darkness with food and ammunition, evacuating wounded and sick on their return trip. But as Allied grip tightened on sea and air, Komori became increasingly dependent on the trickle which found its way over the tortuous trail from Iboki. Carrying and distributing these supplies imposed still more of a drain on his manpower, and he withdrew his headquarters to Didmop to give more attention to this phase, leaving direct defense of the airfield to Major Tobuse.

DISILLUSIONMENT OF A "HERO"

Fighting deteriorated into a matter of rare patrol contacts and random skirmishing; of ambush and counterambush. A strong U. S. combat patrol drove Major Tobuse's "defenders" from the airfield to alternate covering positions 300 yards to the west and ranged on all the way to the Pulie river unmolested. But when the Americans displayed no slightest interest in the precious airfield itself, in defense of which the Japanese were prepared to "fight till the glorious end," it began to dawn belatedly on Komori that his mission might have certain quixotic aspects. Meanwhile his sick list mounted as the shortage of food and medical supplies became increasingly acute.

When arrival of fresh radio batteries on 5 February enabled him to resume interrupted communications with 17th Division headquarters,³² he concluded a gloomy situation report:

At present, the airfield is covered with grass 4 to 5 [feet] high. The airfield, 200 m [sic] in width 800 m in length, will be serviceable only for small airplanes. However, it will take quite some time to develop it. Consequently, I believe that it will not be of great value.

He had received copy of orders governing withdrawal of General Matsuda's force from

³⁰ Upon reaching Iboki the previous November, Komori had come under jurisdiction of Gen Matsuda's 65th Brig, and his early reports were addressed to that headquarters. With withdrawal of the Cape Gloucester force he appears to have passed again to control of 17th Div with which he communicated henceforth.

³⁰ ALAMO *Sum Info*, 16-17Jan44. ALAMO G-3 *Op Rpt*, 16-17Jan44. The prisoner was a member of 1-141 and declared gloomily that his unit has been virtually "annihilated" (a favorite Japanese expression) in the day's action. ALAMO *Weekly Rpt* No. 24. All sources in ALAMO G-3, No. 17.

³¹ Both infantry battalions were understrength to begin with and less one company each. Early U. S. estimates before identification of 1/141 placed Japanese strength as 837 to 907 and no reports estimated it above 1500.

the Borgen Bay area to the Talasea-Gasmata line as early as 22 January, and began casting envious eyes in the same direction. On 8 February he hinted more broadly to that effect:

As has been reported, the value of Merkus airfield is so insignificant that it seems the enemy has no intention of using it. . . . Due to damage sustained by enemy bombardments and to the increased number of patients, it becomes more and more difficult to carry out the present mission. . . . It is my opinion that as the days pass, replenishment of supplies will become more and more difficult and fighting strength will be further diminished; our new line will be cut off and consequently leave us with no alternative but self-destruction.

Division headquarters, however, was not impressed, and a telegraphic response the

following day ordered him curtly to continue his mission. "Wondered what to do about the order all night long," Komori recorded in his diary. "Could not sleep last night . . . I felt dizzy all day today."

He was cheered briefly when some of Tobuse's people ambushed an American patrol, killing two, wounding two and capturing two "automatic rifles" (probably Tommy guns). But the inconsiderate enemy retaliated next day, killing a valued sergeant major, another sergeant and a runner, and chasing a supply detail so deep into the jungle that two days were required to extricate it. Some of his own men broke into a warehouse to loot the meager stores remaining.



COCONUT TREES AT ARAWE suffered from bombing and artillery fire. (Army Photo.)

Despairing of further succor by sea, on 18 February he began evacuation of his hospital patients overland via the difficult trail toward Iboki.

At last, on 24 February, he received the overdue warning order to prepare for his own retirement and promptly alerted his units. This was implemented early the following morning by receipt of 17th Division Operation Order A Number 106 directing him to fall back and join Colonel Jiro Sato, then at Upmadung collecting supplies preparatory to covering the 65th Brigade's further withdrawal. At once Komori ordered in all detachments³⁴ and had his forward echelon in motion within a few hours.

In the meanwhile, the Americans had been organizing for another attack designed to clear the whole area, once and for all. On 27 February two platoons of Company B, 1st

³⁴ ATIS 937, 1.

(Marine) Tank Battalion, moved out in support of the 2d Squadron, 112th Cavalry and reached the airfield, which Major Tobuse had quit by order the previous day, without encountering so much as an enemy straggler.³⁴ However, a patrol pushing farther toward the Pulie River came up with the rear elements of Tobuse's force en route to join Komori at Didmop and wounded three Japanese in the last armed encounter to occur in the region.³⁵

The Arawe operation was over.

Major Komori put his own headquarters on the trail at 0630 on 28 February, "leaving behind the graves of 150 men," as he recorded in writing *finis* to his futile, impossible mission.

He was not sorry to leave; at least, not then.

³⁴ Co B, 1st Tank Bn, SAR.

³⁵ *Komori Diary*. No U. S. report mentions this incident.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER X

Talasea

EASTWARD TO TALASEA ¹

By the end of February there remained no doubt that the original mission of the 1st Marine Division, securing western New Britain, had been accomplished. But the original Backhander plan had visualized a drive eastward to Talasea and this, combined with pursuit of enemy forces fleeing to the sanctuary of Cape Hoskins and Rabaul, remained to be accomplished. As previously discussed, a series of leapfrog maneuvers had carried the 5th Marines 60 miles east from Cape Gloucester in pursuit of Matsuda's tattered remnants. Now based at Iboki Plantation, the regiment was vigorously patrolling southward and eastward, with not too satisfactory results.

Sixty miles beyond Iboki, 120 miles from Cape Gloucester, the Willaumez Peninsula juts 25 miles northward from New Britain like a crooked finger.² In 1944 it contained four coconut plantations and three times that many mountain peaks. In addition, there

¹ Coded APPEASE. Except as otherwise cited, this chapter derives from the following basic documentary sources: *1st MarDiv SAR, APPEASE*; *5th Marines Unit Report*; *2d Battalion, 5th Marines Record of Events*.

² McMillan, *op. cit.*, 220 describes the peninsula as resembling the silhouette of a lusciously curved woman.

was a German mission at Bitokara and an airdrome of sorts at Talasea. Its possession by the division would provide a clear boundary marking the extent of the advance on New Britain, but from a more practical view escape routes from all western New Britain to Cape Hoskins seemed to funnel through the base of the peninsula. By taking a giant stride across water from Iboki to Talasea, the Marines hoped to be in a position to plug the funnel before all the retreating Japanese could get through. No one was much surprised, therefore, when on 1 March division issued an operation order which directed the 5th Marines to seize and occupy Talasea and patrol southward to extensive Numundo Plantation, located at the eastern junction of the peninsula and the mainland.

On that same date the 5th had welcomed on board a new commanding officer, Colonel Oliver P. Smith, newly joined to the division, who had served briefly as chief of staff. In a command and staff switch, Colonel Smith and Colonel Selden had swapped jobs. In as the new regimental commander's executive officer was Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Buse, Jr., whose 3d Battalion, 7th Marines had successfully assaulted Hill 660.

Plans called for the reinforced regiment, designated Combat Team A, to land at a point about midway on the west coast of the

Willaumez Peninsula north of Volupai, labeled Beach Red. This was the narrowest part of the peninsula and was recommended by Flight Lieutenant G. H. Rodney Marshland, RAAF, who had operated Santa Monica Plantation just south of Talasea prior to the coming of the Japanese in 1942.

The chosen zone of operations was about as good a one as the Marines could have found. It presented them with a short, comparatively flat route to their objective which might make possible utilization of tanks. A dirt track approximately four miles long connected Beach Red with Bitokara, and although it was not designed for motor transport the Marines could hope.

Beach Red contained about as much depth as had Beaches Yellow 1 and Yellow 2 in the Gloucester landings, but was more confined on its flanks. Its 350 yards of sand nestled between a cliff on the right and a swamp on the left. The cliff constituted the northwestern slope of Little Mt. Worri, a mass rising 1,360 feet above the beach and enfolding the native villages of Liapo to the south and Volupai on the west. Overlooking this smaller mountain from the south was Big Mt. Worri, higher by 300 feet and with a more encompassing base. Included in its ridge line was Mt. Schleuther, on the peninsula's eastern coast which dominated Bitokara, Talasea and the Waru villages from an altitude of 1,130 feet.

Four hundred yards inland from Beach Red was Volupai Plantation, containing a collection of small buildings and groves of coconut palms and cacao trees. Volupai track, linking Beach Red with Bitokara, skirted the northern bases of the several mountains. The country, except for the plantations and villages, was typical of New Britain: overgrown jungle and underbrush.

Sea and air control in the New Britain area had passed so completely into Allied hands that it was decided to transport the assault forces from Iboki to Volupai in a convoy of 38 LCM's, 17 LCVP's and five

LCT's³ with only five PT boats as escorts.⁴ The LCT's belonged to the Navy, while the other craft were handled by the Army's 533d Engineer Boat Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert Amory, Jr.

D-Day and H-Hour were set for 6 March and 0800 respectively. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines was brought up from Cape Gloucester to Iboki to act as division reserve for the operation, no one being too certain how the Japanese would react to an assault so close to Cape Hoskins. Division estimated about 4,000 enemy troops in the Talasea-Cape Hoskins⁵ area, roughly the strength of the reinforced 5th Marines, which could be augmented by another 1,000 in the Rein Bay-Arawe area, 1,500 remnants of the Matsuda forces, and 3,500 from the naval garrison at Gasmata. Thus the assaulting Marines could face a potential force of 10,000 Japanese. Looking at it realistically, however, it was believed that whatever enemy forces were in the Talasea-Cape Hoskins area were concentrated at the latter location and these would probably not exceed one battalion.⁶

Task organization for the operation included:

5th Marines
2d Bn, 11th Marines
Company A, 1st Battalion, 17th Marines
Company F, 2d Battalion, 17th Marines
Battery B, 1st Special Weapons Battalion
1st Platoon, Battery A, 1st Special Weapons Battalion
1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Tank Battalion (plus four Medium Tanks)
Company A, 1st Medical Battalion
Company B, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion (less two tractors)
1st Platoon, Company B, 1st Motor Transport Battalion (less one section)
2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (MP's)

³ The Navy took a dim view of this shore-to-shore operation insofar as the LCT's were concerned, as will be described subsequently.

⁴ Ltr LtCol Robert Amory, Jr., Mass. NG, to CMC, 25Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Amory*.

⁵ As previously noted, headquarters Japanese 17th Div was at Gavuvu on Cape Hoskins.

⁶ 5th Mar Opn Or 17-44, 2.



LCM'S AND LCT'S loading at Iboki for the Volupai landing.

Detachment Ordnance Company, 1st Service Battalion
 Detachment Graves Registration Section, 1st Service Battalion
 3d Air Liaison Party
 Boat Battalion, 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment (less Companies B & C)
 Detachment Company C, 592d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment
 Detachment Company F, 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment
 Medical Detachment, 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment
 Company A, 563d Engineer Boat Maintenance Battalion (less one platoon)
 Provisional Division LCT(5) Flotilla 8 TF-76

Shortly after midnight in the early hours of 3 March PT boats put ashore an amphibious patrol consisting of Australian Lieuten-

ant Marsland, Lieutenant Bradbeer of the D-2 Section, and two native scouts just north of Cape Bastian on the western side of the Willaumez Peninsula. Two earlier efforts had aborted: the first because of enemy troops spotted in the proposed landing area, the second because of bad weather.⁷

The patrol's mission was to contact friendly natives in order to gain some indication of enemy dispositions and strength. Stationing themselves at the village of Bagum, the two white men learned that there were an estimated 24 Japanese at Kambili, 15 between Waru and Kumeraki, 39 between Waru and Giri, 20 with one machine gun at

⁷ D-2 *RofE*, 28Feb44 and 1Mar44.

Waru Village No. 2, 20 with a machine gun on Little Mt. Worri's northwest slope. And so it went. Obviously the area was still in enemy hands, but it seemed evident that he would not make a serious fight to retain it. A survey of the trail net indicated the tracks were primarily for pedestrians, but were in good shape for them. At 2230 that night a PT boat picked up the men and took them to Iboki where they imparted the information they had gleaned.

The 5th Marines, meanwhile, utilized the few days to test fire weapons, sample a new ration labeled 10-in-1, and watch trials of the proposed naval gunfire support for the landing. This novel method consisted of securely lashing and blocking four medium tanks into as many LCM's so that fire could be delivered over either gunwale.¹⁰ The Iboki tests were satisfactory and were fully justified later in the operation, as will be described.

Assault elements of Combat Team A began loading at 1300, 5 March, for the overnight run to Willaumez.¹¹ They consisted of 1/5, 2/5, one section Regimental Weapons Company 37mm guns, forward echelon H&S Company, forward echelon A Medical Company, Batteries E and D of 11th Marines, detachment of Company A, 1st Tank Battalion, and the Air Liaison Party. Five LVT's were loaded into each of the five LCT's to carry the first wave of the assault troops over the coral reefs. This was something of an experiment itself and was later listed as an accomplishment of the operation. The force duly embarked and with its escort of PT boats departed for the objective at 2200.

D-DAY AT BEACH RED

On 13 January Lieutenant General Yasushi Sakai, commander of the 17th Division,

¹⁰ Tests were also run on half-tracks which proved satisfactory. It was felt, however, that once ashore tanks would be of more value than half-tracks, so only tanks were taken along on the landing operation. 1st MarDiv SAR, *APPEASE*, 4.

¹¹ This task force of Army LCM's and Navy LCT's supporting a Marine amphibious assault had the unique distinction of an Army lieutenant colonel (Amory) in tactical command of all craft. This was one of the few times in World War II when an Army officer exercised tactical command of naval vessels.

IJA, had assigned the defense of Talasea to the 1st Battalion, 54th Infantry, commanded by Captain Kiyamatsu Terunuma.¹² The defenders, known variously as the Talasea Garrison Unit and the Terunuma Detachment, were reinforced by the 9th Battery, 23d Field Artillery.¹³ Captain Terunuma received explicit orders to hold the ground around Volupai and withdraw only on division order.

Apparently having reason to believe that the Marines would attempt to land at Beach Red, the defenders constructed an intricate communications net between Talasea and Volupai, placed some mines on the beach, constructed defenses of a sort, sighted in 90mm mortars—and then inexplicably did not attempt to defend the beach as they could have done very well under the circumstances.¹⁴

The shoestring convoy assembled off previously described Volupai beach as dawn broke on D-Day, with everyone accounted for except two key boats. One contained the Air Liaison Party; the other Major Gordon D. Gayle, commanding officer of 2/5, and Lieutenant Colonel Noah P. Wood, Jr., commanding officer of 2/11, with the artillery reconnaissance and communication parties. Several of the craft had lost contact during the night¹⁵ and by sheer chance Major Gayle's boat encountered the ALP craft broken down and adrift. Although it caused him considerable delay, Gayle agreed to give the LCM a tow to Beach Red.

¹² ATIS 899, 17.

¹³ *Ibid.* *Murayama* includes, in addition, one platoon, 21st Mortar Battalion, and one squad, division radio unit. The Marines identified the 2d, 4th and 7th Companies, 54th Inf, and elements of the 8th Shipping Engineers.

¹⁴ Terunuma's conduct of the defense and his own fate are principally matters of surmise. Japanese records of the engagement are few and none goes into detail. Under such circumstances the account must of necessity present a one-sided view.

¹⁵ "My coxwain was completely lost, would not trust his compass and got a little panicky. I required him to follow the compass until the horizon became visible after which we piloted on terrain features," (Ltr LtCol G. D. Gayle to CMC, 28Apr52, hereinafter cited as *Gayle*.)

In its orders to Combat Team A for the Talasea operation, division had set forth an elaborate plan for air support. One squadron of fighters from the Fifth Air Force was to appear over the convoy at first light¹⁴ and remain to protect it until the boats were unloaded. Two flights were to fly over Beach Red, for interception and protection. Two additional flights were to cover the withdrawal of the boats to Iboki where the craft were to pick up the remainder of Combat Team A. The air support was to bomb and strafe Beach Red, smoke Volupai Point and the northwest point of the beach, strafe the inland trail and road net, and bomb Talasea airdrome and installations.¹⁵

But there was no signs of any part of this support¹⁴ as the boats wallowed in the water of the rendezvous area, their intentions obvious to anyone who might see them from peninsula. Colonel Smith realized that the longer his force waited off its landing beach in broad daylight, the longer the Japanese would have to prepare a welcome. Therefore, 25 minutes past H-Hour the combat team commander ordered in the assault wave.

As the LVT's carrying Lieutenant Colonel W. H. Barba's 1st Battalion, roared across the coral reefs to Beach Red, one lone plane appeared. But it was hardly an indication of the expected air support. Captain Theodore A. Petras, aide and pilot to Major General Rupertus, had been ordered to fly Brigadier General David A. D. Ogden, command-

¹⁴ "The Fifth Air Force could never be over a convoy at first light since they were not trained nor equipped to take off in darkness and therefore take off time was usually first light. This was a constant point of friction between naval forces who wanted first light coverage and the Air Force, who did not have pilots trained for night flying." *Fuller*.

¹⁵ "This element of the plan strongly influenced my decision to tow the ALP boat. . . . Many times was tempted to leave him for a turn-around craft to rescue, but each time decided that the ALP function was important enough to warrant my delay." *Gayle*.

¹⁶ Later the irritated 5th Marines learned that the support elements of the Fifth Air Force had been weathered in.

ing general of the Army's 3d Engineer Special Brigade, over to watch the amphibious operation.¹⁷ Airborne in a Piper Cub, Captain Petras' sole armament consisted of 30 hand grenades, and these were sent tumbling down to Japanese positions, actual or otherwise, with unobserved effect. The enemy later complained, however, that they had been heavily bombed during the landing operations.¹⁸

The LCM-tank gunboats hove to close inshore and raked the beach with machine guns. Japanese reaction was swift, if not sure. Some sniper fire was observed and 90mm mortar shells began splashing in the water,¹⁹ but Companies A and B drove on shoreward and within 10 minutes after crossing the line of departure about 500 Marines had landed.²⁰ The Marsland-Bradbeer patrol had reported a machine-gun bunker on the northwest slope of Little Mt. Worri, but it was found to be empty by a reinforced rifle platoon dispatched from the 1st Battalion to eliminate it.²¹

The two assault companies pushed forward to establish a beachhead line through which the 2d Battalion could pass and continue the attack in the direction of Bitokara Mission. Company A accomplished this with relatively little difficulty on the right, but on

¹⁷ Interview with Maj T. A. Petras, hereinafter cited as *Petras*, 11Apr50.

¹⁸ *Murayama*.

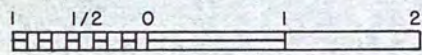
¹⁹ "When Company A made its run into the beach, there was some concern because we thought the 'supporting naval gunfire' from the tanks in the LCM's was falling short, and as we approached the beach the supporting gunfire did not lift. Upon observing the tanks, we found that they had ceased firing and we were running under enemy mortar fire." Ltr Maj R. F. Nellson to CMC, 24Mar52.

²⁰ "The official Japanese account of the landing states that the initial landing attempt was repulsed and that a second landing 7,000 yards southwest of the actual landing site was successful. This history by Murayama would have Combat Team A landing in the face of Big Mt. Worri.

²¹ *Barba*. Advancing forces later encountered a group of enemy carrying a machine gun and moving down the mountain toward Volupai Plantation. They surmise that this was the force originally occupying the abandoned position.

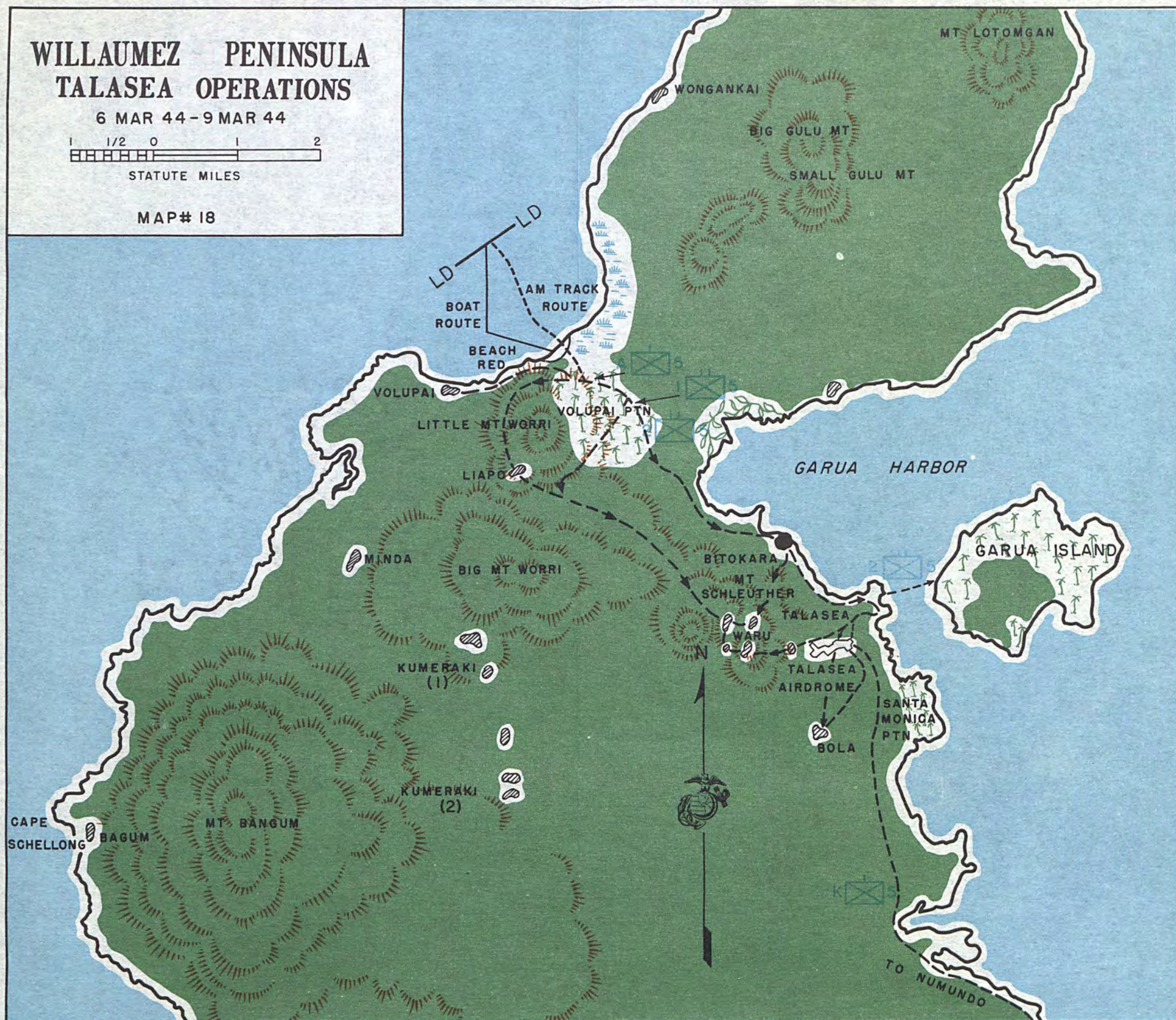
WILLAUMEZ PENINSULA TALASEA OPERATIONS

6 MAR 44 - 9 MAR 44



STATUTE MILES

MAP# 18





A MEDIUM TANK is supplied with 75mm shells at Volupai Plantation.

the left there existed a virtually impassable swamp, running north and south and extending to the edge of the Volupai track. As a result, Company B had to pass through a slot between Little Mt. Worri and the swamp in order to accomplish its mission, encountering and eliminating an enemy pocket of resistance before establishing its lines 200 yards inland.²²

Meanwhile the reinforced platoon patrol that had gone after the bunker on Little Mt. Worri had run into difficulty. The retreating enemy joined other of their fellows and hastily manned defensive positions which

²² Account of operation by Lt O. W. Garner prepared for LtCol G. D. Gayle, undated, hereinafter cited as *Garner*.

had been prepared in the Volupai coconut grove. The platoon accounted for about a dozen of the Emperor's troops, losing one Marine killed and another wounded in the process. Finding he could not advance against the Japanese all-around defensive positions, the patrol leader requested assistance but was instructed to hold what he had until the 2d Battalion arrived on the scene.

Landing the 2d Battalion, temporarily commanded by its executive officer, Major C. R. Baker, was not as easily nor as quickly accomplished as with the 1st Battalion. It was a simple matter to cross the line of departure on schedule, but it was something else to get into the beach in an LCM. Coral reefs permitted the boats to move in only a single column along a route described as two

sides of a triangle. Another impediment was that, once landed, all gear had to be man-handled. At 0930 2/5 began coming in, but because of the tortuous boat route to the beach elements were still landing when Major Gayle's landing craft arrived on the scene with the ALP boat in tow, at 1230.

Although the 1st Battalion had not yet achieved its first objective—the edge of the plantation area—Company E's advance guard began moving through the 1st Battalion's lines astride the Volupai Plantation track at 1100. However, this forward motion was brought to an abrupt halt 200 yards farther on where the Japanese had dug positions commanding the narrow trail. As Company E attempted to attack outside the plantation track, a medium tank commanded by Lieutenant John M. Scarborough moved up the trail to the company's assistance and knocked out a heavy machine-gun position.²³ But suddenly two Japanese, one on each side of the trail and each armed with a magnetic mine,²⁴ leaped out of the brush. The defending Marine infantry killed one before he could reach the tank, but the other succeeded in affixing the mine to the port side of the turret. The blast that followed killed the Japanese and the Marine who was trying to stop him, as well as jamming the turret so that it could not be operated and stunning the tank crew within. Simultaneously the rear of the turret was pierced by a missile, presumably an anti-tank grenade, which made a hole about three quarters of an inch in diameter.²⁵

Accompanied by two other medium tanks and supported by the 81mm mortars of the

²³ Ltr LtCol Rowland L. Hall to CMC, 27Mar52. Hereinafter cited as *R. L. Hall*.

²⁴ The enemy's use of the magnetic antitank mine, something new to the 1st MarDiv, brought a request from the IMAC for a detailed description of it. The use of mines on the Volupai track also produced an urgent request from the 5th to division that mine detectors be expedited to the scene of action. *D-3 Journal*.

²⁵ A short time later in an attempt to move forward again, this tank struck a land mine. The force of the explosion flattened the first bogie wheel on the right track and blew off a track end connector. *R. L. Hall*.

1st Battalion, Company E launched a cautious attack against the Japanese entrenchment in the southwest corner of the plantation, gaining spirit and momentum from the tanks' assistance.²⁶ By one of those occasional strokes of fortune that crop up in war, an enemy officer killed here had on his person a detailed map of Japanese positions in the Talasea-Bitokara-Waru area, and by equally good fortune it was turned over to intelligence personnel instead of being thrust into someone's pocket as a souvenir.²⁷ This map, after being translated by R-2, greatly simplified planning of the regiment's next moves.

Meanwhile, with the assistance of the medium tanks, Company E began moving toward the coconut grove with increasing momentum, despite having lost its company commander shortly before. Enemy entrenchments occupied only by a few dead Japanese were passed a short distance within the plantation. Despite only fragmentary resistance, Major Gayle became concerned about his flanks and dispatched Company G on a swing to the right with orders to meet Company E on the far side of the plantation area.

As the advancing elements pushed their way through the coconut trees, rear echelon personnel on Beach Red were suffering heavier casualties than the assault units. All during the day the Japanese lobbed 90mm mortar shells on to the beach,²⁸ shells landing capriciously and inevitably taking their toll in the crowded, constricted area.²⁹ Among

²⁶ *Gayle*.

²⁷ 1st MarDiv SAR sets forth that the map was captured within three hours after the landing. Maj H. J. Adams, R-2 at that time, says that it was translated and copies distributed by 1300. Ltr Lt Col H. J. Adams to CMC, 8Apr52, hereinafter cited as *Adams*.

²⁸ 5th Mar *Unit Report* fixes the number of 90mm mortars in action against the beach as two.

²⁹ Maj Gayle attempted to locate the mortar positions by estimating where he would put them if he were the enemy. Late that afternoon he had artillery fire a blind concentration on the site he had picked, a clearing on the far side of Volupai Plantation, with gratifying results. *Gayle*.

the early victims was Lieutenant Commander Richard M. Forsythe, regimental surgeon, who continued working with the wounded until he was evacuated.³⁰ The heaviest casualties that day were recorded in the 11th Marines and among medical company personnel. Both groups had to remain on the beach, there being no other place to go.

At 1500 five P-39's from the Fifth Air Force made their belated appearance over hotly contested Volupai Plantation, but although four of the planes were carrying 500-pound bombs, they did not tarry. Later they reported that they had been unable to locate the Marines and therefore had proceeded on to Cape Hoskins to drop their loads.³¹

As D-Day drew to a close, Colonel Smith concluded that his combat team was being opposed merely by a delaying action. Enemy troops, which had numbered 527 officers and men two days earlier, were well-fed and well-equipped and putting up a fight. But it was not the sort of fight they gave when attempting to destroy the Marines. Thus it would appear that the Japanese were trying to cover the escape route to Cape Hoskins, whether for a definite or indefinite period could not be known. To make this time as short as possible was the job of the 5th Marines.

The combat team dug in where it stood as night approached, the 1st Battalion continuing to maintain the beachhead line. Advance elements of the 2d Battalion set up an all-around defense within the coconut grove, while the rear battalion CP joined with Company F, battalion reserve, in a perimeter defense at the abandoned enemy entrenchments on the edge of the plantation. Batteries E and D of the 11th Marines had registered their guns late that afternoon and kept up a harassing fire just beyond the coconut grove during the night. After a day's fighting the companies required a resupply of rations and ammunition. This



MACHINE GUN AMMUNITION CARRIERS accompanied by a corpsman move along toward the Talasea airstrip.

was effected at night, as at Cape Gloucester, by utilizing the LVT's over the muddy trail.³²

At the end of the first day the Marines had penetrated approximately 2,000 yards inland from the beach and killed 35 Japanese, including three officers. The deadly 90mm mortars, however, had given the regiment casualties out of proportion to its opposition and its gains. More than half of these were incurred on the beach, and the figures for the day represented more than half the total casualties the combat team would suffer between 6 March and its departure on 25 April: 13 killed and 71 wounded, nine of the fatalities and 29 of the wounded in the 11th Marines alone. At 1830 an LCM loaded with 50 wounded departed Beach Red for Iboki, and the 5th requested more litters from division.³³

BITOKARA, TALASEA AND WARU

At 0200 on 7 March a handful of enemy sought to infiltrate the lines of Company E, and the resulting flurry of rifle fire and grenades wounded two Marines. That

³⁰ Dr. Forsythe died of his wounds 30 March in the 1st Field Hospital. D-3 *Journal*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6Mar44.

³² *Baker*. LVT's were employed as mobile supply dumps throughout the drive across the peninsula.

³³ D-3 *Journal*.



A JAPANESE 90MM MORTAR position near Talasea. The mortar tube is not shown.

marked the only enemy activity between dusk and daylight, and it was considered of such a minor nature that Colonel Smith radioed division that his forces had experienced no counterattack during the night.

Although the 2d Battalion was receiving light fire when it halted to dig in for the night, nothing happened as daylight of D-plus 1 revealed the Marine positions. A patrol sent forward to seek out the Japanese quickly returned, reporting the enemy dug in about 50 yards to the front. But Company E moved in to investigate only to discover that once again the Japanese had abandoned prepared positions. The area contained a 90mm mortar emplacement, complete with weapon and ammunition, but Marines could see that artillery shells had burst within five feet of it, possibly accounting for the absence of the crew.³⁴

³⁴ 1st MarDiv SAR, *APPEASE*, 3. "It was with considerable elation that I viewed this mortar position," *Gayle*. Beach Red continued to receive mortar fire on D-plus 1, but at a diminished rate.

Surmising that the enemy would make a stand at a small stream bisecting the trail beyond the clearing, Major Gayle sent Company G on a sweep to the right, aimed at enveloping the Japanese flank. But at 1100 Company E crossed the stream without incident and Company G was recalled. This peaceful interlude did not last long, however, for at 1145 the advance guard met resistance from enemy lodged in the northwest slope of Mt. Schleuther, and a brisk fire fight developed. The clash at this point was no accident. Headquarters, 17th Division, IJA, had directed Captain Terunuma to concentrate his forces in the vicinity of Talasea,³⁵ and, quite logically, he had dug in on the 1,130-foot height that dominated the Bitokara-Talasea track and all connecting trails. There, 54th Infantry elements brought the 2d Battalion's morning walk to a halt.

The Marines built up their fire, but soon it became evident that the Japanese were attempting to turn the battalion's right. Artillery and mortar support were requested, and Company F was sent up the 45 degree slope with all speed to extend the threatened flank and seize the high ground.

Within the next few minutes there occurred one of those breathless bits of action that so often determine the ultimate outcome of a larger battle. As Company F's advance platoon climbed to the dominant hill crest, it found that the Japanese had the same objective, and a fire fight developed that drove the enemy over the reverse slope. But Company F's right flank was now in danger and a platoon from Company H was pushed forward to protect it. These new arrivals spotted a group of five Japanese digging a machine-gun position on the western crest, the gun lying nearby. Firing as they ran, the Marines killed all five of the enemy and turned the machine-gun around to bear on its former owners.³⁶ The 2d Battalion had taken the initiative and now had the advantage. By the time the Japanese

³⁵ *Murayama*.

³⁶ Ltr Capt James M. Newman to CMC, 21Mar52.

realized they had lost their positions, they had also lost 40 men plus the machine gun.

Combat Team A's progress on D-plus 1 could be measured principally by the progress of the 2d Battalion. Colonel Smith's plans called for his reserve 3d Battalion to make an overnight run from Iboki in order to arrive early on D-plus 1 and thereby free 1/5 from the beachhead line, that unit proceeding to Liapo and thence to Waru where the main Japanese force was thought to be. But back at Iboki loading plans went awry when General Rupertus, who was on the scene, directed Lieutenant Colonel Harold O. Deakin, commander of 3/5, not to depart prior to dawn.³⁷ The battalion did not arrive at Volupai until 1500, therefore, and began the relief of the 1st Battalion at that time.

When it had become evident that the reserve battalion would be delayed, a reinforced company from the 1st Battalion was sent toward Liapo. But the trail from Volupai faded out, and the patrol, operating on an azimuth, did not reach the objective before dark.

The 2d Battalion dug in for the night of D-plus 1 on the slopes of Mt. Schleuther and the Volupai track, effecting an all-around defense and firing its mortars from time to time in the direction of the enemy, also dug in on the mountain. Japanese activity was confined to the front of Company F and apparently consisted of a *banzai* attack that somehow missed fire. The chatter and movements of the congregated enemy bore all the earmarks of a build up, but no charge developed.

As dawn broke over the Willaumez Peninsula, Company F readied itself for a resumption of the fight. A mortar barrage was laid down in front³⁸ of the company and a 37mm gun was manhandled up the steep hill to assist in the advance, but these efforts proved anticlimatic. A patrol investigating the enemy positions of the night before

found only 12 dead Japanese, 11 of them as a result of Marine fire and the twelfth a victim of harakiri.

While preparations were underway to continue the fight on the hill, a scout platoon was sent 500 yards down the track to a trail junction at Bitokara. It returned shortly to report the enemy entrenched there, backed up by at least one mountain gun. The entire battalion, less Company F, was sent forward, the latter unit proceeding over Mt. Schleuther's foothills, and the two forces converging on the Japanese entrenchments. It was a familiar story—abandoned positions, but evidence of recent occupation. No opposition had been reported by 1340 when Company G announced itself established on the eastern side of Bitokara,³⁹ and the remainder of the battalion moved into the mission area to set up a perimeter defense.

The morning of 8 March on Beach Red found the 1st Battalion moving out east of Little Mt. Worri in the direction of Liapo, its patrol the previous afternoon having skirted the western edge of the hill mass. Companies A and B moved southward on separate tracks, a native guide clad in Japanese clothing leading the latter organization. The terrain was difficult, the underbrush heavy, and Company A's advance guard mistook the guide for an enemy soldier. In the shooting that followed, one man was killed and several wounded, including the unfortunate native.⁴⁰

Locating an East-West trail about one-half mile from Liapo, Colonel Barba sent a patrol to the village to get another guide and to join forces with the group that had moved out the preceding day. This done, the battalion began its push to the next objective over rough terrain. Waru consisted of four native villages forming a rough square and

³⁷ D-2 *Bulletin* No. 74 relates that the movement of 2/5 to Bitokara had been opposed that morning. *Gayle* notes: "We were opposed, but the opposition did not choose to fight when we threatened to envelop."

³⁸ Ltr Maj J. S. Stankus to CMC, 1Apr52; *Barba*; *Garner*.

³⁷ Ltr Col H. O. Deakin to CMC, 12Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Deakm*.

³⁸ A short mortar shell landed in the battalion area, wounding 14 men. 2/5 *RofE*.



THE BOOBYTRAPPED Japanese 75mm mountain gun that was inadvertently tripped by a Marine. (Army Photo.)

situated on Mt. Schleuther's ridge line about 2,000 yards due west of Talasea and dominating it. The battalion found the going too difficult, however, and set up an all-around defense perimeter for the night just short of its goal.

Back at Bitokara Major Gayle awaited two scouting groups sent to determine enemy positions on Mt. Schleuther and to feel out any forces at Talasea. The former reported that the Japanese were well dug in on a nearby peak, and at 1500 a task force consisting of Company E and reinforcing elements began the ascent. A request for artillery fire on Scheuther brought several rounds dangerously close to the 2/5 CP,⁴¹ and the battalion's 81mm mortars promptly took

⁴¹ LtCol Wood, CO of 2/11, was present at Gayle's CP when this occurred. Because of the casualty rate in 2/11 on Beach Red, artillery was not up to its usual high performance during the movement to Talasea. *Gayle*.

over the support missions. As the task force approached the enemy positions, however, it ran into concentrated fire from machine guns and small arms, backed up by a 90mm mortar and a 75mm field piece. The Marines fought back for an hour and sustained 18 casualties before they were ordered withdrawn to the mission.

The second scouting party had returned from Talasea, meanwhile, to report no indications of enemy. Company F was dispatched hurriedly to the airdrome and in less than an hour reported possession of it. While the remainder of the battalion effected a perimeter defense at Bitokara Company F maintained a lonely vigil at the airstrip through the night.⁴²

Action during the night was largely confined to artillery and mortar duels with Japanese participation gradually slackening and

⁴² Ltr Maj W. H. Cuenin to CMC, 1Apr52.

finally ceasing altogether. Upon Company E's retirement to Bitokara, the enemy sighted their 75mm gun on the mission where the 81mm mortars had set up near the battalion command post. Gayle retaliated by getting effective artillery support, which, abetted by mortar fire, harassed the enemy area throughout the night.⁴³

Companies G, B, and C launched a coordinated attack at 0800, 9 March, following artillery and mortar concentrations on the enemy areas. Company G was assigned the mission of clambering to the top of Mt. Schleuther, while the other two companies struck directly at the four villages. This hefty punch hit only empty air. The Marines found the 90mm mortar, the 75mm field piece,⁴⁴ one dead Japanese and two stragglers

⁴³ *Baker.*

⁴⁴ The 75mm gun had been ingeniously boobytrapped. Vines were left hanging about it, which ap-

who reported that their main body had withdrawn on 7 March, leaving a rear guard of about 100 men who, in turn, had departed toward Bola the preceding night.⁴⁵

For reasons best known to the Japanese, the 17th Division had chosen this providential time to issue its withdrawal order to the Terunuma Detachment, that unit complying rapidly and in good order.⁴⁶ Companies G and C made contact at 1028, and the

peared to be camouflage but in reality were trip wires to the trigger mechanism. The barrel had been plugged with dirt. When a Marine inadvertently hit one of the vines the weapon exploded, blowing off the breach block and wounding one man. 1st MarDiv SAR, *APPEASE*, Intelligence Addenda to Special Report.

⁴⁵ "I later came to believe that the appearance of Company F on the Talasea strip, near Bola, together with our artillery on Schleuther precipitated this withdrawal." *Gayle.*

⁴⁶ *Murayama.*



TALASEA ROADS were not designed for medium tanks.

Waru area was declared free of the enemy at 1300.⁴⁷

While primary attention focused on Waru during the morning, the 2d Battalion sent a patrol to Talasea to contact Company F and determine if the enemy had attempted to move in there under the cover of night. At 0935 it came back with a negative report, and another patrol was readied to investigate the island of Garua, lying about 1,000 yards east of Talasea. Proceeding in two LVT's, the patrol landed at 1147, made a thorough search of the island and returned to Bitokara at 1520 to report Garua deserted but in good police.

On the afternoon of 9 March Colonel Smith moved his regimental command post to Bitokara.⁴⁸ He directed the 1st Battalion to consolidate defenses around Waru; the 2d Battalion to assume responsibility for the airdrome and Talasea; Company K to establish the defense of the regimental CP, and the 3d Battalion, less Company K, to maintain the beachhead line at Beach Red. This done, he informed division that Talasea was secure and that his forces would concentrate on mopping up and patrolling Willaumez Peninsula.

The Volupai track had proved no better than other New Britain roads under damp conditions, and a 10-ton wrecker was requested from division to extricate three medium tanks from the mire. Company F, 17th Marines, assisted by Company F, 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, assumed the task of improving the cross-peninsula trail so supplies and equipment at Beach Red could be transported to the eastern coast, completing the job on 12 March.

From 6 March the four-day campaign had cost the Marines 17 killed and 114 wounded,

⁴⁷ 2/5 *RofE* shows that G/5 returned to Bitokara from Waru at 1120, but *SAR, APPEASE*, 4, relates that the 1st Battalion declared the area free of enemy at 1300.

⁴⁸ "Recognizing Bitokara as the choicest spot in the area, I made immediate preparations to surrender it to Regimental headquarters, and commenced looking for the second choice spot. We consolidated our holdings at Talasea." *Gayle*.

while an estimated 150 Japanese met death. Securing of Talasea gave the division possession of the airdrome, a questionable prize to be sure.⁴⁹ More definitely on the credit side, occupation of this area put the Marines in a position to sit squarely athwart the Japanese route to Cape Hoskins and points east. Further, Colonel Smith pointed out to division that an advanced PT boat base located here could throttle enemy barge traffic between Hoskins and Rabaul and force the Japanese to withdraw to the Gazelle Peninsula, a move they had already under way as events proved. But to take full advantage of its new position the regiment must dispatch patrols southward on the heels of the withdrawing Japanese. And this it did.

THE NAVY AT WILLAUMEZ

The composite navy of Marines working with Army LCM's and Navy LCT's had its own brushes with the enemy during the Willaumez campaign and came off as victoriously as its compatriots on the ground.

On 9 March with Bitokara and Talasea secured, Colonel Smith ordered the landing craft carrying ammunition and provisions to his combat team from Iboki to proceed around the northern tip of the peninsula and land their cargoes at Talasea Point instead of braving the reefs at Beach Red. As the convoy rounded the peninsula's tip and started down the eastern shore, its crews sighted a group of enemy barges.

The report subsequently dispatched to the Commander in Chief of the United States Fleet by the Commander of LCT Group 23 best describes what happened:

At Bulu-Murli on the tip of Willaumez four enemy barges were observed on the beach, poorly camouflaged. The Commander, LCT Group 23, detached

⁴⁹ The airdrome was overgrown and in a state of disrepair when the Marines took over. It was much too short to have any tactical value, but was utilized satisfactorily for cub traffic between the regiment and division, and a sergeant was placed in charge of field operations. A Japanese fighter lay on its back in the middle of the strip and at first all incoming planes had to land on one side or the other, but eventually the craft was hauled away. *Petrus*.



SHORE PARTY OPERATIONS at the Talasea jetty. (Army Photo.)

LCT 397 and set course sufficiently to starboard to pass within 1,000 yards of the beach, then turned slightly to port to allow all guns to bear from the starboard quarter, and expended one magazine from all guns (two 20mm, three .50., two .30 cal.) on targets. Machine gun fire was returned weakly, but no hits scored on 397. One enemy barge was observed to ground on ringing coral reef. No barges were observed actually destroyed, but the Chief of Staff of the First Marine Division later credited 397 with one barge destroyed in this incident.⁵⁰

On the same afternoon two LCM-tank gunboats also scored a hit on the enemy's

⁵⁰ The account of LCT participation is taken from *Talasea Action Report*, Commander, LCT Group 23, Flotilla 8, to COMINCH, U. S. Fleet, 15Mar44, with endorsements by Commander, LCT Flotillas, 14May 44, and Commander, Task Force 76, 26Jul44.

barge activities.⁵¹ The substitute combat vessels spotted a lone Japanese barge near Cape Hollmann at the northern tip of Willaumez and one of them proceeded to give battle, firing 18 rounds of 37mm HE. The enemy craft made for the shore where about 20 of the Emperor's troops were seen to depart their vessel hurriedly. The second tank had joined the action by this time, firing 310 rounds of .30-calibre machine gun, but the Japanese apparently made good their escape.

Three days later natives from Bulu-Daba on the west coast of Willaumez made their way to the 5th Marine CP and reported that

⁵¹ *R. L. Hall*. These gunboats were composed of light tanks on LCM's rather than the medium models.



THE ROADS TO TALASEA were muddy, too. (Army Photo.)

on the night of 6 March the Japanese had fled their village in 5 barges and headed east. The villagers reported that the barge attacked by the LCM-tank gunboat was not one of these five barges but was from the Witu Islands.

Although the 1st Division considered the shore-to-shore operation from Iboki to Talasea a success, the Navy displayed a notable lack of enthusiasm. True, the LCT officers and crews were commended for their actions, but the authorities complained that the Marines commandeered three of the five LCT's without authority. The Commander of LCT Flotillas, 7th Amphibious Force, declared that the craft were required to run continuously over an extended period which put four of them out of commission for a week; that they had no proper navigational escort, were without communications and did not possess compasses sufficiently reliable to justify their employment over such an extended

stretch of water. He credited pure luck with the fact that none was lost. The Commander of Task Force 76 stated that the Commander, Seventh Amphibious Force, had not been advised of the operation during the planning stage and if he had been forewarned could have furnished additional ships, craft and naval gunfire support.

The Navy might pull its chin and growl, but the operation had come off successfully without any loss to the precious naval craft.

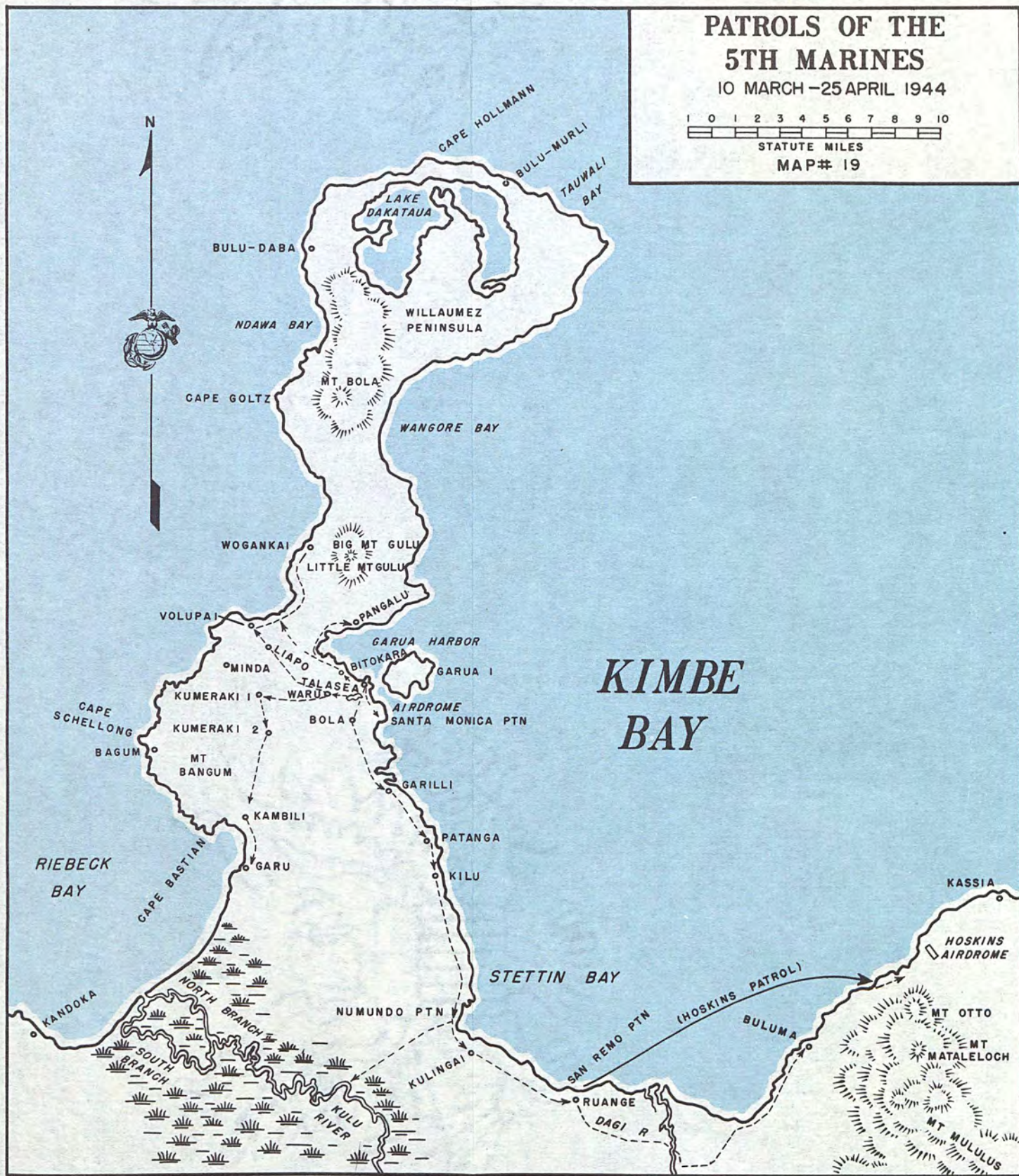
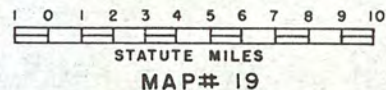
THE FIFTH MOPS UP

Starting on the morning of 10 March and continuing until 25 April, the 5th Marines' three infantry battalions patrolled north, south and southeast. They encountered no large bodies of enemy troops, nor did they expect to.⁵² It was literally the mopping-up

⁵² This expectation resulted from faulty estimate of the enemy's capabilities and intentions. Actually

PATROLS OF THE 5TH MARINES

10 MARCH - 25 APRIL 1944



of Japanese stragglers from western New Britain.⁵³ The 47-day period cost the regiment three men killed and eight wounded, while the 5th's patrols accounted for 151 Japanese dead and 68 prisoners.⁵⁴

With the Talasea area secured, Colonel Smith reached the conclusion that the enemy was withdrawing as rapidly as possible to Cape Hoskins. He thereupon acted to complete the unfilled portion of his orders from division: patrol to Numundo Plantation. A reconnaissance patrol on 10 March found enemy positions at Bola and Santa Monica Plantation evacuated, but came upon entrenched enemy at Garilli. On 11 March Captain Andrew Haldane's Company K left Bitokara with orders to proceed to Numundo on a three-day patrol, a time estimate that was to prove too optimistic.

Company K reached Garilli to find it empty of enemy, but just north of Patanga encountered Japanese small-arms, automatic-weapons and mortar fire. For four days the Marine patrol made slow progress, fighting an enemy who made a stand in the heavy vegetation approximately every 200 yards and then withdrew effectively before the advance guard flankers could close in. On the evening of 16 March the company entered Kilu where the Japanese made their final

the first echelon of the 65th Brigade crossed the base of the peninsula on the day of the Volupai landing, with the other echelons strung out far behind. *Murayama*. This dilatory activity cost the Marines their last opportunity to intercept the organized Japanese remnants.

⁵³ "In judging the speed with which the 5th Marines was able to position itself across the escape route of the Japanese, it must be borne in mind that there were no roads capable of taking even jeep traffic, nor were boats available for shore-to-shore operations. . . . After the evacuation of Red Beach practically all boats were withdrawn by division. . . . In retrospect, one might question why, after the occupation of Talasea, boats were not diverted to effect a shore-to-shore operation against San Remo Plantation. It must be borne in mind, however, that the regiment was on the end of a long and tenuous supply line . . ." Ltr MajGen O. P. Smith to CMC, 31Mar52, hereinafter cited as *O. P. Smith*.

⁵⁴ D-3 *Journal*.

stand. While the two forces battled, a Marine landing craft appeared offshore and as it approached the beach the enemy diverted what apparently was a 75mm field gun from the ground action to the "naval force". In the boat was Lieutenant Colonel Deakin who had obtained permission from Colonel Smith to transport a section of 81mm mortars to Captain Haldane's assistance. Although the Japanese bracketed the craft, they failed to hit it and the weapons were landed without casualties.⁵⁵ Shortly after the heavy mortars began lobbing shells toward the enemy, the Japanese broke contact and the Marines reached Numundo 48 hours later without finding the Terunuma Detachment again.⁵⁶

Captain Terunuma had executed an able withdrawal and had accomplished his mission: to hold up the Marine advance south of Talasea long enough to permit the organized residue of the Matsuda and Komori forces to pass through to Hoskins.⁵⁷ This done, he broke contact with the Marines and made good his own escape. His delaying action had cost him eight dead, while Company K lost one officer killed and seven men wounded.

While Company K made its way toward Numundo, activity continued in the Talasea area. On 12 March the 3d Battalion, less the detached company, moved to Bitokara mission from Beach Red and provided an honor guard for the flag raising ceremony. Colonel Smith and Lieutenant Colonel Buse raised the colors, the same one which had flown over Cape Gloucester,⁵⁸ which made the victory official. Later that day, the Talasea airdrome having been sufficiently cleared, Major Gen-

⁵⁵ *Deakin*.

⁵⁶ There is no record of the 5th Marines ever again encountering elements of the defending Talasea force, after Terunuma broke contact 16 March. A patrol captured a Japanese straggler from the 7th Company on 7 April near San Remo, but he related that he had come down with malaria during the withdrawal and remained behind.

⁵⁷ *Murayama*. This source glosses over the retreat, referring to the movement of the Matsuda and Komori remnants as "the transfer eastward."

⁵⁸ *O. P. Smith*.

eral Rupertus stepped from his Piper cub to the division's latest real estate acquisition.

Defense lines around the area were prepared and strengthened, and patrols thrown out to Wongankai, Pangalu, Kumeraki, Volupai and Liapo. The 1st Battalion set up an ambush at Garu⁶⁰ which was productive of enemy dead and prisoners for awhile. Company I replaced Company K at Numundo and in turn was replaced on 25 March by the 2d Battalion. Inasmuch as the enemy continued to straggle eastward singly and in small

⁶⁰ Because of vast swamps at base of peninsula, main Japanese withdrawal route crossed north of Kulu river, ran northward to Garu, thence southeast to Numundo. Part of the Japanese Waru defense was sited against an attack from the direction of Garu, and the road from Kumeraki 1 to Waru was mined. *Barba.*

groups with little or no communications, patrols were kept busy returning over and over again to the same villages and plantations in hopes of catching unwary Japanese. Such hopes frequently paid off.

It was not all patrolling, however. After Cape Gloucester, Bitokara-Talasea seemed a garden spot. The buildings of a German Mission, with an extensive lawn, flowers and fruit trees, occupied a high hill overlooking Garua Harbor, with a native village nearby. Talasea consisted of a coconut grove, a jetty and a collection of buildings, all damaged to a greater or lesser extent. Natives, with a skill openly admired by the Marines, constructed a thatched chapel there for the use of all faiths, as well as several large shelters for the regimental quartermaster. As a measure of reciprocity, Company A, 1st Medical Battalion, established a clinic for the



BITOKARA MISSION after the flag had been raised. (Army Photo.)



COLONEL SMITH welcomed General Rupertus and Captain Petras to the Talasea airstrip three days after it was secured.

natives, utilizing captured Japanese medical supplies to treat their ill.

Hot water springs abounding in the area provided the men with hot baths, in most cases their first since leaving Australia. Garua Harbor offered swimming and fishing facilities, with rubber boats available to those who liked these recreations. True, some rain still fell to remind the troops that they were still in New Britain, but the end of the monsoon brought a great deal of sunshine as well. Schools and training were instituted for those not preoccupied with patrolling. With what amounted to contempt for enemy capabilities, movies were held nightly without fear of blackouts. Relaxation came as a welcome change after months in the jungles.

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On 26 March a PT boat base was established at Talasea, which greatly increased the range and effectiveness of the deadly little craft. One day later, however, there occurred one of those tragic errors of mistaken identification, for friendly aircraft strafed and bombed two PT boats operating from the new Willaumez base off Bialli Plantation. Torpedoes and gasoline exploded, partially destroying the boats, killing five men and wounding 18.⁶⁰ Fortunately, such mistakes did not happen often.

At this time the Australians also took advantage of the advanced base to establish a radio control station at Bitokara for their

⁶⁰ D-3 *Journal*. The planes were two Beauforts and two P-40's.



MARINES WASH AWAY the mud and grime after battle.

system of coastwatchers⁶¹ who continued to operate in the enemy-held sections of the island.

On 30 March the 2d Battalion moved southeast from Numundo to San Remo Plantation, described by one Marine as "a very pleasant place."⁶² From that point patrols probed westward to the Kulu River and eastward into the Cape Hoskins area as far as Buluma.

Patrolling the various escape routes continued to be the primary occupation of the Marines, but on 13 April they undertook a slightly more ambitious project. One group's completion of a course at the newly-created Division Amphibious Scout School coincided with a headquarters inspiration to send a patrol to Cape Hoskins to study possible landing beaches and the airdrome, and to estimate enemy strength in the area.⁶³ Aerial

reconnaissance had indicated no Japanese in the region, and a plan was bandied about the division CP to land the 5th Marines on the cape in order to claim the airdrome before relief by the Army.⁶⁴ Assignment of the mission as a "graduation exercise" directed that the 2d Battalion's Lieutenant Richard R. Breen and Australian Lieutenant Marsland lead the 16-man patrol, while Major H. J. Adams, now Assistant D-2, and Lieutenant Bradbeer, scout school director, stand by in LCM's.⁶⁵

Picking up a platoon from the 2d Battalion at San Remo, the patrol embarked in two LCM's provided by the Army's 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment and dropped the platoon about eight miles west of the objective to guard a trail junction from Gasmata. With two natives, the "graduates" then landed about 5,000 yards west of the

⁶¹ Ltr LtCol Harry S. Connor to CMC, 27Mar52.

⁶² *Baker*.

⁶³ Ltr Maj R. R. Breen to CMC, 14Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Breen*.

⁶⁴ *Adams*.

⁶⁵ Ltr Maj J. D. Bradbeer to CMC, 31Mar52, hereinafter cited as *Bradbeer*.

airdrome⁶⁶ and proceeded overland toward it.⁶⁷

The group ran into a mortar and machine-gun ambush after covering about 2,000 yards, however, and withdrew without casualties, to learn later that the Japanese used scout dogs in an effort to trail its withdrawal.⁶⁸ Nothing

⁶⁶ *Breen* recalls that the landing was made at 0300, while *Bradbeer* says it was made "in broad daylight."

⁶⁷ An Australian plane spotted the patrol on the trail, circled it several times and then dropped a load of daily news sheets, thereby undoubtedly contributing to the group's exposure. *Adams*.

⁶⁸ *D-3 Journal*.

further was heard of the proposal to land on Cape Hoskins, presumably because of the opposition encountered by the patrol, as well as the unexpected early relief by the Army.

The gradual eastward movement as represented by the 2d Battalion's patrols to Buluma and the attempted reconnaissance of Cape Hoskins gave rise to rumors that the 1st Division was eventually going to take Rabaul. Such reports formerly had some basis of truth, but now were entirely without foundation as the Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided long since to by-pass that citadel in favor of isolating it.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Fuller*.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER XI

Long Trail A'Winding

SATO, KOMORI & COMPANY¹

Late in February, as a result of continuing attrition and the destructive raid on Truk by U. S. carrier task forces,² the Japanese high command ordered all combat aircraft at Rabaul evacuated to that naval base. This, combined with certain other considerations, caused Eighth Area Army to revise its concept for the defense of New Britain.

With Cape Gloucester in their enemy's hands, all the rest of the island save for the northeastern tip ceased to have any value to the Japanese. Hence, to attempt defending the Talasea-Gasmata line, as stipulated in the original withdrawal orders, could constitute nothing more than a futile gesture. Accordingly, General Hitoshi Imamura issued new orders directing the further withdrawal of all elements on both coasts to

¹Except as otherwise noted, detail concerning the movements of these two officers and their troops derives from the two diaries previously noted: ATIS 939, 1; and ATIS 999, 5.

²16Feb44 as a covering action for operations in the Marshalls.

the immediate Rabaul area³ where he still anticipated an early attack.

Chapter VIII left Colonel Sato with 65th Brigade headquarters at the inland village of Upmadung, carrying out his mission of transporting thither the stores accumulated at Iboki, including 60 tons of provisions Eighth Area Army had managed to send in by submarine.⁴ The 23 February departure of the doughty Matsuda,⁵ followed shortly by Katayama and Sumiya, left him once more low man on the totem pole when it came to covering the wholesale withdrawal.

The colonel got the provisions moved with time to spare. He left a small observation group at Iboki to report on enemy activities and an outpost of about platoon strength at Talawaga, near the mouth of the Aria River. The former withdrew before the Marines' approach on 24 February, and Sato

³*Murayama* gives 23Feb44 as date of issuance and summarizes orders in detail. Sato received 17th Div orders on 25 Feb. His own series of implementing orders appear in ATIS 918, 7, and ATIS 937, 3.

⁴*Murayama*.

⁵A map in *Murayama* shows brigade hq departing the Aria River and records its arrival at Cape Hoskins on 25Feb44.

called in the latter a few days later when hostile patrols began probing in that direction. About the same time he received orders notifying him that the Komori Group would fall back on him from Arawe and directing him to take command of the combined force upon its arrival.

Immediately upon receipt of his withdrawal orders⁶ on 25 February, Major Komori dispatched his adjutant (by coincidence, a lieutenant named Sato) to Upmadung to make arrangements regarding provisions. Colonel Sato directed that five tons of supplies be concentrated as quickly as possible at a "three-fork road" south of a place called Augitni.⁷ He detailed troops to carry the material "with all possible speed," leaving their weapons and equipment under guard to facilitate the job.

Komori dispatched his force to the rendezvous point in successive echelons. He himself left Didmop with the rear guard on 28 February and reached Augitni via Vakan on 1 March. The following morning he started his hospital patients along the evacuation route and sent a detail of 250 men to Bulawatni to help transport provisions.⁸ To his delight, the first shipment to arrive contained a considerable quantity of saki, which Sato had picked up at Iboki and generously shared with his new associate.

This chanced to be the first time when all of the officers of the miscellaneous Merkus force had been together. The means being at hand, they decided to make it a festive occasion. Starting with toasts to the Emperor, the high command and big-hearted

Colonel Sato, they went on improvising well into the evening. As Komori recorded in his diary: "It was fun." Evidently he acquired a gargantuan hangover, since he spent all next morning sleeping off the night before. He was still feeling queasy two days after the event, though attempting to explain his indisposition by writing: "Must have eaten too much last night."

But it was not in the cards that this period of leisure should last much longer. The Marines at Iboki became increasingly troublesome, though quite unaware that they faced anything more than starving stragglers. When one of their patrols entered Talawaga on 5 March, Colonel Sato felt the hot breath of pursuit on his neck and moved to the trail fork where he assumed command of the combined force. The next morning the Komori Group resumed its withdrawal in a north-westerly direction along the right prong of the trail fork, while Sato prepared to follow with his command on the 7th. At this point the ways of these two officers parted, and thenceforth each pursued his individual course toward the destiny that awaited him.

As noted in Chapter X, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines had relieved the 5th Marines at Iboki for the Talasea operation. The patrol mentioned above consisted of Company A of that unit, commanded by Captain Harold F. Jennings, which had reached Talawaga in LCVP's by way of the Aria River, with the mission of proceeding overland to make contact with the Army force at Arawe. It soon found ample evidence that it had intercepted the main Japanese withdrawal route in the form of sick and dying stragglers. Yet the patrol killed several comparatively well fed soldiers with plenty of food and cigarettes in their packs, a discrepancy which rather puzzled Jennings.

The patrol moved with caution, examining each abandoned bivouac area thoroughly and taking a number of prisoners. On 7 March Jennings passed through Bulawatni, within three to four miles of the trail along which Sato was proceeding in the opposite direction at the time, and he might have intercepted the enemy rear guard had he pressed

⁶ ATIS 937, 1.

⁷ SA Det Op Order No 2, ATIS 937, 3. Augitni was sometimes transliterated "Agaribachite." The only certainty in regard to its location is that the U. S. map was widely in error. A miscellany of fragmentary evidence places it 4 to 6 miles south of village spotted as Bulawatni. Its location on accompanying maps is highly suppositional, based mainly on Japanese sketch map appearing in ATIS 733, 7.

⁸ Transport was handled by relays, each group of carriers dumping its load at a designated spot where another group picked it up. POW 917.



THE 1st BATTALION, 1st Marines, was based at Iboki for patrolling to the south and east.

on to the trail fork below Augitni. But the continuing southeasterly bearing of the trail he followed convinced him that it would take him far afield from his designated destination.⁹ So he halted the patrol a short distance below Bulawatni on the 8th and had his men cut a trail due west through the jungle to a north-south track that an Army patrol from Arawe had used recently. Then, too short on supplies to complete its mission, the patrol returned to Iboki, arriving on the 10th.¹⁰

On 6 March the Komori Group, with Major Tobuse's 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry in the lead, covered 16 kilometers on the trail running northeast from the fork toward the coast to reach what the Japanese called the

⁹ According to the most comprehensible captured Japanese map (ATIS 733, 7), the trail turned due south at Augitni and sharply southwest at Vakan, reaching Arawe via Didmop. On his withdrawal, Komori had covered Didmop-Augitni stretch in two days.

¹⁰ Material on this patrol derives from Capt Jennings' report of 14Mar44, contained in 1/1 *Hist*, 17-21. On 11Mar the 3d Platoon of Co A left Iboki via the Army trail and reached Arawe on the 17th. *Ibid.*

"North Road." Along the way the commander was distressed to encounter many stragglers from the 53d Infantry, a sight which he described in his diary as "extremely pitiful." He could do little to help them, however, as it was problematical whether his own men could reach the next supply point on the amount of provisions they were able to carry, and which they refused to share with anyone else.¹¹ He still had an operational radio¹² at this time and learned from 17th Division of the Marine landing at Volupai.

After the first day on the trail, Komori's progress becomes difficult to follow, owing to his use of place names occurring in no other reports or maps. It was slow and difficult at best, because of rain and mud, and the necessity for wide detours to find fords through deep streams and safe passages through or around extensive swamps. His immediate force numbered about 200, and on 8 March he recorded the Tobuse Battalion a half-day's march ahead. He sighted occasional enemy reconnaissance planes, and on the 12th U. S. landing craft fired upon his men as they attempted to cross the Kuhu River, obliging them to take to the jungle and swamps. This finished the radio, and from then on he remained out of touch with practically everybody.

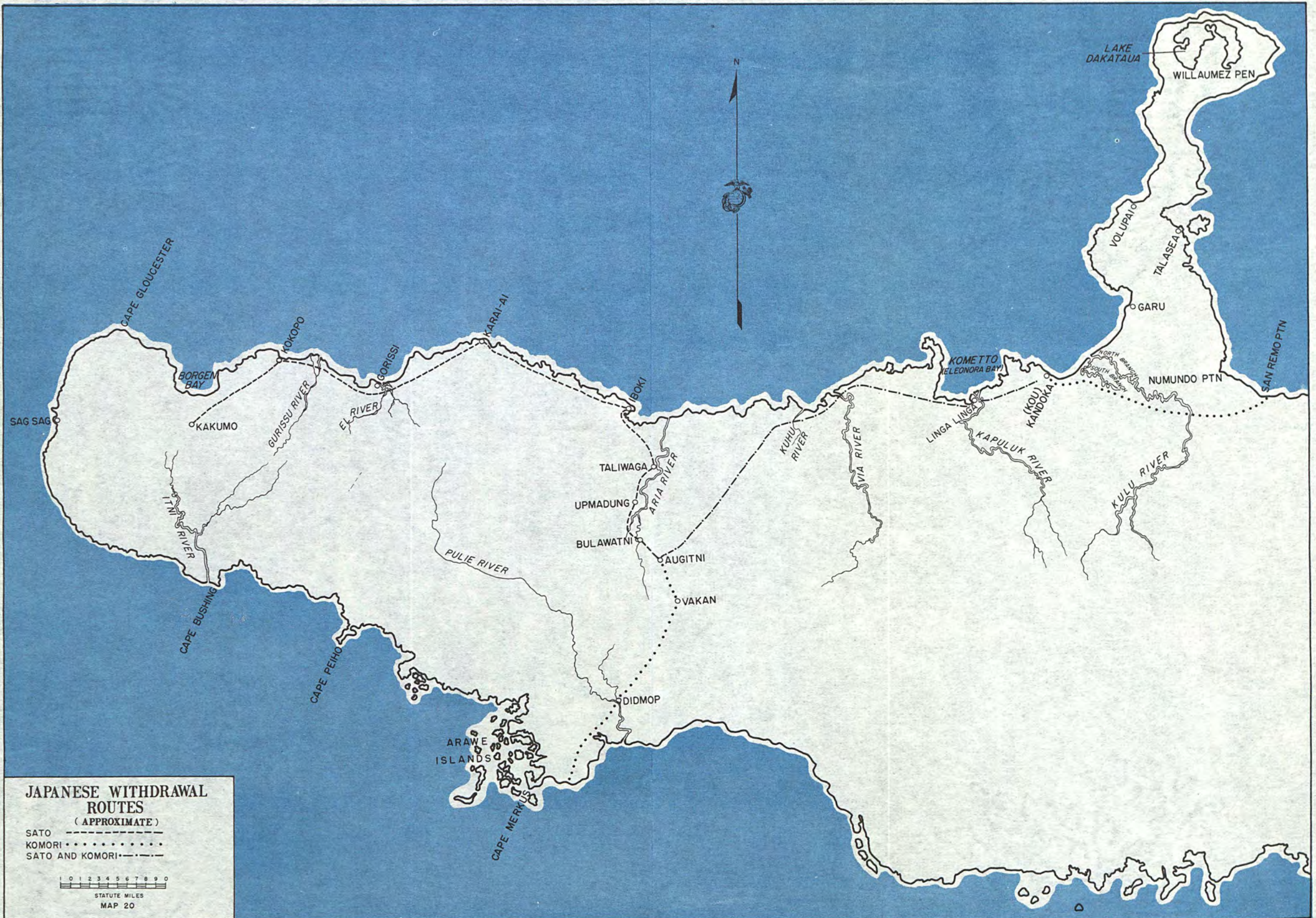
The broad Via River stopped his force on the 14th. When improvised rafts refused to float, the major and 15 others swam across. The rest, through weakness or timidity, declined to follow this excellent example, and it took two days and a wide detour inland to get the whole group to the right bank. Then, on the 17th, provisions ran out.¹³

The North Road led generally east-west at distances varying from two to three miles

¹¹ POW 917.

¹² The radio was broken down into four man loads for hand carry and had to be reassembled for use. POW 990.

¹³ "... thereafter lived on taro, natives' vegetables, birds and fish." POW 999.



inland from the coast.¹⁴ Thus the weakening men came by painful stages to Kometto (Eleanora Bay)¹⁵ and the welcome coconuts of Linga Linga Plantation on the 21st. But the wide Kapuluk River posed a formidable obstacle to further progress. "We are all weary," Komori recorded in his diary that night, "and Kou"¹⁶ [the main supply dump] is still a long way off."

They tried first to swim the Kapuluk near its mouth, but 18 men of the 2d Company

¹⁴ POW 199.

¹⁵ It would appear that the Japanese used the name Kometto to apply both to the bay itself and some place located on its shore, probably Linga Linga.

¹⁶ Also appearing as Ko and Koho. Consensus of incidental evidence indicates that it was the place appearing on U. S. maps at Kandoka, a name occurring nowhere in Japanese records or interrogations.

were swept away and 12 of them drowned, only the captain reaching the far bank safely. A patrol far upstream failed to find any fording point, so the troops spent the rest of the day building rafts. These managed to stay afloat, but broke apart so frequently that another two days were required for the passage. Then came the real heart-breaker on the 24th: they reached Kou only to find the provisioning post evacuated.

Again they staggered forward, living on coconuts and what food they could get from natives encountered. Since they possessed little to barter¹⁷ with, they usually ended by plundering the owners' scanty gardens—not the best sort of public relations for

¹⁷ "Stragglers were trading rifles and ammunition for taro from natives." POW 936.



COASTAL PATROL EXPLORES native village while pursuing Japanese eastward.

a force becoming increasingly in need of help. On 25 March an officer patrol encountered a U. S. patrol, and once more the group had to detour. On the 26th Komori hired a native to guide him to Numundo Plantation, at the eastern base of the Willaumez Peninsula. But evidently the man had a change of heart, for the major recorded next day that, lacking a guide, "we advanced using a compass."

They now entered a region of extensive swamps, intersected by another major obstacle: the two-pronged Kulu river. The column got across this stream on the 27th, but lost five more men in the swift current. The survivors emerged from the swamps on the 29th and followed the river southward.¹⁸ On the 31st Komori made his final diary entry, eloquent in its stark simplicity: "We are very tired and without food."

Apparently at this point malaria laid the major low.¹⁹ Ordering his men to continue toward Cape Hoskins, he took refuge in a native village, accompanied only by his executive officer, his orderly and a corporal attached to his headquarters. For lack of further diary entries, obscurity shrouds the last week of his life.

CONTACT AT KANDOKA

Colonel Sato resumed his march one day behind Komori (7 March), and his experiences generally paralleled the major's until he reached Linga Linga, on 23 March.

By rehabilitating stragglers during his stay at Upmadung, he had built up a conglomerate force of 400 to 600 men,²⁰ many

¹⁸ This course was necessitated by establishment of a Marine road block at Garu where the main trail skirted to the north of the swamp area.

¹⁹ Exactly when Komori came down with malaria remains uncertain. POW 996 states that this occurred on 8 March, but nothing in the major's diary bears this out, so the logical assumption is that he became separated from his troops simultaneously with the diary's termination.

²⁰ POW 1000; POW 936. Estimates vary widely, probably because the group moved in separate echelons.

of them in dubious condition, representing practically every unit that had fought in the Cape Gloucester area. He had learned of the Marines' Volupai landing from 17th Division, and two days out of Augitni he called all officers together to discuss the situation. Among these was 23-year-old Second Lieutenant Goremasamon Kawazu of the 30th Machine Cannon Company, who later described the event as follows:

* He [Sato] pointed out quite honestly and frankly the seriousness of the situation. He drew a parallel between the predicament of Rabaul and the desperate situation in the Aleutians a year ago. He had no words of encouragement for his officers but expected them to carry out their duties in the traditional manner.²¹

On 19 March he learned from Komori that enemy patrols had infiltrated west of Willaumez Peninsula, and upon arriving at the Linga Linga coconut grove he was alarmed to discover evidences of recent bivouac by what appeared several hundred Americans. By this time sickness and hunger had whittled his own effective strength to about 250. As he was preparing to get these across the Kapuluk River the following morning (24 March) lookouts reported a number of U. S. landing craft entering Eleanora Bay (Kometto) and apparently heading toward the plantation.

Sato immediately prepared to repulse a landing and sent out patrols. The enemy craft sheered off, however, and later that day he sent what little equipment he had left across the river but remained with his men and weapons in defensive positions on the left bank.

He sighted more landing craft, together with reconnaissance planes on the 25th, but the Americans headed eastward without approaching closely. Encouraged, Sato put his force across the Kapuluk late that afternoon and bivouacked two kilometers beyond. Next morning he learned that the craft he had sighted had landed their troops near Kou, the former Japanese rationing point.

²¹ POW 1000.

Probing cautiously in that direction, his advance party ran head-on into a Marine patrol.

This unit was the 3d Platoon of Company F, 1st Marines under Lieutenant W. C. Schleip. The Japanese had the good fortune to surprise their enemies in the act of crossing a stream; also to have with them one heavy and two light machine guns. With the fire of these and small arms they kept the Americans pinned down for approximately three hours, at which time approach of another Marine patrol caused them to break contact and withdraw.²²

To explain the presence of 1st Marines elements so far east requires a brief digression.

As noted previously, the 1st Battalion had been operating in the Iboki area at the time the Komori and Sato Groups pulled out. On 11 March this unit (less Company C) moved by water to Linga Linga and conducted vigorous patrolling for a week, leaving behind those traces of its recent presence which had alarmed Sato on the 23d. Companies E and F and a headquarters group of the 2d Battalion under Major C. H. Brush, Jr., then assumed responsibility for patrolling the Japanese withdrawal route, and were on their way to this mission when Sato's lookout sighted Company F's boats entering Eleanora Bay on the 24th.

By prearrangement Captain Petras, aide and pilot to the commanding general, reconnoitered ahead of the landing in one of the 1st Division's little cub planes—and spotted the Japanese at Linga Linga. This word he promptly signalled to the boats, then scouted farther until he found another suitable landing point. As an interested passenger, Petras had Brigadier General E. C. Long, once a pilot himself, who took over the controls while the captain drew a hasty



THE JAPANESE abandoned cases of ammunition as they retreated eastward.

sketch map of the area. This he dropped to one of the boats, then guided them in to the new beach, where the Marines came ashore some distance in Sato's rear.²³

In the meanwhile, Company E continued eastward and landed at the Kulu River mouth at the base of Willaumez Peninsula. There the Marines encountered only four enemy stragglers, killing three and taking one prisoner. Then they moved westward to Kandoka (Japanese Kou), where they were joined by two platoons of Company F, brought thither in the boats that Sato sighted on the 25th, and the combined force returned to the Linga Linga region. As a result of Lieutenant Schleip's fight the next day, however, Major Brush brought both reinforced companies back to Kandoka on the 27th. Failing to find any trace of the Japanese main body, he contented himself with setting up a trail block manned by the 3d Platoon and Weapons Platoon of Company E and returned to the command post, now set up on Yaluaia Island in Eleanora Bay.

Reason for the failure to make contact appears in the Sato Journal, which records the unit's position on that day as south of Kou and headed northeast. It describes the men as "physically and spiritually worn out" as a result of "yesterday's battle and the

²² 2/1 *Hist*, 19. Journal of Sato Group states that their opponents "finally retreated toward the east." This action cost Schleip one killed and five wounded seriously enough to require evacuation to Borgen Bay. He estimated Japanese casualties as 20.

²³ *Petras*.



MARINES ON PATROL take a break.

absence of rations." They gathered tree buds for food and "experienced terrible suffering." The presence of many wounded slowed progress further. At last, on the 29th, they reached the coast where they found some taro fields but had to work cautiously because of the known presence of Marines in the vicinity.

But time was running out on Colonel Jiro Sato, IJA. On 30 March a patrol from Kandoka spotted his rear echelon and reported counting 73 Japanese with machine guns and a radio.²⁴

This patrol consisted of eight men under Second Lieutenant Richard B. Watkins,²⁵ in command of the trail block. At 0900 that morning he had led his group inland from the village over some faint trails which he hoped the Japanese main body might be using, since diligent search of the main coastal route had failed to discover the force that Lieutenant Schleip had engaged. The Marines had proceeded about a mile and a half and were about to cross a stream in a sparsely wooded area when they sighted two

²⁴ 2/1 *Hist*, 20.

²⁵ Details regarding these events derive from Itr Capt R. B. Watkins to CMC, undated, received in Apr52.

Japanese standing with slung rifles, apparently resting.

Watkins had about decided to dispose of these when they moved off in a northeasterly direction, followed almost immediately by a large body of their compatriots. Lying where the Japanese could easily have spotted them, the Marines counted the 73 enemy soldiers and noted the equipment cited above. Conspicuous among them was a tall, burly officer being carried on a litter. The Japanese were cutting fresh trail through the jungle, and fortunately were too intent on their work to discover the patrol. They made excruciatingly slow progress, however, and Watkins did not dare to move until the last man had disappeared.

He then returned with all speed to Kandoka, sending a runner ahead with his report. At the village he met Major Brush who had come over from Yalulai with one squad on what he had intended as merely a routine inspection. He promptly radioed his command post to send a rifle platoon and a 60mm mortar section to the scene and ordered Watkins to hold the trail block with one rifle squad, one machine-gun squad and two mortar squads while he himself set off with the rest of the troops available in an effort to overtake the Japanese from the rear.

Before his own departure that morning, Watkins had sent a six-man patrol under Sergeant Frank Chliek to an inland village some two miles south of Kandoka, right where the Japanese appeared to be heading. The lieutenant promptly dispatched a native messenger there with a warning; then, when firing broke out in that direction, he surmised, correctly, that Chliek had become engaged and took the remaining rifle squad and hurried to his assistance.

He arrived to find the sergeant and his men crouched on high ground by the east-west trail with dead Japanese all around them. The volume of fire was intense, the pattern not at all clear. As it turned out, Chliek had stumbled upon the column somewhere near its head and, taking advantage of his superior position, immediately opened

fire. Major Brush's force, which had been closing rapidly, was on the opposite side of the valley at this time; hence, at sound of the first shots, had hastened to the scene and struck the Japanese column's other flank. In order to avoid becoming involved in a fire fight with that group, Watkins ordered Chliek's patrol back to Kandoka and followed with his own squad at a slower pace. Brush caught up with him shortly, whereat a counting of heads showed that, miraculously, the Marines had not sustained a single casualty.

Here is the aftermath as Watkins recalls it:

On the following morning I took a 20 man patrol through the battle area. We counted 55 dead including 3 officers. It was quite easy to believe that perhaps 20 more died in scattered positions throughout the dense underbrush. The dead were all within a 100 yard stretch of trail. We encountered 2 more Japanese who had evidently just come upon the scene who were sitting side by side staring dazedly at the destruction and did not even turn their heads when we approached.

The burly officer previously observed on a litter proved to be Colonel Sato. Evidently Sergeant Chliek's patrol had struck the enemy column at precisely the point where he was being carried, for the colonel had only had time to leap to his feet and draw his sword to fight back before the Marines' fire riddled him.²⁰ Seeing their leader fall, those Japanese farther forward took off in mad flight, while those behind were cut off by the converging of the two patrols.

Thus perished one of the few Japanese to deserve much credit for the performance of the 65th Brigade on New Britain.

Although the rear echelon attacked by the two patrols comprised less than half of Sato's total force, the group, as such, ceased to exist with the death of the leader who alone had held it together. Units split into components, these into smaller parties, straggling eastward over a variety of trails,

²⁰ The manner of Col Sato's death is corroborated by POW 1002 who was among those toward the head of the column and thus escaped—for the time being.

often hacking their own way by compass azimuth. Typical was the experience of young Lieutenant Kawazu. After escaping the Sato debacle, he rounded up 16 survivors of his unit and offered them the choice of following him or making their own way; only three chose to share his fate.²⁷

Now no Japanese capable of cohesive action remained west of Cape Hoskins—and precious few there.

FURTHER PATROLLING BY 1ST MARINES

The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines remained in Linga Linga—Kandoka region ten days longer, patrolling vigorously to the east, west and south, but encountered only a diminishing trickle of stragglers. During the entire period of its operations here, 2/1 accounted for 183 Japanese killed and 65 taken prisoner, of whom 42 were turned in by natives.²⁸

How many Japanese reached the safety of Cape Hoskins remains problematical, but the number would appear to be far higher than the Marines suspected. During the early stages of the withdrawal, many were evacuated by boat from Karai-ai and Iboki, and, as noted in passing, Matsuda's headquarters and the remnants of 2/53 had escaped intact by water. The fact that the Marines failed to intercept any organized groups except Sato's rear guard, while numerous Japanese sources agree that such groups existed, would indicate that several of these got through²⁹ before depletion of the coastal supply dumps brought about the most serious phase of attrition. In any event, a chart showing garrison units in the Rabaul area at the time of its surrender in

²⁷ POW 1000.

²⁸ 2/1 *Hist*, 21. The natives became increasingly aggressive as enemy conditions worsened. Most prisoners they turned in were weakened stragglers who had taken refuge with them, but there were instances of natives attacking groups of comparatively strong Japanese with clubs and knives.

²⁹ *Murayama*, who was at Cape Hoskins himself, states categorically that such was the case.



NATIVES ENTERTAIN with a "sing-sing."

1945 lists the 65th Brigade, with a strength of 2,700.³⁰

Early in March the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines had been earmarked for a special operation contemplated by division headquarters: seizure of Garove Island, location of the Japanese offshore barge staging base. At 0530 on the 7th of that month an amphibious patrol consisting of Lieutenant H. C. Duncan of Company K, Sub-Lieutenant W. G. Wiedeman, RANVR, and two natives landed from a PT boat under cover of darkness to reconnoiter beach conditions along the eastern shore. They found no Japanese installations in the immediate vicinity, but the beaches proved something less than ideal for an assault landing. Also they heard test firing from the southern part of the

island that indicated the enemy had at least three artillery pieces and numerous 20mm machine cannon.³¹ When subsequent aerial reconnaissance drew unexpectedly heavy dual purpose 75mm fire,³² division concluded that the probable cost of seizure outweighed possible advantages to be gained and reluctantly cancelled the plan.

On 9 April the 3d Battalion relieved 2/1, which returned to Borgen Bay. But two days later, in compliance with unexpected orders 3/1 hurriedly rejoined the regiment,³³ for reasons that will soon appear. Thereafter, such wretched Japanese as remained

³⁰ USSBS, 264. Gen Imamura set the number at 3,000. *Ibid.*, 86.

³¹ Recon Patrols, G-2 Rpts. Duncan estimated 300 Japanese in occupation, but later prisoner interrogations indicated about 850.

³² Statement LtCol J. A. Pounds, 19Jan52.

³³ *1st Mar Hist*, 13.

in the area between Iboki and Willaumez Peninsula were left to the mercy of nature and the natives.

JOURNEY'S END

At its pleasant outpost at San Remo Plantation the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines prepared to give passing attention to the brighter side of war. The date, 9 April: Easter Sunday (also pay day); the occasion: awarding of letters of commendation and meritorious promotions to personnel of the unit.

By now the harassing monsoon had given way to generally clear tropical weather. Although outposts and patrols still killed or rounded up a few Japanese stragglers, the duty was not too exacting, and everybody felt fine. In order to do the business up in style, Major Gayle had ordered a ceremonial parade and invited Colonel Smith and his regimental staff to do the honors. For several days the troops had been scrubbing their faded dungarees, brushing up on their parade ground manners, renewing their familiarity with close order drill. To top off the occasion, natives in nearby villages had agreed to entertain all hands with a "No. 1 sing sing" in the afternoon.²⁴

But there was still a campaign on, however unexciting it had become, and the battalion did not neglect routine security measures. Thus it happened that, at 0830 on the festive day, Company E's outpost came suddenly face to face with a group of four bedraggled Japanese. It was one of those abrupt encounters that allow little time for reflection or deliberation. The flurry of fire that followed killed three of the enemy and wounded the fourth, who promptly surrendered.

He gave his name as Corporal Isamu Kozuki, 1st Battalion, 81st Infantry, IJA.²⁵ And he identified the elder of two dead officers as his battalion and group commander.

Major Shinjiro Komori had reached his journey's end. And a long, rough road he had traveled, from his two Imperial commendations at Arawe to this dismal finish. Search of his pack revealed the diary from which his adventures have been reconstructed, and a rusty pistol—his only weapon.

Failure of his men to take Komori alive almost spoiled the day for Major Gayle. But the parade and "sing sing" came off as scheduled, and very successfully. Three days later Colonel Smith made brigadier general, and cheering word came from division headquarters regarding early relief.

For the 5th Marines, too, was nearing its journey's end, so far as concerned New Britain. With promotion of the regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Buse took over on an acting basis, and General Smith returned to Cape Gloucester to relieve General Shepherd as Assistant Division Commander. Units attached to the regiment followed, and representatives of the Army's 185th Infantry arrived to inspect positions preparatory to replacing the 5th, just as other 40th Infantry Division elements were doing in the Cape Gloucester area with a view toward relieving the entire 1st Marine Division.

Last clash of the campaign occurred on 22 April, when a 2/5 patrol intercepted a party of Japanese, killing 20, including two officers, and suffering the regiment's last fatality on New Britain. Three days later the whole 185th RCT moved into Talasea and San Remo, and at 1530 command of the area formally passed to the Army.

LCM's carrying the 1st and 3d Battalions back to Borgen Bay cleared Talasea at 1630, followed by those carrying 2/5 from San Remo at 2000. The movement was reported complete at 1930 on the 26th, and men of the 5th learned that the 1st Marines had departed this island of evil memory the previous day and that they would follow as ships became available.

Many Marines, cherishing fond memories, had hoped throughout the campaign that they would return to Australia when it ended. But it turned out they were headed for a very different sort of place.

²⁴ 2/5 *RofE*.

²⁵ POW 996.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

CHAPTER XII

Conclusion

THE MARINES DEPART

Relief of the 1st Marine Division occurred suddenly and, even to the Commanding General, somewhat unexpectedly. The D-3 Section anticipated nothing more than staging right there in the Cape Gloucester area for further operations in the Southwest Pacific area and had already inaugurated a training program toward that end. Optimists in D-1 were working out a schedule for granting leave to Australia when the new orders arrived.¹

Nor was the relief affected without some more or less heated correspondence in high places.² General MacArthur, extremely desirous of retaining a Marine division in his theater of operations,³ protested that the First had not fully completed its mission. However, Admiral Nimitz, as CINCPAC, had already slated it for Operation STALE-

¹ Several officers were actually en route by air and had to be intercepted and brought back.

² MacArthur via 7th Fleet; action CINCPAC, 3 Apr44. Nimitz to King, 3Apr44. CINCPAC to CINCSWPAC, 6Apr44.

³ "[MacArthur] said he was sorry to lose the division and then stated: 'You know in Central Pacific the 1st Marine Division will just be another one of six Marine divisions, if it stayed here it would be *my* Marine Division.'" (Fuller.)

MATE (Palau Islands) and declared that substitution of a division without amphibious combat experience would seriously jeopardize success of that venture. He countered MacArthur's contention that he had no unit suitable for the relief by transferring the 40th Infantry Division from his own theater to Southwest Pacific, with the result that the 1st Marine Division completed its movement to the Russell Islands by early May.⁴

With its departure, the division's achievements may be examined with more detachment.

SUMMING UP

With the advantage of hindsight, an accomplished second-guesser can rationalize plausibly that each individual operation in the Pacific was quite unnecessary, *per se*, to the outcome of the war; that, to carry rationalization to the ultimate absurdity, all the Allies needed to do was hold what they had until perfection of the B-29 and the atomic bomb, then use the former to carry the latter into Japan proper. In the case of New Britain, such a contention is perhaps less far-fetched than in some other instances.

But it is pointless to speculate on what might have happened had the New Britain

⁴ McMillan, *op. cit.*, 227.

campaign never been undertaken. The main point is that, at the time, General MacArthur believed control of Vitiaz Strait essential to his further westward progress, and the best strategic brains of the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported this belief. Thus, the operation came off as herein described, with the result that MacArthur's flank security had become a *fait accompli* by the time he resumed his advance in the Southwest Pacific.

At the tactical level, the 1st Marine Division achieved a degree of perfection probably never equaled in jungle operations; from the surprise achieved in selecting the landing beaches, to the adaptation of amphibious techniques which carried patrols 130 miles along New Britain's northern coast.⁶

Casualty figures attest this strikingly. New Britain cost the reinforced division 310 killed in action, 1,083 wounded.⁶ On Bougainville at nearly the same time and under essentially similar conditions, a considerably greater number of Marines, facing a considerably lesser number of Japanese⁷ lost 423 killed and 1,418 wounded.⁸ This comparison is not intended as odious. Luck played a part, if shrewd selection of beaches to achieve an unopposed landing can be so defined. But a more significant reason lies in experience, "know-how." Bougainville constituted their first operation, jungle or otherwise, for most of the Marines who fought there, whereas the 1st Division had been forged in the fire of Guadalcanal, tempered by training in the jungles of New Guinea.

Planning, which had proved such a headache from the beginning, paid off richly in



GENERAL RUPERTUS TURNS OVER CAPE GLOUCESTER to General Rapp Brush, CG of the 40th Infantry Division.

the end. Perhaps the mere fact that Army and Marine ideas remained at odds for so long prompted the latter to excel themselves all the way down the line as a matter of self-justification. In any event, few, if any, operations in the Pacific were more soundly planned in detail, or more efficiently executed. However "useless" the campaign may have proved strategically, it taught many useful lessons and served as the standard on which General MacArthur modeled his subsequent jungle operations to and through the Philippines.

And if the 1st Division staff had been exasperated at times with the ideas of some Army planners, the Marines had no complaint with the wholehearted cooperation they received from General Krueger and his staff, once the issue had been joined. In the words of the officer then serving as G-3, Sixth Army (ALAMO Force):

I wish to state that the First Marine Division did a grand job in the western New Britain operation, one that it has every right to be proud of. My relations with General Rupertus and his staff were always most pleasant and cordial and many close friendships have stemmed therefrom.⁹

⁹ Eddleman.

⁶ "The Cape Gloucester operation was well planned, well led and superbly executed." Morison, *op. cit.*, 378.

⁷ Figures prepared by Personnel Accounting Section, Hq USMC, 5Mar52; KIA include 64 DOW, 1 MPD.

⁸ According to Gen Imamura, approximately 1,200 Japanese occupied the Torokina area of Bougainville at time of the landing, which force had been built up to about 1,600, over and above casualties by the time the Marines were relieved. USSBS, 85.

⁹ Rentz, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*, 140.

So effectively did all elements play their parts in support of the infantry that it is difficult to single out any one for special praise. On New Britain the 1st Marine Division, reinforced, performed like a winning football team without individual stars, where each player did his part so well as to make an exceedingly difficult operation appear easy.

Perhaps the most significant tactical development to emerge was the adaptation of tanks, both medium and light, to jungle warfare. Steps in this direction had been taken in previous operations, notably the Central Solomons and Bougainville, but it remained for the Cape Gloucester fighting to prove the tank decisive: at Hell's Point, Suicide Creek, and in the Borgen Bay area, where unsupported infantry assault of dug-in, mutually supporting positions inevitably would have exacted a high toll of lives.

Credit for the tanks' achievements belong to many elements: to the tankmen themselves, who were always ready to attempt anything; to the Seabees of the 3d Battalion, 17th Marines, who built the bridges over which the tanks advanced to Hell's Point and on to the airfield; to the engineers and pioneers of the 17th, who got them through the jungle to Suicide Creek, then bulldozed the stream banks to bring them into the enemy positions, and who later built a mile-long corduroy causeway across the swamp to the Japanese pocket below Hill 150 that had withstood five days of infantry assault; to the Marine infantrymen, who protected the tanks as the tanks protected them in a fine display of teamwork.

In fact, so convincingly did the tanks perform that General MacArthur appropriated Company A, 1st Tank Battalion and its Sherman mediums for the Hollandia operation late in April, though its employment proved unnecessary.

Terrain and weather conditions imposed especially heavy handicaps on the shore party: 2d Battalion (Pioneers), 17th Marines, reinforced by personnel of a newly arrived replacement draft. Again thorough planning paid off. Its commanding officer,

Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Ballance, came in prepared to cope with narrow beaches, dense jungle and the surf created by the northwest monsoon, but no better prepared than anybody else for the "damp flat." However, so basically sound was his plan of overlapping dumps that, even when many of his proposed dispersal areas proved to be under water, he was able to improvise new ones in unexpected places and, by doubling up on those that were usable, insure a balanced supply of everything necessary from the outset. The shore party unloading and dispersing feat on D-Day merely set the pattern for things to come. Any subsequent shortages—and there were very few—resulted from non-arrival of the material rather than failure to get it where it was supposed to go. In the end the Army, openly skeptical of the plan before, adopted it *in toto* for its own subsequent jungle operations.

Of the 17th Marines as a regiment, it may be said that, if any operation was ever won by bulldozers, this was it.

It was no fault of the artillerymen of the 11th Marines that the tall rain forest greatly reduced the effectiveness of their fires on a dug-in enemy. The alacrity with which they got their guns ashore and into position under conditions artillerymen seldom have to face surprised everyone who saw them and earned the regiment a Navy Unit Commendation, the only unit award issued for the campaign. And the effectiveness of their counter-battery work, when opportunity afforded, rendered the Japanese artillery wholly impotent.

The versatile amphibian tractors did everything expected of them and contributed a few novel touches of their own. As noted throughout the foregoing narrative, they often provided the only mechanical means of bringing food and ammunition to combat areas beyond the swamps. In doing so, their treads chewed up some miles of telephone wire, to the exasperation of many people; but their humanitarian services in bringing out the wounded caused all to be forgiven. In addition, they contributed machine-gun fire support against the enemy, both on land and at sea, and there are at least two verified



IT TOOK A LOT OF MATTING to get the Gloucester airstrip in usable condition.

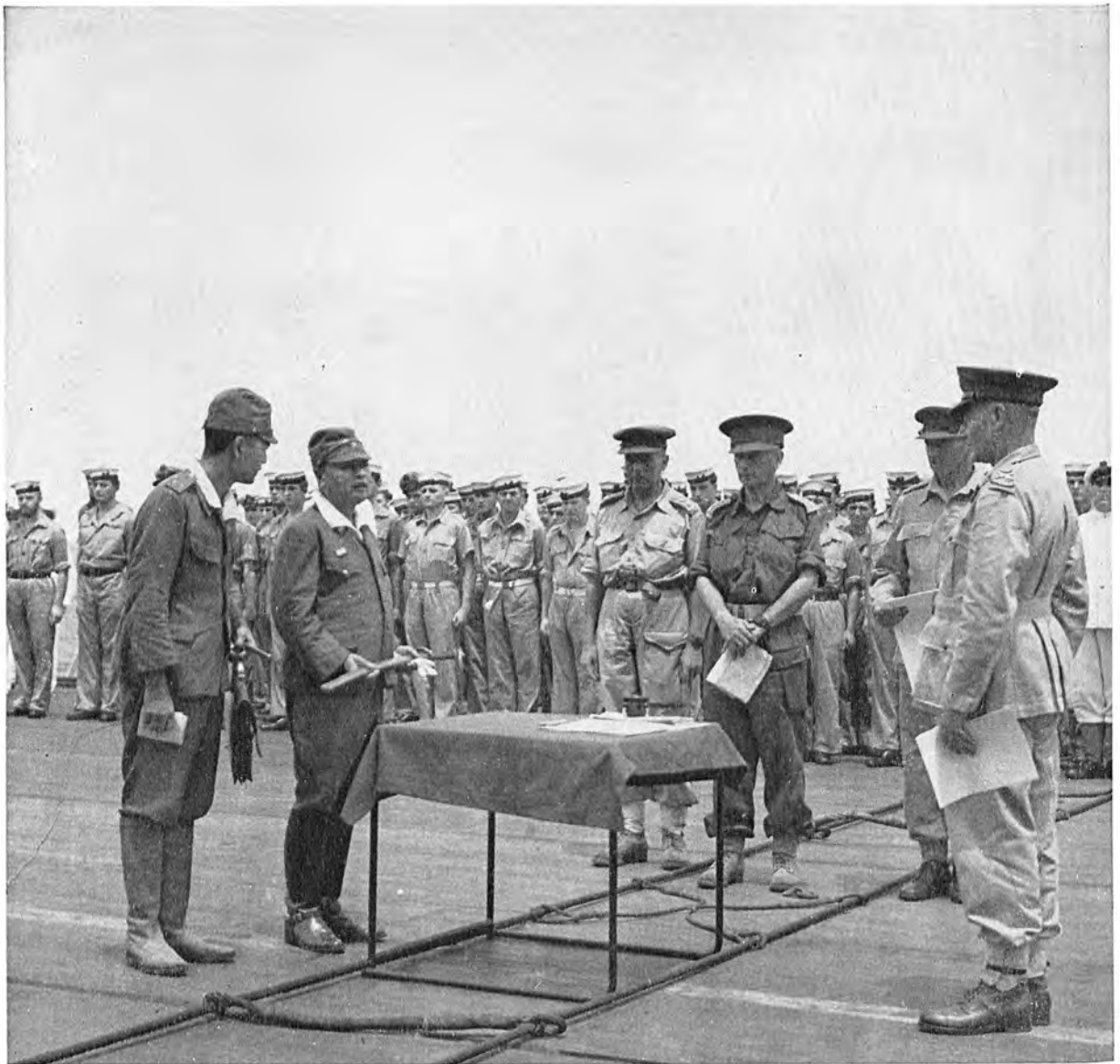
instances of LVT's knocking out Japanese bunkers by the simple process of driving across their tops and crushing them.

Navy Medical Corps personnel performed up to the high standard which had become routine in Pacific operations, under conditions which were anything but routine. No physical handicaps slowed down treatment and prompt evacuation of the wounded, and despite the discomforts of climate and jungle, incidence of illness was kept surprisingly low.

No operation in which Marines ever participated had more strictly amphibious features than the New Britain campaign. One reason why these proved so strikingly successful is described by the officer who commanded the Army landing craft that participated in the later phases:

Another important and novel feature of this campaign which contributed not a little to its success was the fact that the First Marine Division maintained actual operational command over a substantial fleet of landing craft. The Army unit manning these was as much an integral part of the Task Force as any battalion in the division. No longer was it necessary to *request* amphibious lift, it could be *ordered*, and it was, not only for logistical support but for tactical landings and continuous patrolling. The increased mobility, freedom of action, general expedition that this lent to the operations eastward to the San Remo Plantation demonstrated what should have been obvious that a landing force commander should have as complete control over his boats as he does over his trucks and tanks. So pleased were the senior officers of the division by the way in which this integration worked that they formally requested that the boat battalion of the 533rd Engineers be permanently assigned to the division and redesignated as the 4th Battalion, 17th Marines.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ltr LtCol Robert Amory, Jr., Mass.NG, to CMC, 2Apr52.



GENERAL IMAMURA (second from left, foreground) surrenders his sword, Rabaul and the Japanese Southeastern Army forces to Australian Lieutenant General Sturdee (right). (Photo courtesy of Australian Military Mission.)

The authors of this monograph are unable to document the formal request referred to above, but personal correspondence with the then Chief of Staff¹¹ and D-4 indicates that the division was fully aware of the value of

¹¹“Amory’s outfit did a fine job, but to repeat, I don’t remember anything more than just casual conversation as to the desirability of having them attached.” Ltr MajGen J. T. Selden to LtCol F. O. Hough, 28Apr52.

this operational command and that there was considerable discussion regarding effecting the boat battalion’s permanent attachment.

Among the lessons learned, one proved wholly negative in character. The 1st Division departed New Britain convinced that the bazooka was useless as a weapon owing to the failure of its rockets to detonate in the soft earth and log Japanese defenses, and the tendency of its battery discharge system to

short-out owing to the excessive moisture. This illusion led to the expenditure of considerable time and ingenuity after the campaign in developing a mount which would permit the 60mm mortar to be fired from the shoulder as a flat trajectory weapon. This actually worked, at the cost of many sore shoulders, only to prove inferior to the despised bazooka when the division hit the adamant coral of Peleliu on its next operation.

EPILOGUE

For all practical operational purposes, the New Britain campaign ended with seizure of Willaumez Peninsula and Japanese withdrawal of all their forces to the immediate vicinity of Rabaul. There they sat out the rest of the war in magnificent isolation, harassed by routine "milk run bombing," powerless to influence the issue that was being decided hundreds and thousands of miles to the west and northwest. Expecting an attack until the end, General Imamura kept his garrison alert and in shape to do battle, making it cockily clear to his eventual conquerors that he surrendered only on Imperial order. Perhaps he was entitled to this gesture.

With the enemy self-isolated on the Gazelle Peninsula, some of the coastwatchers moved back in to see that they remained so. These hardy gentry organized and armed bands of friendly natives and led these in guerrilla warfare against the Japanese: raiding outposts, ambushing patrols and generally keeping their activities under observation. Such operations finally reached the point where the coastwatchers' chronicler could state with commendable pride (and considerable exaggeration): "And now 40,000 Japanese were

held in that same Gazelle Peninsula by 29 Coastwatchers and 400 armed natives."¹²

These developments combined to make all of New Britain save the extreme tips worthless to either side. Outposts of the 40th Infantry Division continued to round up a few wretched stragglers for a while around the base of Willaumez Peninsula, and on 7 May patrolled eastward to the abandoned Cape Hoskins airstrip.¹³ However, this wide dispersal of forces complicated supply problems to no useful purpose, and subsequently all Allied troops were withdrawn to the immediate area of the Cape Gloucester air-drome.¹⁴

Rabaul had slipped into the backwash of the war as inevitably as the Solomons before it and the Marshalls after. Its remaining military value existed only in the minds of Imamura and his immediate associates, who finally surrendered it to its former owners.

In a ceremony similar to that which had taken place in Tokyo Bay a few days earlier, Lieutenant General Vernon A. H. Sturdee, C. B., C.B.E., D.S.O., received the surrender of the Japanese Imperial Southeast Army and Naval forces at Rabaul on 6 September 1945. The surrender ceremony was held on the deck of the aircraft carrier, HMS *Glory*, which lay in Simpson Harbor for the occasion. General Sturdee, GOC 1st Australian Army, received the swords of the Japanese commanders and the surrender of all Japanese forces in the area involving approximately 135,000 men.

¹² Feldt, *op. cit.*, 241. Chap XX of this work describes these operations in detail.

¹³ 40th InfDiv BACKHANDER Opn Rpt.

¹⁴ This occurred following relief of 40th InfDiv by Australian 5th Div in November, 1944.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

APPENDIX I

Bibliography

This monograph is based primarily on documents issued by units participating in the operation: special action reports, war diaries, journals, orders, dispatches, etc. Such a study entails the consultation of literally hundreds of individual items. Many of these duplicate one another; many others contribute nothing of value, or too little to warrant special notice. The listing below includes only those specifically cited in the text. It is arranged by echelons from the top downward to individuals, who are listed alphabetically. Except as otherwise noted, these documents are on file in the records of Historical Branch, G-3, Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps.

To supplement these basic sources, preliminary drafts of this monograph were distributed to many individuals who occupied key positions during various phases of the campaign, soliciting comments, corrections and elaborations. Notes, personal correspondence and interview transcripts resulting are cited in passing but are not listed here for want of space. All of this material has been made part of the record and is available for consultation.

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APPENDIX II

The Vegetation of New Britain and Its Effect on Military Operations

By Captain L. T. Burcham, USMCR (Ret.)¹

While the designation "rain forest" applied to the vegetation of New Britain is correct in a broad, general sense, this term conveys no idea of the variations in this rain forest which occur in response to such local influences as soil, drainage, and differences in elevation.

Vegetation may affect military operations by limiting or preventing movement; by limiting or preventing observation; and by providing cover and concealment from both ground and air. Further, vegetation serves as an excellent index to the character of the terrain, since there are definite, consistent relationships between plants and the habitats in which they grow. In the Southwest and Western Pacific the relatively uniform natural conditions, which have been little disturbed by man, are reflected by a small number of broad, uniform vegetation types. In that part of New Britain where

the 1st Marine Division operated, and with which this discussion deals specifically, the vegetation may be classified in only six types—in contrast to more than twenty types in current use in the western United States. These are recognized and described as follows: mangrove swamp, swamp forest, tropical rain forest, secondary growth, grassland, and plantations.

Mangrove Swamp: Mangrove trees may range from twenty to sixty feet tall; those in one locality generally are of uniform height. The main trunk is raised above the ground, supported by a dense tangle of stout prop roots which develop at an angle to the trunk, often ten feet above the ground. Mangroves can begin growth only in brackish or salt water, hence are found only near coasts on tidal flats and estuaries subject to flooding. The terrain is always poorly drained, and usually flooded at high tide; deep, muddy, meandering streams are common.

Cover from air observation is complete: ground observation and visibility are restricted to 10 to 15 yards. Movement of troops is virtually impossible due to the tangle of trunks and roots, as well as the poorly-drained or flooded terrain.

¹This scholarly discussion was contributed by Capt Burcham, now Forestry Technician with California Division of Forestry, at the request of the authors of this monograph as a service to the Marine Corps. He served as Ass't D-2 through the Cape Gloucester phase of the operation, and as R-2, 5th Mar at Talasea.



A CAPE GLOUCESTER PATROL makes its way through a devastated swamp forest.

Swamp Forest.—Swamp forest is characterized by widely spaced trees of very irregular height, the tallest being upwards of 100 feet high. Quite commonly these trees have widely spreading buttress roots, which give a fluted appearance to the bottom of the trunk. Wide spacing and irregular height of the mature trees permit a moderately dense to very dense undergrowth of varying heights. Both undergrowth and mature trees are generally thickly matted with lianas, vines, and lawyer cane.

Swamp forest occurs near coasts or along lower courses of streams and similar inland areas; wherever it occurs much of the area is subject to periodic or occasional overflow by flood waters during the rainy season. The terrain under swamp forest always is of low relief and poorly drained. Some areas are comparatively dry during the dry season,

but they are commonly flooded in the wet season by standing water or overflow from nearby streams. This vegetation type is the dank, steaming tropical jungle of the fiction writer.

Cover and concealment are complete in swamp forest. Ground observation usually is restricted to a few yards. Movement of troops or vehicles is very difficult. Flooded areas virtually preclude movement during the wet season. Large areas of swamp forest occur in the Cape Gloucester-Borgen Bay area: the vegetation behind the landing beaches was a strip of swamp forest which extended nearly to the airdrome area on the west, as well as eastward around Borgen Bay. In fact, a major part of the area where the 1st Marine Division operated was characterized by this type of cover.

Tropical Rain Forest.—Above the swamp forest is found the true rain forest of the tropics. Here the tallest trees are of fairly uniform height, set so closely together as to form virtually a complete canopy overhead. Usually there are only ten to twenty of these mature trees per acre, commonly 125 to 150 feet tall. There is a second "story" of smaller trees, their crowns reaching to just below the canopy formed by the tallest trees; frequently there is an understory of brush and young trees beneath these, ranging up to twenty or thirty feet tall. Sometimes there is a fairly complete ground cover of ferns and other herbs up to about two feet in height. The actual interior of such a forest is relatively open except for occasional small tangles of climbing bamboos, rattan

palms, or lianas. Rain forest is characteristic of higher ground and well-drained terrain which may vary from gently rolling to rugged.

Complete cover and concealment from air observation are afforded. Ground observation is limited—a standing man can be observed at about 50 yards; a prone man usually will be concealed at 10 yards. Foot troops can move through rain forest with little difficulty and require practically no trail cutting. Physical character of the terrain—spur ridges, deep stream channels, or the like—may make travel difficult, but the vegetation itself offers little hindrance in true rain forest, which covers practically all of New Britain from an elevation of about 500 feet up to about 7,000 feet.



THIS IS THE JUNGLE found at the base of Hill 660.



LUSH VEGETATION and coconut plantations were found at Talasea.

Secondary Growth.—Secondary growth occurs in vicinity of native villages where clearings for gardens have been abandoned and are reverting to forest. It forms a dense tangle of young trees, brush and vines; height and density depend on age of growth.

Since garden clearings are made in rain forest, the terrain under secondary growth is the same—well-drained, and gently rolling to rugged in configuration. This type of vegetation provides complete concealment for vehicles in its early stages. Ground observation is limited to a few feet. It is practically impossible for troops or vehicles to move through secondary growth without extensive cutting. Due to native practices of abandoning a garden after three or four years of cultivation, this vegetation type is relatively extensive about large villages.

Grassland.—Two kinds of grassland occurs on New Britain. First, the Kangaroo grasses (*Themeda spp.*), blade grass (*Imperata sp.*) and a number of similar grasses form stands which resemble the taller pasture grasses. Second, wild sugar cane (*Saccharum spontaneum*) occurs in pure stands over considerable areas; the stems are thick and reed-like, frequently an inch or more in diameter, and up to 15 feet tall. Both of these types of grassland were commonly called “Kunai grass” by our troops. Strictly speaking, Kunai refers to a variety of blade grass, *Imperata cylindrica* var. *koenigii*—supposedly “kunai” is a corruption of *koenigii*, which has been loosely applied throughout Australasia to all species of *Imperata*.

On New Britain grassland is confined to a few small areas near the coast, mostly in

vicinity of Cape Gloucester, and on the west coast south of Aisega. It occurs only where the moisture supply is locally deficient. Configuration of the terrain varies from gently undulating to mountainous; the footing is firm. Foot troops frequently find complete concealment from ground observation; concealment from air observation is partial to complete, depending on height of the grass. In low grasslands visibility is excellent, but in taller grasses it is restricted to a few feet. Movement is easy for foot troops in the lower grasses, but entails considerable difficulty in old growth stands of wild cane. Grassland vegetation presents little problem to operation of vehicles.

Plantations and Cultivated Areas.—The cultivated areas here are planted mainly to coconuts; there are a few plantations of cocoa, coffee, and rubber. The coconut plan-

tation is so familiar it needs no description. In most cases the trees are underplanted with grasses or legumes, which then are controlled by grazing cattle, to keep down weeds and shrubs. Usually plantations are located on the coast or navigable rivers.

Coconut plantations frequently are planted on swampy or poorly drained ground; other plantation crops are on well-drained ground. In a well-kept plantation there is little cover or concealment from aircraft. Ground observation and cover are poor. Movement of foot troops and mechanized equipment are relatively easy if swampy areas can be avoided. In plantations untended for a few years considerable young growth will be present, affording better cover and reducing visibility, but not appreciably affecting movement.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

APPENDIX III

Some Explanation in Regard to Place Names

Since the natives of New Britain speak many dialects, spelling of local place names is necessarily phonetic. The Australians during their regime listened carefully as the natives pronounced the words, then adapted these sounds to the English alphabet and thus set them down on maps and pertaining documents. The Japanese, in turn, transliterated some of the Australian names into Japanese characters, coined some new ones, and rendered native versions of place names phonetically into their own language. U. S. translators, encountering these several versions in captured enemy documents, transliterated them back into English, again phonetically, as they thought the Japanese had thought the natives pronounced them.

Checked carefully against the earlier Australian versions, the results often made sense, but in many instances this triple translation produced some decidedly odd results. For example, quite early in the campaign the Marines learned from enemy sources that General Matsuda's headquarters lay at or near a place transliterated from the Japanese as "Egaroppu" (sometimes rendered "Aikaroppu"), a locality wholly unknown to any available sources until someone finally associated it with what the Australians had mapped as "Nakarop," a factor which con-

tributed no little to the success of the Japanese withdrawal.

Bearing in mind Japanese difficulty in pronouncing the letter "l" and tendency to substitute the "r" sound helps to explain many cases. Thus, our "Nigol" became their "Nigoru," but how they ever managed to come up with something that sounded like "Agaripachine" (or "Agaribachite") for the place Australian maps labeled "Augitni" remains one of those secrets that make the East mysterious.

During later phases of the campaign, when Marine patrols roamed the hinterland at large, intelligence officers contributed further to the confusion by attempting their own phonetic renditions in a well-meant effort to bring earlier maps up to date. On entering a village, they would inquire its name of their native guides, then spell out the reply as they thought it sounded to American ears, often with results that bore little relation to Australian versions owing to certain differences of pronunciation in the dialects of the two nations (example: U. S. phonetic rendition of what our allies called their own country would be spelled "Orstrylia").

The guides themselves were less than helpful at times. Jungle-bound all their lives,

few had traveled far beyond their own localities; often they did not know for certain which village was which, and with the characteristic desire of these people to please their new friends they agreed readily that it was what the Marines believed it to be, even when they did know better.

As a result, the same village may appear at several different locations on different maps, sometimes under different names, and may be spotted still elsewhere in reports using target square coordinates. Trail routes vary similarly. The maps used in this monograph make an effort to reconcile these discrepancies. In general, they adhere to the

precampaign version as finally corrected, in the studied belief that the Australian surveys were more thorough and made under more favorable conditions and with greater familiarity with the natives. The many features not appearing on the earlier maps are adapted from U. S. overlays, sketches and reports; and where such documents present convincing evidence of error in the basic map, correction is attempted either by accepting the U. S. version or effecting an intelligent compromise between the two, occasionally with some slight help from the Japanese.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

APPENDIX IV

The Shore Party¹

One of the concrete results of the New Britain operation was the development of a shore party plan which was subsequently used successfully at Peleliu and Okinawa by the 1st Marine Division and adopted by the Army for its jungle campaigns in New Guinea and the Philippines. New types of shipping—LST's, LCI's, LCT's—necessitated a new concept of shore party procedures, and at Cape Gloucester these were shaped and polished through use and experience.

In October, 1943, 2d Battalion, 17th Marines and Company C of the 1st Battalion were attached to Combat Team C at Cape Sudest,² the plan being that the Shore Party would land with the assault organization. Although from time to time this was augmented by elements of other organizations, the hard core of the organization remained 2/17.

The plan evolved by Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Ballance and his two assistants, Major Levi W. Smith, Jr., and Captain

Nathaniel Morgenthal, provided a system of overlapping dumps. Thus, for instance, dumps were segregated along the beach from left to right in the following manner: Class I (rations and water); Class III (lubricants and fuels); Classes II and IV (miscellaneous supplies and equipment); Class V (ammunition). The left flank LST utilized the first three dumps alone, but shared the ammunition dump with the LST on its right. This second LST, in turn, had its own Class I and Class III dumps and shared the miscellaneous dump with the LST on its right. And so on along the beach.

Four LST's were unloaded simultaneously on Beach Yellow 2 and three on Beach Yellow 1. Seven provisional companies were formed, one responsible for each LST, and two pools of equipment were planned, one for each beach.

First elements of the Shore Party to land on D-Day were reconnaissance teams charged with the specific missions of (1) marking beach flanks; (2) determining best landing sites for LST's, (3) marking road nets from these sites to proposed dump areas. Road nets and dump areas had been optimistically selected on the map before the landing in the mistaken belief that there were 300 yards of usable dispersal space between the beach-

¹ This account draws principally upon an interview with LtCol Nathaniel Morgenthal, 24Apr52, hereinafter cited as *Morgenthal*.

² The shore party was detached from Combat Team C and attached to the ADC Group upon that command's activation on 29Dec43.



SHORE PARTY AT WORK. Thousands of sandbags were needed to connect LST's with the beach.

line and the swamp. Because of the infamous "damp flat," however, dumps had to be concentrated along the narrow strip of firmer ground just off the beach.³

Until overhead wires could be set up, internal communications were handled exclusively by radio since the tracked bulldozers and LVT's quickly chewed up wires laid along the ground. But eventually the Shore Party net became so efficient that its switchboard became a secondary switchboard for Division Headquarters.

Due to high surf and coral reefs, docks were not feasible, a factor which had been

recognized before the landing. Consequently each LST carried about 1,000 filled sandbags to be used in a subsidiary ramp connecting the vessel with the beach. An astronomical number of sandbags were used in this fashion, each such ramp requiring between 3,000 and 4,000 and nearly every LST necessitating a new one.⁴ Later, empty oil drums were filled with sand to augment the vital bags. Although they were extremely difficult to handle, particularly in the surf, they remained in position longer than the sandbags.

³ "This concentration was bad in principle, but we lost nothing to the enemy because of it." *Morgen-thal*.

⁴ It was virtually impossible to get an LST to hit an existing narrow ramp, and the action of the surf tore the sandbags apart and washed them away within a short time.



BEFORE THE SANDBAG RAMPS were built, motor vehicles had to be pulled onto the beach.

Working with Sixth Army headquarters, the Marines had devised a scheme to mobile load some 500 Army 2½ ton trucks with supplies and equipment to be driven to the dumps and unloaded, as described in Chapter V. The plan looked good on paper and, in fact, worked successfully for the Marines after D-plus 1 as well as for the Army in subsequent operations. But on D-Day, as noted, it was thrown awry when the truck drivers abandoned their vehicles where they stood in a mad scramble to get away on the departing LST's, thereby presenting Division with a magnificent traffic jam. On D-plus 1 there was a recurrence of the incident as the second LST group beached and departed, but the shore party succeeded in placing a number of the previously abandoned vehicles back aboard. Thereafter the plan worked with increasing success.

As the first LST's began unloading at both Yellow Beaches, the Shore Party en-

countered a problem that was to have near-serious consequences. By Navy orders the vessels were to withdraw within a specified time regardless of unloading progress. Thus, owing to the combination of physical difficulties, many LST's departed Cape Gloucester with such vital cargo as ammunition, which had been stowed aft, still aboard. The amount of bulk cargo unloaded on D-Day averaged 150 tons per LST, but a total of 395 tons returned to New Guinea. This made it necessary for division to request air drops of small arms and mortar ammunition, and at times the ration and fuel stores for the BACKHANDER Force fell to only two days supply on hand.⁵

⁵ Annex C to 1st MarDiv SAR, 3, 4. Actually, Division had too small a perimeter for airdrops at that time and ammunition was scattered far and wide over the New Britain jungles, only a small amount of it being retrieved. (Interview with Lt Col G. F. Gober, 29Apr52.)

However, failure to unload completely had positive value in that it resulted in a revision of LST loading methods. Originally cargo was loaded horizontally. For example, Class V cargo was loaded aft from port to starboard; in front of it would be Class III; then from port to starboard would be a layer of Class IV, and so on. In order to get to Class V, everything forward of it had to be removed. During the New Britain campaign this method was replaced by a vertical loading scheme, which, incidentally, worked with marked success in the Peleliu operation later in 1944.^a Under this, Class V supplies would be loaded along the starboard bulkhead from bow to stern. Parallel to them would be Class I supplies, and so on until loading was completed. This system provided a better balanced unloading program, and at the same time permitted removal of any one item in the event of an emergency.

The Shore Party also came to the conclusion that loading trucks three abreast on

^a "Vertical loading required much more prior planning in order to give the ship a balanced cargo, but the results were worth the extra effort." *Morganthal*.

an LST's tank deck was the most efficient method; that attempting to unload without trucks is too inefficient; that 10 men per truck and two traffic control men per LST are required for unloading; that an LST should blow its bow ballast tanks just before making a run into the beach, fill them upon reaching the beach in order to hold the ship steady, and blow all ballast tanks before retracting. Liberty ships that put into Borngen Bay during later phases of the campaign gave the Shore Party Marines training in rigging and winch operations which was to prove of incalculable value at Peleliu on D-Day.

The shore party concept had come a long way indeed from the methods used at Guadalcanal. The shore party procedures that became SOP at Cape Gloucester as a matter of course were based on the beach and shore conditions found there. However, their ready adaptation by the 1st Marine Division to the very different conditions prevailing at Peleliu and Okinawa, and by the Army in subsequent New Guinea operations and the Philippines campaign, gave ample evidence of their efficacy.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

APPENDIX V

The Cape Gloucester Air Force

One of the more fortunate aspects of the New Britain campaign was the creation of a light air force within the 1st Marine Division two-and-one-half months before D-Day. No one could foresee the type of terrain that would be found, the extensive patrolling required, or that the division would have to spread itself over an area 110 miles long. The proposal for an air liaison unit seemed a good one at the time, but the pilots and their tiny Piper Cub planes proved it substantially more than just a good idea.

The composition of the Cape Gloucester Air Force (the unit's unofficial designation)¹ was typical of the Old Breed. Its pilots wore no wings, carried no flight orders, received no flight pay and were not designated Naval Aviators. The one officer and 11 enlisted men who comprised the pilots and observers

¹ This account draws principally upon an interview with Maj T. A. Petras 11Apr50 and two articles in the *Marine Corps Gazette*: "Gen Rupertus' Improved Air Force" by Capt Richard M. Hunt, Jun 49, and "Aerial Spotters" by Lts T. A. Watson and F. W. McCalpin, Oct44.

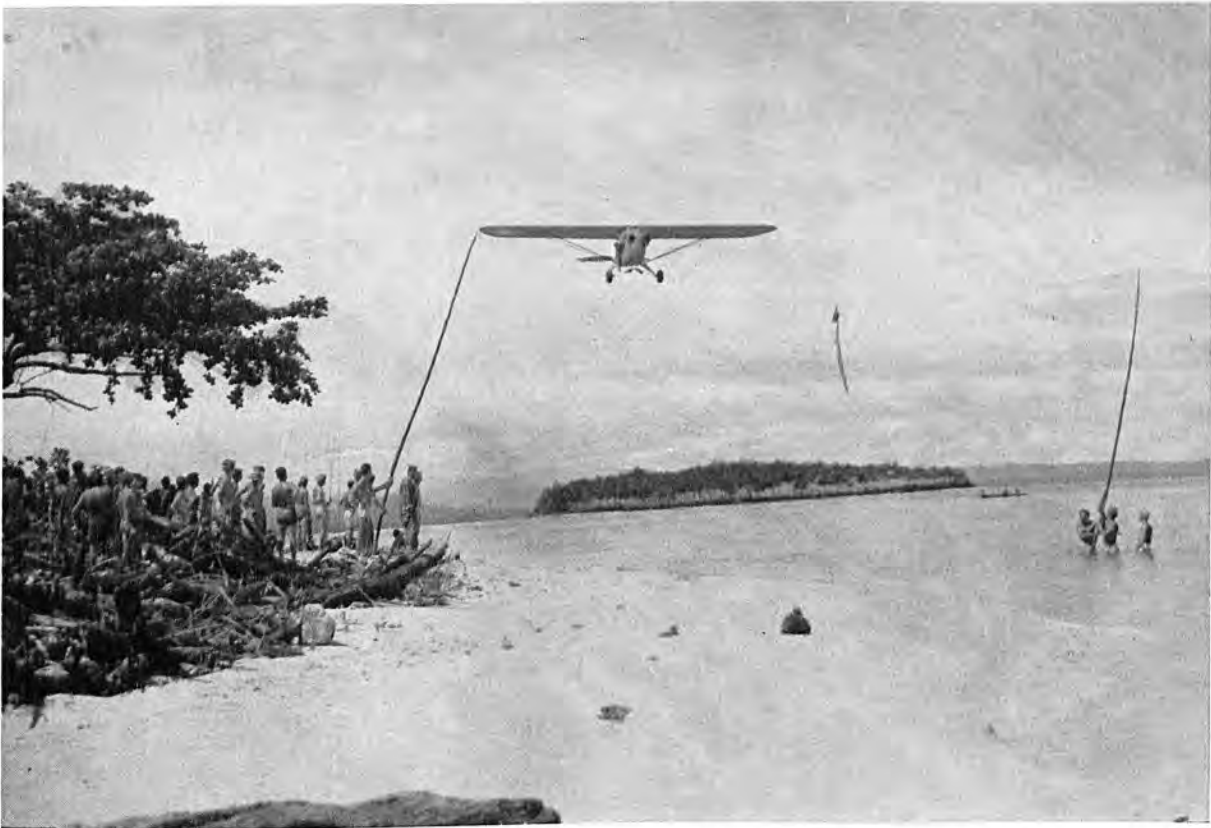
² Because the German Air Force and its deadly Messerschmidts were much in the news at the time, the division affectionately dubbed the unit its "Luft-waffe," the little planes "Messercubs" and "Piperschmidts."

of the aerial unit were merely infantrymen and artillerymen on leave from their organizations. But they flew eight to ten hours daily in New Britain, weather permitting, and logged well over 1,000 hours in the air. The all-essential ground crews were men who might or might not have worked with planes previously, only one having had any extensive experience with Piper Cubs.

Initially the idea of a light air force within the division was for artillery spotting and Captain T. A. Petras, aide and pilot to Major General A. A. Vandegrift, together with Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth H. Weir, Division Air Officer, suggested such a unit to his superior in the early summer of 1943. The division commander was favorably impressed, while Brigadier General W. H. Rupertus, then ADC, was of the same mind, having recently witnessed Army air-ground maneuvers.

On his next visit to SWPA headquarters in Brisbane, General Vandegrift brought the matter to the attention of General MacArthur, who agreed to furnish the division 12 planes when it reached Goodenough Island.

Once in the New Guinea area, General Rupertus, having succeeded General Vandegrift in command, placed Captain Petras and



THE METHOD USED AT CAPE GLOUCESTER to effect a message pickup by air. This photograph was made later in the year at Pavuvu.

his co-pilot, Lieutenant R. F. Murphy, in charge of organizing and training the unit. A division order called for all personnel with flying experience to identify themselves, and 60 applicants appeared. From these, 12 were selected as pilots and observers. Administratively the Air Liaison Unit was a part of Headquarters Battalion, later transferring to the 11th Marines and still later reverting back to Headquarters.

Of the 12 L-4 65 horsepower Piper Cubs provided by the Army, six were considered in good condition and six were in varying states of disrepair. By utilizing parts from the latter group, however, nine planes were kept in flyable condition.

For more than two month the personnel of the newly created air force trained over the jungles, practicing artillery spotting, radio sending and receiving, signalling, and message pickups. In embarking for Cape Gloucester the planes were partially dis-

mantled and stowed on LST's, unloading on Yellow Beaches 1 and 2 at H-plus 6 hours.

Upon hitting the beach the air unit experimented with floats on one plane, but the surf proved too heavy for satisfactory service. However, once the airdrome was acquired, air operations began in earnest. It was quickly learned that the original mission—artillery spotting—could not be handled satisfactorily due to faulty air-ground communications, but the planes were used extensively for other projects.

The big airlift of the campaign was the three-week Puller patrol to Gilnit. By pre-arrangement with the patrol commander the light planes supplied the large group with the necessities of life and also dropped and picked up messages. The aircraft, carrying two cases of K rations per load, could fly in at 50 to 200 feet and pinpoint the air drop target.



THE CAPE GLOUCESTER AIR FORCE utilized the Talasea airstrip.

Additional assignments included flying senior officers to forward areas, photography, spotting Japanese troops, giving scouts a preliminary view of the ground they were to cover, general reconnaissance, and "bombing" the Japanese with hand grenades.

As the division extended itself eastward to Talasea, from Cape Gloucester, scheduled runs between the two points were inaugurated. "Local" hops were done with the L-4's, stopping at intermediate points such as Iboki. With two new L-5 185 horsepower Stinsons piloted by Army personnel, non-stop "express" trips were made in one and a half hours as compared with the 20 hours required via LCM.

The planes were not armed. Fortunately, they were never caught aloft by Japanese aircraft. Captured enemy documents indicated that the tiny craft were feared because

their presence usually fore-shadowed artillery or infantry action, and as a result they were seldom fired at from the ground. No planes or pilots were lost in combat, but operational accidents accounted for two of the craft. One L-4 cracked up at Iboki when it attempted take off overloaded. An L-5 came to grief when it had to land on the Number 1 strip at Gloucester and hit a bomb crater.

The Cape Gloucester Air Force performed its functions remarkably well with few experienced personnel to start and a constant shortage of parts and maintenance equipment. The New Britain campaign could have been won without it, but its presence eased to some extent a difficult operation.

The irregular air force accompanied the division to the Russel Islands where it continued to operate, making runs between Pavuvu, Banika and Guadalcanal. Before

the Peleliu operation, however, a Quantico-trained squadron of Naval Aviators replaced the "amateurs" of Cape Gloucester. Upon General Rupertus' recommendation the original pilots were awarded the Air Medal, and

they, together with the observers and maintenance men, returned to their original organizations.

Thus the Cape Gloucester Air Force became a memory, and a pleasant one.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

APPENDIX VI

Chronology

1942

- 23 January Japan invades New Britain, New Ireland, Solomons; seizes Rabaul.
- 8 March Japanese invade New Guinea (Lae, Salamaua, Finshhafen).
- 4-8 May Battle of the Coral Sea.
- 3-6 June Battle of Midway.
- 28 July Japanese start overland drive on Port Moresby from Buna-Sanananda area.
- 7 August 1st Marine Division lands in Tulagi area and on Guadalcanal; first American land offensive undertaken in the war against Japan.
- 5 September Japanese invasion attempt wiped out at Milne Bay.
- 13-15 November Battle of Guadalcanal; final Japanese attempt to engage in naval action in the Southern Solomons ends in disaster for the Japanese Navy.
- 9 December Relief of 1st Marine Division begun at Guadalcanal;

division transferred operationally from SoPac to SWPA.

1943

- 12 January 1st Marine Division arrives at Melbourne, Australia.
- 23 January Australian-U. S. counterdrive recaptures Buna-Sanananda area.
- 7-8 February Japanese naval feint enables Japan to deceive U. S. Fleet and facilitate the final evacuation of forces from Guadalcanal.
- 1-4 March Battle of the Bismarck Sea.
- 29 March Joint Chiefs of Staff issue CARTWHEEL directive.
- 21 June Central Solomons campaign opened with landings by Marines and Army troops at Segi Point, New Georgia.
- 30 June Woodlark and Tobriand Islands occupied by 12th Defense Bn and Army elements.
- 8 July Major General W. H. Rupertus relieves Major Gen-

	eral A. A. Vandegrift as Commanding General, 1st Marine Division.		ADC attack order for the drive toward Hill 660.
15 August	U. S.-New Zealand forces land at Vella-Lavella.	11 January	Marines take Aogiri Ridge and General Shepherd orders it named "Walt's Ridge."
31 August	1st Marine Division alerted for movement from Melbourne to advanced staging area.	16 January	Hill 660 taken by 3d Bn, 7th Marines.
19 September	1st Marine Division combat teams begin departure from Melbourne.	31 January	Marine patrols locate General Matsuda's abandoned headquarters at Nakarop or "Egaroppu."
24 September	Bradbeer scout patrol to Cape Gloucester.	16 February	Army patrol from Arawe meets elements of the Gilnit Group on the Itni River, thus securing all western New Britain.
2 October	Capture of Finschhafen by Allied forces completes recapture of Lae area.	21 February	3d Bn, 5th Marines lands at Karai-ai.
1 November	IMAC opens Bougainville campaign with landing at Cape Torokina.	25 February	2d Bn, 5th Marines lands at Iboki.
5 November	First carrier-based air strike at Rabaul.	29 February	1st Cavalry Division lands in the Admiralties.
25 November	Kavieng, New Ireland, bombed by carrier-based planes.	6 March	Combat Team A (5th Marines, reinforced) lands at Volupai Plantation for Talasea operation.
30 November	Lieutenant General Walter Krueger issues Field Order No. 5 for Arawe and Cape Gloucester operations.	9 March	Talasea declared secure.
		18 March	Patrols reach Numundo Plantation.
15 December	Amendment 1 to Field Order No. 5 issued, setting up final organization of the the BACKHANDER Task Force; 112th Cavalry RCT lands at Arawe.	20 March	4th Marines seize Emirau.
		22 April	Army lands at Hollandia.
		28 April	1st Marine Division relieved at Cape Gloucester; command of BACKHANDER Task Force passes to Commanding General, 40th Infantry Division.
26 December	1st Marine Division lands on Cape Gloucester at Sili-mati Point and Tauali.	27 November	40th Infantry Division relieved on New Britain by the Australian 5th Division.
30 December	Cape Gloucester airdrome declared secure.		
	1944		1945
1 January	Brigadier General L. C. Shepherd, Jr., issues first	6 September	Japanese surrender Rabaul to the Australians.



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

APPENDIX VII

Task Organization

Over-all commander in the New Britain Campaign was General Douglas MacArthur, within whose area it took place. More directly concerned, however, was Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, simultaneously commanding the New Britain (ALAMO) Force and Sixth Army, to which the 1st Marine Division was operationally attached although under administrative control of I Marine Amphibious Corps, commanded by Major General Roy S. Geiger. The first groups listed below under BACKHANDER Task Force constituted the organization for the landing, 26 December 1943. The ADC Group task organization was established to carry out the drive to the southeast, while a new task grouping was set up for the APPEASE (Talasea) operation.

BACKHANDER TASK FORCE¹ (1st Marine Division, Reinforced) (15 December 1943) MajGen William H. Rupertus

Greyhound Group (Combat Team C) Col Julian N. Frisbie

7th Marines

1st Bn, 11th Marines

4th Bn, 11th Marines

¹ The Garrison Group and the Amoeba Group (Division Rear Echelon) have been omitted. Company B, 1st Tank Battalion remained in New Guinea until 9Jan44 when it joined the Army forces at Arawe. Third Battalion, 11th Marines (less Battery H) remained at Finschhafen until it rejoined the division on 19Feb44.

Co A, 1st Tank Bn
3d Plt, Co D (Scout) 1st Tk Bn
3d Plt, MP Co, Div Hq Bn
Btry D, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
3d Plt, Btry A, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
Det Sup & Serv Co, 1st Serv Bn
Co C, 1st MT Bn
Co C, 1st Med Bn
Co C, 1st Amph Trac Bn
2d Bn, 17th Marines
Det Hq Co, Hq Bn, 1st Marines
3d Plt, Ord Co, 1st Serv Bn
Det Co C, 583d Sig Bn
Det 15th Weapons Sq
Det 2d ESB
Det Sp Wpns Gp, 12th Def Bn

Wild Duck Group (Combat Team B) Col William J. Whaling

1st Marines (less BLT 21)

2d Bn, 11th Marines

Det H&S Btry, 11th Marines

C Btry, 1st Sp Wpns Bn

2d Plt, A Btry, 1st Sp Wpns Bn

Co B, 1st Amph Trac Bn (less 2d Plt)

Co B, 1st Bn, 17th Marines (less 2d Plt)

1st Plt, Co D (Scout) 1st Tk Bn

2d Plt, 1st MP Co

Co A, 1st MT Bn

2d Plt, Ord Co, 1st Ser Bn

Det Sup & Sup Co, 1st Ser Bn

Det 583d Sig Bn

Det 2d ESB

D Med Co, 1st Med Bn

Stoneface Group (Battalion Landing Team 21) Lt
Col James M. Masters, Sr.

2d Bn, 1st Marines
Btry H, 11th Marines
4th Plt, Btry A, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
1st Plt (Surg) Co B, 1st Med Bn
Det Co C, 583d Sig Bn
Det ANGAU
Det 2d ESB

Antiaircraft Group Col William H. Harrison
Det H&S Btry, 12th Def Bn
90mm Gp, 12th Def Bn
Det Sp Wpns Gp, 12th Def Bn
One gun Sec, 155mm Gp, 12th Def Bn

Engineer Group, Col Harold E. Rosecrans
17th Marines (less 2d Bn & Cos A, B and C)
Co E, 1st Med Bn
Base Engr Hq

Reserve Group (Combat Team A) Col John T.
Selden

5th Marines
5th Bn, 11th Marines
Co A, 1st Bn, 17th Marines
Co B, 1st MT Bn
Co A, 1st Amph Trac Bn
2d Plt, Co D (Scout), 1st Tk Bn
1st Plt, Btry A, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
Co A, 1st Med Bn
Btry B, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
1st Plt, MP Co, Div Hq Bn
Co A, 1st Tk Bn
Co C, 1st Tk Bn
1st Plt, Ord Co, 1st Serv Bn
Det Sup & Serv Co, 1st Serv Bn
* * * * *

ADC GROUP TASK ORGANIZATION BrigGen
L. C. Shepherd, Jr. (1 January 1944)

Attack Group Col Julian N. Frisbie
7th Marines (less 2d Bn)
3d Bn, 5th Marines
Co C, 1st Amph Trac Bn
3d Plat, Ord Co, 1st Serv Bn
Det Sup & Serv Co, 1st Serv Bn

Artillery Group LtCol R. B. Luckey
1st Bn, 11th Marines

4th Bn, 11th Marines
Det H&S Btry, 11th Marines

Shore Party Group LtCol R. G. Ballance
2d Bn, 17th Marines
Co C, 17th Marines
Co C, 1st MT Bn
Co C, 1st Med Bn
Co E, 1st Med Bn
Det 1st Serv Bn

Group Reserve
2d Bn, 7th Marines
Btry D, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
Plt, Co C, 1st Tk Bn

* * * * *

APPEASE OPERATION TASK ORGANIZATION
(1 March 1944)

Attack Group Col O. P. Smith

5th Marines
2d Bn, 11th Marines
Co A, 17th Marines
Co F, 17th Marines
Btry B, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
1st Plt, Btry A, 1st Sp Wpns Bn
1st Plt, Co C, 1st Tk Bn (plus 4 Med Tks)
Co A, 1st Med Bn
Co B, 1st Amph Trac Bn (less 2 Amphib Traes)
1st Plt, Co B, 1st MT Bn (less 1 Sec)
2d Plt, Co B, 1st Bn, 1st Marines (MPs)
Det Ord Co, 1st Serv Bn
Det Graves Regis Sec, 1st Serv En
3d ALP
Boat Bn, 533d Engineer Boat & Shore Regt (less
Cos B & C)
Det Co C, 592d EBS
Det Co F, 533d EBS
Med Det, 533d EBS
Co A, 563d Engineer Boat Maintenance Bn (less 1
Blt)
Prov Div LCT (5) Flotilla 8, CTF76

*Reserve Group*² LtCol W. A. Reeves
1st Bn, 1st Marines (less 1 Plt)
Det Co B, 1st Med Bn

² The Reserve Group was set up by the BACKHANDER Task Force, but it was not included in the 5th Marines' operation order, nor was it ever committed on the Willaumez Peninsula.

Executive Officer Maj Rowland L. Hall¹
 (To 14 January)
 Maj Donald J. Robinson
 (To 14 April)
 Capt Michael J. DeSandis
 Bn-3 Maj Rowland L. Hall
 (From 15 January to 19
 March)
 Capt Michael J. DeSandis

1st Marines (CT B)

Commanding Officer .. Col William J. Whaling
 (To 28 February)
 Col Lewis B. Puller
 Executive Officer LtCol Harold D. Harris
 (To 23 February)
 LtCol John E. Weber
 (To 20 March)
 LtCol Walker A. Reaves
 (From 8 April)
 R-1 1stLt James K. Young
 (To 22 January)
 1stLt James D. Currie
 (To 6 March)
 1stLt Frank C. Shephard
 R-2 Capt George P. Hunt
 (To 6 January)
 Capt James W. Horton
 R-3 Maj Martin F. Rockmore
 (To 6 January)
 Capt John N. Rentz
 (To 20 January)
 Capt Arthur W. Larson
 (To 13 April)
 Maj Bernard T. Kelly
 R-4 Maj Francis T. Eagan

1st Bn, 1st Marines (BLT 11)

Commanding Officer .. LtCol Walker A. Reaves
 (To 7 April)
 Maj Raymond G. Davis
 Executive Officer Maj Louis E. Hudgins, Jr.
 Bn-3 Capt Robert K. McClelland
 (To 21 February)
 Capt James M. Rogers

2nd Bn, 1st Marines (BLT 21)

Commanding Officer .. LtCol James M. Masters, Sr.
 (To 9 February)
 Maj Charles H. Brush, Jr.
 (To 11 April)
 LtCol William W. Stickney
 Executive Officer Maj Charles H. Brush, Jr.
 (To 9 February)
 Capt Roy W. Wallace, Jr.
 (To 11 April)

Maj Charles H. Brush, Jr.
 Bn-3 Capt Arthur W. Larson
 (To 20 January)
 Capt John J. Jachym

3d Bn, 1st Marines (BLT 31)

Commanding Officer .. LtCol Joseph F. Hankins
 Executive Officer Maj William McNulty
 Bn-3 Capt George B. Gierhart
 (To 21 February)
 1stLt James A. Junkin

5th Marines (CT A)

Commanding Officer .. Col John T. Selden
 (To 29 February)
 Col Oliver P. Smith
 (To 11 April)
 LtCol Henry W. Buse, Jr.
 Executive Officer LtCol William K. Enright
 (To 5 January)
 LtCol Lewis W. Walt
 (To 8 January)
 Maj Harry S. Connor
 (To 12 January)
 LtCol Lewis W. Walt
 (To 31 January)
 LtCol Odell M. Conoley
 (From 9 February to 20
 February)
 LtCol Henry W. Buse, Jr.
 (To 11 April)
 Maj Harry S. Connor
 R-1 Capt Alan F. Dill
 R-2 Capt Henry J. Adams, Jr.
 (To 31 March)
 Maj Walter S. McIlhenny
 (To 10 April)
 Capt Levi T. Burcham
 R-3 Maj Gordon D. Gayle
 (To 5 January)
 Maj Harry S. Connor
 R-4 Capt William L. Williams

1st Bn, 5th Marines (BLT 15)

Commanding Officer .. Maj William H. Barba
 Executive Officer Maj Harry S. Connor
 (To 5 January)
 Maj Harold T. A. Richmond
 Bn-3 Capt Walter S. McIlhenny
 (To 17 January)
 Capt Maurice Raphael

2nd Bn, 5th Marines (BLT 25)

Commanding Officer .. LtCol Lewis W. Walt
 (To 5 January)
 Maj Gordon D. Gayle
 Executive Officer Maj Charles R. Baker
 Bn-3 Capt Walter H. Cuenin
 (To 31 January)

¹ Maj Hall served also as Bn-3 as additional duty.

Capt Edward W Bryan

3d Bn, 5th Marines (BLT 35)

Commanding Officer . . . LtCol David S. McDougal
 (To 7 January)
 Maj Joseph S. Skoczylas
 (7 January only)
 Col Lewis B. Puller
 (7-8 January)
 LtCol Lewis W Walt²
 (To 12 January)
 LtCol Harold O. Deakin
 (To 10 April)
 Maj Walter S. McIlhenny
 Executive Officer . . . Maj Joseph S. Skoczylas
 (To 7 January)
 Maj Robert H. Dillard
 (To 31 March)
 Maj Clyde A. Brooks
 (From 11 April)
 Bn-3 Capt George W. Smith
 (To 22 January)
 Capt Erskine W. Wells

7th Marines (CT C)

Commanding Officer . . . Col Julian N. Frisbie
 (To 20 February)
 Col Herman H. Hanneken
 Executive Officer . . . LtCol Lewis B. Puller
 (To 23 February)
 LtCol John E. Weber
 (From 21 March)
 R-1 1stLt Frank C. Sheppard
 (To 6 March)
 CWO Frank R Shaw
 (To 31 March)
 Capt Robert A. Scherr
 R-2 1stLt Francis T. Farrell
 R-3 Maj Victor H. Streit
 R-4 Capt Marion S. Reed

1st Bn, 7th Marines (BLT 17)

Commanding Officer . . . LtCol John E. Weber
 (To 6 March)
 Maj Waite W. Worden
 (To 11 April)
 LtCol Harold O. Deakin
 Executive Officer . . . Maj Waite W. Worden
 (To 6 March)
 Maj Lloyd W. Martin
 (To 11 April)
 Maj Waite W. Worden
 Bn-3 Capt Preston S. Parish

² McDougal and Skoczylas were WIA on the same day; Puller took over command jointly with that of 3/7 pending arrival of Walt. See Chap VII.

2nd Bn, 7th Marines (BLT 27)

Commanding Officer . . LtCol Odell M. Conoley
 (To 7 February)
 Maj Charles S. Nichols, Jr.,
 (To 14 February)
 LtCol John W. Scott, Jr.
 Executive Officer . . . Maj Charles S. Nichols, Jr.
 (To 7 February)
 (From 15 Feb to 17 March)
 Maj Claude B. Cross
 Bn-3 Capt Louis G. Ditta
 (To 31 January)
 Capt William T. Watkins
 (To 23 February)
 Capt George E. Sexton

3d Bn, 7th Marines (BLT 37)

Commanding Officer . . LtCol William R. Williams
 (To 3 January)
 LtCol Lewis B. Puller
 (To 8 January)
 LtCol Henry W. Buse, Jr.
 (To 20 February)
 Maj William J. Piper, Jr.
 Executive Officer . . . Maj William J. Piper, Jr.
 (To 20 February)
 Maj Hierome L. Opie, Jr.
 Bn-3 Capt William J. King
 (To 3 January)
 1stLt Robert B. Morton
 (To 31 March)
 1stLt Hugh S. Tremaine

11th Marines (Artillery)

Commanding Officer . . Col Robert H. Pepper
 (To 31 January)
 Col William H. Harrison
 Executive Officer . . . LtCol Robert B. Luckey
 (To 14 February)
 LtCol Thomas B. Hughes
 R-1 Capt Floyd C. Maner
 R-2 Maj Daniel S. Pregnall
 (To 21 March)
 Capt Richard W. Payne
 R-3 Maj Louis A. Ennis
 (To 16 February)
 Maj Elliott Wilson
 (From 22 February)
 R-4 1stLt Gordon R. DalGLISH

1st Bn, 11th Marines

Commanding Officer . . LtCol Lewis J. Fields
 Executive Officer . . . Maj Hoyt U. Bookhart, Jr.
 Bn-3 Maj Elliott Wilson
 (To 21 February)
 Maj John R. Chaisson

2d Bn, 11th Marines

Commanding Officer . . . Maj Noah P. Wood, Jr.
Executive Officer Maj Fred T. Bishopp
Bn-3 Maj Archie D. Swift, Jr.

3d Bn, 11th Marines

Commanding Officer . . Maj Ernest P. Foley
(To 2 February)
LtCol Forest C. Thompson
(To 25 March)
LtCol Richard A. Evans
Executive Officer Maj Henry M. Wellman, Jr.
(To 2 February)
Maj Ernest P. Foley
(To 12 March)
Maj Henry M. Wellman, Jr.
(To 21 March)
LtCol Richard A. Evans
(To 25 March)
Maj Henry M. Wellman, Jr.
Bn-3 Capt Searle W. Gillespie
(To 2 February)
Maj Henry M. Wellman, Jr.
(To 12 March)
Capt Searle W. Gillespie
(To 21 March)
Maj. Daniel S. Pregnall

4th Bn, 11th Marines

Commanding Officer . . LtCol Thomas B. Hughes
(To 16 February)
LtCol Louis A. Ennis
Executive Officer Maj Dale H. Heely
(To 16 March)
Maj George E. Bowdoin
Bn-3 Capt Ivan L. Smith
(To 10 January)
Maj George E. Bowdoin
(To 16 March)
Capt Marshall Smith

5th Bn, 11th Marines

Commanding Officer . . LtCol Charles M. Nees
Executive Officer Maj James H. Moffatt, Jr.
Bn-3 Maj Samuel S. Wooster
(To 9 February)
Maj William M. Miller
(To 13 March)
Capt William J. Hannan

17th Marines (Engineer Reg't)

Commanding Officer . . Col Harold E. Rosecrans
(To 18 February)
Col Francis I. Fenton
Executive Officer LtCol Robert G. Ballance
(From 22 February)
R-1 Capt William I. Kent
(To 31 January)

Capt Francis L. Cooper
(To 30 March)
WO Paul Adams
(To 19 April)

R-2 Capt Francis L. Cooper
Capt Albert N. Lange
(To 21 February)
Capt Warren S. Sivertsen
R-3 Maj John P. McGuinness
(To 21 February)
Maj Levi W. Smith, Jr.
R-4 Maj William A. Stiles

1st Bn, 17th Marines (Engineer)

Commanding Officer . . Maj Henry H. Crockett
(To 4 March)
Maj John P. McGuinness
Executive Officer Maj Austin S. Igleheart, Jr.
(To 21 February)
Maj John P. McGuinness
(To 4 March)
Maj John H. Goodwin
(To 17 April)
Capt Sidney Schulder
Bn-3 Capt Sidney Schulder
(To 21 March)
Capt Jim M. Joyner
(To 3 April)
Capt Sidney Schulder
(To 17 April)
Capt Eugene T. Schoenfelder

2d Bn, 17th Marines (Pioneer)

Commanding Officer . . LtCol Robert G. Ballance
(To 21 February)
Maj Austin S. Igleheart, Jr.
Executive Officer Maj Levi W. Smith, Jr.
(To 21 February)
Capt Nathaniel Morgenthal
Bn-3 Capt Nathaniel Morgenthal
(To 21 February)
Capt Franklin P. Walton
(To 31 March)
1stLt John H. Heussner

3d Bn, 17th Marines (Seabees)

Commanding Officer . . Cdr Thomas A. Woods,
(CEC) (To 31 January)
LtCdr James T. Redd, (CEC)
Executive Officer LtCdr James T. Redd, (CEC)
(To 31 January)
Bn-3 Lt William W. Wickes
(To 31 March)
Lt C. B. Farrell
Lt William W. Wickes

12th Defense Battalion

Commanding Officer . . Col William H. Harrison
(To 31 January)
LtCol Merlyn D. Holmes
Executive Officer LtCol Merlyn D. Holmes
(To 31 January)

Bn-3 LtCol Louis C. Reinberg
Maj Robert C. McGlashan
(To 21 January)
Maj Harry F. Noyes, Jr.
(To 31 January)
Maj Joseph R. Jacyno



THE CAMPAIGN ON NEW BRITAIN

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