



**BOUGAINVILLE and the**

**NORTHERN**



**SOLOMONS**



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## BOUGAINVILLE and the NORTHERN SOLOMONS



Bougainville, largest of the Solomon Islands chain, is approximately 125 miles long and has an average width of 30 miles. A League of Nations mandate administered by Australia, Bougainville was captured by Japanese forces in their drive towards New Guinea early in World War II. By 1943, Bougainville and the other islands of the Northern Solomons had gained strategic importance. Bougainville had adequate facilities for basing fleet units and aircraft. Its capture would contain Japanese forces at Rabaul and help neutralize the major enemy base at Truk.

Japanese planners were under no illusions about Allied intentions. When elements of the I Marine Amphibious Corps began landings on Cape Torokina on 1 November 1943, the Japanese garrison was swift to react. Assault forces of the 3rd Marine Division fought off a major counterattack on the night of the landing. This attack, and a subsequent battle on 7-8 November, was decisively beaten. Despite these victories, Marine units faced stiff Japanese resistance and physical difficulties in November and December 1943. In January, the 3rd Marine Division was relieved by Army units of the XIV Corps in order to prepare for the invasion of Guam. By that time, the Japanese had expended in excess of 10,000 lives to defend the Northern Solomons. U.S. losses were less than 1,000 killed and 2,800 wounded.

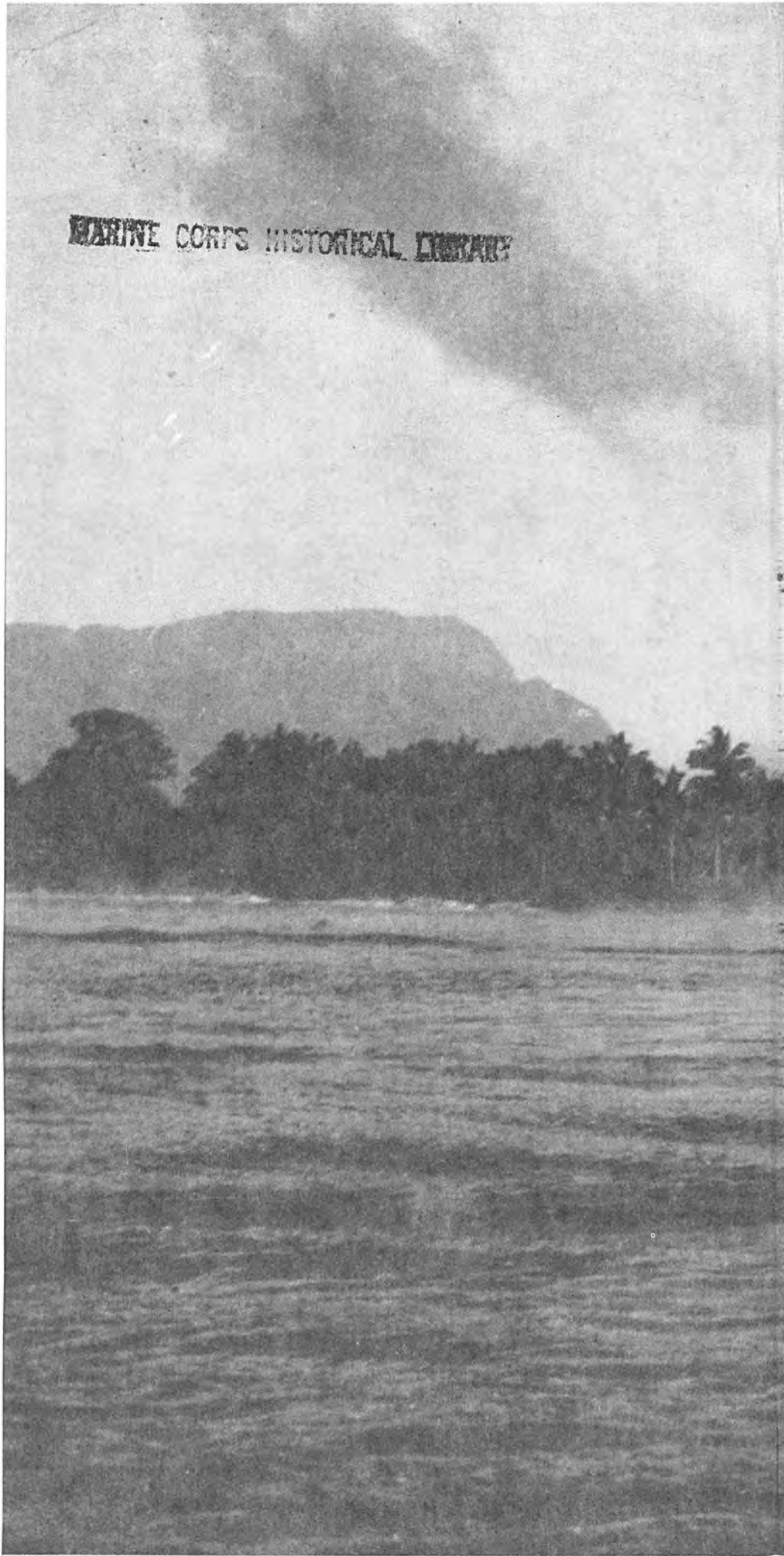
*Bougainville and the Northern Solomons* is an operational monograph prepared by the Historical Section, Headquarters United States Marine Corps. In addition to the 3rd Marine Division's battle for Bougainville, it also covers operations of New Zealand's 8th Brigade Group in the Treasury Islands, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment on Choiseul, the 30th New Zealand Battalion in the Green Islands and the Marine Raider Battalions on Emirau.

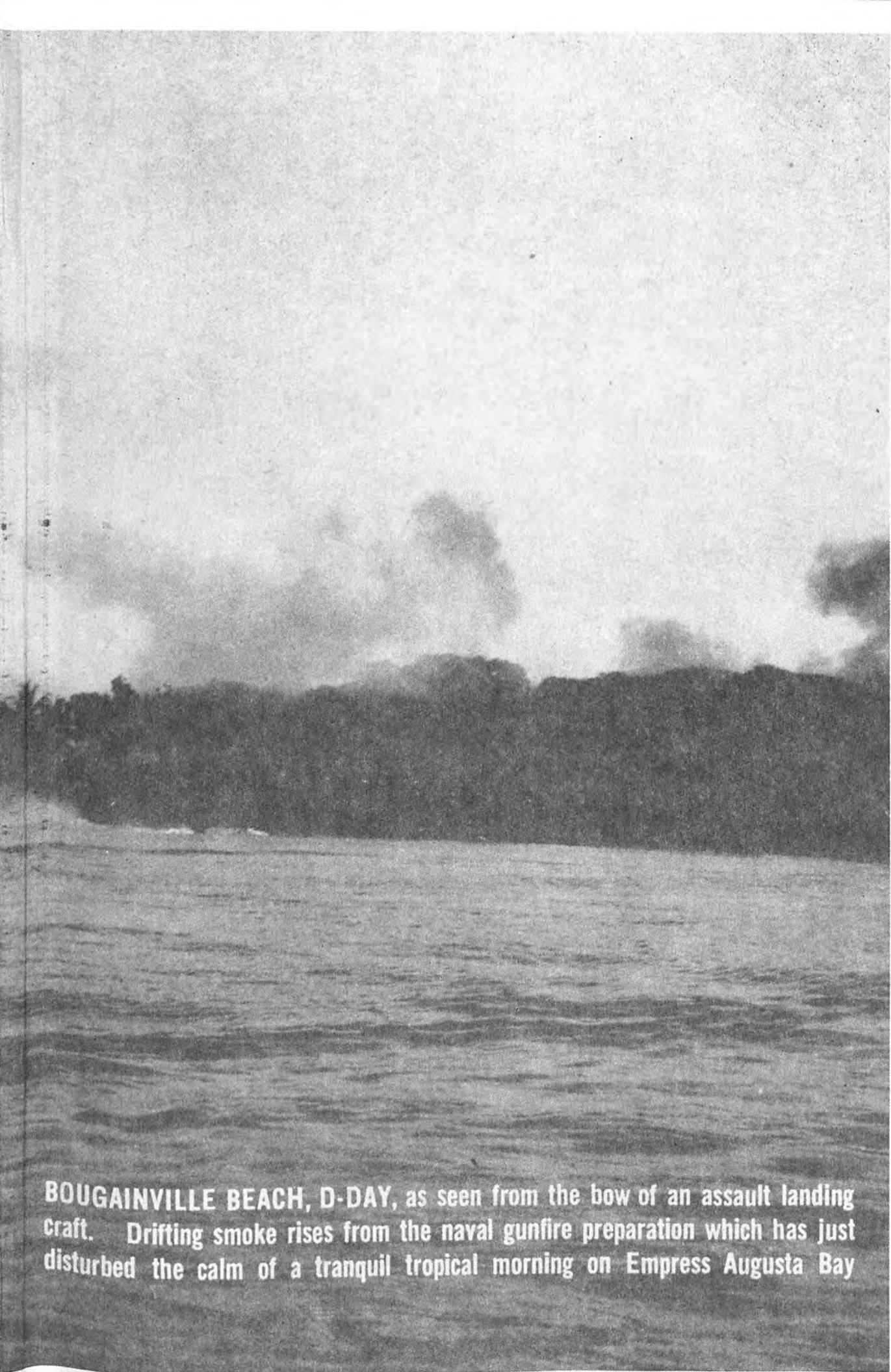
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**BOUGAINVILLE BEACH, D-DAY, as seen from the bow of an assault landing craft. Drifting smoke rises from the naval gunfire preparation which has just disturbed the calm of a tranquil tropical morning on Empress Augusta Bay**



# **BOUGAINVILLE and the NORTHERN SOLOMONS**



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

Major John N. Rentz, USMCR

**1948**

**Marine Corps Monographs  
in This Series**

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THE COVER OF THIS NARRATIVE shows men of the Third Marines hotly engaged on Blue Beach shortly after their landing.

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## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

# Foreword

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BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS is a narrative not only of Marines against the Japanese, but of Marines against the jungle. In all the past history of the Corps, whether it be Nicaragua, Haiti, or Guadalcanal, it is improbable that Marine units ever faced and defeated such an implacable combination of terrain and hostile opposition.

In this struggle, as always, superior training, discipline, determination and unquestioning will to win on the part of individual Marines were the crucial factors. Indeed, those same factors may be said to constitute common denominators of victory under any circumstances, whether jungle or atoll, on the ground or in the air.

C. B. CATES,

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

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## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

# Preface

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BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS CAMPAIGN is the fourth in a series of operational monographs being prepared by the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, concerning Marine Corps operations in World War II. As a sufficient number of these narratives are brought to completion, they will be edited into a single operational history of the Marine Corps in the past war.

Throughout the campaign for the Northern Solomons, the Marine Corps took part in every action, either through the presence of Marine units or by exercise of landing force command. However, many of the troops involved at one time or another came from the U. S. Army or from the Imperial Forces of New Zealand. Because of this thread of continuity, it seems appropriate that the entire campaign, diverse and long as it was, be treated as an entity. However, it is more correct that the Army should recount the story of the repulse of the major Japanese counteroffensive on Bougainville in the spring of 1944. The U. S. Army exercised command and furnished the XIV Corps which fought so gallantly and bore the brunt of the action in the decisive defeat of the Japanese forces seeking to eliminate the beachhead established by the I Marine Amphibious Corps. Attached to the XIV Corps, was the 3d Defense Battalion, FMF and Marine Air Groups 14 and 24. Thus, operations and events which took place on Bougainville after relief of the I Marine Amphibious Corps by the XIV Corps, U. S. Army, have been mentioned in summary alone. In the Green Islands narrative, conversely, although command did not vest in a Marine Corps Headquarters, a substantial portion of the participating units (four aviation Squadrons) were Marine, and it is necessary that the entire story—not a long one—be related in order that the reader may gain the rounded picture which will enable him to follow the Marine air operations.

One of the Northern Solomons engagements, the so-called Choiseul Diversion, has been treated in more detail, for exemplary purposes, than the much larger actions on Bougainville. The reasons for this differentiation lie in the smaller scale of the individual units—often squads, or patrols of platoon size—as well as in a desire that Marine officers be able to study, in full detail, the performance of a relatively small unit in an independent mission of importance.

For the purpose of this study, the Northern Solomons is defined as that area lying north of a line drawn from the southeastern tip of Choiseul westward past the northern tip of Vella Lavella. Although in the Bismarck Archipelago, Emirau Island is included herein because operations conducted there were directed, essentially as part of The Northern Solomons Campaign, by the South Pacific command.

Acknowledgment must be made for the generous assistance furnished by Dr. John Miller, of the Pacific Section, Historical Division, Special Staff, United States Army; Mr. J. J. Bagnall of the Collection and Dissemination Division, Central Intelligence Agency; and of course to the staff, Office of Naval Records and Library. Lieutenant Colonel R. D. Heintz, Jr., Officer-in-Charge of the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, participated extensively in the editing, cartographic planning, and final production of this work. Finally, acknowledgment is made to those officers and men who furnished additional information of historical value by submitting to interview and having their opinions and assertions duly recorded.

All statements contained herein have been documented and cited for the reader's convenience. They are as accurate as the sources from which they were drawn. In the first four chapters no effort is made to explain or excuse successes or failures. In the fifth and concluding chapter, however, surmise appears in the evaluation of the campaign and analysis of lessons learned. The first draft of this monograph was submitted to a number of the key officers and men who participated in various Northern Solomons operations, and the resultant work evolves from their criticisms and comments regarding the initial effort.

Maps and sketches in this monograph were prepared by the Reproduction Department, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia. All photographs, unless otherwise indicated, are official Marine Corps, Navy, or Army.

It is hoped that all persons with first hand experience will aid in further improvement of this study by submitting written comments or, when feasible, visiting the Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters Marine Corps, to make oral comments and be interviewed.



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





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## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER I

# Plans and Preparations

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### STRATEGIC SITUATION

IN THE PACIFIC prior to 1944, the attention of U. S. strategic planners was, to a great extent, directed toward the reduction of Truk and establishment of our forces in the Carolines and Marianas. In common with enemy positions in the Marshalls and Gilberts, Rabaul, in eastern New Britain, constituted a principal outguard of Truk. Until Rabaul, in turn, could be brought under our control or suitably neutralized, Truk and the Carolines could not be approached from the south.

Rabaul, however, not only furnished security for the Northern Solomons and Carolines, but also provided a base for possible Japanese offensive operations against New Guinea, Australia, and New Zealand. As the immediate key to the Japanese defense of the area, Rabaul constituted the major obstacle to Allied advance up the Solomons chain, and therefore became the primary objective.

Thus the very name—Rabaul—haunted the thinking of Allied leaders in the South and Southwest Pacific. It was the main remaining threat to the American-Australian life-line. No operation in the Solomons or New Guinea, no matter how successful could be considered complete as long as Rabaul remained strong, since it was always possible for resurgent Japanese troops to move from Rabaul and attempt the reconquest even of Guadalcanal or eastern New Guinea.

Neutralization of Rabaul, in consequence, was an indispensable condition of the South Pacific planning of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was

essential that the place either be seized or contained before projected operations in the Philippines or the South Pacific could be undertaken. Thus the Northern Solomons campaign, which consisted of one large operation (Bougainville) and numerous smaller ones,<sup>1</sup> became in effect the campaign to contain and neutralize Rabaul.

To bring about this objective, the Allied high command, as early as July, 1942, decreed that the Rabaul area be brought under air attack, to destroy its base facilities and cut its supply lines. Such an effort necessitated seizure, establishment and protection of airfields and intermediate airstrips where bombers could be based and from which covering fighters could be flown.

Having decided to bomb Rabaul to ineffectiveness the Joint Chiefs of Staff further elected to choose sites for establishment of the proposed airdromes. Both for the immediate purpose of providing fighter-cover for the bombers, as well as by reason of its broader importance to the strategy of Northern Solomons, it was obvious from the beginning that a location on Bougainville would be more effective than any other area under consideration.

Rabaul had been first specified as an objective of Allied effort by a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 2 July 1942. This directive assigned three tasks to South and Southwest Pacific forces; Task One, seizure of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi, and "adjacent positions"; Task Two, seizure of the remainder of the Solomons, Lae, Salamaua, and

<sup>1</sup> In addition to Bougainville, the Northern Solomons campaign embodied the following operations: Treasury Islands, Choiseul, Green and Emirau.



**THE COASTWATCHERS** became legendary figures in the South Pacific war, living for months in enemy-surrounded jungle, subsisting on what they could find, and operating on their nerve. Here is a typical group of Australian "Cobbers" posed with their ever-faithful native scouts.

the northeast coast of New Guinea; Task Three, seizure of Rabaul and "adjacent positions". Although this directive was later modified, and the concept of seizure of Rabaul was changed to one of neutralization, it fixed the pattern for South and Southwest Pacific operations from August 1942 to the early part of 1944.

Even before the war, Japanese Imperial Headquarters had likewise recognized the significance of Rabaul and the necessity of establishing a southern outguard for that stronghold. Consequently, as part of their strategic scheme, Japanese war planners had incorporated into the design for the Greater East Asia War a concept for seizure of the Solomons and eastern New Guinea

area before November, 1942.<sup>2</sup> In line with this project, almost immediately after 7 December, 1941, Japanese troops occupied Rabaul (23 January 1942).

As dictated in the enemy plan, occupation of Bougainville was to follow immediately.

By 21 January, 1942, the Japanese began to launch air attacks against the 25 Australian soldiers (commanded by Lieutenant J. H. Mackie), who were stationed in the vicinity of Buka Passage, just to the north of Bougainville

<sup>2</sup> US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Campaigns of the Pacific War* (Washington, 1946), 3. Hereinafter cited as *Campaigns*.

Island.<sup>3</sup> By mid-March the Japanese had landed raiding parties at various points along the coasts of Bougainville, and finally, on 30 March, Australian coastwatchers, with sinking hearts, watched gray Japanese warships come sliding out of the cold morning mists, bearing troops whose numbers were to be augmented again and again, and who were destined, dead or alive, to remain in the Northern Solomons for the duration of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Moving out over Bougainville, the Japanese quickly swallowed vantage points on the island. Subsequently, the entire island was in their grasp. Meanwhile the Japanese propaganda machine made headway with its "Asia for the Asiatics doctrine," and many natives of the island not only sympathized with the Japanese cause, but actively abetted it.<sup>5</sup>

By spring of 1943, Japanese troops occupied positions on an arc through the Aleutians, the Marshalls and Gilberts, the Solomons and New Guinea.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the battle of Midway (4-6 June, 1942), however, the enemy had lost four large aircraft carriers,<sup>7</sup> together with the flower of Japanese naval aviation's strength in pilots and planes. Not only did this loss prevent an assault against Midway, but it also later denied to Japan much needed carrier air support in the great sea-battles soon to be fought in defense of the Solomons area.<sup>8</sup>

By February 1943, Buna and Gona in New Guinea, and Guadalcanal in the Solomons were again under Allied control. To the west of Guadalcanal, the Russell Islands were occupied by the Allies on 21 February, 1943 and with complete Allied domination of New Georgia and the Ellice Islands toward the close of August, 1943,

<sup>3</sup> Eric A. Feldt, *The Coastwatchers* (New York, 1946), 58-60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-74. None of the sources consulted gives the identification of this body of men. The point of landing was apparently on the east coast of the island, somewhere between Numa Numa and Kieta.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-70.

<sup>6</sup> F. T. Miller, *History of World War II* (Philadelphia and Toronto, 1945), 607.

<sup>7</sup> *Interrogations of Japanese Officials* (2 vols., Washington, 1946) I, 13. Hereinafter cited as *Interrogations*. Cf. *Campaigns*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Millier, *op. cit.*, 609.

the southward drive of the Japanese was completely stalled.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Allied forces moved steadily along the coast of New Guinea, by April pushing 75 miles northwest of Buna.

Strategically, Allied plans called for establishment of air and naval bases to implement the northward advance. It was necessary to impede the heavy though sporadic Japanese air attacks on Allied bases and front lines, and to cut off the system of air supply that Japan had built up for the New Guinea and Solomons area.<sup>10</sup> To attack in New Guinea without control of the air meant continued operation in face of the great Japanese base at Rabaul on the open flank of such a venture.<sup>11</sup> With necessarily extended supply lines thus laid open to air or sea attack, it was essential that Rabaul be taken, reduced, neutralized, or contained.<sup>12</sup>

As early as May, 1942, General Douglas MacArthur, U. S. A., suggested that the Allies proceed along the southern route of approach toward Japan via the northern shores of New Guinea and the Solomons. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 2 July, 1942, even then recognized that positions on Bougainville would be necessary in order to bring Rabaul under attack.<sup>13</sup>

On 28 February, 1943, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had accepted a plan of operations entitled "Elkton Plan," formulated some six months before by MacArthur. This concept envisaged seizure of operating airdromes in New Georgia to provide land-based air support for subsequent operations against the Northern Solomons. The Joint Chiefs decided that:

Airdromes in southeastern Bougainville are required by South Pacific Force for operations against Rabaul or Kavieng and to support Naval Striking Force. Such bases exist in the Buin-Faisi area. Enemy airdromes in New Georgia are interspersed between the Guadalcanal bases and the bases in the Buin-Faisi area. These must be captured or neutralized prior to the assault on the southern Bougainville bases. With the enemy in possession of a line of supporting airdromes at Kavieng, Rabaul, Buka, and Buin-Faisi, it is improbable that amphibious forces can operate successfully in the New Georgia area prior to neutralization. Therefore, the operations against New

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 617.

<sup>10</sup> *Campaigns*, 175, 184, 191.

<sup>11</sup> E. J. King, *U. S. Navy at War: Official Reports to the Secretary of the Navy* (Washington, 1946), 103.

<sup>12</sup> *Campaigns*, 176.

<sup>13</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Elkton I, Plan of Operations in the Pacific*, 1-3. Hereinafter cited as *Elkton I*.

Georgia are visualized as following the operations to secure airdromes in the Vitiaz Strait area.

The Joint Chiefs went on to declare that—

this operation will be conducted by South Pacific Forces in accordance with plans developed by them. Strong air support of the operations by Southwest Pacific air forces from bases in New Guinea, may be anticipated. The time of initiation of the operations will be controlled by the Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area.

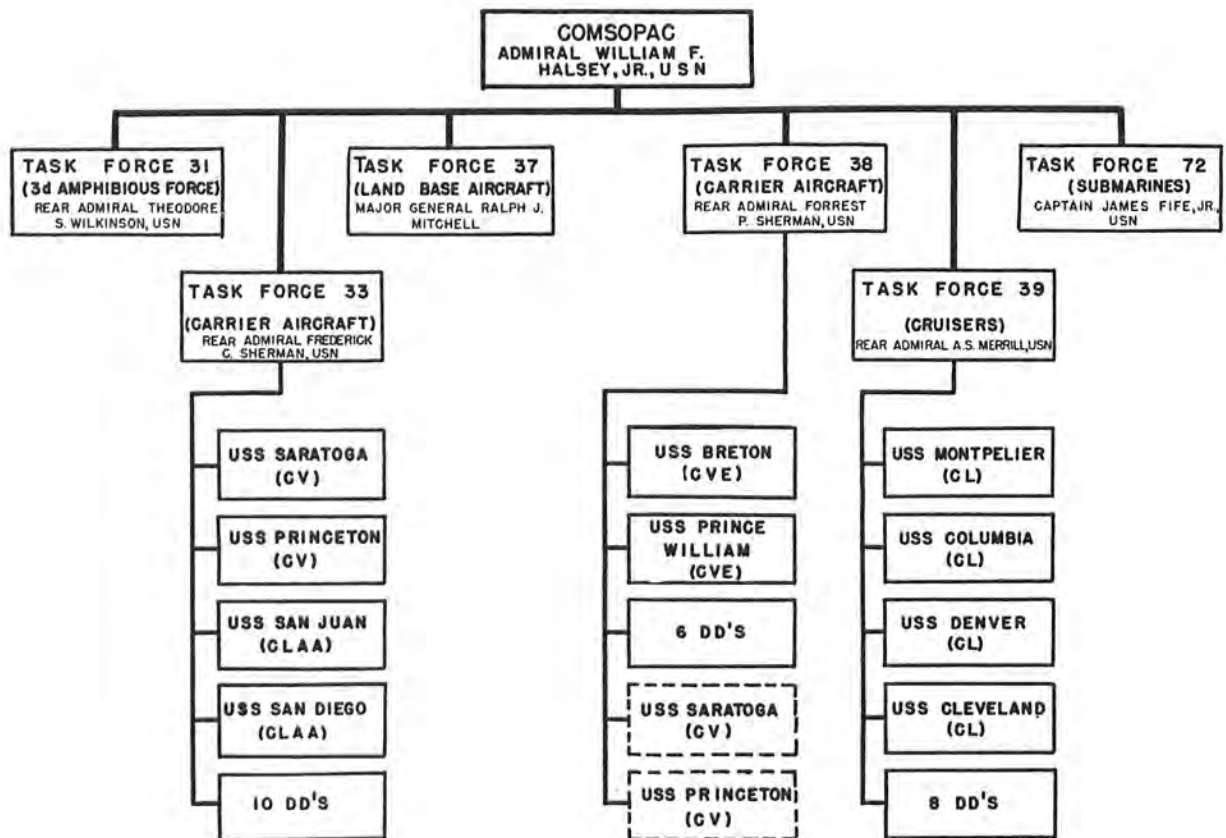
Thus, some eight months before the operation was undertaken, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided to attack the Bougainville area.

By March 1943, therefore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in revising its orders of 2 July 1942, directed that all operations against Rabaul by both the South and Southwest Pacific forces would be conducted under the supervision of General MacArthur. All operations of South Pacific forces in

the Solomons were placed under the direct command of the Commander, South Pacific, who would confer with MacArthur and follow his general directives.

Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., USN, Commander, South Pacific Area, had to decide, therefore, how to make Rabaul useless to the Japanese. As a related task, he realized that he would have to neutralize the airfields at the northern and southern tips of Bougainville in order that heavy bombers could get through to attack Rabaul. Finally, he hoped to cut the flow of supplies to Japanese troops located in bypassed areas of the Solomons.

From the enemy point of view, continued occupation of the Northern Solomons by the Japanese assured them of being able to supply bypassed positions in the Southern Solomons and

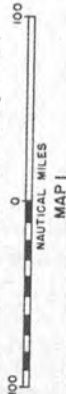


DIAGRAM, TASK ORGANIZATION, SOUTH PACIFIC FORCE, NOVEMBER 1943

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS  
1943

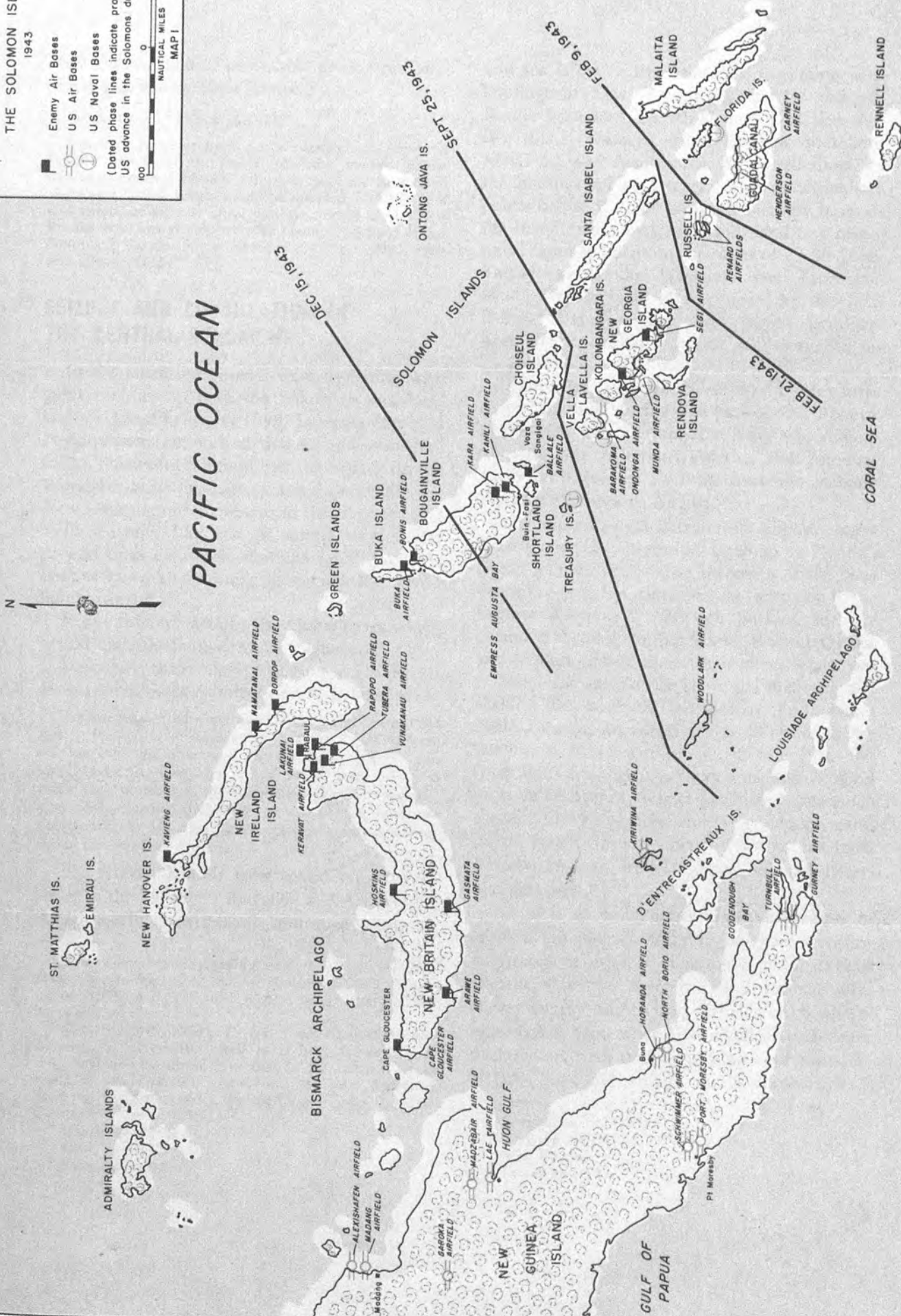
- Enemy Air Bases
- U S Air Bases
- U S Naval Bases

(Dotted phase lines indicate progress of the US advance in the Solomons during 1943)



PACIFIC OCEAN

CORAL SEA



New Guinea, and of being able to evacuate surviving garrisons at their leisure.<sup>14</sup>

As Admiral Halsey put it:

Rabaul, a Japanese naval and air stronghold, appeared at this time to be the logical objective towards whose seizure or neutralization all efforts of both the South and Southwest Pacific Forces would be directed. Until Rabaul was seized, or at least naval and air control of the New Britain area was established, the planned advance of the Southwest Pacific Forces along the New Guinea coast was impracticable.<sup>15</sup>

### SEIZURE AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE CENTRAL SOLOMONS

In the meantime, events were occurring with great rapidity on both the Solomons and New Guinea. On 9 February 1943, Japanese Imperial Headquarters announced that Guadalcanal had fallen. Successful landings had been made on the Woodlark-Kiriwina Islands and Nassau Bay, on New Georgia and Rendova, in the Russells, and Vella Lavella. Lae and Salamaua were under ground and air attack, and the great Japanese base at Wewak was under almost constant aerial bombardment.<sup>16</sup>

It was time for action; time for a move which would make Rabaul virtually ineffective.<sup>17</sup>

Describing the strategic situation which existed at this time, Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King said:

The evacuation of Guadalcanal on 8 February 1943 was by no means an indication that the Japanese were retiring from the Solomons. On the contrary there was ample evidence that they would make every effort to retain their positions in the Solomons and in New Guinea. Conversely, having pushed them out of the Southern Solomon area, our next undertaking was to push them out of the Northern Solomons.<sup>18</sup>

The Russell Islands were seized on 21 February by the 3d Raider Battalion and Army units. Allied forces undertook a continued land, air

and sea effort in the Solomons, beginning with landings in New Georgia by the 1st and 4th Raider Battalions, the 9th Defense Battalion, and the Tank Platoon, 10th Defense Battalion, MAG-22, and Army units. As a preliminary to the landings in New Georgia, strong intermediate points before Rabaul, more particularly bases in the Bougainville area, were subjected to a heavy naval bombardment on the night of 29-30 June. Farther south, the Woodlark and Trobriand Island Groups were also occupied by the 12th Defense Battalion and Army units. Landings were effected in New Guinea at Nassau Bay on 29 June.

Because of severe losses suffered by Japanese Army Air units during this period, and because of the fact that the Japanese Navy was responsible for the Solomons defense, the Japanese Army withdrew its air units from the Rabaul-Bougainville area in August.<sup>19</sup>

The fall of Munda airfield on 5 August, almost exactly one year after initial landings on Guadalcanal, and six weeks after inception of the New Georgia campaign, climaxed the campaign in the Central Solomons.<sup>20</sup> Although Japanese in force occupied the neighboring island, Kolombangara, and had an airfield there, their effectiveness was nullified not only by the continual bombing and shelling they received, but also by the fact that Vella Lavella, an island about 14 miles to the northwest, was occupied by Marine (4th Defense Battalion), Army, Navy and New Zealand units on 14 August, despite Japanese resistance in the air. On 25 August, the New Georgia campaign ended when American forces occupied Bairoko Harbor. By 27 August Arundel Island was occupied.<sup>21</sup>

As soon as practicable after occupation of Munda, air operations from that base were inaugurated in support of amphibious operations elsewhere in the Solomons and to neutralize enemy supply dumps and airfields on Bougainville. On 3 September 1942, Vella Lavella was declared secured, thus by-passing approximately 10,000 Japanese troops on Kolombangara.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *The Bougainville Landing and the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, 27 October-2 November, 1943* (Washington, 1946) 4-8. The work is cited hereinafter as *Combat Narratives*.

<sup>15</sup> COMSOPAC, *South Pacific Campaign—Narrative Account*, 6. Hereinafter cited as Halsey, *SoPac Narrative*. It should be noted here that in the chain of command between Admiral Halsey and the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the Commander, Pacific Ocean Areas, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN.

<sup>16</sup> *Campaigns*, 142.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177.

<sup>18</sup> King, *op. cit.*, 63.

<sup>19</sup> *Campaigns*, 142-143, 175.

<sup>20</sup> King, *op. cit.*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>22</sup> *Campaigns*, 143.

Since this turn of events made Kolombangara untenable for the enemy, the latter attempted to evacuate troops by nightly barge runs, but this proved costly, particularly after American destroyers began an anti-barge campaign in September.<sup>23</sup>

The Central Solomons campaign ended on 6 October when the Japanese had completed the evacuation of troops from Kolombangara and Vella Lavella. Since most of the troops evacuated from Guadalcanal, Kolombangara, Vella Lavella, and other islands in the Southern and Central Solomons ultimately reached Bougainville,<sup>24</sup> and since Japanese activity increased greatly in that vicinity, attacks in the Bougainville area were indicated. To that end air raids and naval surface bombardments were launched.<sup>25</sup> In an effort to oppose these operations, the Japanese poured approximately 700 planes down the funnel of Solomons attrition between June and October, 1943.<sup>26</sup>

With Allied attacks in the Pacific increasing in severity, the Japanese, about May, 1943, formulated an operation plan called the "Z" plan. This plan established a front line of defense stretching from the Aleutians, Wake, the Marshalls, the Gilberts, Nauru and Ocean, to the Bismarcks, the area behind this line being considered vital to defense of the Empire. The Combined Fleet<sup>27</sup> was to serve as the mobile reserve of the defense forces and was to sortie without delay upon contact with Allied forces anywhere on or within the line just described. In the Bismarck-Solomons Area, the Japanese had disposed units of the Eighth Fleet and most of the Eleventh Air Fleet.<sup>28</sup>

Modification of the "Z" plan resulted from U. S. landings at Munda and Kolombangara and at Lae and Salamaua, for it was apparent to the enemy that Rabaul's effectiveness as a major base was declining. This modification reduced the

<sup>23</sup> King, *op. cit.*, 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Interrogations*, I, 81.

<sup>25</sup> King, *op. cit.*, 66.-67. See also IMAC *Bougainville Beachhead*, Phase I, 4. Hereinafter cited as IMAC *Opn Rpt.*

<sup>26</sup> *Campaigns*, 143, 150.

<sup>27</sup> This was the name given by the Japanese to the main body of their fleet.

<sup>28</sup> *Campaigns*, 42.

so-called "vital area" by withdrawal of the Japanese front line of defense to the line Kuriles-Marianas-Carolines. Since Bougainville no longer lay within the so-called "vital area", the Combined Fleet was no longer to be committed to its defense.<sup>29</sup>

As the Allied advance progressed steadily toward the "vital area", by-passing areas of resistance before the front line of defense, Japanese Imperial Headquarters found it necessary on 30 September 1943 to issue an order which reads in part as follows:

Make every effort to hold the important southeastern area extending eastward from the eastern part of New Guinea to the Solomon Islands by repulsing all enemy attacks in the area. To accomplish this purpose: (a) Consider Rabaul as the center and make every effort for a protracted defense of important positions in the Bismarck Archipelago and Bougainville areas. (b) Endeavor to hold out in the northern New Guinea Area by reinforcing important positions in this area. (c) Endeavor to destroy the attacking enemy before landings are made by using air and surface forces. (d) In case the enemy succeeds in landing operations endeavor to destroy him before he consolidates his position thereby disrupting his plan for counterattack. (e) Endeavor to concentrate military supplies for high speed transport to the above-mentioned positions, particularly those in New Guinea.<sup>30</sup>

In light of this enemy situation, the structure of the Northern Solomons campaign, therefore included one principal landing—Bougainville—and several peripheral operations—Treasury Islands, Choiseul, and Green. Bougainville was the keystone of this structure. Except for general remarks, therefore, the initial discussion will treat primarily the Bougainville phase of the campaign, while peripheral operations are described separately in a later chapter.

## BOUGAINVILLE AND ITS PROTECTORS

The Japanese could have had no illusions about Allied intentions, for preparations to wrest the final Solomons' stronghold from their grasp were obvious. Arrows indicating the direction of Allied advance pointed toward Rabaul, and Bougainville lay directly in the path of that advance. It was only natural that, following moves from Guadalcanal to New Georgia to Vella La-

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.



vella, the Bougainville area should be next attacked.

For over a year and a half the Japanese had been industriously organizing positions on Bougainville. The enemy appeared prepared to launch an assault against Australia from these positions, and also from these same positions he was prepared to oppose attacks on the nerve center of his southern perimeter, Rabaul. On the other hand, the problems to be encountered by any attacker against Bougainville were more complex, and the situations more involved than those encountered previously.

Bougainville is the largest island in the Solomons. In 1943 it had adequate facilities for basing fleet units and aircraft. Close at hand to the main base at Rabaul and other subsidiary bases around that area, it lay within easy reach of the Japanese fleet at Truk. As visualized by American planners, it was probably well defended in accessible sectors, while a mobile reserve was probably readily available to counterattack landings elsewhere. Further, during the approach of any attack force enemy air and surface units could sally forth and engage convoys in battle<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, the Allies could take advantage of the fact that (although this was not entirely evident at the time) Japanese sea and air power were on the wane; that successful landings had been made in the Central Solomons and in New Guinea; that the enemy was suffering from attrition to his air forces; that Japanese lines of communication and supply could be brought under attack at any time; that even though the coming strike at Bougainville was obvious, the exact point of landing on a large island might be concealed until the landing was an accomplished fact; and that interior communications on Bougainville were entirely inadequate for quick reinforcement by Japanese reserves. The most troublesome factor confronting the Allies, in fact, was the scarcity of shipping available.

The risks involved in a landing on Bougainville were calculated, but, with approval of General MacArthur, who had requested that Admiral Halsey investigate the feasibility of attacking Bougainville proper rather than landing on

<sup>31</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 23-31.

the strongly defended Shortland Islands, it was decided to land at Empress Augusta Bay on the premise that this location fitted exactly into the ultimate air plan and, at the same time, was so inaccessible from established Japanese positions on Bougainville that an estimated three months would elapse before the Japanese could organize an effective counter-offensive on the ground.<sup>32</sup>

## IMAC PLANNING

Plans for landing in the Northern Solomons underwent many changes before they emerged in final form. First conceived as an attack designed to seize a heavily defended area and destroy opposing forces located there, the plans gradually were reduced to more conservative aspirations as time went on, but finally were developed into a bold, extensive operation.<sup>33</sup>

During preliminary study of the proposed operation, a new concept emerged; it was believed that the Japanese were more vulnerable in the air and on the sea than on the ground. Study also indicated that the forces originally allocated for the operation were insufficient for the assault as envisaged.<sup>34</sup>

With these ideas in mind, first on 26 July and then again on 5 August 1943, the objective of the operation was changed

to furnish a base for further operations and to deny to enemy air and naval forces the use of South Bougainville, South Pacific Forces will, on or about 15 October, seize, occupy and defend Shortland, Faisi and Ballale Islands, and such other small adjacent islands as may be necessary.

Thus, the target was limited to the Shortland area.<sup>35</sup>

Preliminary Marine plans for the operation went ahead with formation of the provisional units needed to execute the plan, e. g., the 2d Marine Raider Regiment and the 2d 155mm

<sup>32</sup> Halsey, *SoPac Narrative*, 8. For a detailed analysis of factors which prompted the decision to land at Empress Augusta Bay, see page 11 following.

<sup>33</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> COMSOPAC, Letter of Instruction of 26 July 1943, serial 001346 and COMSOPAC, Letter of Instruction of 5 August 1943, serial 001421. Hereinafter cited as COMSOPAC LofI, 26 Jul 43 and COMSOPAC LofI, 5 Aug 43.

Artillery Battalion. Logistic plans were made to form Branch No. 3 of the Fourth Base Depot, and station that unit, along with the Corps Evacuation Hospital, on still unsecured Vella Lavella. Marine units for the operation were assembled on Guadalcanal.<sup>36</sup>

On 6 September 1943, Admiral Halsey directed Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, USN, Lieutenant General Millard F. Harmon, USA, Major General Charles D. Barrett, and Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson, USN, to make a survey of the strategic situation and to submit recommendations for future planning. The following day these officers recommended that "the concept of the attack on Shortland should

<sup>36</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 8. See also IMAC LofI, 17 Sep 43, serial 0036, entitled "Warning Order 18-43"; this document is cited hereinafter as Warning Order 18-43.

be abandoned" and that "the following alternate plan should be placed in effect:

*Step 1.*—Complete projected airfields in New Georgia and Vella Lavella.

*Step 2.*—Continue and increase air effort to neutralize by air enemy airfields in the South Bougainville Area, and to put heavy pressure on airfields in the Buka Area.

*Step 3.*—On D-day simultaneously seize and occupy Treasury Islands and Choiseul Bay Area; install long range radar at both of these positions, construct airfields at one or both positions as found feasible, establish motor torpedo boat advance bases and staging points for landing craft at both positions; all in order to contain and strangle Southern Bougainville.



**THE HIGH COMMAND.** Assembled on Guadalcanal in 1943, during the planning for the Northern Solomons campaign, this group includes many officers who played important roles in the operations to come. In the front row, left to right, are: Brigadier General A. F. Howard, Rear Admiral Theodore Wilkinson, USN, Major General Charles D. Barrett, and Major General Robert S. Beightler, USA.

*Step 4.*—By air action, neutralize airfields in the Buka area.<sup>37</sup>

The officers further recommended that after accomplishing step four, the Allies advance up the axis of either Choiseul-Kieta or that of Treasury Island-Empress Augusta Bay, determination of which was to be in accordance with the reaction of the Japanese to the original plan of attack.<sup>37</sup>

This new concept immediately underwent study by planners. However, the board of planners, when it made its recommendations on 7 September, had not reckoned with the rapid success of the Vella Lavella operation, which had forced the Japanese to evacuate Kolombangara without a struggle. This favorable eventuality necessitated further re-examination of the entire strategy.<sup>38</sup> The changed situation thus dictated that any operation in northern Choiseul, the Shortland Islands, or the Treasury Islands, could depend upon reserves of troops and supplies in the Vella Lavella area. Finally, occupation of both the Treasury Islands and Choiseul would make desirable the establishment of IMAC headquarters at Vella Lavella. Lack of adequate shipping, however, later altered this plan.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, it was felt that occupation of Choiseul coupled with a subsequent attack on the Tenekau Bay area (located between Kieta and Numa Numa on the east coast of Bougainville) would unduly delay completion of the Solomons campaign. Moreover, fighter planes, operating from airfields located on Choiseul, would be unable to cover bomber strikes on Rabaul. Since the overall view of the operation looked toward denial of Rabaul to the Japanese, planners turned their thoughts toward establishment of a beachhead on Bougainville Island proper, by-passing Japanese strongholds in the Shortland-South Bougainville area.<sup>40</sup>

Upon completing his analysis of "Elkton III", Admiral Halsey decided that the immediate mis-

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum for COMSOPAC from Fitch, Harmon, Barrett, and Wilkinson, dated 7 September 1943.

<sup>38</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Elkton III Operation Plan*, 26 April 1943, 1-3. This plan had been Phase II of the JCS directive of 2 July 1942. It had been prepared in SWPA for Kavieng and was approved by JCS.

sion assigned to his South Pacific Force was neutralization of Buka, at the northern end of Bougainville. According to his interpretation, such neutralization could be accomplished if airfields were constructed on the northern tip of Choiseul Island or in the Treasury Islands or both. As a result of this interpretation, a plan for the seizure of these areas was prepared and presented to the Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, in lieu of the Shortlands project, which earlier had been abandoned. However, when plans for attacking Choiseul and the Treasury Islands were submitted to General MacArthur, he objected to their intent, because he felt that the main objective, Rabaul, could not be brought under effective air attack from the proposed bases.<sup>41</sup>

On 17 September, members of Admiral Halsey's staff, including the Admiral's Marine War Plans Officer, Colonel William E. Riley, met with MacArthur and were told:

Please inform Admiral Halsey that I feel the intent of the J. C. S. directive would not be satisfied by seizing and operating from Treasury and Choiseul Bay; that I believe myself the occupation of a suitable base for air operations on Bougainville proper and essential to further operations against the Bismarcks; that I feel it essential, in order to comply with the intent of the J. C. S. directive, that such a base be seized on Bougainville and that the operation for its seizure be initiated during the present calendar year.

MacArthur felt the Bougainville operation was so essential that he released Admiral Halsey from any real or implied obligation to support the proposed attack of the Southwest Pacific Force at Cape Gloucester, in order that the South Pacific Force could employ all its means in prosecution of the campaign. When asked if there were any consideration that influenced him to prefer an attack on either the east or the west coast of Bougainville, General MacArthur replied, "No, that is entirely as Halsey decides. To me it makes no difference."<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Admiral Halsey's representatives found that General MacArthur shared their distaste for a frontal assault on the heavily defended areas to the south, and favored instead an attack on a more lightly defended beach.

<sup>41</sup> Letter, MacArthur to Halsey, dated 11 Sep 43.

<sup>42</sup> *Planners' Discussion—Bougainville Operation*. Cf. Halsey, *SoPac Narrative*, 8.



**IMPENETRABLE JUNGLE RISING FROM SWAMP** confronted Marines who landed at Empress Augusta Bay. The Northern Solomons campaign was a two-fold struggle in which the terrain presented opposition as formidable as that of the Japanese.

One more short-lived step ensued before the final plan was adopted. Admiral Halsey, on 22 September 1943, cancelled all previously-adopted plans and substituted the following planning alternatives for Phase I: (1) "Seize and hold Treasury Islands and northern Empress Augusta Bay area, Bougainville Island, and construct airfields in the vicinity of Empress Augusta Bay;" or (2) "Seize and hold Treasury Island and Choiseul Bay Area, install radars, PT bases and staging points thereat, and construct airfields in the vicinity of Choiseul Bay Area in preparation for Phase 2." A second phase to either alternative was designed to secure a hostile airfield in the vicinity of Tenekau, Bougainville Island, during the latter part of December, 1943.<sup>43</sup>

Alternative two had to be disregarded. Early

<sup>43</sup> COMSOPAC Warning Order of 22 September 1943, serial 001901. Hereinafter cited as COMSOPAC Warning Order 22 Sep 43. These changing plans, naturally, made IMAC planning most difficult.

reconnaissance revealed that Buka was too distant from Munda and Barakoma to be considered as an objective, for fighter cover could not be provided over that target; Kahili was also rejected as being too strongly defended for the size of the force available for an attack in that area; the Shortlands were rejected not only because of estimated strength of probable Japanese opposition to an attack in that area, but also because of insufficient beach-area for a landing. Kieta and Numa Numa, on the flanks of the proposed operation for carrying out phase two of the 22 September plan, had been commercially developed, and the Japanese had installed comparatively strong garrisons and improved airfields there. In addition, the longer approach by sea, coupled with an annoying shortage of shipping, would render execution of phase two impracticable. On the other hand, a landing on Choiseul, although tactically sound, would not in itself constitute a direct threat to Rabaul but would be merely a preliminary step towards

additional landings to the northwest. Thus, a period of time would be consumed and excess material wasted without furthering the strategic intent of all the planning—denial of Rabaul to the Japanese.<sup>44</sup>

Tactical and logistic considerations fixed Empress Augusta Bay on the west coast of Bougainville as the final objective. This area presented, however, disadvantages not previously encountered; but to offset this, intelligence had revealed that the area was not likely to offer strong opposition to a landing; defenses were of a negligible character; beach trails and inland foot-trails were only irregularly patrolled; and the Puruata-Cape Torokina area appeared to fall into a natural defensive region approximately eight miles by six miles in dimension.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, direct information concerning the locality was available, for coastwatching had been inaugurated in May, and this continued to provide some intelligence on terrain and enemy activities through the planning stages.<sup>46</sup> In addition to aerial reconnaissance which furnished useful information throughout the operation, a ground

<sup>44</sup> 3d Amphibious Force, *Seizure and Occupation of Northern Empress Augusta Bay*. . . . Hereinafter cited as CTF-31 *Opn Rpt.*

<sup>45</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 134-139, 145. The Japanese became aware of the presence of coastwatchers toward the end of August, and forced their withdrawal.

patrol was landed by submarine (U.S.S. *Guardfish*) in the area above the Laruma River; aided by native guides, this patrol scouted the area and tentatively selected an airfield site. Reports by this patrol further confirmed selection of Cape Torokina as the landing beach.<sup>47</sup>

Major General Charles D. Barrett, who had succeeded Lieutenant General A. A. Vandegrift as Commanding General, IMAC, on 15 September 1943, completed his concept of the operation plan by 27 September, and issued it in a letter of instruction to General Turnage, Commanding General, 3d Marine Division, on the same day.<sup>48</sup>

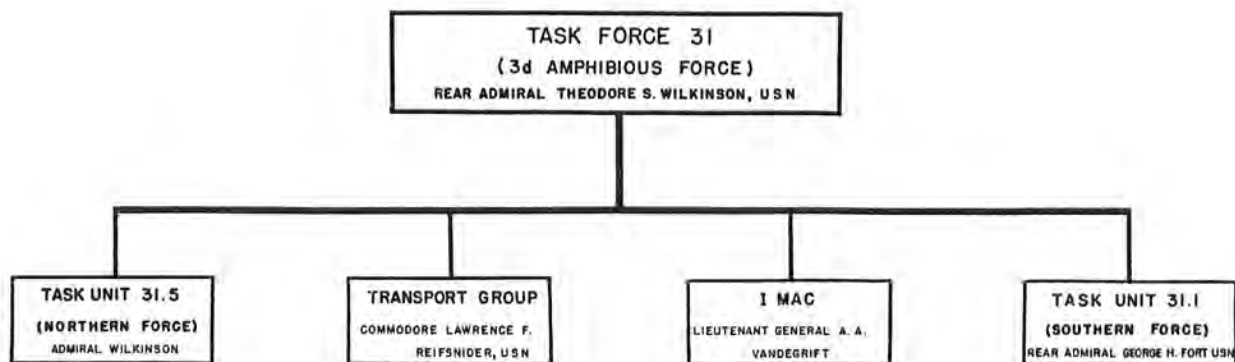
The Commander of Task Force 31 (3d Amphibious Force), Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson, USN, was placed in overall command of the operation as directed by Admiral Halsey's order of 22 September, and, as instructed, he began to coordinate all detailed planning.<sup>49</sup> In an additional operation plan dated 12 October 1943,<sup>50</sup> Admiral Halsey set 1 November as D-day, and ordered Admiral Wilkinson to seize and hold the Treasury Islands

<sup>47</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt.*, I, 4. See section entitled "Accumulation of Intelligence", this chapter, for further details.

<sup>48</sup> IMAC LofI, 27 Sep 43, serial 001A.

<sup>49</sup> IMAC Concept of Operations Plan I, serial 002A, hereinafter cited as IMAC *Concept*. See also COMSOPAC Warning Order 22 Sep 43.

<sup>50</sup> COMSOPAC Opn Plan 16-43, dated 12 Oct 43.



**DIAGRAM, TASK ORGANIZATION, TASK FORCE 31**

on 27 October, in order that protection would be afforded to convoys proceeding to Bougainville. In the same plan Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, commander of shore-based air in the South Pacific area, was directed to support the operation with land planes by flying reconnaissance missions and providing air cover and support for land and surface forces engaged. Carrier aircraft under Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman, USN, were to support the operations of General Mitchell's planes by an air-strike against the Buka and Bonis airfields, and basing planes ashore when the Cape Torokina airstrips were prepared to receive them.<sup>51</sup> A surface task force commanded by Rear Admiral Aaron S. Merrill, USN,<sup>52</sup> was to furnish cover for the amphibious landings, and to render support by bombardment of Japanese installations in the Buka-Bonis and Shortland areas during the night of 31 October–1 November. Prior to and during this operation, submarines of the South Pacific Force (Task Force 72, borrowed from Admiral Barby's Seventh Fleet), under Captain James Fife, Jr., USN, were to attack Japanese shipping and surface units and to furnish reconnaissance information. It was also planned that aircraft of the Southwest Pacific Area would bomb Rabaul in the meantime.<sup>53</sup>

Plans of 12 October directed Admiral Wilkinson to be prepared to establish a patrol torpedo boat base on northwestern Choiseul on five days' notice.<sup>54</sup> It was feared that the landing on the Treasury Islands, located on a direct line toward Bougainville, would serve to point out to the Japanese the main objective in the Bougainville area and cause them to send reinforcements there.

To throw the Japanese off the scent, therefore, Major James C. Murray, Staff Secretary of IMAC, suggested that elements of the Choiseul landing be retained in the final plan, even though it was not intended to seize the island, or any

position thereon. Thus, the diversionary raid on Choiseul was conceived.<sup>55</sup> Choiseul's size and position would suggest its use as a base against Shortland or Bougainville, and if Bougainville. U. S. seizure of a base on Choiseul would indicate a landing on the east rather than the west coast.

Operation orders for the Choiseul diversion, therefore, were given by IMAC on 22 October,<sup>56</sup> directing the 2d Parachute Battalion, 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, FMF, to land at Voza, Choiseul, during the night of 27 October, not only to conduct a raid but also to be prepared to establish a permanent base if the situation should so warrant.<sup>57</sup>

In order to facilitate and expedite planning, all Task Group commanders were authorized to work directly with the various staff sections of the units they were supporting.

Final concepts of the campaign were dictated by the decision that the operation should look more definitely toward reduction of Rabaul. It was decided to establish a beachhead on Bougainville proper; as a protective feature for Bougainville-bound convoys and as a boat refuge, the Treasury Islands were to be taken; the landing on Choiseul was modified to a diversionary movement—"a series of short right jabs designed to throw the enemy off balance and conceal the power of the left hook to his mid-riff at Empress Augusta Bay."<sup>58</sup> Japanese strength, availability of airfield terrain, the position astride the enemy system of communications between Rabaul and the Solomons, airline distances which placed it at the geographical center of the Bougainville arc of Japanese air and naval installations, availability of advance naval base facilities, and the comparatively favorable convoy routes, plus the opportunity of maintaining U. S. shore-based aircraft over the target for a maximum time, all dictated selection of Cape Torokina as the projected beachhead.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Campaigns*, 151. In Admiral Sherman's force were the carriers *Saratoga* and *Princeton*, the anti-aircraft cruiser *San Juan* and *San Diego*, and ten destroyers, all comprising Task Force 33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 153. Admiral Merrill's force (Task Force 39) consisted of the cruisers *Montpelier*, *Cleveland*, *Columbia*, and *Denver*, and eight destroyers.

<sup>53</sup> COMSOPAC Opn Plan 16-43.

<sup>54</sup> *Loc. cit.*, gives a detailed analysis of the task assigned Admiral Wilkinson.

<sup>55</sup> IMAC Opn Rpt, I, 3.

<sup>56</sup> IMAC Operation Order No. 2, 22 Oct 43, hereinafter cited as IMAC Opn O #2.

<sup>57</sup> Krulak letters of 5 Nov 43 and 22 Nov 43. For complete details concerning this diversion, see Chapter IV, section 2, following.

<sup>58</sup> General Roy S. Geiger, in his report on the operation, made this statement.

<sup>59</sup> IMAC Opn Rpt, I, 3.

In speaking of this final concept, Admiral Halsey said,

Enthusiasm for the plan was far from unanimous, even in the South Pacific, but, the decision having been made, all hands were told to get going.<sup>60</sup>

The final concept of the plan had now emerged. On 15 October 1943, IMAC issued the operation order for the landing on Bougainville.<sup>61</sup>

This order directed a landing by the 8th Brigade Group, 3d (NZ) Division, on the Treasury Islands on 27 October to capture or destroy Japanese forces located in the area; to establish long range radars and an advance naval base in order that a staging refuge for landing craft and operating facilities for motor torpedo boats could be put into operation. The 3d Marine Division was to land on 1 November on beaches between Cape Torokina and the Laruma River, and on Puruata and Torokina Islands, to capture or destroy Japanese forces located there and to build and protect airfields, radar sites, and an advance naval base in that area. This operation was undertaken to obtain positions for further offensive operations. Prior to and during the operation, aircraft of the Southwest Pacific Force were to fly missions against Rabaul, and units of Task Force 33 were to carry out reconnaissance, search, and striking missions on the surface. Task Forces 37, 38, and 39 were named the support of Task Force 31, while submarines of Task Force 72 were directed to execute attacks against enemy shipping and surface units in order to give additional support to the operation.

Initially the order specified the coconut plantation east of Cape Torokina as the site for the airfield, but a Naval Construction Battalion (71st NCB) was instructed to reconnoiter, as soon as safety permitted, for the purpose of finding another landing strip.<sup>62</sup>

If a weak link existed in the chain of offensive preparations which IMAC began forging in the fall of 1943, it was the bare minimum of avail-

<sup>60</sup> Halsey, *SoPac Narrative*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> IMAC Operation Order No. 1, 15 October 1943. Although planning and preparation of the order was done under the direction of General Barrett, it was signed by General Vandegrift who had succeeded Barrett as CG, IMAC, upon the untimely death of the latter.

<sup>62</sup> IMAC Opn O #1.



**GENERAL A. A. VANDEGRIFT**, Commander of the I Marine Amphibious Corps, who shaped the Landing Force plans for Bougainville, Treasury Islands, and Choiseul. After the sudden death of Major General Barrett, General Vandegrift found himself unexpectedly charged with executing his earlier plans.

able shipping which might, in the event of any early losses, jeopardize adequate support of the landing force. It was therefore decided that in addition to the staging-storage-bivouac area west of the Poha River on Guadalcanal and the Fourth Base Depot in the Russells, an advanced supply base would be necessary.<sup>63</sup>

Supply items peculiar to the Marine Corps were stocked at the Fourth Base Depot. The principal source of general supplies, however, from which probably a tenth of the supply tonnage would be drawn was Guadalcanal.

Therefore, to utilize available shipping during the preparatory phase and to reduce the amount of shipping which might be needed after inception of the Treasury-Bougainville operations, it was decided to establish a depot forward of Guadalcanal, at a sufficient distance to permit movement of supplies to the target area by LCT's (landing craft, tank), if a shortage of LST's (landing ship, tank) made it necessary. It was

<sup>63</sup> IMAC Opn Rpt, I, 7-8.

also considered desirable to have a minimum of ammunition, rations, and petroleum as far forward as possible in the event an emergency made it necessary to move them to the fighting fronts hurriedly.

Although the Japanese still had a sizable force on Vella Lavella, that island afforded the best location for such a depot. An engineer reconnaissance party was dispatched to reconnoiter the east and west coasts of Vella Lavella, and it subsequently reported that the east coast from Barakoma to Orete Cove furnished landing, storage, and bivouac areas suitable for the project.<sup>64</sup>

On the basis of this finding a Task Organization was formed to establish a hospital and Base Depot. This unit was moved to Vella Lavella in echelons. Major James C. Murray accompanied the first of these as staff representative for CG, IMAC, and reported upon arrival to CG, 3d NZ Division, then Island Commander, arranging with him allocation of areas from the Juno River to Bipora Village.<sup>65</sup> Within these areas Major Murray carried out his assigned mission.

Upon arrival of the second echelon, Colonel Alton A. Gladden, who had been designated commanding officer of Corps Troops, Vella Lavella, assumed responsibility for further direction of the project.<sup>66</sup>

While planning was underway, meanwhile, combat intelligence preliminary to the operation was being gathered on a scale not heretofore attempted. Many patrols were landed on pro-

posed objectives, while map and aerial photograph studies were made of the areas. Interviews were held with individuals who were acquainted with the localities which were under study. Slowly the early trickle of information grew into a flooding tide.

## ACCUMULATION OF INTELLIGENCE

Various means were employed to collect combat intelligence for the Bougainville operation. Amphibious reconnaissance patrols were landed by submarine, seaplane, and motor torpedo boat to penetrate defended beaches; these were the first to be undertaken on so wide a scale in the South Pacific and they key-holed the Shortland area, the Treasury Islands, Choiseul, Santa Isabel, and the Kieta and Numa Numa areas.<sup>67</sup> Extensive aerial reconnaissance provided much valuable information in regard to southern and northern Bougainville. In order to obtain specific information relating to terrain, hydrographic conditions, enemy dispositions and defenses, and any other information that might be of use, three patrols were landed from a submarine in rubber boats on Shortland and on the Treasury Islands on the night of 22-23 August. These patrols were withdrawn by the same means on the night of 27-28 August.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Their reports indicated that the best landing beaches in the vicinity that were suitable for all types of landing craft were located between the Saveke River mouth and Falamai Point. Furthermore, these beaches had an ample water supply nearby and also had adequate dispersal and bivouac areas. The party saw signs of Japanese activity but actually sighted no Japanese.

In order to obtain last minute information before the *Goodtime* (Treasury) operation, a reconnaissance party of two New Zealand noncommissioned officers (Sgt. W. A. Cowan of the 8th Brigade Intelligence Section and Corporal Nash of the Australian Naval Intelligence Service), and some natives was landed by patrol torpedo boat on Mono Island, the largest of the Treasury Group on the night of 21-22 October and was withdrawn in the same manner the following night. This party reported that according to natives, the Japanese had recently landed reinforcements in the area and that their strength was about 225 men; that medium caliber guns had recently been emplaced on both sides of Falamai Point; that machine guns were emplaced on Mono Island along the approaches to the landing beaches; that there was an observation post located at Laifa Point with direct wire communication to the radio station near the Saveke River; and that Stirling Island was unoccupied by the

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-9.

<sup>65</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 8. An amusing incident occurred in this connection. When moving from Guadalcanal to Vella Lavella, Murray carried a letter of introduction from General Barrett to Major General H. E. Barrowclough, CG, 3d NZ Division. In preparing this letter a stenographer had misspelled the General's name as "Bearclaw", its phonetic approximative. When Murray handed him the letter, General Barrowclough, a dignified Imperial officer, winced perceptibly. For a complete report of this incident, and the movement of the Task Organization to Vella Lavella, see Ltr LtCol J. C. Murray to Dir Div Pub Info, dtd 4 Nov 47, Serial 2185 over JCM/vca.

<sup>66</sup> IMAC Engineer confidential Memorandum to CO, 19th Marines, 31Aug43; Corps Engineer confidential Memorandum to CO, 19th Marines, 3 Sep 43; CG, IMAC secret LofI to OinC, Vella Lavella Det, 77th NCB, 30 Sep 43; CG, IMAC LofI to CO, IMAC NCB, 14 Oct 43.



On 3 September 1943, at 2230, a patrol composed of Captain J. R. Harper, Lieutenant R. C. Parlier, USN, Lieutenant Morse Holladay, Platoon Sergeant W. A. Dunsworth, Corporal D. L. Kettler, and Private First Class T. G. Simpson debarked from a patrol torpedo boat into native canoes at a point southwest of Rhodes Island, and landed on Santa Isabel just opposite Bero Island, crossed the main island and reconnoitered the Rekata Bay area as far south as Suavanu Point, and Papatara Fa Island. Having completed reconnaissance of the Suavanu Point area, Harper's men moved via native canoe to the Kia Bay area where they reconnoitered but found only negative information. Upon returning to its starting point, the group left the Santa Isabel area on 9 September at 2230.<sup>69</sup>

On 6 September 1943, at 2300, a patrol composed of Captain Gordon Warner, Captain William R. Helmer, Lt (jg) K. P. Hill, Corporal Edgar C. Terrell and Corporal William Weber, was discharged from a PT boat into a native canoe about one-half mile southeast of the Ruravai Island mission, off the southwest coast of Choiseul. Landing at the mission wharf on the southeast side of the island about 0115, the patrol spent the remainder of the night in the wharf boat shed. Next morning the group proceeded via canoe in a northwesterly direction along the shore toward Posarai Village, to observe shore line, beaches and jungle. On reaching Posarai Village at 0830, Warner's men proceeded to move along inland waterways to Todoro Lagoon, where they disembarked and continued north-

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Japanese. When they were withdrawn, the party brought with them several Mono Island natives who were to serve as pilots for the attacking forces on the day of the landing.

Finally on the night of 25-26 October an advance party of three New Zealanders and two natives led by Sgt. Cowan was landed in order to cut the communication lines between Laifa Point and the radio station (*Combat Narratives*, 12-13) at 0400 on 27 October, to establish an observation post in order to observe Japanese movements, and to furnish native guides to the combat units. (Row Rpt. 3. The correct title of this document is "HQ 8 (NZ) Bde Gp, 3 (NZ) Div NZEF, In the Field, REPORT ON OPERATIONS—TREASURY IS., (OP 'GOODTIME')" 30Nov43).

<sup>69</sup> 3d MarDiv, Santa Isabel Patrol Report. See bibliography for complete description of this document.

west by native trail to a village on the Doroko River, just north of Mount Sambe. At this point the patrol made camp for the night.<sup>70</sup>

On 8 September 1943, the party left the Doroko River and proceeded south to the high cliffs overlooking Zoga where an observation post was established in order to observe Japanese positions, the beach, harbor channels, and terrain. After spending the day thus occupied, the patrol left its observation point and traveled in a northwesterly direction to the village of Gorabara, where it arrived at 1800 and set up camp for the night.

The following day the five men traveled for a period of two hours via canoe to Panai, where they landed and followed a native trail to a point of observation about one mile north of Kakasa. Information was gathered in regard to the Kakasa area, before they retired northwest at 1530 in order to make camp on the bank of the Verulatu river. Ascent of Mount Maitabe to the north consumed the entire working day on 10 September, and it was not until 12 September that the group reached the coastwatcher's station just north-northwest of Kanaga village.<sup>71</sup> From Kanaga village, the party proceeded via canoe downstream on the Kanaga river to the north coast of the island, along which it proceeded along the inner reef to Nanano Island, where it arrived at approximately 0900, and finally made the contact at 1215 with a Navy patrol bomber, which had been directed to rendezvous with it.

During their travels the men observed some Japanese activity, and made a study of the beaches and terrain which indicated that there were few good airfield sites or landing beaches on the parts of the island observed. Upon returning to Guadalcanal, the patrol reported its findings to the planners.<sup>72</sup>

Two patrols, number one being composed of Commander W. Painter, (CEC) USNR, Captain J. J. Delahanty, Lt. (j. g.) F. B. Rauch,

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<sup>70</sup> For map of Choiseul showing patrol routes, see Map 24.

<sup>71</sup> LtCol Warner reports that his patrol was the first group of white men to scale Mount Maitabe.

<sup>72</sup> 3d MarDiv, Patrol Reports—Choiseul, "K" Patrol. See bibliography for clarification.

USN, Pilot Officer Leatham (of the Royal New Zealand Air Force), and Private A. N. James; number two consisting of Captain R. Enich, Lieutenant W. T. Manley, Lt. (j. g.) E. Greathead, USN, and Sergeant J. Mandel, were landed from a Navy patrol bomber at Nanano Island off the northeast coast of Choiseul on 22 September 1943, at 1500, where the first patrol was joined by Sub-Lieutenant C. W. Seton of the Royal Australian Navy, the coastwatcher in this area.

From this point the groups proceeded by native canoe to the village of Mamarana, near the northwestern tip of the main island, where they arrived at 0600 the next day. Upon landing, the parties moved overland toward Mount Gaili in the west, and, on arriving at that position at 1100 on 24 September 1943, separated, the first reconnoitering to the west, the second to the south. General mission of patrol number one was to reconnoiter in the Choiseul Bay area and then work northwest along the coast away from Japanese-occupied areas in an effort to study the terrain with a view to establishment of radar stations, airfields, bivouac areas, dump areas, and landing beaches. Patrol number two had the same general mission as patrol number one, except that the area in which it was to conduct its reconnaissance lay between the mouth of the Warrior River Point and Moli Island, thence overland to Bubukana.

Patrol number one bivouacked east of Terikukure Plantation at 1700 on the evening of 24 September 1943, shortly after hearing Japanese activity. The following day it reconnoitered the Choiseul Bay area and in the evening observed a B-24 attacking Japanese positions there. On 25, 26, and 27 September, the area along the beach from Poroporo to Maramana was studied. On 28 September the party proceeded to the rendezvous at Salamanda to meet patrol number two.

In the meantime, patrol number two had passed 24, 25, and 26 September reconnoitering along the beach southwest to the vicinity of Moli Island. The following two days were spent traveling overland from Vudertaru to a point on the beach near Pola, where it boarded a canoe and

proceeded to the rendezvous at Salamada, and rejoined patrol number one. Patrol number two did not observe any Japanese land or sea activity but did spot Japanese planes on 25, 26, and 28 September. Accompanying natives, however, reported Japanese activity in the vicinity of Moli Island, and at mouths of various rivers in the area.

After joining forces, the groups returned to Nanano via Susuka and boarded the Navy patrol bomber about 1500. They had observed several fair airfield sites in the vicinity of Choiseul Harbor, and had definite knowledge of enemy barge activity in that area. They had also located several good landing beaches and, from conversations with natives and the coastwatcher, were able to estimate that there were about 300 Japanese in the Choiseul Bay region and about 1,000 in the Kakasa Region.

Along the southwest coast of the island, the patrols reported, there was no suitable site for a landing strip; however, there were some level areas on the island, but these were swampy, and a great deal of work would be necessary in order to drain them. On the other hand there was a suitable area slightly northeast of Poroporo, although it would probably require 30 days' work on the part of an entire construction battalion or its equivalent to grade and surface a strip of 150 by 4,000 feet, and a suitable beach road had to be constructed before work on the airfield could begin. It was also noted that a strip could be built on Kondakanimboko Island if the landing beach could be improved, the channel between island and mainland were filled in, and a road were built from the beach to Sipasai and Taro Islands.

Reported further were some locations where radar could probably be placed, but these would have to be spotted after troops had come ashore. The nature of the terrain had prevented direct observation to locate those positions accurately.

These findings were immediately conveyed to planners upon the patrol's return to Guadalcanal, and the planners incorporated the findings into operation plans.<sup>73</sup>

Two patrols composed of Navy and Marine

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, IMAC Patrol.

Corps personnel were sent to Bougainville on 23 September 1943, one going to the Kieta area on the northeast coast and the other going to the Cape Torokina area on the southwest coast. On the northeast coast the party was composed of Captain Bertram S. Behrens, First Lieutenant Oscar Salgo, Lieutenant Stuart (RANVR), Lt. (j. g.) Woods, USN, Lt. (j. g.) Reed, USN, Platoon Sergeant Gwost, Sergeants Hagler, Schramm, Bisol, Ober, Clark, and LaMonte, Corporals Aaron and Splain, Private Roberts, and four native guides, embarked in the Submarine U.S.S. *Gato*. This group had as its mission reconnaissance of probable landing beaches in the vicinity of Cape Mabiri, from Asitavi to Metong Plantation. To accomplish this mission, the party divided into two sections each night and reconnoitered specific sections of beach area. In the meantime the submarine took soundings off shore for the purpose of charting the coast. As the men moved from submarine to beach, they took soundings on the way in. When ashore, patrol members would examine the beach area and the land directly behind it.

A considerable amount of Japanese activity in the area was noted, but despite this, a reasonably accurate and complete survey of landing beaches and approaches thereto in the area was made. The men returned to the submarine each night, and at 0145 on the morning of 28 September, returned for the last time.<sup>74</sup>

The party on the southwest coast consisted of Captain Harry B. Barker, First Lieutenant James C. Clemmons, USA, Lts. (j.g.) Kenneth P. Hill and Edward C. McBurney, Ensign Morris N. Palmer (all three USN), Second Lieutenant William C. Langdale, Ensign Antone Jossten (RANVR), 30 enlisted men, and four natives. This group was to reconnoiter beaches and terrain between the Torokina River and Atsinima Bay, five miles inland and the islands off-shore. Embarked in the submarine U.S.S. *Guardfish*, the men landed in rubber boats and operated ashore from 2000, 23 September 1943, to 2000, 26 September 1943.

While ashore, this party observed that terrain

<sup>74</sup> IMAC Patrol Report on Empress Augusta Bay Area. See bibliography.

behind the beaches was extremely swampy, and that few suitable sites for airstrips existed, neither did it find the reported road along the coast. On 11 different occasions, Japanese planes were sighted flying along the coast. Other Japanese activity noted was the presence of one sentry at the mouth of the Laruma River, and the sound of heavy guns in the vicinity of Mutupena point, and glare of antiaircraft searchlights sweeping the sky from the vicinity of Mavavia.<sup>75</sup> In the meantime the *Guardfish* had made an extremely accurate survey of hydrographic conditions off-shore. All information obtained was duly reported upon return to Guadalcanal.<sup>76</sup>

On 1 October 1943, a low level aerial reconnaissance mission was flown over the Cape Torokina region by a PB2Y piloted by Lieutenant (j.g.) Hager and carrying an observation party consisting of Lieutenant Colonel S. S. Wade, Lieutenants (j.g.) Kenneth P. Hill and Edward C. McBurney. This party also noted that swamps existed inland from the beaches, and that the small coconut grove just east of Cape Torokina might be a suitable site for a small landing strip.<sup>77</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel James M. Smith, 3d Division Headquarters, and Captain John I. Delehanty, 21st Marines, landed at Atsinima Bay on the night of 27 October with a coastwatcher party under direction of Lieutenant Keenan (RANVR)<sup>78</sup> in order to determine strength, location, and disposition of Japanese forces and location of their coast defense guns in the Cape Torokina area. This information was to be communicated via radio to Commander, Task Force 31 by 1200, 30 October. If the Japanese did not have more than 200 to 300 men in the area, a large fire, visible to seaward, was to be lighted on the beach. Furthermore, this party was to locate high, dry, ground behind the beach between Cape Torokina and the Laruma River, and to be prepared to guide assault troops to it. Native scouts were to be sent to the Jaba area

<sup>75</sup> 3d Amphibious Force Reconnaissance Report. See bibliography for complete description of this document.

<sup>76</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 18.

<sup>78</sup> Felct, *op. cit.*, 161-162.

to observe and report on Japanese activity noted in recent photographs of that area. This information was to be made available to the Commanding General, IMAC, and the Commander of Task Force 31, immediately after landing of assault units had been accomplished.

Existence of high ground about 1,000 yards east of the Koromokina River, suitable for radar installations was to be determined. Immediately upon landing of the first wave of invasion forces, the party was to rejoin our forces by approaching from the west displaying an American flag.<sup>79</sup>

Intelligence information regarding the strength and disposition of Japanese forces in the Cape Torokina area was meager, and the very nature of the jungle in that area prevented secrets hidden beneath dense foliage from appearing on aerial photographs. True, there were signs of activity on Cape Torokina itself, but the character of the photographs prevented an exact determination of the extent or characteristics of activity there. Equally obscure was the size and extent of swamp areas immediately inland from the beach, and to complicate matters there was practically no reliable hydrographic information available.

Charts of the northern Empress Augusta Bay area were vague, and an aerial photographic survey of the region had disclosed that the coast line was eight to ten miles removed from positions indicated on the charts. Early reconnaissance by the submarine *Guardfish* had indicated presence of uncharted shoals. Consequently, approach to the target had to be scheduled to occur after daybreak.

Intelligence estimated enemy strength as follows: Northern Sector (Buka area), 5,000 troops; Eastern Sector (Numa Numa-Kieta area), 5,000 troops; Ballale and adjacent islands,

<sup>79</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 20. Because of excessive terrain difficulties encountered, and because of radio failure, none of the information that this group obtained was made available to the invading forces until they were finally ashore; furthermore, the fire was not lighted. Lieutenant Colonel Smith rejoined the American forces as planned on 1 November, and made an oral report to General Turnage. Smith displayed the first American flag to be shown ashore. The remainder of the patrol proceeded to the Numa Numa area to act as a coastwatcher party.

3,000 troops; Shortland area, 5,000 to 6,000 troops; Southern Sector, 17,000 troops. The only enemy concentration of any strength in the Empress Augusta Bay area was estimated to be 1,000 troops at Mosigetta. These appeared to be, for the most part, engaged in cultivating extensive rice fields.

Throughout September there was ample evidence that the enemy was strengthening his Bougainville defenses. He appeared determined to continue defense of the Buin-Shortland-South Bougainville area. This was indicated by (1) rapid replacement of aircraft combat losses, (2) reinforcement and expansion of facilities of advance bases in the northern Solomons, (3) maintenance of supply, even at the cost of critically needed ships, (4) continued development of existing air bases and construction of new ones.<sup>80</sup>

At this time, however, the enemy was under severe Allied punishment from the air, and it was increasingly evident that he was gradually placing less confidence in his ability to maintain the safety of his air bases in southern Bougainville. Strength of aircraft at Buka continued high, but concentrations at Kahili, Ballale and Kara began to dwindle. While this was clearly a recognition of Allied air and naval superiority (captured documents admitting it), the Japanese conceded nothing to Allied land forces. The enemy was preparing his bases for a frontal assault, and now he committed himself to a passive rather than an active defense, digging in, taking shelter from artillery and aerial bombardment and making only minor air raids at night.

It was anticipated by now that the Japanese were, after Kolombangara, preparing to counter further bypassing or flanking movements and had adopted one of two courses: either a large increase in the number of their coastal areas provided with strong, static defense facilities, or a considerable increase in mobile troops to repulse landings on lightly defended areas; intelligence indicated that the second course was held in high favor on Bougainville.

Not until later in October, however, were there any indications that the Japanese had started to

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

apply this factor to the Empress Augusta Bay area. Intelligence photos for the first time indicated that there was any military activity in the Cape Torokina region. It was in no wise alarming, indicating no enemy awareness of his danger, and consisted merely of a few emplacements for anti-aircraft guns, a slit trench, and some minor building construction. Further defensive installations, possible 20 gun sites, were discovered behind the point of the Cape in the closing days of October. There was nothing to indicate, however, that the enemy had fully awakened to his peril.<sup>81</sup>

### ASSAULT UNIT PLANNING

As intelligence poured in, planning continued unabated. CTF-31 and CG, IMAC, ironed out details so essential to a successful operation. The task organization for the operation was set up by letters of instruction from General Barrett to General Turnage and Brigadier R. A. Row,<sup>82</sup> of the New Zealand Army.

General Turnage immediately instituted the detailed planning necessary to execute his assigned mission. Preliminary planning had begun previously upon receipt of a verbal warning order, later confirmed by a letter of instruction. According to these orders, the 3d Marine Division was directed to land in the vicinity of Cape Torokina to seize a beachhead between the Torokina and Laruma Rivers extending inland approximately 2250 yards and over a front of about 7350 yards.

Troops were to proceed toward the objective in two echelons via Efate, New Hebrides, where rehearsals would be conducted. Due to the shipping shortage, only those items absolutely essential to maintenance of life and combat were to be taken to the combat zone by the first echelon. To do this, personnel landing in assault would carry on their persons only two days' rations and two units of fire.<sup>83</sup>

On 28 September, General Barrett issued a

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> IMAC LofI to CO, 8th Brig Gp, 3d NZ Dvi, 803943; IMAC LofI to CG, 3d MarDiv, 27Sep43. The proximity of IMAC and 3d MarDiv Headquarters on Guadalcanal made planning efforts fairly easy.

<sup>83</sup> IMAC LofI to 3d MarDiv, 27Sep43.

letter of instruction to Brigadier Row concerning the Treasury Islands operation.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to providing for combat details, the final order, issued 15 October 1943, assigned code names to the operation.<sup>85</sup> One week later, on 22 October, the 8th Brigade Group was directed to land on the Treasury Islands on D-day minus five days, prepared to furnish one rifle company "as garrison for PT boat advance base in NW Choiseul" on four days notice from CTF-31.<sup>86</sup>

Since the tentative task assignment of 27 September had envisaged an early landing by the 37th Infantry Division,<sup>87</sup> the 3d Marine Division was to prepare to carry out its assigned mission in coordination with the 37th upon the latter's arrival subsequent to D-day, in order that the perimeter could be extended and additional airfield sites, naval base facilities, and long-range radar sites could be incorporated into the defensive sector.<sup>88</sup>

Tactical planning met with several immediate limitations. Transportation allotted IMAC for movement to the combat area for initial landings consisted of only eight APA's (attack transports) and four AKA's (attack cargo vessels). It therefore became necessary to plan to transport the Division to the landing area in succeeding echelons.<sup>89</sup>

Evaluation of Japanese strength and known dispositions on Bougainville, coupled with known characteristics of the Cape Torokina area, i. e., jungle covered swamp and lack of roads, evoked the conclusion that whatever defenses the Japanese had established in the area must be local-

<sup>84</sup> IMAC LofI to 8th Brig. For complete details concerning this operation see Chapter IV, Section 1, following.

<sup>85</sup> Code names had been selected previously by COMSO-PAC and appear in his 16-43. The order of 15 October assigned the code name "Dipper" to the whole operation, "Goodtime" to the Treasury Islands, "Cherryblossom" to Empress Augusta Bay, and "Hairbrush" to Puruata Island. By virtue of a change issued 22 October, the name "Dipper" was applied to Bougainville only, while the name "Blissful" was assigned to the Choiseul operation.

<sup>86</sup> IMAC Change No. 2 to Operation Order No. 1, 22 October 1943.

<sup>87</sup> IMAC LofI to 3d MarDiv, 27Sep43.

<sup>88</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> IMAC Tentative Shipping Assignment, 27Sep43.

ized and restricted by terrain to small detachments. It was not expected that large bodies of reinforcing troops, such as could endanger the bulk of the Division, could be brought to the area readily and committed, except by sea. Whatever initial opposition the enemy offered to our landing would have to come from the air. Due to the proximity of Japanese air bases, however, this reaction was fully expected.

Tactical considerations dictated that the 3d Division embark three task units in the available ships. Two of these consisted of reinforced infantry regiments of four landing teams each, while the third unit consisted primarily of the 3d Defense Battalion, FMF, which was to furnish anti-aircraft artillery support. With each task unit it was necessary to embark logistic personnel, such as engineers, air, naval base, signal, and service troops, whose primary mission was immediate development of air and naval base facilities. Furthermore, loading of each ship was restricted to about 500 tons of supplies and equipment, and all elements of the Division embarked thereon would have to be landed simultaneously, so that ships could be unloaded within a five to six hours' time-limit imposed by CTF-31.

Since swamps were known to exist immediately behind the beach, and space for unloaded supplies would therefore be at a premium, landing plans of the 3d Marine Division therefore envisaged employment of 12 beaches, one per ship, 11 extending west from Cape Torokina some 7350 yards, and one on the north (inner) shore of Puruata Island. (For beaches and detailed scheme of maneuver, see map 3.) Each combat team was to overrun and destroy all Japanese positions in its respective sector, seize a shallow beachhead initially and institute immediate vigorous reconnaissance patrolling to front and flanks, meanwhile unloading ships as rapidly as possible and installing beach defenses. At the same time, the units were to be prepared to deploy to right or left, or to make a lateral shift in either direction as a unit.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> 3d MarDiv Opn Rpt, 3. The word *sector* as used herein denotes the area commonly referred to as *zone* or *zone of action* in other campaigns. Operation orders and reports of the Bougainville campaign habitually use *sector*.

## REHEARSAL

Task unit A-1 (3d Marines, reinforced), organized as noted, into four landing teams, embarked on 13 October—before IMAC had issued Operation Order No. 1—from Tetere, Guadalcanal, in its attack transports with task unit Headquarters and transport division flag in the U.S.S. *Jackson*, famous throughout the fleet for the jingle about "relaxin' in the Jackson". Cargo accompanying each landing team was limited to 520 tons.

The transport division proceeded to Efate, in the New Hebrides, where, from 16 to 20 October, the force engaged in landing exercises. The loaded ships then stood by at Espiritu Santo until 29 October, when they proceeded to Koli Point, Guadalcanal, where, on 30 October, Commodore Reifsnider and General Turnage embarked on board the U.S.S. *Hunter Liggett*.<sup>91</sup> The transport division made its rendezvous with the balance of the attack force 84 miles west of Guadalcanal at 0740 on 31 October.<sup>92</sup>

Task unit A-2 (9th Marines, reinforced) went through the same routine with its transport division during the period 18-25 October<sup>93</sup> at the conclusion of which it proceeded to a point about 20 miles south of the eastern end of San Cristobal Island where it joined Task unit A-3 just before dark on 30 October.<sup>94</sup>

Task unit A-3 (3d Defense Battalion, reinforced) conducted landing exercises at Guadalcanal during the period 26-29 October and effected final rendezvous with the other task units on 31 October.

As a result of the rehearsals it was estimated that the average time for unloading the APA's and AKA's would be four and one-half hours, assuming a 2,500 yard-run from anchored transports to beach.<sup>95</sup>

During the period 14 to 17 October four APD's (destroyer-transports) and eight LCI's (landing

<sup>91</sup> Admiral Wilkinson and General Vandergrift boarded the *George Clymer*.

<sup>92</sup> 3d MarDiv Opn Rpt, 81.

<sup>93</sup> 3d MarDiv Opn O 18-43, 6Oct43.

<sup>94</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 39.

<sup>95</sup> Transport Group, 3d Amphibious Force, Action Report, 1-4. Hereinafter cited as *TG 3d AmphFor AR*.

craft, infantry) were made available to the 8th New Zealand Brigade for training. Landing exercises were carried out on Florida Island.

Loading and embarkation of the New Zealand Brigade for the Treasury Islands operation occurred without incident during the period 23 to 26 October.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, by the end of October, IMAC troops were fully trained and thoroughly acquainted with plans which had been months in preparation. With a feeling of confidence in themselves, their comrades, and their weapons, they patiently awaited the dawning of that day toward which all their effort had been bent—1 November 1943.

Training was finally completed and preliminary maneuvers were underway. Troops had al-

ready been landed and were fighting in the Treasury Islands and on Choiseul.<sup>97</sup> At last Admiral Halsey was prepared to launch the principal amphibious operation: the operation designed as the knock-out punch of the Northern Solomons campaign—Bougainville.

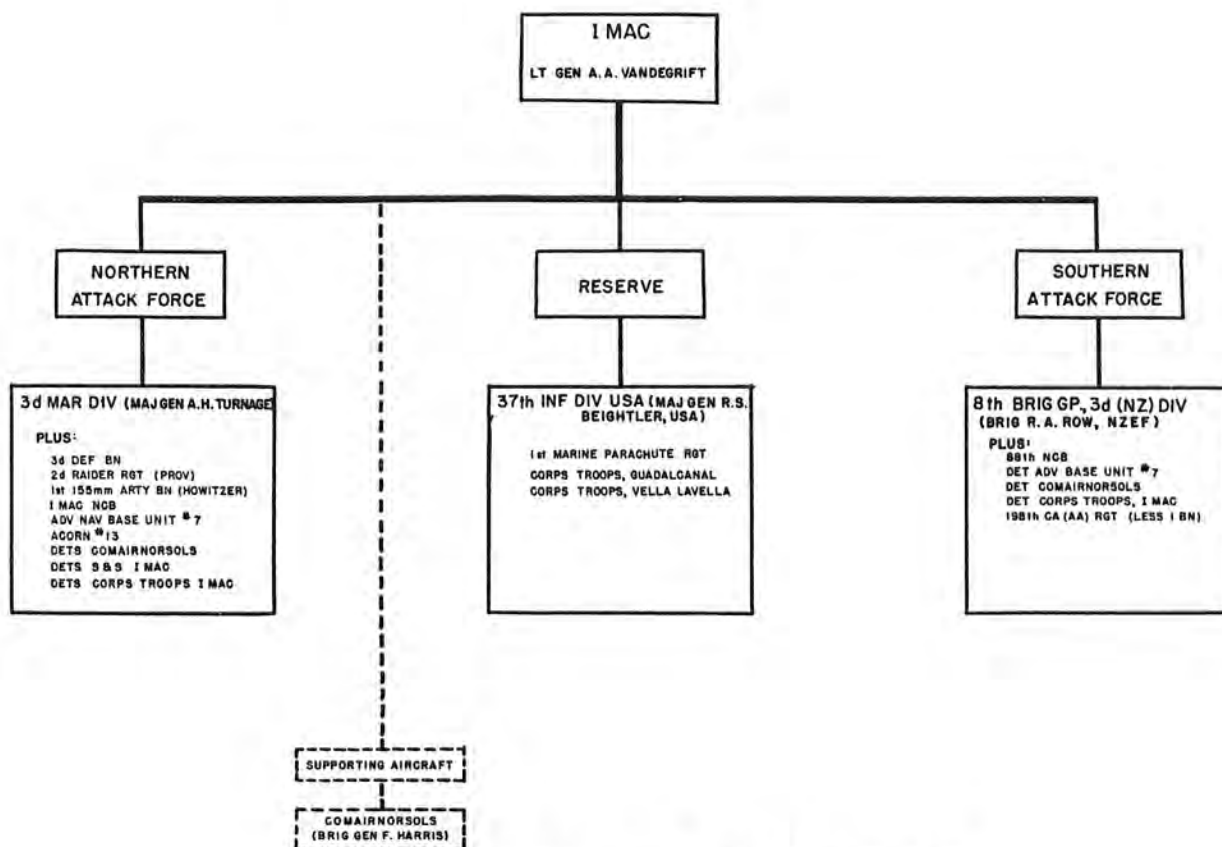
## APPROACH

Landing operations at Empress Augusta Bay were coordinated with a series of surface bombardments and air strikes designed to neutralize Japanese airfields on the northern and southern extremities of Bougainville.

While these operations were underway, the

<sup>96</sup> *Report of Operations—OP GOODTIME*, 6. Hereinafter cited as Row Rpt.

<sup>97</sup> For discussion of these subsidiary operations, see Chapter IV.



**DIAGRAM, I MAC TASK ORGANIZATION**

Transport Divisions were protected by Destroyer Divisions 90, 89, and 44, while Task Forces 37, 38, and 39 moved in to furnish cover and support against attack from Japanese surface forces. Task Force 72 furnished submarine support as planned. Minesweeping and protective minelaying operations were carried out. During the night of 31 October—1 November, overhead cover was provided by Navy Liberators, Ventura night-fighters, and "Black-cats".<sup>98</sup>

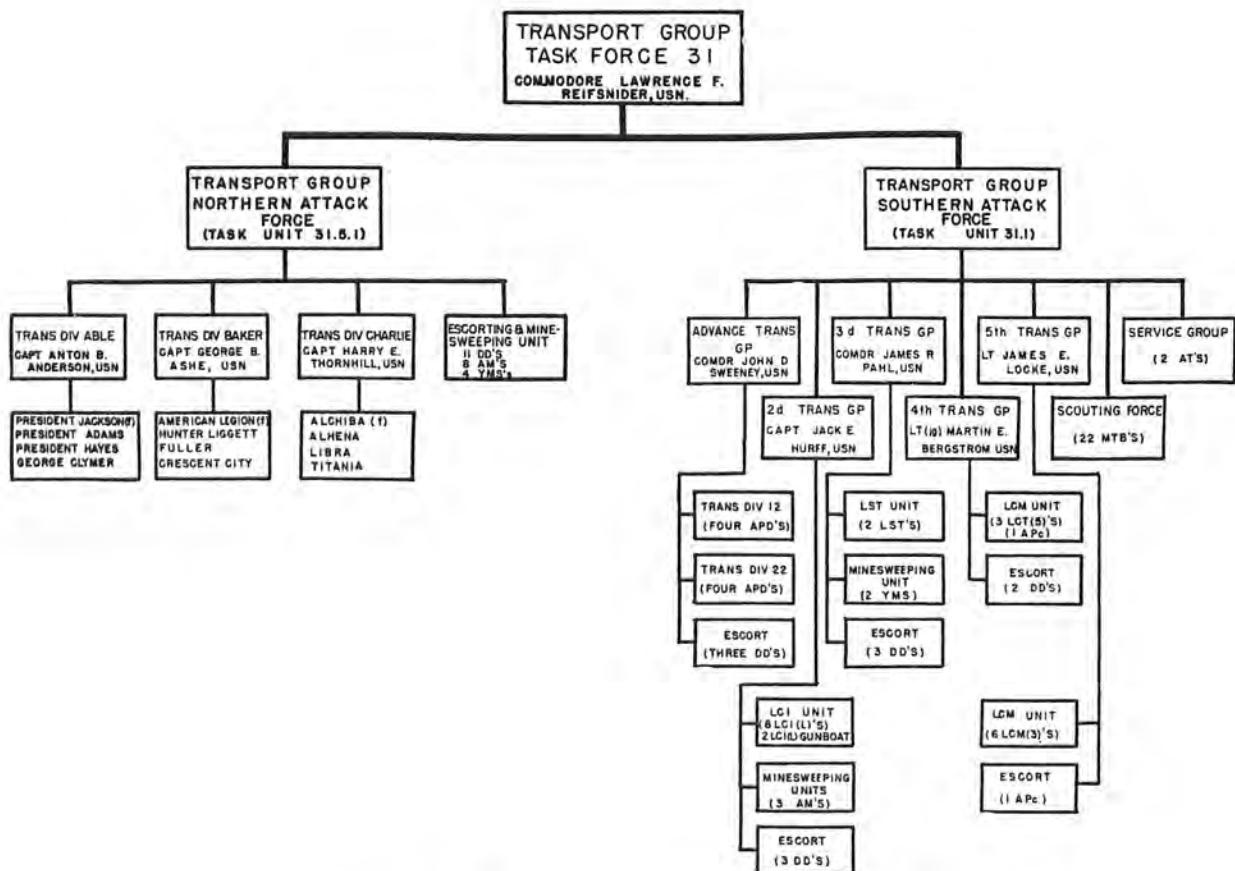
As a precaution against alerting the Japanese to our main intention, Admiral Wilkinson had postponed the rendezvous of the three transport divisions until the morning of 31 October (D minus one day). This took place at 0740, that day, and Commodore Reifsnider assumed tactical

command of the Transport Group and screen. From that time until 1800 the force followed a northwesterly course, then steering toward the Shortlands Islands area in order to deceive the Japanese into thinking that the target was to be somewhere on southern Bougainville, associated with our seizure of the Treasury Islands and our landing on Choiseul. After night fell, the course was again altered, this time in the direction of Empress Augusta Bay. During the night eight separate bogies were chased by the night fighters, which were being constantly vectored<sup>99</sup> by the *Conway*, but none of the Japanese planes apparently sighted the convoy.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> To vector—to determine the relative positions of friendly and enemy aircraft and transmit this information to friendly planes.

<sup>100</sup> *TG 3d AmphFor AR*, 5-6.

<sup>98</sup> *IMAC Opn Rpt*, I, 12.

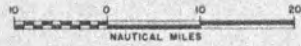


DIAGRAM, TRANSPORT GROUP ORGANIZATION

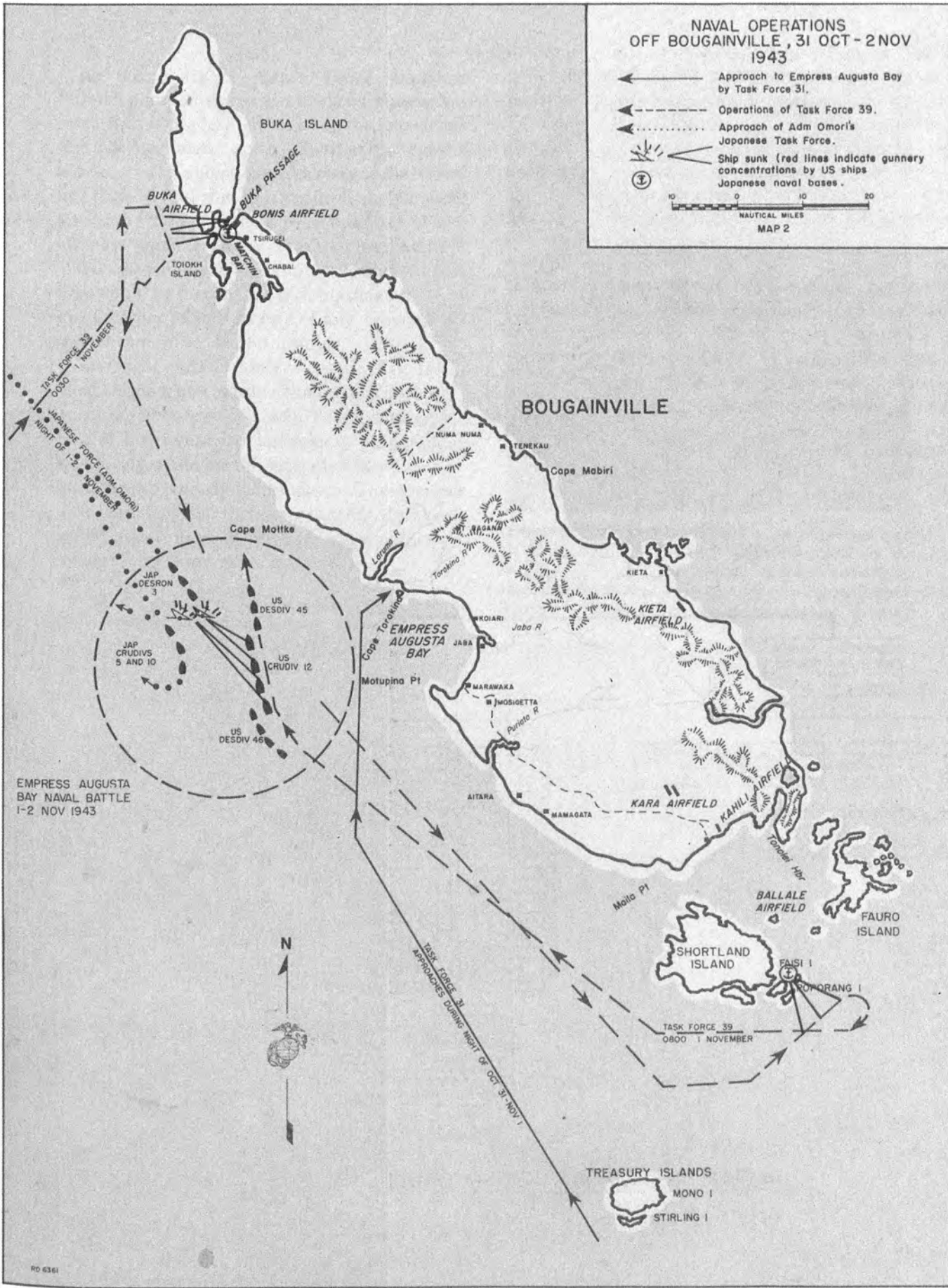


NAVAL OPERATIONS  
OFF BOUGAINVILLE, 31 OCT - 2 NOV  
1943

- ← Approach to Empress Augusta Bay by Task Force 31.
- ← Operations of Task Force 39.
- ← Approach of Adm Omori's Japanese Task Force.
- ☄ Ship sunk (red lines indicate gunnery concentrations by US ships Japanese naval bases).



MAP 2



EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY NAVAL BATTLE  
1-2 NOV 1943

As the Northern Attack Force ploughed through phosphorescent seas toward Empress Augusta Bay, its leaders felt secure in the knowledge that the starboard (north) flank of the convoy was secured by operations underway in the Treasury Islands, and that as a result of the Choiseul diversion <sup>101</sup> the Japanese were unaware of our ultimate point of attack. Furthermore, Admiral Wilkinson and General Vandergrift realized that they would be forewarned by long-range radar in the Treasury Islands in case of any Japanese air attacks that should be forthcoming.

The night of 31 October was dark. Tiny freckles of clouds momentarily obliterated certain stars as an observer would watch. Below decks, purposeful but unhurried last-minute preparations were being made for the supreme test which was to take place shortly before dawn. The Marines were confident that their long months of training would assure them of ultimate victory. In their minds the issue was never in doubt.

<sup>101</sup> See Chapter IV ff. for discussion of operations in the Treasury Islands and on Choiseul.



**COMMODORE REIFSNIDER EXPLAINS** details of the approach on Bougainville to General Turnage, commander of the 3d Marine Division. This picture is believed to have been taken on the morning of D-day minus one, as Reifsnider's Transport Group moved northward past the Treasury Islands



## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER II

## Establishing Bougainville Beachhead

### LANDINGS AT CAPE TOROKINA

D-DAY, 1 November 1943, dawned bright and clear.<sup>1</sup> General Quarters had been sounded at 0500,<sup>2</sup> and troops lining the rail at 0614<sup>3</sup> saw a beautiful sunrise which outlined Bougainville's forbidding mountain range. Wisps of smoke curled into the sky from the great jungle-surrounded volcano, Mt. Bagana. The atmosphere was tranquil.<sup>4</sup>

The task force had proceeded without incident and at 0432, 1 November, course was set to approach Cape Torokina, while speed was reduced to 12 knots. Minesweepers swept clear lanes about 6,000 yards ahead of the transports.<sup>5</sup>

The sweepers found no mines and reported sufficient water for the transports, which then began to enter the transport area about 0545,<sup>6</sup> with *Hunter Liggett* in the lead. Upon reaching a point about 3,000 yards off Cape Torokina, each transport executed a 100° turn to port and took the point itself under 3-inch fire. When abeam, Puruata Island was taken under 20mm fire.<sup>7</sup> At

0637, Admiral Wilkinson announced 0730 as H-hour.<sup>8</sup> By 0645, when all transports were anchored in line in the transport area, about 3,000 yards from the beach, the AK's being in parallel line some 500 yards to seaward, the traditional signal "land the landing force" was thereupon executed.<sup>9</sup> Marines clambered over the sides to take their places in the LCVP's and LCM's. In the first trip of the boats, approximately 7,500 troops were to be landed on beaches some 1,500 yards away from the line of departure.<sup>10</sup>

The signal to start the first assault wave for boats of the *President Adams* (carrying elements of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, reinforced),<sup>11</sup> which had a 5,000 yard run to the beach,<sup>12</sup> was executed at 0710.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously the fire-support destroyers *Anthony*, *Wadsworth*, *Terry*, and *Sigourney*, which had been firing intermittent missions since about 0547, commenced their prearranged fires. This fire lifted at 0721, and immediately thereafter 31 TBF's of Marine Air Group 14, flying from Munda, bombed and

<sup>1</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 12.

<sup>2</sup> L. D. Burrus, editor, *The Ninth Marines A Brief History of the Ninth Marine Regiment*. . . . (Washington, 1946), 40.

<sup>3</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin M. Josephy, *et al.*, *Uncommon Valor: Marine Divisions in Action* (Washington, 1946), 88.

<sup>5</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 6. This final approach had to be made with extreme caution because of existent navigational hazards.

<sup>6</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 12.

<sup>7</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 6.

<sup>8</sup> 3d Marine Regiment Unit Journal. See bibliography in appendix for more complete description of this document. Hereinafter cited as 3d Marines Journal.

<sup>9</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> 3d Marine Regiment Combat Report, I. A copy of this document is enclosed with the 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*. Hereinafter cited as 3d Marines AR.

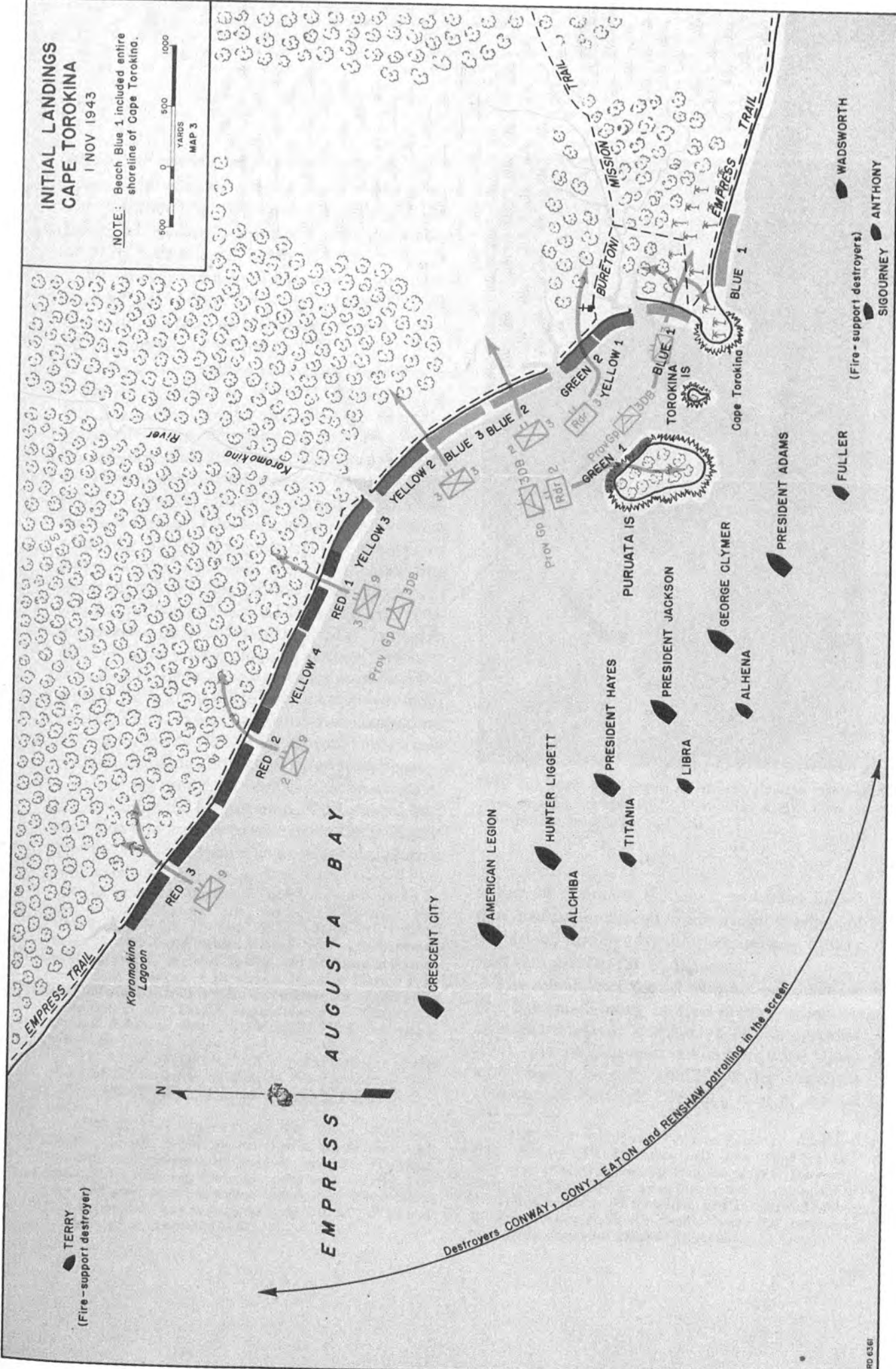
<sup>12</sup> Because of the necessity of circumnavigating Puruata Island.

<sup>13</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 7.

# INITIAL LANDINGS CAPE TOROKINA

1 NOV 1943

NOTE: Beach Blue 1 included entire shoreline of Cape Torokina.



strafed the beaches for about five minutes.<sup>14</sup> First boats to hit the beach were those of the *President Jackson* (carrying elements of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, reinforced), which grounded at 0726, four minutes before H-hour.<sup>15</sup>

By approximately 0730, white star parachutes,<sup>16</sup> indicating "Landing Successful", were seen going up from several of the beaches, despite varying degrees of resistance.<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese defenders of Cape Torokina on 1 November consisted of the 2d Company, 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry plus 30 men from the Regimental Gun Company. In addition to their organic weapons, this force was equipped with one 75mm gun. Total strength numbered approximately 270 officers and men under command of Captain Ichikawa, in prepared positions consisting of 18 pill-boxes, solidly constructed with coconut logs and dirt, and connecting trenches and rifle pits. Of this force, one platoon was stationed on Puruata Island and one additional squad on Torokina Island. The 75mm gun was emplaced on the shoulder of Cape Torokina near Beach Green 2, and riflemen were disposed around the gun. All other beaches were undefended. The Japanese had based their dispositions on an estimate that Allied forces would attack east of Cape Torokina and west of Cape Motupena.

It was not until 5 November, that survivors of the 2d Company, 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, had their first opportunity to take stock. Only 68 officers and men had been able to escape the Marine



**OVER THE SIDE**—Men of the 3d Marine Division clamber down a cargo net into an LCM waiting to land them at Torokina on the morning of D-day.

<sup>14</sup> The following Marine air squadrons participated in the original landing: As cover—VMTB-232, 143, VMSB-144, VMF-221 and 215; VMSB-144 marked beach positions with white smoke; VMF-215 patrolled over the task force; VMTB-231 and 143 bombed Torokina beach positions. A detailed account of Marine aviation activities in this action is contained in *Amphibious Landings in the Pacific Ocean Areas...* edited by Captain Edna L. Smith, USMCWR, USN publication OP-519B/C16261, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 7. A complete account of this phase of the action is available in this document.

<sup>16</sup> 3d MarDiv Unit Journal. See bibliography in appendix.

<sup>17</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 13 and 9th Marine Regiment Combat Report, 13 (hereinafter cited as 9th Marines AR) represent the extremes of time in reporting "Landing Successful". However, since the variation is only 12 minutes, and since practically every officer interviewed stated that the landing was at "approximately 0730", 0730 may be accepted as the official time.

onslaught. Captain Ichikawa, wounded in action, had been replaced as commanding officer of the defending force by the Probationary Officer who commanded the 2d Platoon.<sup>18</sup>

The schedule of the 3d Marines provided for simultaneous landing by four landing teams on beaches from Cape Torokina to the Koromokina River, the 1st Battalion landing on Cape Torokina (Beach Blue 1), the 2d Raider Regiment (less the 3d Battalion) landing west of the 1st

<sup>18</sup> 3d MarDiv. D-2 Special Action Report, 1 February, 1944, Annex "A". Ichikawa had been wounded and later evacuated to Japan. In Prisoner of War Interrogations, he is identified as a 1st Lieutenant in command of the 11th Company, 3d Battalion, 23d Infantry (Combat Intelligence Center, South Pacific Force: PW Interrogation #322, Corporal Isakichi Hanaski).



A MARINE DIVE BOMBER from VMSB-144 turns gently toward the beachhead area prior to peeling off in one of the prelanding airstrikes at Torokina on D-Day morning.

Battalion (Beach Green 2), the 2d Battalion to the west of the Raiders (Beach Blue 2), and the 3d Battalion between the Koromokina and the 2d Battalion (Beach Blue 3). The 9th Marines scheduled landings of its 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions from left to right in that order on Beaches Red 3, Red 2, and Red 1, and provided for simultaneous landing of the 3d Raider Battalion (less Company L, which landed on Beach Green 2) on Beach Green 1, Puruata Island, in order to destroy all anti-boat defenses which might be emplaced there.<sup>19</sup>

When boats of the 3d Marines came in line with Puruata Island, they were taken under three-way crossfire of machine-guns on the Cape, the western tip of Puruata Island, and Torokina Island.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, casualties from this fire were

<sup>19</sup> 9th Marine Regiment Operation Order 57-43, 24 October, 1943.

<sup>20</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 12.

light, but LCP's (landing craft, personnel), being employed as command boats by boat group commanders, because of their distinctive appearance as compared with LCV's (landing craft, vehicle), were easily identifiable for what they were and thus were well worked over while in range of Japanese guns.<sup>21</sup>

Having passed Puruata Island safely, boats of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines approached their beaches on the western side of Cape Torokina, only to be taken once again under machine-gun and rifle fire, this time from positions on the Cape itself. These positions were in well concealed log and sand bunkers, many of which were joined by connecting trenches. On the northwest shoulder of the cape, on the Raider's beach, a 75mm Mountain gun was emplaced in a coconut log and sand bunker, protected by interconnected

<sup>21</sup> 3d Marines AR, 1a.

rifle positions. The area to seaward from the Cape past Puruata Island and the channel to the north was covered.<sup>22</sup> As the boats came into range, this gun began to fire at them, and succeeded in destroying about four and damaging ten others with 50 high explosive shells.<sup>23</sup>

Typical of all these boats was No. 21, of the *Adams*. Embarked were Lieutenants Byron A. Kirk and Harris W. Shelton, with two squads of Kirk's 2d Platoon, Company C; a detachment of 1st Battalion Headquarters Company; and a demolition squad, Company C, 19th Marines. Less than 20 seconds before this boat was to reach the beach, three shells from the Japanese 75 hit the boat in rapid succession. The first shell killed the coxswain and put the boat out of control, while the second and third shells killed both lieutenants and 12 enlisted men, while wounding 14 others. Some survivors, under Sergeant Dick K. McAllister, went over the side, and by aiding one another were able to get to the beach, where they

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Ia.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, I-1a. This document is a most readable account of the engagement in so far as activities of the 3d Marines are concerned.

immediately engaged the Japanese defenders with rifles and hand grenades.<sup>24</sup> Since the only way to get aid for the wounded was to get them back to the ship, Corporal John McNamara decided to attempt to get the boat underway. By this time the boat had drifted up on the beach, so McNamara and a seaman climbed aboard and backed it into the sea. Having been damaged, however, the craft was not seaworthy, and therefore sank. Only four or five of the wounded survived.<sup>25</sup>

In the meantime the Boat Group commander's boat had been shot to pieces by the 75, and the boat waves were completely disorganized.<sup>26</sup> As a result, assault companies of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, landed in an order practically the reverse of that planned. To make matters worse, the Japanese opened up with their beach defense

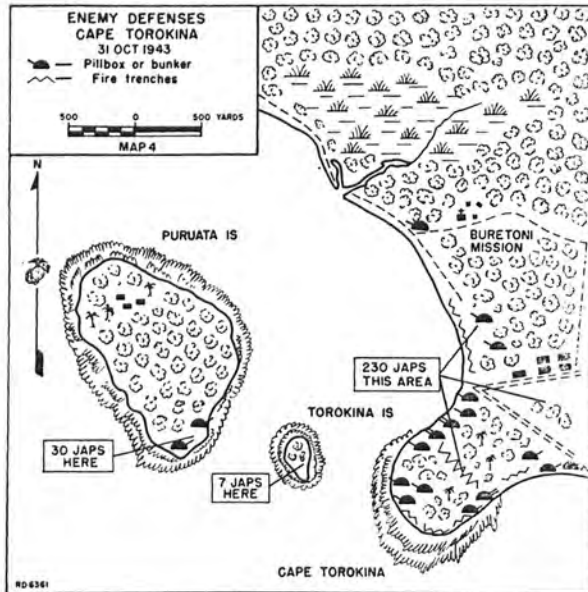
<sup>24</sup> John Monks, *A Ribbon and A Star* (New York, 1945), 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> U. S. S. *President Adams*, Action Report for Landing at Torokina Point, Bougainville Island on 1 November, 1943; see also Monks, *op. cit.*, 3-4 and the letter of Col. George McHenry to CMC dated 3 December 1943.

<sup>26</sup> 3d Marines AR, Ia.



**LANDING CRAFT UNDER FIRE ROUNDING PURUATA ISLAND** on the way in to the beach. At this point, assault waves were also receiving enemy fire from Torokina Island, in left background, and from Cape Torokina itself (not shown).



machine-guns, and those Marines who were able to get ashore unscathed had to cross the beach through a hail of fire. In spite of disorganization of units and the wounding of the 1st Battalion

commander, Major Leonard M. Mason, early in the attack, impromptu but aggressive individual action soon got the situation in hand and insured successful completion of the landing.<sup>27</sup>

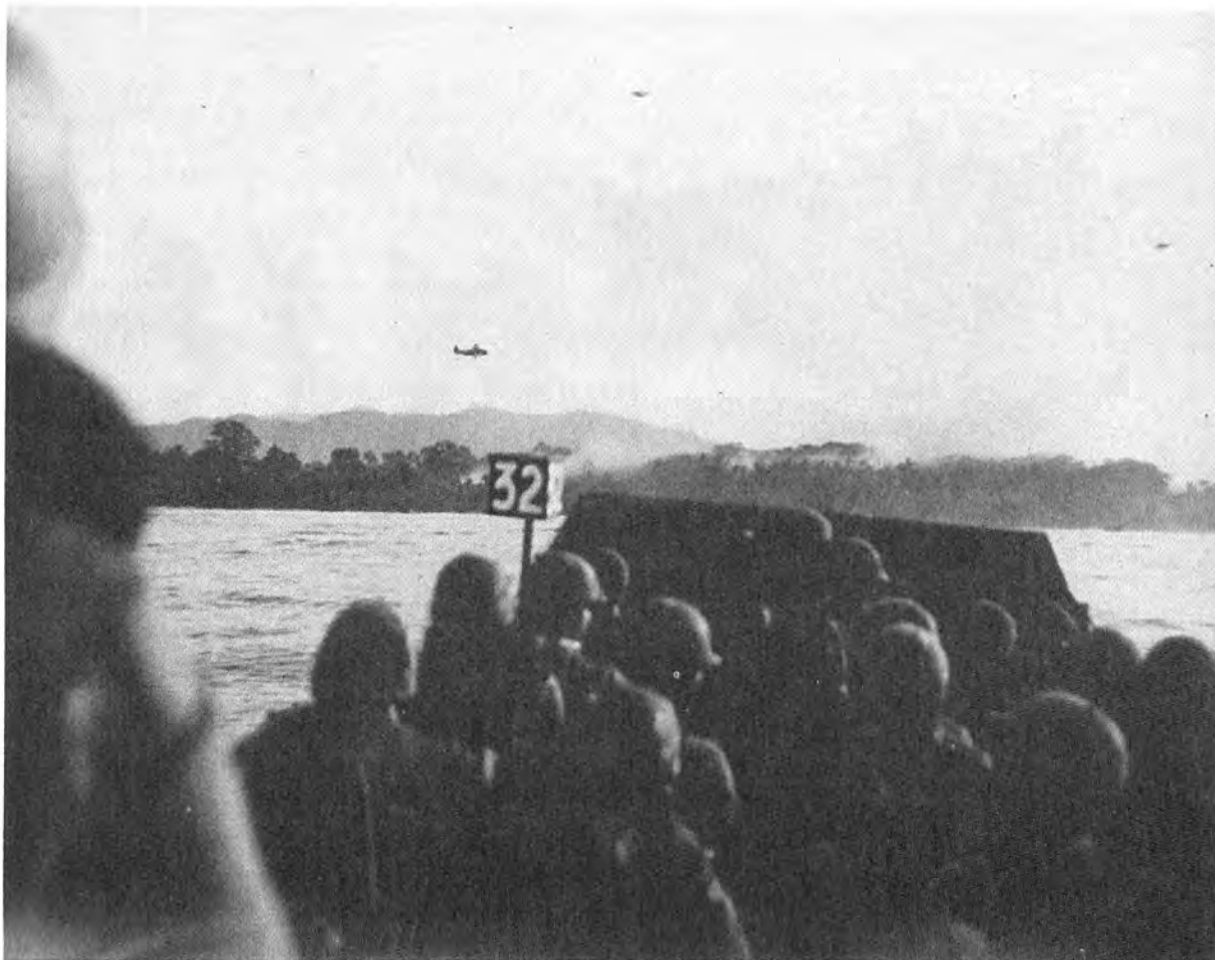
By the time the shore had been gained, entire organizations were broken up. Platoons and companies were thrown out of position by being landed on the wrong part of the beach; contact was lost between companies; the battalion lost communication and therefore control of its subordinate units. This condition, brought about by cannon fire, emplaced and coordinated machine-guns, and by high dense brush that grew nearly to the water's edge, might have resulted in destruction of the entire force if it had not been for the presence of an unusually large number of individuals who had received thorough training as small unit leaders, and who knew the mission and were ready and willing to take charge in a crisis. Because every Marine had been thoroughly indoctrinated and briefed on the entire maneuver, each was able to carry out the mission in the sec-

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, I.



**APPROACHING THE BEACH**, landing craft machine-gunners spray the shoreline with .50 caliber fire which may help to keep Japanese defenders pinned to their positions, and hold down enemy fire during the last minutes of the approach.





**THE FINAL RUN IN** of an LCVP to the beach, while a torpedobomber of Marine Air Group 14 makes a last pass at the smoking jungle.

tor in which he found himself, even though he may have been landed in the wrong place. What is more, these men went on to complete the mission assigned to that sector without direction from higher echelon, achieving spontaneous unity of effort and attaining their objectives despite absence of control.

Stress which had been laid on small unit training, particularly in rifle squad and platoon tactics, now paid a dividend. Until the beach defense and its supports were overcome, the battle was one of small groups, composed of men, sometimes not even of the same squads, but in every case taken in charge by some Marine whose instinct for leadership enabled him to meet the emergency.

Attacks were well coordinated, well led, and well executed, and as a result the Marines who got safely ashore eventually reached each battalion's objectives where, with little delay, units somewhat automatically reorganized and either shifted position to the sector originally assigned, or merely exchanged responsibility for the sector with the consent of the battalion commander. Company C, which had been landed on the extreme right flank in place of Company A, which had been scheduled to land there, suffered particularly heavy casualties.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Monks, *op. cit.*, 14-15. 3d MarDiv Unit Journal also gives some interesting comments concerning action on the beach.



**ON THE BEACH AT LAST**, 3d Division Marines fan out on the double to get across the exposed shoreline and plunge, already deployed for combat, into Bougainville jungle.

That the troublesome 75mm gun did not succeed in causing an even greater number of casualties and increased havoc among the landing forces was due, in large measure, to a considered act of great bravery by Sergeant Robert A. Owens, Company A, 3d Marines.<sup>29</sup> Realizing that rifle fire and grenades were gaining no results in silencing the gun, he posted four comrades to cover with fire the two rifle bunkers adjacent to the gun position. As his mates were moving into position to take up fire on these bunkers, Owens observed them being shot one by one, but, realizing that once having begun the assault it would be useless to stop, he advanced toward the gun position alone, being hit several times on the way. Owens continued his assault nevertheless, entered the gun position through the fire port, killed some of the gun crew, and drove the remainder through

<sup>29</sup> An indication of the confusion prevalent at this point may be gathered from the fact that Sgt. Owens was a member Company A, 3d Marines, which was scheduled to land on the extreme right flank of the beachhead, whereas the 75mm gun in question was close to the sector of the 2d Raider Battalion—in other words, to the left of the 1st Battalion beach.

the rear door, where they were instantly shot. His charge carried him just clear of the emplacement where he fell dead of the wounds he had received. It was afterwards discovered that a round had been placed in the gun chamber and that the block was nearly closed. Thus Owens undoubtedly prevented the gun from destroying additional lives. As a result of his action, Sergeant Owens was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.<sup>30</sup>

There is no doubt but that seizure of the Cape was the key to success. Through the vigorous ef-

<sup>30</sup> It was through the efforts of a Marine Corps historian, Captain William G. Wendell, that Owens finally received the honor he so richly deserved. Captain Wendell, while making a study of the Bougainville campaign, discovered that, although Owens had been recommended for the Medal of Honor, the award had been neither approved nor made. After a thorough investigation on the part of Captain Wendell, and after much correspondence on the part of all officers cognizant of facts in the case, the recommendation was finally approved. See Decorations and Medals Division, HQMC, file #00317. See also Van Orden letter of 9 May 1945; of. Director of Personnel letter to CMC dated 7 February 1945. Further information is contained in *Parris Island Boot*, 18 August 1945.

forts of Major L. M. Mason order appeared out of chaos. Although wounded, Mason refused to be evacuated until he was sure the landing of his battalion had been successful.

While the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines was involved in fighting on the Cape, elements of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, and the 2d Raider Battalion were also engaged. These units likewise had to land in the face of rifle and machine-gun fire and having been landed out of position, had become thoroughly disorganized on reaching the beach.<sup>31</sup> Companies were forced to move laterally

<sup>31</sup> McMath-Schmuck letter (memorandum) to Officer-in-Charge, Historical Section, Division of Public Information, USMC, dated 17 November 1944.

on the beach, under fire, in order to reach their proper positions. In an effort to prevent additional confusion or immobilization by Japanese fire, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph P. McCaffery, Commanding Officer of the 2d Raider Battalion, moved under fire from mortars and automatic weapons, from unit to unit in order to dispose those units to insure maximum effectiveness of the troops. Initiating an attack which ultimately led to reduction of the Japanese positions, McCaffery led his men until he was felled by enemy fire. His valiant and inspiring leadership was largely responsible for reorganization of troops ashore on beaches immediately to the left (north) of Cape Torokina. Lieutenant Colonel McCaf-



**MOPPING UP JAPANESE BUNKERS**, two wary Marines of the 3d Regiment help to make Cape Torokina safe for democracy

fery died aboard the U. S. S. *George Clymer* as a result of his wounds, but the inspiration which he had given his men, and the high esteem in which he was held, lived on.<sup>32</sup>

On the left (north) flank of the beachhead, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, and the 9th Marines landed against opposition not quite so formidable as that offered by the Japanese, but of a nature to make the landing difficult by any means. Here the beach was steep; so much so that landing boats could not beach along the length of keel. Here jungle grew to the water's edge, and surf was extremely rough. These natural obstacles combined with lack of experience on the part of coxswains caused many landing boats to broach to in the surf. Before the 3d Marines and the

<sup>32</sup> *Headquarters Bulletin*, July, 1944, 48.

Raiders had secured their beaches in the vicinity of Cape Torokina, in order that alternate beaches could be assigned to boats originally assigned in the 9th Marines' sector, 64 LCVP's and 22 LCM (3)'s had broached and stranded. This loss in landing craft resulted in unloading difficulties later.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, the 9th Marines quickly made their way ashore, established defensive positions as ordered, and despatched a strong combat patrol to the Laruma River mouth to protect the Division right flank.

On Puruata Island, the 3d Battalion, 2d Raid-

<sup>33</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 7-8. The LCVP's mounted two .30 cal. machine-guns, and the LCM's two twin .50 cal. machine-guns. The 25th NCB stripped these guns from the broached boats and remounted them on the beach, thereby giving the beach, at 1800 on D-day, defenses as strong as those of the front lines.



**THIS JAPANESE 75 MM CANNON PLAYED HAVOC** with assault waves of the 3d Marines, sinking four landing craft and damaging ten before it was silenced by Sergeant Robert A. Owens, posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his feat.



**SERGEANT ROBERT A. OWENS**, who posthumously won the Medal of Honor for singlehandedly assaulting and silencing, at the cost of his life, the Japanese 75 mm gun which brought down such destructive fire on 3d Marines landing craft from Cape Torokina.

ers, met stiff opposition in the form of Japanese riflemen and machine-gunners in well-concealed pill-boxes, covered by riflemen in rifle pits and trees. The terrain was overgrown by heavy brush and afforded poor visibility. This opposition did not deter the Raiders, however, and individual combat training previously received now stood them in good stead. Throughout D-day and part of the next, the Raiders combed the island and finally succeeded in locating and reducing all opposition. By noon of D plus one day, resistance on Puruata Island had ceased. There were no prisoners.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Monks, *op. cit.*, 708. See also Headquarters Bulletin, cited *supra*; cf. IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 13.

The machine-guns on the western tip of the island which had caused such disorganization among landing boats were taken before the first day was over. The Raiders had done their job well.

More than half the leading force—between seven and eight thousand troops—had gotten ashore in the first trip of the boats and had gained footholds on the beaches before interference by Japanese air forces became threatening.

At 0730 large numbers of approaching enemy planes were picked up by radar. Fighter cover succeeded in breaking up most of the Japanese formations, but about 12 Val dive-bombers were able to break through and attack the transports, fortunately, however, only killing two men, and wounding five others in the *Wadsworth*. During this period, enemy fighting planes ineffectually strafed the beaches but inflicted few casualties since shore party personnel had dug slit trenches immediately upon landing.

Several serious attempts to attack our ships, however, were made by the Japanese within the next few hours. On one occasion, for example, a flight of four Marine fighters from VMF-215<sup>35</sup> was patrolling 13,000 feet above Cape Torokina, when six enemy planes were observed approaching our beachhead at 10,000 feet. Each Marine pilot jumped one enemy. After a brief *mélée*, only one Japanese plane was left to streak homeward and one Marine F4U—that piloted by Lieutenant Hanson—was in the water.<sup>36</sup> Such interceptions were repeated a number of times throughout the day, and although the ships' antiaircraft fire was ineffective, the fine Marine fighter cover prevented effective enemy air attacks.<sup>37</sup>

Most serious consequence of these air attacks, however, was the resultant delay in unloading, for twice during the day all ships were required to withdraw from the transport area for defensive maneuvers. Equipment and supplies had been reduced to approximately 500 tons per ship,

<sup>35</sup> Captain Authur T. Warner, 1st Lieutenant Lloyd E. Cox, 1st Lieutenant Robert M. Hanson, and 2d Lieutenant Samuel M. Sampler. VMF-215 was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Herbert H. Williamson.

<sup>36</sup> Lieutenant Hanson was soon picked up by a rescue boat.

<sup>37</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 8; VMF-215 War Diary, November, 1943.



**SURF WAS EXTREMELY ROUGH AND MANY BOATS BROACHED TO** on the 9th Marines' beaches. Reading from left to right in background, lie Cape Torokina, Torokina Island, and Puruata Island.

and five hours was the time estimated for unloading. Interruption by air attacks caused certain misgivings with regard to a supply the future of which at that moment was by no means assured. But four transports, which had not finished their task, were able to return to the area on the morning of 2 November, and complete discharge of cargo without further difficulty or delay.<sup>38</sup>

To add to unloading difficulties, the high attrition of landing craft due to enemy action and surf, reduced the number of boats available for movement of supplies. Coupled with this was the fact that the shore parties unloading on the beach, were taken under fire. As the heavy surf took toll of many boats, intervening shoals prevented the salvage tug, U. S. S. *Sioux*, from proceeding to assist stranded craft. To make matters worse, it was necessary to abandon beaches on the left because of surf, so ships assigned to those beaches had to shift to new stations.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> IAMC *Opn Rpt.*, I. 13.

<sup>39</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt.*, 8.

Gunnery performance of several fire-support ships left much to be desired when firing on shore targets. Some ships fired short for almost five minutes, with all salvos landing in the water. When finally on target, however, our gunfire was helpful in the initial landing. It must be said, however, that the nature of the terrain was such that effective support was difficult, and shells frequently detonated against trees before they reached their targets.<sup>40</sup>

Debarkation plans had called for the landing of engineer and anti-aircraft artillery organizations from Task Unit C on beaches within the 3d Marines' sector. Despite great difficulties, anti-aircraft defenses were established on the beaches well before the debarkation of equipment and supplies was completed.

On Cape Torokina, as bunker after bunker

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16. LtCol James M. Smith, who had accompanied the amphibious patrol ashore, watched this bombardment from the enemy point of view, and reports that its effect was practically nil.

fell to the assault of squads and platoons, control was gradually reestablished over the separate battalions; and the advance then begun had by evening successfully terminated in occupation of the proposed initial beachhead line.<sup>41</sup>

With the fanning out of the first patrols, it became evident that, with the exception of two avenues of approach to Cape Torokina, the 3d Marine Division was hemmed in by swamp and the most dense and rugged jungle that Marines had ever seen. With each battalion on its final objective for the first day, it was only by exceptional effort on the part of communication personnel that even lateral command lines between various teams could be laid before dark. Patrols from the 2d Raider Battalion and from

the 1st and 2d Battalions, 3d Marines, pushing through swamp and tangles that held their advance to a few dozen yards an hour, could not make contact. To plug gaps and close possible avenues of approach of Japanese reinforcements which, from documents discovered on bodies of dead in the bunkers, were known to be north of Piva Village, Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, and Company L, 3d Raider Battalion, were shifted to the Cape Torokina sector and put into position to cover the flank and rear of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, now nearly 1000 yards from its beach.<sup>42</sup>

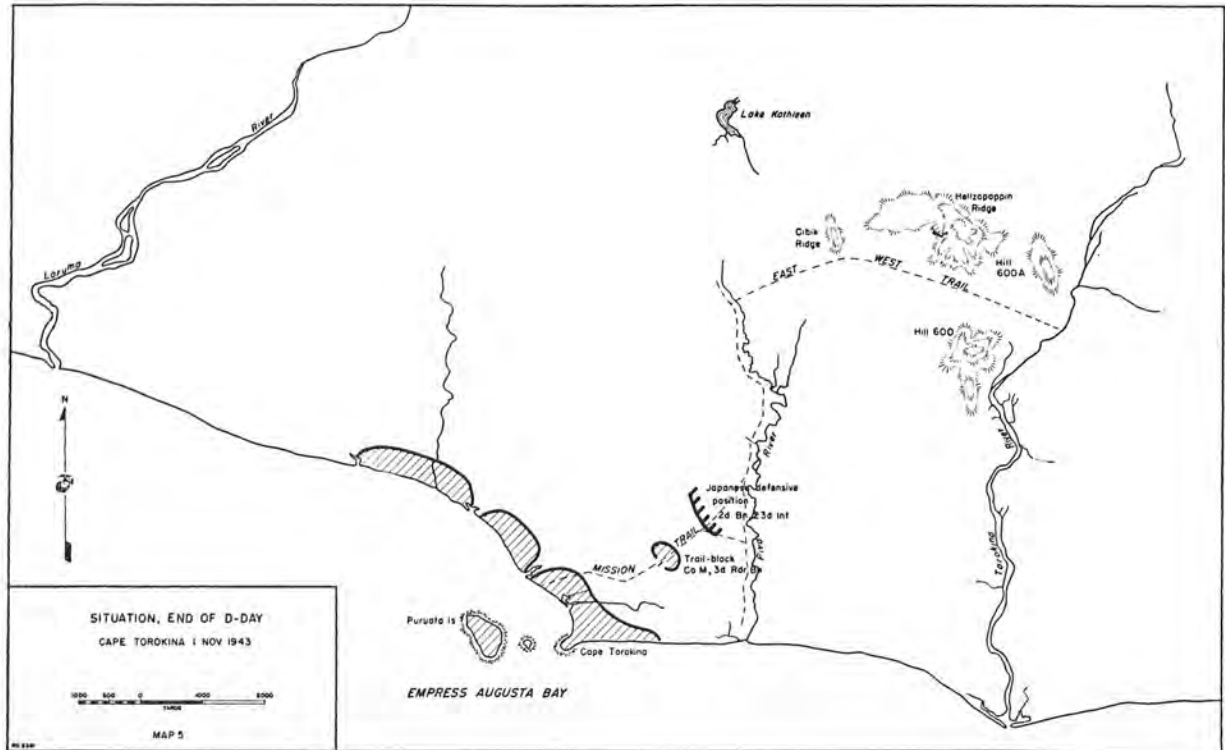
In the meanwhile, the 2d Raider Battalion, which had been assigned the mission of estab-

<sup>41</sup> 3d Marines AR, IIIa.

<sup>42</sup> 3d Marines AR, *loc. cit.* gives a detailed account of these activities.



**MOPPING UP ON TOROKINA ISLAND**, a platoon of the 2d Raider Battalion finds the going tough, despite the fact that only seven Japanese garrisoned the labyrinthine jungles of the tough little island.



lishing a roadblock across the trail to the northeast into the Cape Torokina area before the Japanese could determine a course of action, was securely established. This prevented Japanese forces from having access to the area. The expected counterattack from this vicinity never materialized. In the course of this action the Raiders captured a wounded Japanese Sergeant Major, first prisoner taken in the course of the operation.<sup>43</sup>

On the day of the landing, the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, had been the right battalion of its regiment. On 2 and 3 November the 1st and 2d Battalions were moved in succession to the right (east) flank of the perimeter. This left the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, on the extreme left flank, still in the same area it had occupied upon landing. Consequently, Lieutenant Colonel Walter Asmuth, Jr., commanding the battalion, curved his left flank back to the sea. Late in the day on 3 November, the battalion was attached to the 3d Marines, which (less 1st Battalion) had been

<sup>43</sup> 3d MarDiv D-2 SAR, Annex "A".

moved from the right to the left sector. Meanwhile the 2d and 3d Battalions, 3d Marines, had begun an advance inland through the swamps.

The line of advance of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, was generally to the north to enable it to maintain contact with the Raiders on the right; for this purpose Company A, 3d Marines, was attached to the 2d Battalion from 6 to 11 November. General route of the 3d Battalion was north, then east along the perimeter of the Division beachhead; the 3d Battalion was assigned the mission of locating the route of a lateral road from right to left flank.<sup>44</sup>

Unloading supplies onto the beachhead of the 3d Marine Division and subsequent distribution of those supplies to beach dumps was a major task on D-day and those immediately following. All transports and cargo vessels supplied personnel to assist in this unloading. Each of the eight APA's furnished a complete shore party, from among troops aboard, consisting of approximately 550 officers and men. Of these, 120 worked unload-

<sup>44</sup> 3d Marines AR, IIIb.





**THE 9TH MARINES SHIFTING POSITIONS** on the afternoon of D-Day. Men of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, moving eastward to new areas due to the unsuitability of the beaches, and because of expected enemy resistance in that direction.

ing the ship itself, 60 were boat riders, and 200 were used on the beach with sole duty of unloading cargo from boats. Remaining personnel were used for shore party headquarters, pioneer work, vehicle drivers, dump supervisors, communicators, medical personnel, beach party personnel, and for work at the dumps created.

It had been planned to have the AKA's furnish 120 men for work in holds, 50 men to ride boats to and from shore, and 200 men to work on the beach, unloading cargo from boats as they landed. Only 350 officers and men were available to each AKA, however, it therefore became necessary to make up the difference by drawing men from the APA's. This drain upon personnel embarked in the APA's was felt principally by combatant units.

Used in initial stages of the operation as working parties to assist shore parties was a large percentage of personnel of the 12th Marines. One battery of this regiment was to be landed with

each battalion of the 3d and 9th Marines. Since many artillerymen were not released from shore party duties until 4 November, several batteries could not be placed in operation until that date.

In addition to 12th Marines personnel, men from H & S Company, 19th Marines (whose regular duties consisted of reconnoitering for orientation of high and low ground areas, in order to disseminate terrain information rapidly for tactical, engineer, and dispersal purposes), were used until 3 November by the shore party. Other elements of the 19th Marines were assigned completely, with the exception of a few demolition personnel, and were also engaged in shore party activity until 9 November. Naval Construction Battalions augmented shore parties and were not released until 3 November to begin road construction. Some personnel from companies of the 3d Medical Battalion were held with shore parties until 11 November.

Other units used in shore party work and in

establishment of supply dumps were assigned regularly to the task. These included elements of the 3d Service Battalion, 3d Motor Transport Battalion, 3d Amphibious Tractor Battalion, and 3d Medical Battalion. Also included during D-day landings were elements of Division Special Troops: Headquarters Battalion (Headquarters, Military Police, and Signal Companies); Special Weapons Battalion; and parts of the Tank Battalion.

Three platoons of the Special Weapons Battalion landed on D-day, the remainder coming in on 6 November. The entire Battalion was attached for operational purposes to the 3d Defense Battalion. Those elements of the Tank Battalion which landed, acted for the first several days as scouts and reconnoitered terrain over which they would be required to fight.

In spite of the tie-up during D-day, the 3d Defense Battalion brought ashore on beaches of the 3d Marines most of their bulky anti-aircraft equipment, and managed to establish anti-aircraft defenses on 1 November before unloading of equipment and supplies was completed. Battery D (90mm), however, landed on D-day as infantry and did not land its guns until the following day.

Although the landings had been made with comparatively small loss in men and material, some confusion still existed on several beaches due to circumstances which had arisen after boats had left their line of departure. The impossibility of landing supplies and equipment on the three western beaches, forced boats originally destined for them to discharge at points farther east. Despite this, the job of unloading was completed.

Daylight hours of 2 and 3 November were devoted to sending out patrols to flanks and front for the purpose of insuring security and reconnaissance; in establishing beach defenses; and in reinforcing and improving defenses of the Cape Torokina sector. On 3 November, after a ten minute preparation by a 12th Marines 75mm Pack Howitzer battery and automatic weapons of the 3d Defense Battalion, the 3d Raider Battalion sent a combat patrol consisting of two platoons from its Demolition Company to Torokina Island, where a small but determined band

of Japanese had harassed Cape Torokina and Puruata beaches with machine-guns for two days. No Japanese were found. Initial resistance to our landing had come to an end.<sup>45</sup>

During the first three days, 192 Japanese dead were buried in all sectors.<sup>46</sup> The stoutly-held defenses around Cape Torokina had been reduced with facility, at a cost of 78 killed and 104 wounded. The beachhead was firmly established to a depth of about 2000 yards.<sup>47</sup>

## NAVAL BATTLE OF 1-2 NOVEMBER

The Japanese wasted no time in reacting to the landing on Bougainville. As soon as they could divine U. S. intentions in the Bougainville area, the enemy immediately began to assemble available naval forces in the vicinity of Rabaul. Returning Allied pilots and coastwatchers reported that at least two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, 10 destroyers, and other light units had been sighted in that area. It appeared that the Japanese were going to make a major effort on the surface.<sup>48</sup>

The only U. S. Navy striking force available in this area was Admiral Merrill's task force, which had bombarded the Buka-Bonis and Shortland areas in preparation for initial landings. Immediately after the Shortlands bombardment, this force had refueled and returned to the Cape Torokina region to protect landing forces from surface attack, and to cover retirement of the transports.<sup>49</sup> Admiral Merrill at this time had with him under his command four light cruisers and eight destroyers.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> 2d Raider Regiment Special Action Report, Bougainville, 2.

<sup>46</sup> 3d MarDiv D-2 SAR, Annex "A".

<sup>47</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 51.

<sup>49</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 49. This force is known both as Task Force 39 and as Task Force Merrill.

<sup>50</sup> A popularized and fairly accurate account of the work of Task Force 39 can be found in Fletcher Pratt, *Night Work: the Story of Task Force 39* (New York, 1946). See particularly pp. 198-214 for the account of the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay. Admiral Merrill's cruisers were the CL's *Montpelier*, *Cleveland*, *Columbia*, and *Denver*; his destroyers were the *Charles Ausburne*, *Dyson*, *Claxton*, *Spence*, *Thatcher*, *Converse*, *Footie*, and *Stanly*.

Very early on the morning of 2 November the Merrill Task Force was in position off the entrance to Empress Augusta Bay to intercept enemy surface forces reported in the vicinity and which appeared to be approaching Cape Torokina. A new moon afforded little light, but occasional flashes of heat lightning silhouetted the ships. Although the night was dark and cloudy, a light southwest wind sometimes puffed the clouds away to reveal patches of clear sky.<sup>51</sup>

Rear Admiral S. Omori, sailing from Rabaul in the heavy cruiser *Myoko*, with the heavy cruisers *Haguro* and *Agano*, the light cruiser *Sendai*, and six destroyers, was Admiral Merrill's opponent.<sup>52</sup>

At about 0027, radar contact with the Japanese force was made and our destroyers were ordered to attack with torpedoes. Since the Japanese force was divided into three groups and was spread over a wide area, it was impossible to keep the entire force simultaneously on the radar screens. In addition to this difficulty, certain units of the U. S. task force were inexperienced and were required to conduct a difficult maneuver under very adverse conditions.<sup>53</sup> At about 0230, nevertheless, in an area roughly 45 miles west northwest of Empress Augusta Bay, U. S. destroyers delivered the initial torpedo attack. In the ensuing action, the *Sendai* and the destroyer *Hatsukaze* were sunk while the *Haguro*, the *Myoko* and the destroyer *Shiratsuyu* were damaged. On the United States side, the *Foote* was hit in the stern by a torpedo, and the *Spence* and the light cruiser *Denver* received minor damage from gunfire. Throughout the engagement the Japanese commander had difficulty in locating our forces despite the fact that star shells and aircraft flares were employed repeatedly. Although the night was dark and overcast, Admiral Merrill employed smoke to screen his maneuvers, thus hampering Japanese efforts at illumination. Admiral Omori broke off action because the radar-controlled fire of the U. S. ships was vastly more effective than his own optically-controlled weapons, and because he had no accu-

rate estimate of the size of the opposing American force. In addition to this, he rightly feared being in position where American planes could find him at daylight.<sup>54</sup>

As a result of this battle, Task Force Merrill enjoyed the satisfaction of defeating and turning back a strong Japanese force and thereby saved the Bougainville transports and landing forces from what might well have been disaster.

By nightfall 3 November, the beachhead on Bougainville had in any case been firmly established, and all immediate objectives secured. Construction of an airstrip and an advance naval base began.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PERIMETER

Establishment of the perimeter, which formed the second phase of the operation, took place largely within the month of November. Five major actions (one defensive and four offensive) were fought during this period, while non-combatant activity included the building of a network of roads, construction of a fighter strip, survey for a bomber field, location of dumps and other problems of support. Japanese opposition was for the time being less onerous than were natural obstacles, but, despite severe handicaps, communications functioned smoothly and satisfactory progress was made on the fighter strip during the month.

The second phase defined itself by the steps of progression leading from seizure of a foothold on Cape Torokina to establishment of a perimeter within which, by 30 November, the various objectives—fighter strip, projected bomber field and advance naval base—were defended by well-anchored lines.

In the first several days intelligence reports indicated only scattered enemy groups facing the right flank Marine forces on a line running from the Koromokina River to the vicinity of the Piva. Surprise, which had rolled over the meager Japanese defenses, was now exploited with speed.

<sup>51</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Campaigns*, 153.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 152; see also *Combat Narratives*, 56–71. Pratt (*op. cit.*, 212–214) quotes a most interesting, but grossly inaccurate Japanese account. Omori was relieved of command upon his return to Rabaul.

The Japanese could offer nothing more serious than patrol action and sniper infiltration during the first six days after the beachhead had been secured.

For a considerable period, in fact, there was no indication that the enemy was aware of the true objective of the operation, that is, to establish and maintain a beachhead on Bougainville within which fighter and bomber fields could be built and an advance naval base established. That the Japanese had stationed only 300 troops in the vicinity of Cape Torokina, though aware of the possibility of a landing there, would indicate that they had not taken our threat seriously. It may be that, knowing the beach and terrain conditions rather intimately due to months of association, the enemy felt that we would never attempt a landing in that area, or that, if we did, then the operation would surely fail.

From an enemy prisoner and captured documents, it was determined that the Japanese had anticipated a landing at Cape Torokina on or about 30 October, but since his defenses were made up of only approximately 300 men and one 75mm gun, he could not have considered the threat except in the most casual expectancy. There was also evidence that the enemy considered a main landing more likely in lower Empress Augusta Bay with Motupena Point and the Jaba River as the prime objectives. Much stronger defenses against landing operations were organized at those points.<sup>55</sup>

There were several courses of action that he might pursue: He could make counterlandings on either flank with movement of troops in small craft from Buka passage or the Kahili area, supplemented by movements in destroyers from Rabaul, or he could attack overland with forces in southern Bougainville. He might prevent occupation of the ground selected for the airfields. By shelling and air bombardment he might impede our shipping and the extension of our defensive positions.

But no course whatever was pressed home with sufficient determination to put in jeopardy ground we had won. The chief enemy threat, however, seemed mostly likely to emanate from the south

against our right flank or center.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the counterlanding at Atsinima Bay, which led to the Koromokina lagoon engagement, and air harassment, almost exclusively by night, were the only tangible efforts mounted by the Japanese from among the many capabilities which we adjudged to be theirs during the early days of the beachhead.

Physical difficulties within the Bougainville beachhead were even greater than had been expected from reconnaissance and observation made prior to the landings. No roads existed in the area, and vehicular communication could be effected only along the narrow strip of beach where surf sometimes ran waist deep.

On the left flank some 10,000 yards west of Cape Torokina was the Laruma River, at places fairly wide and for the most part seeking its way to the sea with directness. On the right flank was the Piva, a tortured stream which writhed like a snake as it sought an outlet through jungle lowlands, making frequent bends which gave the Japanese excellent vantage points. To the center, the plume of smoke and glow of the active volcano, Mount Bagana, served as a guide, beckoning our troops to the serrated ridges of the Crown Prince mountain range.

## KOROMOKINA LAGOON

When it became apparent immediately after the D-day landing that the Japanese did not intend to offer resistance on the left (west) flank of the beachhead, General Turnage decided to have the 3d and 9th Marines exchange sectors, for the 3d had been more heavily engaged and had suffered numerous casualties, particularly on D-day.

To this end, as we have seen, on 2 and 3 November, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 9th Marines, were moved to the right (east) sector, while the 3d Marines less 1st Battalion (attached to the 9th Marines in a reserve position in the right sector), moved to the left (west). The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, remained in position on the extreme left of the perimeter with its flank rest-

<sup>55</sup> IMAC C-2 Reports, 1-30 November.

<sup>56</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt.*, III, 4.

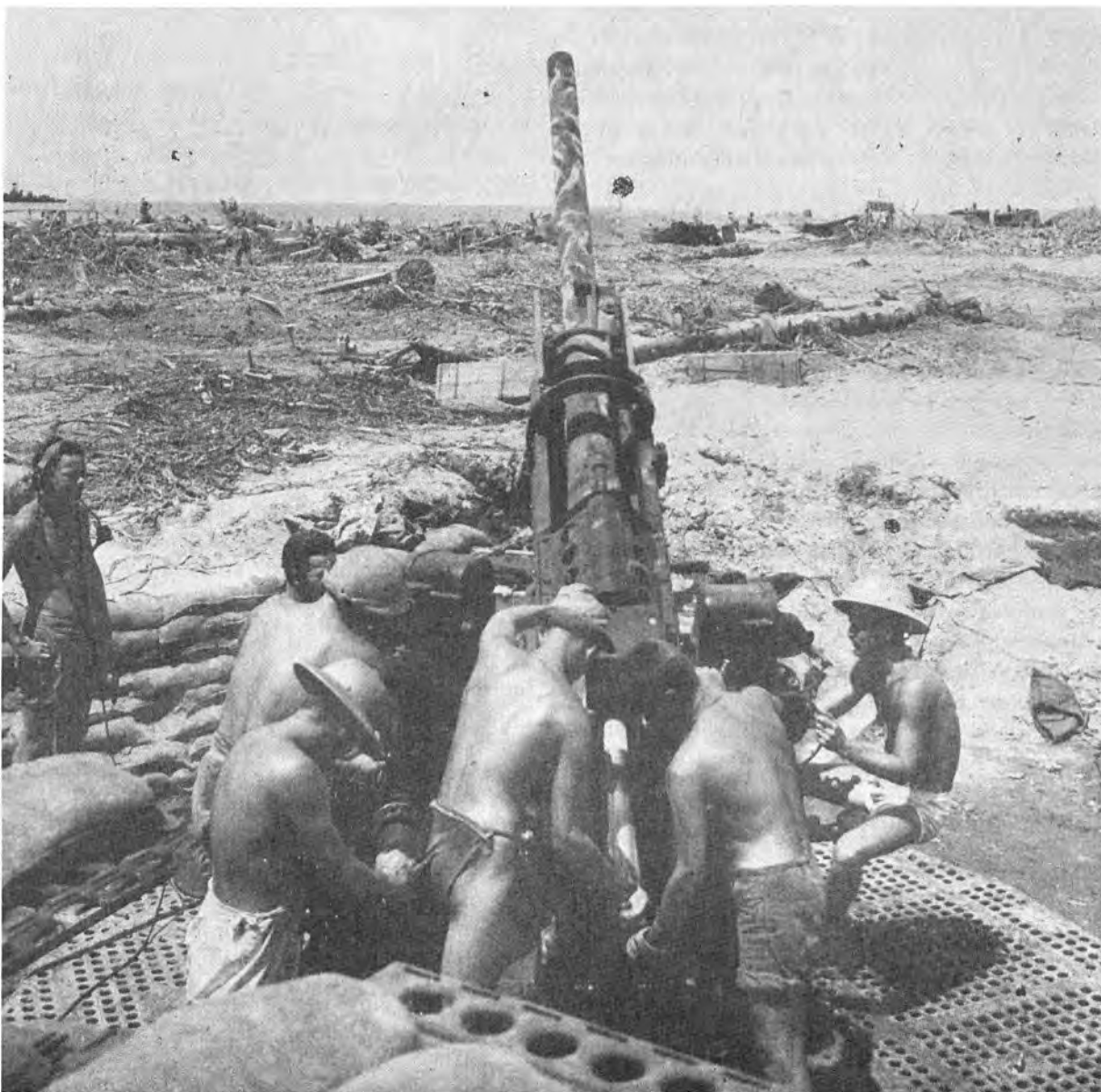
ing on the sea; this battalion was attached to the 3d Marines.

At 1800, 3 November, responsibility for each sector shifted to the newly occupying regiments. The 2d Raider Battalion was assigned the road block on the Piva Trail, and the 3d Raider Battalion constituted the Corps Reserve.

After reduction of Japanese resistance to the

initial landing, enemy activity was confined on 4, 5, and 6 November to patrol activity against the flanks of our positions. Thirteen Japanese were killed.<sup>57</sup> Marines in the meantime were not inactive. Not only were extensive patrols sent out, but positions were improved and forces reorganized for further fighting. In addition, units

<sup>57</sup> 3d MarDiv D-2 SAR, Annex "A".



**3D DEFENSE BATTALION ANTI-AIRCRAFT** gunners deliver trial fire in order to obtain best ballistic data for the 90mm gun which has just been set up overlooking Cape Torokina.

able to do so attempted to make conditions livable, particularly in the matter of galleys, in order that hot food might be served.<sup>65</sup>

The 3d Marine Division and its attached units now began to feel for the enemy as they sought to widen the beachhead; the second phase of the operation thus began.

On 6 November, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines reverted to control of its parent regiment and was moved as regimental reserve to positions east of the Koromokina River; the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, which had arrived on Bougainville on that day, was attached to the 9th Marines and was assigned a reserve position of Puruata Island.<sup>66</sup> Before the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, could be moved to the right sector, however, events transpired which delayed their move still longer.

A few minutes before 0600 on the morning of 7 November, four Japanese destroyers hove to in Atsinima Bay, having just made the run from Rabaul. In the half-light of dawn, a force of about 475 Japanese troops debarked into 21 boats and barges, which made their way to shore.<sup>67</sup> Although observed from positions occupied by an anti-tank platoon on the beach in the west sector, no positive identification of the boats was made until it was too late to take action.<sup>68</sup> Fortunately, because the enemy landed over so wide a front that his full strength could not be assembled quickly, he had to decide whether to lose the initial advantage of initiative, or to attack with but a portion of his force. Characteristically, he chose to attack at once.<sup>69</sup>

Company K, 9th Marines (Captain William K. Crawford), with the 3d Platoon, 9th Marines Weapons Company (First Lieutenant Robert S.

Sullivan) attached, was holding the extreme left flank of the Division beachhead. A combat outpost had been set up in front of this position which consisted of the 2d Platoon, Company M with a platoon of Company D, 3d Tank Battalion (Scouts) attached.<sup>63</sup> This outpost was dug in between swamp and sea, astride the main avenue of approach to our lines from the west. In the meanwhile, a reconnaissance patrol consisting of one platoon of Company K, 9th Marines, was operating along the upper reaches of the Laruma River.

Two Japanese boats, containing an estimated 40 to 50 men, were observed to land with the initial wave only about 400 yards to the west of the U. S. perimeter, in rear of the 9th Marines' combat outpost. This enemy group immediately launched an attack on the positions occupied by the 9th Marines Weapons Platoon. Failing to penetrate the position, the enemy retired into the swamp to regroup for further attack.<sup>64</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Walter Asmuth, Jr., commanding the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, immediately ordered Company K to attack, and called for artillery and mortar support. The attack was launched at 0820, and after having moved only 150 yards, the left assault platoon encountered Japanese who were already digging positions facing the Division main line of resistance. Heavy firing with machine-guns and rifles began, and Company K's left platoon was soon pinned down. The center and right platoons attempted an envelopment in order to attack toward the south, but progress was extremely slow because of dense jungle and heavy swamp. By this time, however, the Japanese had already constructed effective fox-holes and made the most of natural concealment. Furthermore, the enemy was able to take advantage of fox-holes abandoned by the 1st and 2d Battalions, 9th Marines, upon the regrouping of forces several days before. Eventually, therefore, the two enveloping platoons were also pinned down by enemy fire. Since Japanese reinforcements were coming ashore from boats land-

<sup>65</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 334.

<sup>66</sup> 3d Marines AR, Ia.

<sup>67</sup> This force was commanded by Major Miwa Mitsuhiro and consisted of Hq, 5th, 6th Companies, 1st Plat 7th Co, and MG of 2d Bn, 54th Inf Regt; 6th Co, 2d Bn, 53d Inf Regt; and 1st Plat, Shipping Engineers. In addition to its individual weapons, the force was armed with 8 HMG, 17 LMG, and 19 grenade launchers (knee mortars).

<sup>68</sup> Silhouettes of the Japanese craft were similar to those of certain American craft. Despite the fact that standing operating procedure forbade movement of friendly craft during hours of darkness, the Japanese boats were not fired upon. See 3d Marines AR, IIIa, V. See also IMAC *Opn Rpts* I and II, *passim*; cf. 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 21.

<sup>69</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> One platoon of the Scout Company of the Division was attached to each RCT; in this case the platoon was further attached to the Tank Company.

<sup>64</sup> Historical Section, interview with LtCol Jess P. Ferrill, Jr., 17 November 1947.



**INFIGHTING AT KOROMOKINA LAGOON** took place when Japanese troops of the 54th Infantry came down from Rabaul and attempted a counterlanding against the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, on 7 November.

ing down the beach, additional troops had to be called.<sup>65</sup>

At 1315 the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, was ordered into the attack. Company B was in assault, while Company C was echeloned to the right rear. This battalion was to move in left of Company K, 9th Marines. As soon as Company B, 3d Marines, was in position, Company K, which by this time had lost five killed and 13 wounded, was withdrawn. By this time the enemy numbered 200 or more. The attack was now in the hands of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines.<sup>66</sup>

The character of the fighting on 7 November was hand-to-hand, shot for shot, grenade for grenade. The enemy was dug in; our troops were

forced to advance upon emplacements which, five yards away, were not even suspected. It was in this engagement that Sergeant Herbert J. Thomas of Company B, 3d Marines, gave his life in an act of heroism which earned him, posthumously, the Medal of Honor. As his squad advanced through the jungle undergrowth, it was held up by Japanese machine-gun fire. With the intention of knocking out a machine-gun with a grenade, he placed his men in a position to rush in after he had done his work. Sergeant Thomas hurled his grenade, but his comrades froze when they saw it catch in some vines and fall back among them. Thomas instantly threw himself upon the grenade to smother the explosion with his body, and was killed a few seconds later.

Among officers, the hero of the day was Cap-

<sup>65</sup> 3d Bn, 9th Marines AR, 177.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-178. See also 3d Marines AR, IVa.

tain Gordon Warner, Company B commander, who lost his leg as a result of this action. With a helmet full of grenades in his hand, Warner personally led a tank from position to position in order to destroy six machine-gun posts. Warner shouted defiance at the enemy in Japanese,<sup>67</sup> ordering them to fix bayonets and charge; they dutifully obeyed, only to be cut down by Marine rifle fire. By building up a firing line, Warner obtained fire superiority, and consequently prevented infiltration of Marine lines. Captain Warner was subsequently awarded the Navy Cross.<sup>68</sup>

As the fight in front of the perimeter was developing, the patrol from Company K, 9th Marines, which had been reconnoitering the vicinity of the Laruma River, made contact with Japanese troops near the river mouth. A short fire-fight broke out, and rather than become involved with much stronger forces, the patrol leader, Second Lieutenant Orville L. Freeman, wisely decided to move upstream a short distance, then turn east and head for our lines. Every several hundred yards of movement, the Marines would set up an ambush and fire at the Japanese who were attempting to follow. This patrol returned to our lines about 30 hours later, having suffered loss of one killed and one wounded (Lieutenant Freeman); it had accounted for a minimum of three counted Japanese dead,<sup>69</sup> plus, in all probability, other casualties during its series of ambushes.

At the same time, a Japanese force estimated at company strength struck the combat outpost from positions near the mouth of the Laruma. Although the outpost had an artillery forward observer with it, at this juncture his radio failed to function. Consequently the observer had to make his way individually back to our perimeter, there to telephone his fire mission to his battery.

<sup>67</sup> A language which Warner mastered while working in Japan several years previously. This is the same Warner who led the successful patrol to Choiseul in September.

<sup>68</sup> Colonel George O. Van Orden, in his letter to the Officer-in-Charge, Historical Division, Marine Corps, states that it was Warner's work which saved the day. Van Orden had recommended that Warner be awarded the Medal of Honor. For further details on this action see 3d Marines AR, V, and Decorations and Medals Division, HQMC, files on Warner and Thomas.

<sup>69</sup> 9th Marines Unit Journal, 7-8 November.



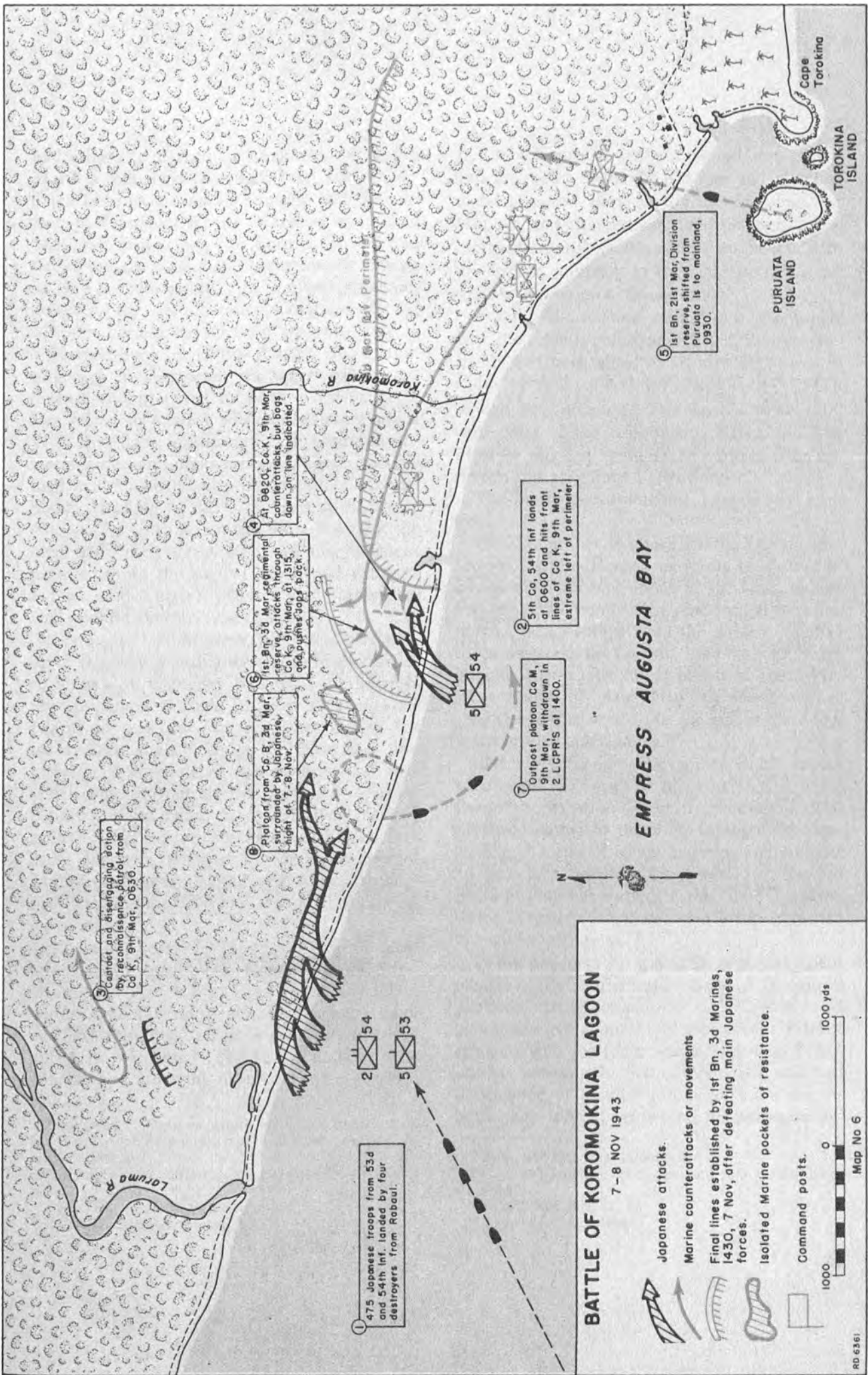
**SERGEANT HERBERT J. THOMAS** was awarded the Medal of Honor at Koromokina Lagoon for his heroism in smothering a grenade's explosion with his own body.

The concentration fell exactly as called, but the outpost continued to be hard pressed. Shortly afterwards, the officer in command of the outpost determined to withdraw to positions within the perimeter, but in so doing encountered the Japanese who had landed between the outpost and the perimeter. The Marines thus found themselves with their backs to the sea, hemmed in by Japanese on three sides. Lieutenant Frank H. Nolander, USNR, was ordered to take two tank lighters to the beach where the outpost was engaged, embark the men and withdraw them. This Nolander did, so that by 1430 he was able to report "60 men were evacuated from the Laruma River outpost without incident".<sup>70</sup>

By nightfall the situation had clarified. The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, was able to establish an entirely new set of lines forward of those which

<sup>70</sup> Advance Naval Base #7, War Diary (Document 64963). For messages concerning the evacuation of the outpost see 3d Marines Journal, 7 November 1943.





3 Contact and disengaging action by reconnaissance patrol from Co K, 9th Mar, 0630.

6 Platoon from Co B, 3d Mgt, surrounded by Japanese, flight of 7-8 Nov.

5 1st Bn, 3d Mar, regimental reserve attacks through Co K, 9th Mar, at 1315, and pushes Japs' back.

4 At 0620, Co K, 9th Mar, counterattacks but bogs down on line indicated.

2 5th Co, 54th Inf lands at 0600 and hits front lines of Co K, 9th Mar, extreme left of perimeter

7 Outpost platoon Co M, 9th Mar, withdrawn in 2 LCPRs at 1400.

5 1st Bn, 21st Mar, Division reserve, shifted from Puruata to mainland, 0930.

1 475 Japanese troops from 53d and 54th Inf. landed by four destroyers from Rabaul.

**BATTLE OF KOROMOKINA LAGOON**  
7-8 NOV 1943

Japanese attacks.

Marine counterattacks or movements

Final lines established by 1st Bn, 3d Marines, 1430, 7 Nov, after defeating main Japanese forces.

Isolated Marine pockets of resistance.

Command posts.

1000 0 1000 yds

Map No 6

had originally marked the perimeter.<sup>71</sup> The 9th Marines combat outpost had been safely evacuated from its precarious position, and the platoon of Company K, 9th Marines, which had been patrolling along the Laruma River, had retired into the swamp and was even now making its way back to safety. Just as darkness set in, however, the 1st Platoon, Company B, 3d Marines, became cut off from the main body.

Platoon Sergeant Clifton Carter, who at that time was in command, set up an all-around defense and prepared to wait for daylight before trying to contact with the adjacent units. With one light machine-gun, Browning Automatic Rifles, and hand grenades, Carter and his men held this exposed position throughout the night, returning to the U. S. lines at daybreak. The success of his action was not a fluke, for the men had received thorough training in night patrols during the stay of the 3d Marines on Samoa, and Carter's platoon was particularly well-qualified in that type of work.<sup>72</sup>

Company C, 3d Marines, which had been held up by the swamp during the attack, now was able to tie in with Company B, so that the Marines now presented a single front to all enemy attempts to penetrate the perimeter during the night. Company officers in the front lines prepared and coordinated the artillery call fires which were shot during the night. To rearward regimental and battalion commanders planned an attack for the next day, despite the fact that some Japanese, trapped by the solid lines of Marines, operated behind our front. Artillery prevented additional enemy troops from moving up to attack.<sup>73</sup>

In the late hours of 7 November a coordinated attack was planned by the Commanding Officer, 3d Marines. Action began early on 8 November, with a 20-minute preparation by five batteries of artillery assisted by machine-guns, mortars and anti-tank weapons.<sup>74</sup> The 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, (Lieutenant Colonel Ernest W. Fry,

Jr.), which early in the fighting had been moved into the sector of the 3d Marines and attached thereto, passed through the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, and attacked with light tanks on a two-company front, A on the right, B on the left, with the reserve company to the right rear.<sup>75</sup> There was not opposition to this advance.

A tomb-like stillness settled over the jungle after the artillery preparation lifted, for over 300 enemy had been killed in an area 300 yards in width to at least 600 yards in depth.<sup>76</sup> Even though they advanced to a lagoon some 1500 yards west of the Koromokina River, the 21st Marines did not again make contact with enemy in this area until 13 November.

The Battle of Koromokina Lagoon had been won.

On 9 November, to insure that the Koromokina Lagoon-Laruma River area would be cleared of any possible concentrations of survivors, a dive bomber strike bombarded and strafed beaches, jungles, and swamps from the western edge of the perimeter to the Laruma River and 300 yards inland. Patrols later found bodies of many Japanese apparently caught by the strike as they returned to the area from the refuge they had taken in the back country.<sup>77</sup>

The air strike of 9 November ended enemy activity on the west. At noon on that day the sector and control of the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, passed to the 37th Infantry Division, leading elements of which had now arrived. The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, reverted to the 9th Marines and was shifted to the Cape Torokina sector. The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines returned to regimental reserve.<sup>78</sup>

From prisoners of war and captured documents, it was learned that General Imamura, Japanese area commander at Rabaul, had planned to put about 3,000 men ashore in three echelons, and the force which landed on 7 November was only the first of these. This unit had the mission of landing just beyond our beach-head, push inland, get behind the perimeter de-

<sup>71</sup> See Map 6. After the attack of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, the perimeter was moved forward (west) of its original position.

<sup>72</sup> Monks, *op. cit.*, 123-124. Cf. Col. Van Orden's letter *supra*.

<sup>73</sup> See Col. Van Orden's letter, *supra*, 6.

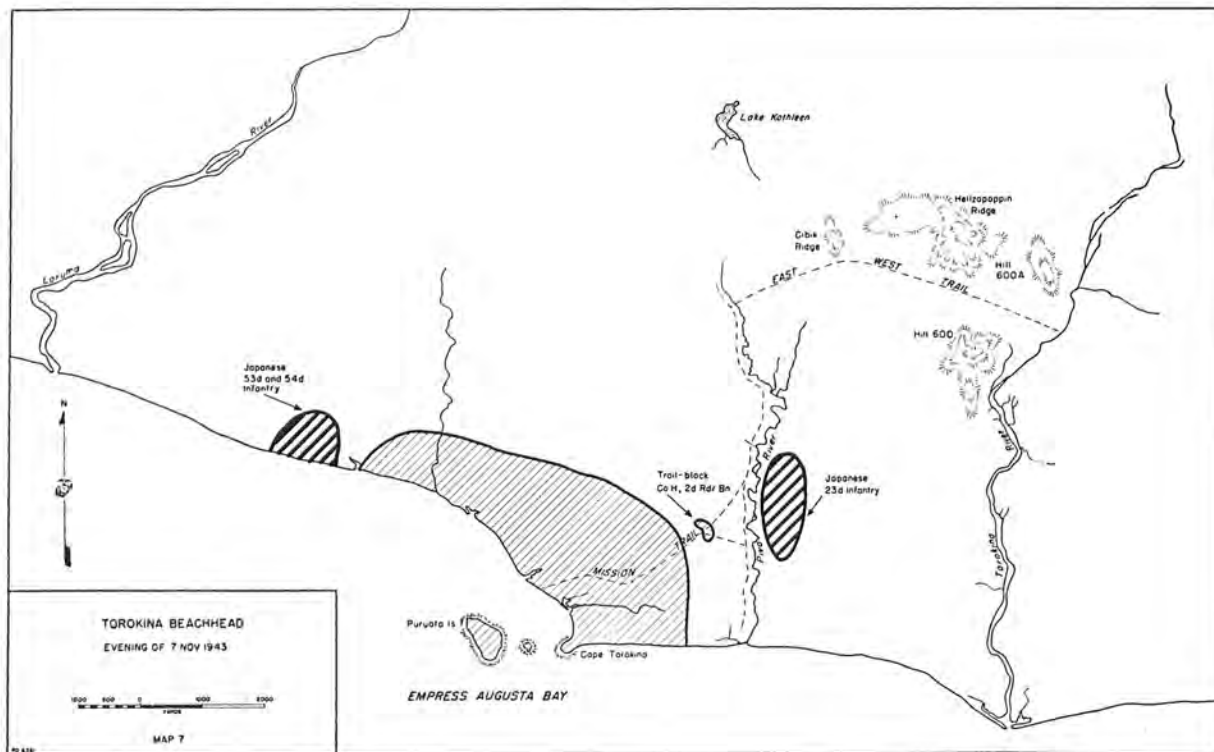
<sup>74</sup> 21st Marines AR, Annex "B".

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 213; Cf. Van Orden letter.

<sup>76</sup> Over 300 Japanese dead were counted in the field after the fight.

<sup>77</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 9.

<sup>78</sup> 3d Marines AR, 87-88.



fense, and engage in guerilla warfare. While they conducted this diversion in the west and north, the Japanese 23d Infantry Regiment, supported by field artillery, its Regimental Gun Company, and a Light Trench Mortar Company, was to attack our right (east) flank with two battalions at about 0600 on 9 November. This regiment was to attack from an assembly area near Peko, northeast of Mopara, and effect a junction with the force on our left flank in vicinity of Piva No. 2. Another force of undetermined size was to make a landing immediately west of the Torokina River, while a platoon of 40 men was to land just east of the river. The Japanese believed our beachhead to be farther east than it actually was, and had estimated our strength to be about five to ten thousand troops.

The first and only echelon to land was wiped out.

Marine losses for the battle were 17 killed and 30 wounded; 377 Japanese bodies were counted on the field.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 9.

Thus the enemy's first serious effort to retake the beachhead was defeated by the vigorous action of the 3d Marine Division, whenever and wherever contact was made. As our troops pushed through tangled vines, suddenly, sometimes at their very feet, they would find a Japanese soldier hidden in a deep, well-concealed foxhole. Their attention would be drawn only by the crack of his machine-gun or rifle as he fired. That our losses were not more severe was due in large measure to poor Japanese marksmanship, although the enemy was well armed and the terrain suited him perfectly.<sup>80</sup>

### PIVA ROAD BLOCK

A part of the mission assigned to the 2d Raider Regiment for D-day was established of a road block astride the Buretoni Mission-Piva Trail, which led from Beach Yellow One inland, in order to deny the enemy use of this trail, the main

<sup>80</sup> See Van Orden letter, *supra*.

route of access to our position from the east. Company M, commanded by Captain Francis O. Cunningham, was initially assigned this duty. Cunningham was ordered to assemble immediately upon landing in order to advance along the trail for a distance of about 1500 yards, where he was to set up the road block.<sup>81</sup>

Although Company M killed several stray Japanese, it met no organized resistance and was able in due course, to set up the road block about 300 yards west of the Piva-Numa Numa Trail junction without difficulty.<sup>82</sup>

In the meantime the 2d Raider Battalion had advanced to the 0-2 line, about 1200 yards inland from the beach. On 3 November, at 1520, Company E relieved Company M on the road block. The following day the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, relieved the 2d Raider Regiment on the 0-2 line, and the 3d Raider Battalion reverted to its parent unit, having accomplished its task of clearing Puruata and Torokina Islands for the 9th Marines. The 2d Raider Regiment now was attached to the 9th Marines but retained responsibility for the road block, furnishing Company E for this duty.<sup>83</sup>

Until this time there had been little or no resistance, but now the Japanese sent in reinforcements. These were larger men, in better physical condition and better equipped than enemy previously seen.<sup>84</sup> At 2200 and again at 2330 on 5 November, Company E was attacked in its positions by an undetermined number of Japanese, some of whom were able to filter through our lines. Finally at 1430, 7 November, coincident with the counterlanding at Koromokina, an assault was made on the road block, now held by Company H. As the tempo of the action increased, at 1500, Company G was sent forward to reinforce Company H. Mortars of the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines fired heavy concentrations in support of troops on the road block, and at 1550 the enemy broke off contact.<sup>85</sup> After this fight, Company H was withdrawn from the

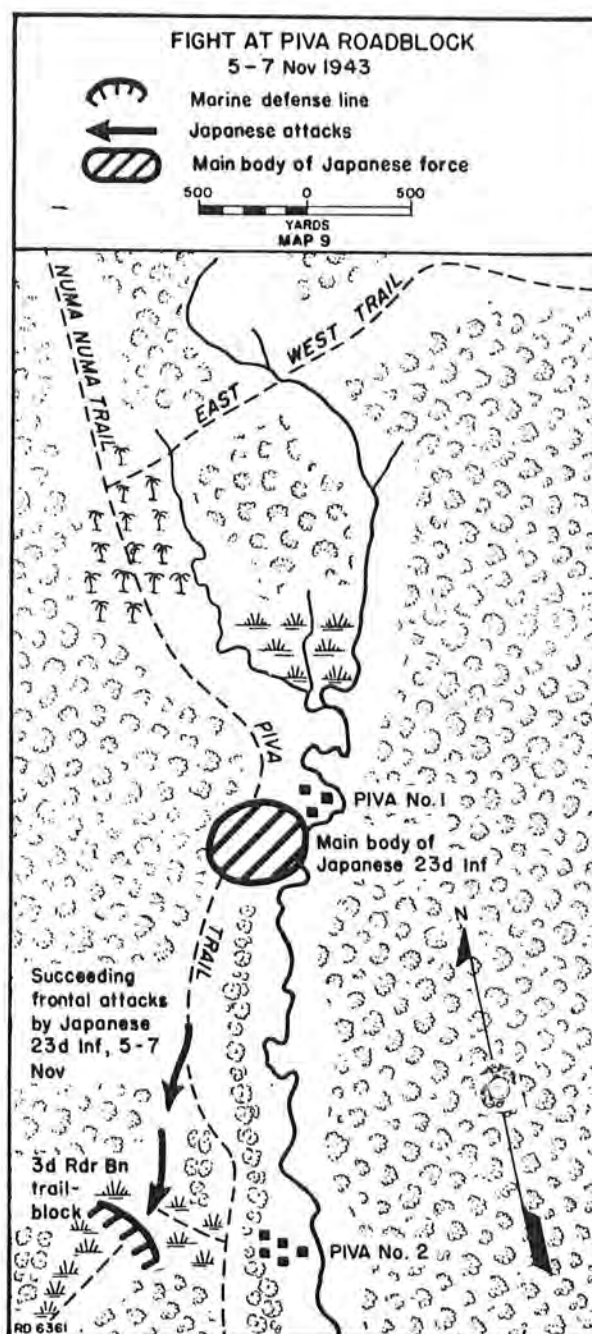
<sup>81</sup> 2d Raider Regiment Operation Order No. 1. See also 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 340.

<sup>82</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 9.

<sup>83</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 155, 334.

<sup>84</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 9.

<sup>85</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 154, 334.



road block; Company G remained. Japanese were now observed digging in west of Piva Village, in the meanwhile harassing Company G throughout the night with mortar fire.<sup>86</sup>

Early in the morning of 8 November, in order

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 155, 334-335.



**MARINE WAR DOG** assists in patrolling up Mission Trail.

to frustrate any further Japanese attempt to attack the road block, Company M, 3d Raider Battalion, was sent there to take up positions behind Company H, which was once again responsible for defense of the installation. At 0730 a force consisting of elements of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 23d Japanese Infantry Regiment, struck following a four-hour mortar preparation.<sup>87</sup> The defending Marines held until 1400, when Companies E and F effected a passage of lines and launched a counterattack which forced the Japanese back a short distance. At the same time, the 4th Platoon, Weapons Company, 9th Ma-

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 346.

rines, supported by two tanks, was ordered to reinforce the attack, but, due to thick jungle and swampy trails, half-tracks and tanks were able to do nothing more than evacuate wounded who by now numbered 12.<sup>88</sup>

Japanese resistance stiffened markedly, and the Raiders' attack bogged down about 1600, whereupon they were withdrawn to a bivouac area within the perimeter for the night.<sup>89</sup>

During the night General Turnage ordered Colonel Edward A. Craig, commanding the 9th Marines, to plan an attack next day which would clear the Japanese from the area in front of the road block.<sup>90</sup> In the meantime Company I, 3d Raider Battalion, relieved Company H on the position; the latter retired to the 2d Raider Battalion bivouac.

For his attack, Colonel Craig decided to use elements of the 2d Raider Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Alan Shapley, since that regiment was more familiar with the terrain in the vicinity. He ordered Shapley to attack on a two-company front at 0800 following an artillery preparation, with the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, a section of tanks, and the 4th Platoon, Weapons Company, 9th Marines, in support.<sup>91</sup>

Responsibility for the attack was further passed from Shapley to Lieutenant Colonel Fred D. Beans, commanding the 3d Raider Battalion.<sup>92</sup>

According to plan, at 0620 on 9 November, Companies L and F of the 2d Raider Regiment deployed to the left and right of the trail behind the road block, now being defended by Companies M and I.<sup>93</sup>

From 0730 to 0800, the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, fired an artillery preparation, during which Colonel Craig went forward to coordinate the attack. At 0800 Companies L and F passed through the lines of Companies M and I, and

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 155, 335.

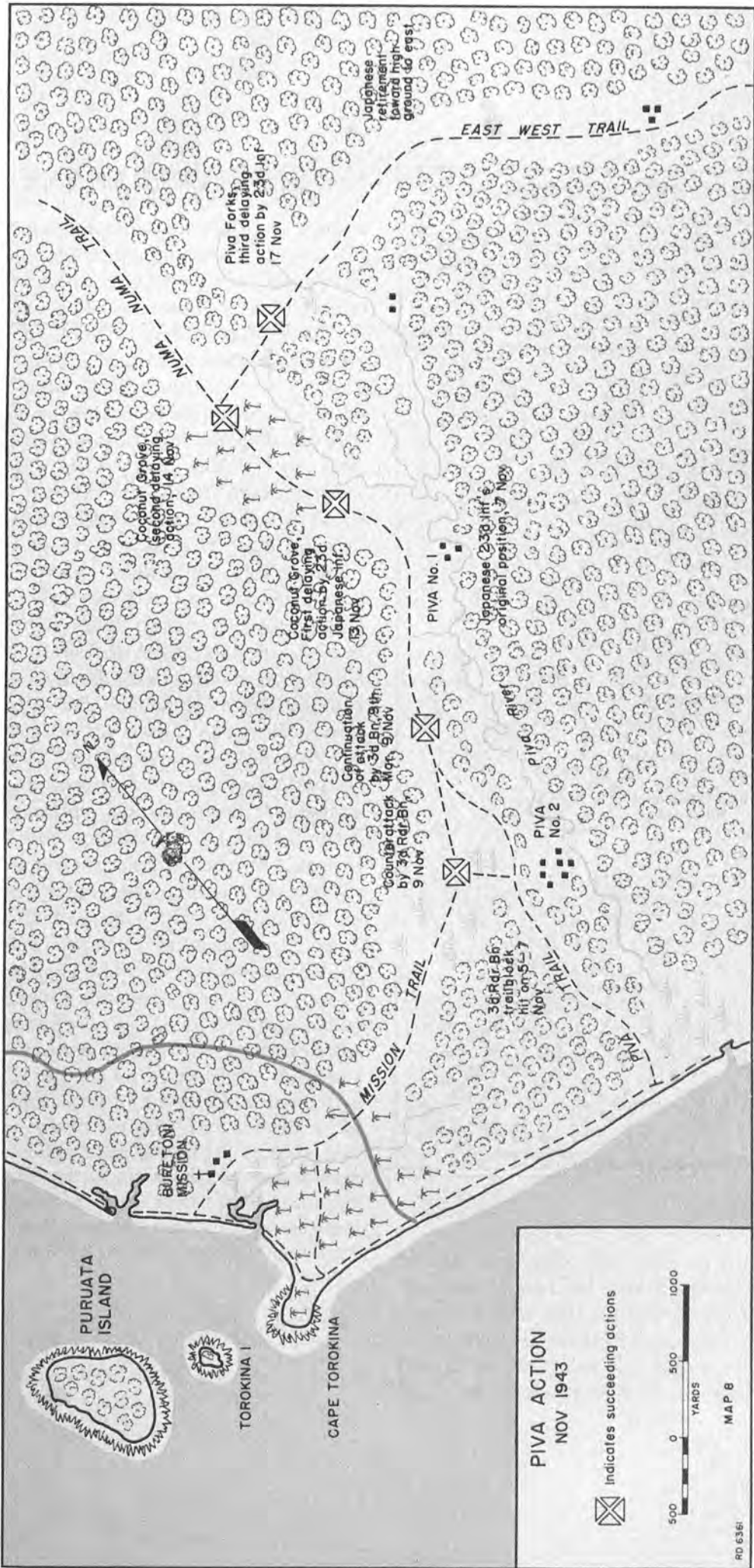
<sup>89</sup> Historical Section, Division of Public Information, HQMC, interview of LtCol Fred D. Beans, 11 September 1947.

<sup>90</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 349.

<sup>92</sup> Historical Section, Division of Public Information, HQMC, interrogation of LtCol Fred D. Beans, 11 September 1947.

<sup>93</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 155.



### PIVA ACTION NOV 1943

Indicates succeeding actions



MAP 8

Piva Forks  
third delaying  
action by 23d Jg  
17 Nov

Coconut Grove,  
Second delaying  
action by 23d Jg  
14 Nov

Coconut Grove,  
First delaying  
action by 23d Jg  
13 Nov

Continuation  
of attack  
by 3d Bn 28th  
Inf 9 Nov

Counterattack  
by 3d Rd Bn  
9 Nov

PIVA No. 1

PIVA  
No. 2

36 Rdr Bn  
trail block  
on 5-7  
Nov

Japanese (230 inf) at  
original position, 9 Nov

Japanese  
retirement  
toward high  
ground for eggs

PURUATA  
ISLAND

TOROKINA I

CAPE TOROKINA

NIMA TRAIL

EAST WEST TRAIL

MISSION TRAIL

PIVA TRAIL

BUJETOWN MISSION

began a slow advance through the jungle at the rate of about 100 yards an hour.<sup>94</sup> In the meantime, while our troops were moving into position to launch the attack, the Japanese attempted several attacks on the right of our road block causing one platoon of Company F to be held up so that contact was lost between the various platoons of that company. This contact was not effectively regained for the duration of the attack. By 0930 the attack had progressed only about 40 to 50 yards. A heavy fire-fight was in progress, the Japanese resisting our advance with light machine-guns and "knee mortars". Since flanking maneuver was inhibited by swamp, the assault necessarily had to be frontal. The Japanese were screeching defiance, while Marines yelled back.<sup>96</sup>

By 1030, Company F had become so confused due to internal lack of contact, that Company I was sent in to relieve it. Almost immediately upon resuming the attack, Company I reported that the Japanese were attempting to move around the right flank of our assault. As a countermeasure, Colonel Craig deployed the Weapons Company, 9th Marines, to the right rear of Company I. This stopped the Japanese threat. At approximately 1130 Companies I and L drifted apart, so one of the two support platoons of Company M was sent into the gap in order that the advance would not be held up. In face of stubborn opposition, the advance continued slowly, until, quite suddenly at 1230, for reasons still obscure, enemy resistance collapsed.<sup>96</sup>

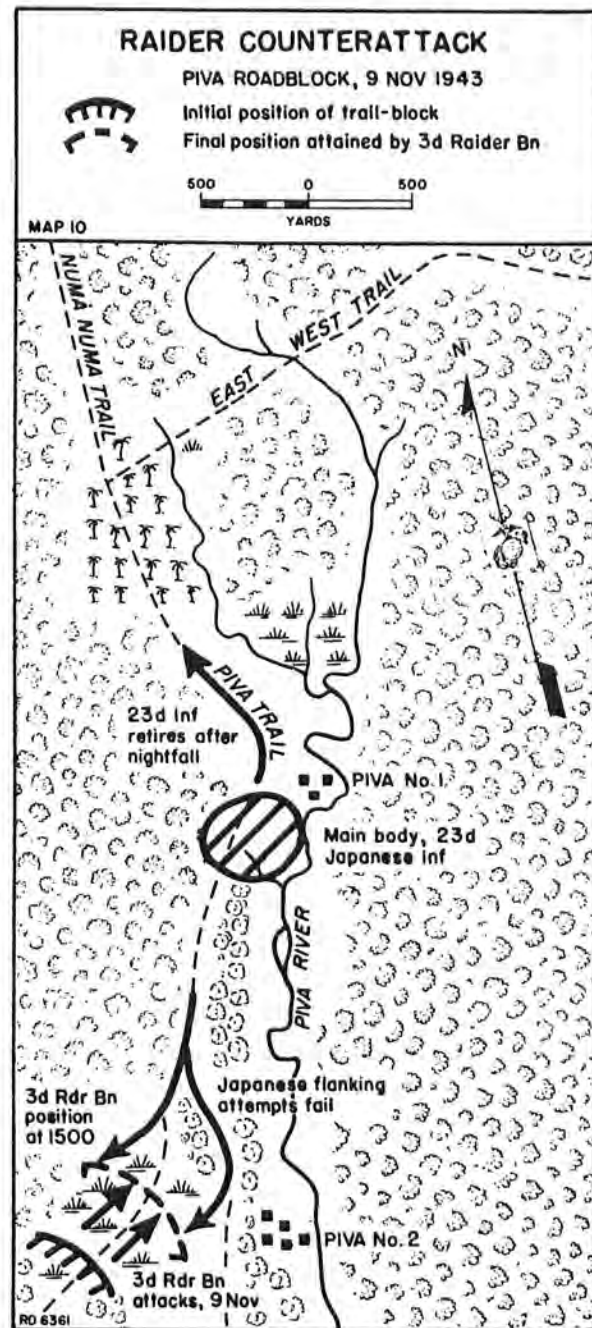
The advance now became quite rapid, and by 1500 Marines had reached the junction of the Piva and Numa Numa Trails. Since no enemy had been encountered for a period of more than 70 minutes, assault elements were ordered to dig in and consolidate the ground so recently won with such difficulty.<sup>97</sup> Local security patrols were sent out about 200 yards to the front and upon returning these reported that no Japanese had been contacted, but that there was a large, empty

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>95</sup> Historical Section, Division of Public Information, HQMC, interrogation of LtCol Fred D. Beans, 11 September 1947.

<sup>96</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 155, 335, 349.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.



bivouac area about 300 yards up Numa Numa Trail. At about 1720 several Japanese stragglers were reported withdrawing along the Numa Numa Trail, and at 1815 a defensive barrage was fired on three sides of the Marine position. This seems effectively to have discouraged the Jap-



**APPROACHING PIVA ROAD BLOCK**, Marines of the 2d Raider Battalion keep clear of the trail.

anese, for there was no further enemy activity that night. Although the Marines lost 12 killed and 30 wounded as a result of this operation, over 100 Japanese dead were counted on the field.

That night Colonel Craig once again planned an attack for the following day. This time he decided to have the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, pass through the defensive positions which had been set up at the trail junction, with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines in support. The 3d Raider Battalion was assigned the mission of protecting the left (northwest) flank of the attack. The attack was to be preceded by a 15-minute artillery preparation followed by a five-minute bombing and strafing attack by VMTB-143.<sup>98</sup>

As planned, the planes (12 TBF's) arrived on station at 0915.<sup>99</sup> The artillery preparation, however, had to be held up for about ten minutes in order that a reconnaissance patrol of the 2d Raider Regiment could withdraw from the tar-

get area.<sup>100</sup> Consequently the time of attack was postponed until 0945. The artillery fired its preparation, and marked the target area for the planes with smoke shells. Front lines were marked with colored smoke. Planes acknowledged the target area at 0920 and at 0945, when artillery lifted, made their run. Simultaneously, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, jumped off in attack. There was no resistance, for the enemy had evacuated his positions leaving equipment, ammunition, and even rifles behind. Piva Village was secured by 1100, and the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, organized an all-around defense and prepared to hold the village against any attack. The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines moved north on the Numa Numa Trail, about 250 yards from the junction, and dug in astride that trail. The following day the line "A

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 63, 155.

<sup>99</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 10.

<sup>100</sup> Company K, 3d Battalion, 2d Raider Regiment, had been on an all-night patrol beyond Piva Village as directed by CG, 3d MarDiv. This patrol returned with a negative report. See 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 335.





**MARINES AT CLOSE QUARTERS** with Japanese of the 23d Infantry Regiment during the Piva Road-Block action, 9 November 1943.

to E” was established and the battle for the Piva Road Block was completed.<sup>101</sup>

The artillery barrage which preceded the attack of 9 November was most effective in the Japanese rear areas. Nonetheless, in areas immediately to the front of the road block, although the barrage had been placed within 250 yards of our lines, it was relatively ineffective. This was due to the fact that during the night the Japanese had crept to positions within 25 yards of the road block, and during the barrage had remained quiet. Consequently, when the artillery lifted and the Marines jumped off, they were met by a sudden, intense volume of close-range rifle and automatic weapons fire.

It was later learned that the Japanese were making an all-out effort to break through our lines, believing that their attack was coordinated with the attack on the left (west) flank of the beachhead. At the Piva road-block, wide flank-

ing movements were denied to the enemy by the difficult terrain on both flanks of the position. The Japanese, however, attempted such a maneuver, first on one flank, then on the other, but on both occasions they were repulsed, and the attacks degenerated into straight frontal assaults on companies deployed to the rear of those in assault.

Japanese attacks were very determined, but, due to the terrain and the disposition of our troops, the enemy was forced to expose himself. This probably accounts for the relatively heavy enemy casualties (over 550 dead) as compared with our own (19 killed and 32 wounded) in that area during the period 5 November to 11 November.<sup>102</sup>

It was during the engagement of 9 November that Privates First Class Henry Gurke and Donald G. Probst, Company M, 3d Raider Battalion were occupying a two-man foxhole in an advanced outpost. Having located the two Marines,

<sup>101</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 62, 155.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 346. See also IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 10.

the Japanese placed it under heavy machine-gun fire followed by a shower of grenade. Two Marines in a nearby foxhole were killed immediately, but Gurke and Probst continued to hold their position. During a lull in the firing, Gurke and Probst discussed the comparative capabilities of the rifle and automatic rifle, the weapons with which they were respectively armed. Both men agreed that the automatic rifle, Probst's weapon, was the more effective for the type of work they were doing. Observing that many grenades were falling close to their position, Gurke told Probst that he would "take it" if a grenade should fall into their hole, in order that Probst could continue in action against the Japanese with his automatic rifle.

The intensity of the Japanese attack increased; a grenade suddenly landed squarely between them. Even though he was aware of the inevitable result, Gurke forcibly thrust Probst aside

and flung himself down to smother the explosion, thereby sacrificing his life in order that his companion could carry on the fight. Gurke was awarded, posthumously, the Medal of Honor. Inspired by Gurke's courageous deed, Probst, although wounded, kept his automatic rifle in action and held his position. For his work, Probst was awarded the Silver Star.<sup>103</sup>

## COCONUT GROVE

In the midst of the action at the Piva Trail road block, on 9 November 1943, Major General Roy S. Geiger relieved General Vandegrift as Commanding General, IMAC, and simultaneously assumed command of Allied forces on

<sup>103</sup> Decorations and Medals Division, file on Pfc Gurke, 0055.



**MACHINE-GUN CREW** of the 3d Raider Battalion engaging the Japanese enemy from a typical Bougainville foxhole during the Piva Road-Block action, 9 November 1943.



**PRIVATE FIRST CLASS HENRY GURKE** won the Medal of Honor for intentionally smothering a Japanese grenade in order that his mate, an automatic rifleman might be able to remain in action.

Bougainville and the Treasury Islands.<sup>104</sup> General Geiger from an advanced command post on Bougainville took direct command of all forces ashore.

Elements of the 37th Infantry Division were now beginning to arrive at Bougainville. The first of these, the 148th Infantry, reinforced, arrived on 8 November and was attached to the 3d Marine Division until 1200, 14 November, when it reverted to the 37th Division. The 129th

<sup>104</sup> General Vandegrift returned to the United States to become, on 1 January 1944, 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Infantry, reinforced, arrived on 13 November, while the 145th Infantry, reinforced arrived on 19 November. The 2d and 3d Battalions (both reinforced), 21st Marines arrived on 11 and 17 November respectively.

The 148th Infantry began relief of units (3d Battalion, 9th Marines, and the 3d Marine Regiment) in the left sector on 9 November; this relief was completed the following day. The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, moved to the right flank of the right sector prior to the attack on 10 November. The 3d Marines moved inland and to the east, thus creating a center sector of the beachhead.<sup>105</sup>

Main attention of the Corps was now directed to patrolling, development of supply routes through extremely difficult swamp, and extension of the beachhead in both Division sectors to include proposed airfield sites already selected by ground reconnaissance.

As elements of the 37th Division continued to arrive, the beachhead was extended inland with the 37th Division occupying the left (west) flank and the 3d Marine Division occupying the right (east). Extension of the 3d Marine Division beachhead was particularly slow due to:

(1) Enemy resistance in force throughout the entire Piva River Forks area;

(2) Extremely swampy ground, unsuitable for continued occupation, located east of the Piva River, south of the East-West Trail; and,

(3) Great difficulties encountered in road construction and ingress through swamps for supply and evacuation routes. Special care had to be exercised lest forces be advanced beyond our means of maintaining them.<sup>106</sup>

Only minor clashes marked the operation for several days after the hard fighting in the vicinity of Piva Road block, but meanwhile there was widespread combat and reconnaissance patrolling. Priority for the moment was road-building. Extensive swamps between the Koromokina and Piva Rivers were hindering supply to front lines. Only half-tracks, Athey trailers, and amphibian tractors could traverse the trail which had been

<sup>105</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 24.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. The 37th Div, fortunately, had slightly better terrain and little enemy action during expansion of the perimeter.

cut through the jungle from Piva River mouth to the vicinity of Piva Number Two (a village along the banks of the Piva River). Beyond that point the Numa Numa Trail was passable.<sup>107</sup>

Meanwhile, enemy dispositions became more clearly defined. The Japanese were evidently in force up the Piva River, north of a coconut grove along that river near the junction of the Numa Numa and Piva-Popotana Trails. Some Japanese were observed to have taken up positions on the east bank of the Piva, and apparently were contained in an area of about 1,000 yards by 1,000 yards. From those positions they directed both mortar and machine-gun fire into our lines. Furthermore, Marine patrols ascertained that enemy outposts were located on the west bank of the river, scattered through the coconut grove and around the junction of the Numa Numa and East-West Trails.<sup>108</sup>

Shortly after the occupation of Piva Village, Commander William Painter, CEC, USNR, and a small party of Construction Battalion personnel moved out with a covering infantry patrol to make a reconnaissance for an airfield site. A suitable area was located, well to the north of the perimeter, but Painter, nevertheless, set about cutting two 5,000 foot lanes destined to become landing strips. Painter returned to the Marine positions a day in advance of the combat patrol, which, on 10 November, made contact with a Japanese patrol.

Subsequent patrols up the Piva Trail, beyond the coconut grove near the East-West Trail junction, failed to establish contact with the Japanese. However, due to tremendous difficulties encountered in movement and supply through the swamps, it was impossible to advance the perimeter of the beachhead far enough to cover the proposed airfield site selected by Commander Painter. It was therefore decided to establish a strong outpost, capable of sustaining itself until the lines could be advanced to include it, at the junction of the Numa Numa and East-West Trails, in order to avoid a fight for the airfield site should the Japanese occupy it first.

On the afternoon of 12 November, therefore,

<sup>107</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 10.

<sup>108</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 11.



**LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROY S. GEIGER**, pioneer Naval Aviator and veteran Marine combat commander, both ground and air, assumed command of IMAC on 9 November 1943, and carried through the Bougainville operations of the Corps to their close.

General Turnage directed the 21st Marines to send a patrol of company strength up the Numa Numa Trail at 0630 the following day. This patrol was to move up Numa Numa Trail to its junction with the East-West Trail and then reconnoiter each trail for a distance of about 1,000 yards, with a view to establishing a strong outpost in that vicinity in the near future. Company E, 21st Marines (Captain Sidney J. Altman) was originally assigned this mission. During the night however, further orders came from division headquarters to the effect that the patrol should be increased in strength to two companies, with a suitable command group and an artillery forward observer team. The mission was modified in that the outpost at the junction of the East-West and Numa Numa Trails was to be established immediately.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 179.

In view of importance of his assignment, Colonel Evans O. Ames, commanding the 21st Marines, decided to send the entire 2d Battalion; the 3d Division chief-of-staff approved this plan. Accordingly, orders were issued to the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Eustace R. Smoak), to have Company E move out at 0630, 13 November, and proceed to an assembly area in rear of the front line of the 9th Marines, remaining there until the remainder of the Battalion would be able to join it.<sup>110</sup>

No artillery preparation was planned for the advance of 13 November, an omission which proved costly, for it later came to be recognized as of prime importance against the Japanese system of defense. With their well dug-in, concealed, and covered foxholes, equipped with a high percentage of automatic weapons, in turn covered by equally invisible riflemen in trees and

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

spider-holes, it had become evident that severe losses would be sustained by attacking infantry, regardless of the size of the force, unless attacks were preceded by artillery or mortar preparation or bombing—or better still, by all three.<sup>111</sup>

On 13 November, Company E cleared its bivouac area at 0630 as planned and proceeded to an assembly area in rear of the 9th Marines' front lines, where it waited further orders. In the meantime, the remainder of the Battalion drew rations, water and ammunition, and waited for arrival of the artillery forward observer party. At 0730 Colonel Robert Blake, 3d Division chief-of-staff, called Colonel Ames, and directed that Company E proceed out the Numa Numa Trail and begin to set up the outpost. Altman led his company through the lines of the

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 185. Due to extensive naval commitments elsewhere, it was not possible to count on availability of naval gunfire during the Bougainville operation.



**A MARINE FOR THE TIME BEING**, Admiral W. F. Halsey is briefed on the situation ashore by the Marine Commanders (left to right), Generals Noble, Geiger, and Turnage.

9th Marines at 0800 and proceeded up the Numa Numa Trail without incident. Suddenly at 1105, when the company had reached a point about 200 yards south of its objective, it was struck by heavy fire coming from a Japanese ambush. Deploying his company as best he could under the circumstances, Altman dispatched a runner to Smoak, informing him of the situation. By this time the company was sustaining a number of casualties from mortar fire as well as rifles and machine-gun.<sup>112</sup>

When he received Altman's message (at 1200), Smoak was leading his battalion about 1200 yards south of the trail junction. His departure had been delayed by the late arrival of the forward observer team and difficulty in supplying his troops in their swampy assembly area. Acting on the meager information contained in Altman's message, Smoak immediately reduced his flank security, and proceeded down the trail as rapidly as possible in order to bring prompt support to Altman. One platoon of Company F was left behind to furnish security for the forward observer's wire team.

By 1245 the battalion was about 200 yards in rear of Company E. Here Smoak learned that Company E was pinned down by heavy fire and was slowly being cut to pieces; that reinforcement was needed immediately; and that the enemy opposition was located south of the trail junction. Smoak promptly ordered forward Company G (Captain William H. McDonough), to give needed assistance to Company E, while Company H (Major Edward A. Clark) was ordered to set up 81mm mortars to support the attack. Company F, less the platoon protecting the wire team, was ordered to a reserve position to await orders. Major Glenn E. Fissel, Smoak's executive officer, was ordered up with the artillery forward observer's party, to make an estimate of the situation and call in artillery concentrations to prevent the Japanese from maneuvering.<sup>113</sup>

Upon arrival in Company E's lines, Fissel realized that the reports which had reached the battalion commander were substantially correct.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 221. The Japanese apparently had moved into this position the previous night.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

He observed that the greatest volume of fire was coming from the east side of the trail, in the direction of Piva River. Therefore, he promptly called for an artillery concentration in that area.

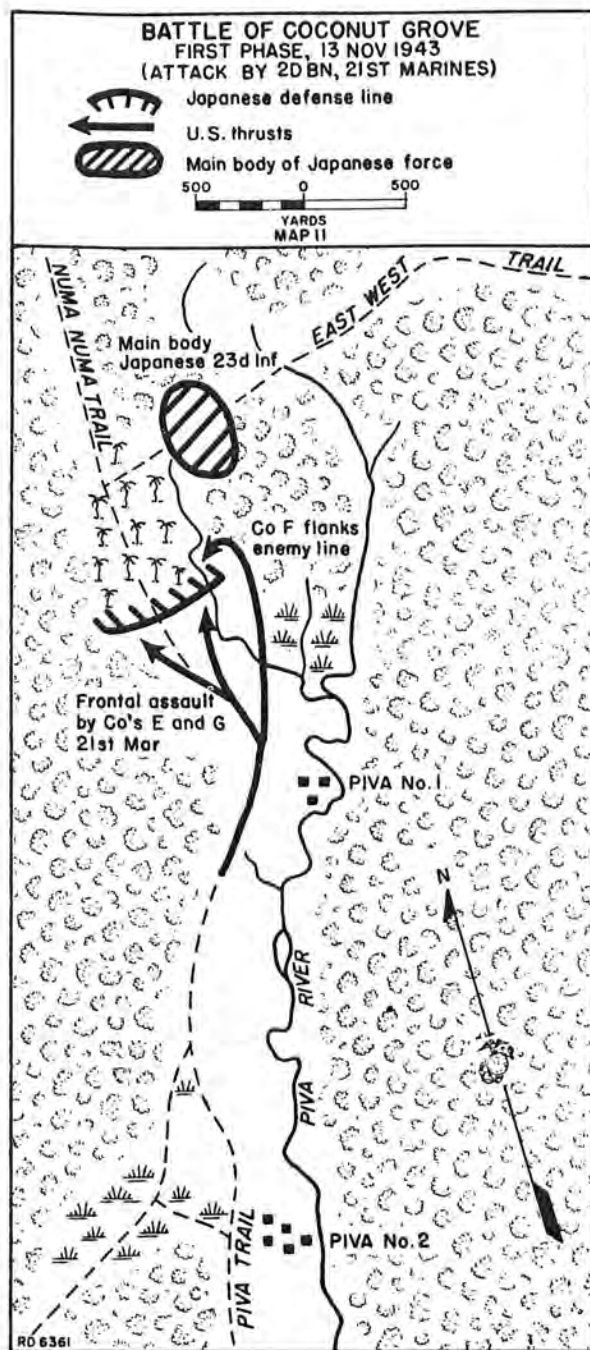
In the meantime, however, Smoak continued to receive conflicting reports. In order to obtain more accurate information he displaced his command post forward into the edge of the coconut grove through which the Numa Numa Trail ran. At this juncture, Fissel phoned Smoak and told him that Company E needed help immediately. Smoak, after a quick reconnaissance, ordered Company F (Captain Robert P. Rapp) to pass through Company E, resume the attack, and allow Company E to withdraw, reorganize, and take up a protective position on the battalion right flank. Company G, which had reached a position to the left of Company E, was ordered to hold. Company F began its movement forward. Company E, finding an opportunity to disengage itself began a withdrawal, redeploying on the right of the battalion position. Unfortunately, however, Company F made contact neither with Company E nor with Company G, and in the meantime, Fissel was wounded.<sup>114</sup> Smoak therefore sent several staff officers to determine the exact positions of his companies. Company F could not be found, and a large gap existed between the right flank of Company G and the left flank of Company E. This left the battalion in a precarious position.<sup>115</sup>

As a result of the reports of his staff officers, Smoak ordered Company E to move forward, contact Company G, and establish a line to protect the battalion front and right flank. Company G, in the meantime, was to extend its line to the right in order to tie in with Company E. By 1630 Smoak decided to dig in for the night. His companies had suffered fairly heavy casualties; Company F was completely missing; and communication with regimental headquarters and the artillery had been broken. Further attempts to press an attack at this time would have been unsound.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Major Fissel died as a result of his wounds, and his body was recovered on 14 November.

<sup>115</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 223.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.



At 1700 the gunnery sergeant of Company F reported in person to the battalion command post. The story he had to tell Colonel Smoak was discouraging. It appeared that Company F had moved out as ordered from its reserve position to the lines held by Company E. In the ap-

proach, however, Company F veered too far to the right and had missed Company E entirely. Company F proceeded onward, however, and went completely around the left, east flank of the enemy, ending in a position behind the Japanese lines. Captain Rapp found it increasingly difficult to control his Company. There were some casualties. Platoons intermingled and became disorganized. On hearing this story, Colonel Smoak ordered the gunnery sergeant to go back to Company F and guide it back to the battalion position. By 1745 Company F was back in the battalion lines and had taken a position on the perimeter which was set up for the night.<sup>117</sup>

At 1830 communications were reestablished and the 12th Marines were ordered to register on the north, east, and west sides of Smoak's perimeter. The 2d Raider Battalion, then attached to the 21st Marines, was directed to protect the supply line from the main line of resistance to the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines. Colonel Ames ordered Smoak to send out patrols and prepare to attack the Japanese in the morning, with tank, artillery, and aircraft support. No action other than sporadic enemy rifle fire occurred throughout the night.<sup>118</sup>

On the morning of 14 November all companies established outposts about 75 yards in front of the perimeter, and sent out patrols. At 0810 friendly aircraft from VMTB-143 appeared overhead, and Ames informed Smoak that these planes were ready to bomb and strafe the objective. Since patrols were out, and since the water supply was exhausted, Smoak had to wait until 0905 before he felt ready to call in the air strike.<sup>119</sup> At this time, artillery marked the target with smoke, and 18 Marine TBF's<sup>120</sup> effectively bombed the area. Immediately after this attack, Company E moved back into its

<sup>117</sup> Historical Section, Division of Public Information, interrogation of Major James A. Michener, 13 September 1947.

<sup>118</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 225.

<sup>119</sup> Before the air strike could be called, Company E, which was in a position close to the target area, had to be withdrawn to a position in the rear of the Battalion front line.

<sup>120</sup> Grumman torpedo bombers. These planes were a part of Marine Air Group 14, then stationed at Munda.

original position in the line. Smoak then ordered an attack, the time of which was based on arrival of water for the troops. Company E on the left and Company G on the right were to be in assault. Companies F and H would constitute the reserve. As designed, the attack was to be a simple frontal assault (supported by the 2d Platoon, Company B, 3d Tank Battalion), with each assault company attacking on a frontage of 100 yards on its particular side of the trail, the guide being toward the center. The tank platoon (five medium tanks) which had arrived a short time earlier, was to attack in line, equally spaced across the front.<sup>121</sup>

At 1015 water arrived and H-hour was set for 1100. At 1045, however, communications were again broken, so the attack was ordered delayed. At 1115, communications were reestablished, and H-hour was set at 1155. The 2d Battalion, 12th Marines, in direct support, arranged to provide a 20-minute preparation followed by a rolling barrage.<sup>122</sup>

At 1135 the preparation began and at 1155 the attack jumped off according to plan. The enemy, who immediately after the preparation had reoccupied their positions, opened fire with rifles and machine-guns. At the same time, moreover, several tanks became confused, began to fire into our own troops, and in maneuvering ran over several men.<sup>123</sup> For a period of five minutes there was complete loss of control and wild shooting, although no tendency to retreat appeared. Smoak, believing that the confusion was due to the noise of the rolling barrage, the snipers, and loss of control by the tanks, moved forward in person to the assault troops and gave orders to cease fire and halt the advance. In the meantime, enemy fire had stopped and company officers were soon able to make the troops realize how foolish they had been.<sup>124</sup>

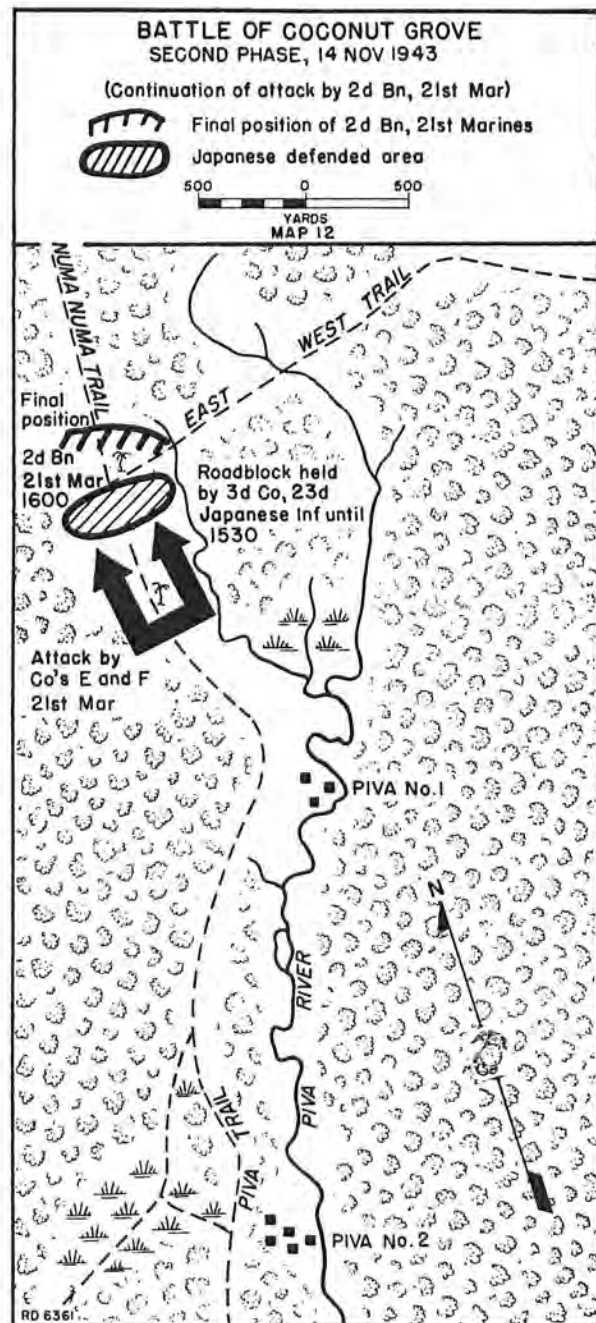
After order had been restored, Smoak directed all companies to stand fast in the positions where they found themselves and to send out patrols to a distance 100 yards north of the trail junction.

<sup>121</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 226.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>123</sup> Two tanks on the left lost direction completely, one changing direction 270°.

<sup>124</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 227.



tion. The tanks, less two damaged by enemy antitank weapons, were ordered to return to an assembly position in reserve.<sup>125</sup>

At this time it was discovered that assaulting

<sup>125</sup> One of the tanks had been knocked out by a land mine, the other by an anti-tank grenade.





**ADVANCING INTO COCONUT GROVE**, men of the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines move forward supported by tanks of the 3d Tank Battalion.

troops had overrun the enemy positions, and that some Japanese were still present in dugouts. These were quickly reduced by riflemen with grenades. By 1400 all enemy resistance had been overcome and patrols returned, reporting no further contact. At 1415, the advance was resumed and by 1530 the objective was in the Marines' hands. A perimeter defense was organized for the night.<sup>126</sup>

Smoak estimated that the enemy resistance which his battalion faced that day was of company strength. Since the Japanese dead appeared to have been killed by rifle fire and by hand grenades, it was probable that either the bombing and shelling had been ineffective or, less probably, that the Japanese had evacuated or buried their dead under fire. It was observed that enemy positions were very extensive and well organized. Numerous machine-gun positions

<sup>126</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 227. Marine war dogs are given much credit for routing out hidden enemy during the mopping up phase of this action.

were well constructed and most of the dugouts were deep with good overhead cover. Although a careful count of enemy dead was not taken, it was estimated that a minimum of 40 Japanese were killed. Six enemy machine-guns were captured. On the other hand, Marine losses amounted to 20 killed (including five officers) and 39 wounded.<sup>127</sup>

This action paved the way on 15 November for an advance on all fronts, about 1,000 yards on the left (west) flank and about 1,500 yards north in the center, to inland defense line Dog.<sup>128</sup>

## PIVA FORKS

While combat action was proceeding generally as planned, continual difficulties were being experienced in logistic support for the beachhead.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>128</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 11. It will be noted that speaking of the inland defense lines, the phonetic alphabet is used to indicate names of various lines. Thus, on maps inland defense line Dog will appear as IDL "D".

Excepting for a treacherous strip of sand along the beach, nothing resembling a road existed in the area. Up and down the coast-line for miles, hugging the meager beach, ten-wheelers, half-tracks, and bull-dozers frequently had to plough through waist-deep surf. A narrow shelf of sand, frequently awash, was the only avenue of vehicular travel ashore.

As successive echelons arrived and disgorged supplies, the necessity for moving dump areas from Puruata Island and fringes of beach to safer and more convenient locations became vital.

About mid-November aerial reconnaissance disclosed that the enemy was constructing an extensive system of defense in depth in the north Bougainville-Buka area to protect the only two airfields that he could hope to keep operational in the Solomons. This did not greatly alarm the Marine forces for it was felt that since the enemy had committed himself to a defense of that area, he was then unlikely to draw many troops from that sector for offensive action in the vicinity of Empress Augusta Bay to the south. Movement would also be difficult because of the difficult terrain and lack of good communications, although the possibility of barge operations could not be overlooked. The real threat, however, seemed to be from the south. The enemy had in that area about 11,000 troops, including his 6th Division Artillery and several independent units capable of being employed against the American right flank or center.

Reliable information indicated that the trail-net from the Mosigetia-Mawareka area, where a large concentration of troops was known to be, to the Jaba and Torokina Rivers, was usable by both troops and pack animals. Artillery could be pack-transported relatively easily. Difficulties of observing trails from the air would tend to conceal enemy movements. The enemy was in some strength in the Mawareka-Jaba area, and it was reliably reported that the coast from Kahili to Mawareka was protected by guns, the size of which was not known. This gave him a fair measure of protection for barge traffic from the Kahili-Shortland area to Mawareka, and thence he could move troops and supplies overland toward our positions.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> IMAC C-2 Journal, II.

Meager, but reliable reports, however, indicated that the Japanese had not made any effort to move over the trails leading from the northeast coast. Hostile patrol activity by mid-November, while not extensive, had been mainly on the right flank. Intelligence through November disclosed some determined effort to support in strength the chief point of resistance on our right flank in the northeast. But if the trail leading north from the southern bivouac and supply areas were used for reinforcement, it was never seriously employed, due possibly in part to harassment by our planes and naval bombardment.

Our activity in the air and on the sea undoubtedly blocked fulfillment of many of the enemy's capabilities in November. Three enemy cruisers, 11 destroyers, 28 transport-freighters, and two oilers were sunk in the SOPAC-SOWESPAC area between 1 November and 20 November. In addition, other Japanese naval units were damaged.<sup>130</sup>

An indication at this time of the extent to which our Fleet controlled the sea may be found in the statistics concerning arrival of succeeding echelons to the beachhead:

Echelon	Personnel	Equipment and supplies in tons	Date of arrival	Unloading completed
1.....	14,321	6,177	1 Nov.	2 Nov.
2.....	3,548	5,080	6 Nov.	7 Nov.
2A.....	5,715	3,160	8 Nov.	8 Nov.
3.....	3,599	5,785	11 Nov.	11 Nov.
4.....	6,678	2,935	13 Nov.	13 Nov.
Total.....	33,861	23,137	.....	.....

Other echelons and supplies continued to arrive throughout the campaign with similar precision. Enemy harassment, though frequent, was ineffective.<sup>131</sup> The only vessel lost in the entire operation was the U. S. S. *McKean*, a destroyer-transport which, on 17 November, sank

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, IIa. Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, *Japanese Naval and Merchant Shipping Losses During World War II By All Causes* indicated that nine combatant and 12 merchant ships were sunk in this area during November 1943.

<sup>131</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 16; 3d AmphFor AR.



**DEEP, SLIMY MUD** characterized the trails and made infantry progress difficult.

as a result of a torpedo-hit from a Japanese plane (Val type). In excess of 50 Marines were lost with the ship.<sup>132</sup>

Because of physical difficulties facing the troops, and due to the lack of roads necessary for moving supplies to Marines in the line, road building rapidly became an "A" priority. Though the location of the bomber field had been selected, progress on its construction was seriously hampered by lack of access roads. This lack also handicapped work on the fighter strip. Engineers and Seabees fell to, however, and completed their formidable tasks with remarkable celerity and thoroughness.

After the remaining elements of the Atsinima Bay counterlanding force were destroyed on the left (west) flank, Japanese resistance to our ex-

<sup>132</sup> U. S. S. *McKean*, Report of Action Involving the Loss of the U. S. S. *McKean*, hereinafter cited as *McKean AR*.

tension of the perimeter was centered mainly on the right flank—to the south along the swampy banks of the Piva River and to the east among the jungle clad uplands.

On 11 November, General Geiger, who had previously ordered all units temporarily attached to the 3d Division to revert to IMAC control,<sup>133</sup> decided to advance inland in order that the proposed airfield sites could be included within the perimeter. On that date, therefore, he directed the 3d Marine Division to strike toward the east, and the 37th Infantry Division with 2d Battalion, 3d Marines attached, to attack to the west.<sup>134</sup>

The combined artillery—now embodying five

<sup>133</sup> Excepting the 2d Raider Regiment and the 148th Infantry (reinforced). General Geiger sent a dispatch to CTF-31 on 9 November which informed Admiral Wilkinson of Geiger's assumption of command, and, on the same date, sent an airmailgram to all subordinate units informing them of the new attachments.

<sup>134</sup> IMAC Opn O #3, 11 November 1943.

battalions—was placed in general support and was ordered to mass fires for beach defenses and inland defense lines on call.<sup>135</sup> The 3d Defense Battalion was to provide antiaircraft and sea-coast artillery protection for the beach area and Puruata and Torokina Islands.<sup>136</sup> Corps Reserve, which consisted of the 2d Marine Raider Regiment and the 1st Battalion 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, all under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Shapley, was directed to be prepared to counterattack in any sector, to reinforce defenses, to occupy defensive positions as designated, or to engage in land or waterborne raider operations. Attacks were to be supported by radar, antiaircraft artillery, and planes of COMAIRNORSOLS, under Brigadier General Field Harris. Division commanders were instructed to coordinate attacks, and contact on the sector boundary was a 3d Marine Division responsibility.<sup>137</sup>

Active patrolling preceded the operation, and with the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, leading off with the support of artillery, tanks, and planes, the various task organizations advanced on all fronts, arriving at inland defense line Dog by 15 November. Steady progress was made and by 21 November inland defense line Easy was reached. During this period two comparatively bitter engagements had reduced prepared Japanese defenses in the vicinity of Piva Road Block and had swept the enemy clear of Coconut Grove. By this date the number of enemy dead was at 918, while American casualties were reported to be 208 killed, 646 wounded, and 131 missing.<sup>138</sup>

It had appeared from documents captured in

<sup>135</sup> On Bougainville, all artillery was lumped into one group and placed under one command. The command was known as "Artillery Group", and consisted of the 12th Marines, the 37th Division Artillery, and the 2d 155mm Gun Battalion (Provisional). Commanding the group was Brigadier General Leo N. Kreber, USA, Commanding General, 37th Division Artillery.

<sup>136</sup> 3d Def. Bn *Opn Rpt*. A copy of this report appears in IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 61.

<sup>137</sup> IMAC *Opn O* #3, 11 November 1943.

<sup>138</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 3. The "missing" figure includes those who were later reported dead. This figure here appears large because it includes those who were reported missing as a result of the sinking of the U. S. S. *McKean* on 17 November 1943.

the engagement at Koromokina Lagoon that an attack was to be made against the Marine eastern flank by the 23d Japanese Infantry which, less one battalion, was in readiness in the hills north of Piva. This scheme was frustrated by the quick destruction of the counterlanding force on our west flank, and when the 23d Regiment moved to carry out its part of the plan, the latter unit found itself blocked by the Raider Regiment. Accordingly (as it was later discovered), the enemy withdrew again to the hills and began construction of defensive positions east of the east branch of the Piva River, and establishment of road blocks and ambushes along the Numa Numa and East-West Trails, thereby preparing a base for further operations along other lines.<sup>139</sup>

When the location of the enemy's main force had been fixed by U. S. patrols, the rate of advance of all units, the speed with which the lateral road was being built, and the number and range of combat and reconnaissance patrols was stepped up to the limit of endurance of men and machines. Neither jungle nor swamp interrupted the steady north and east advance to the vicinity of the junction of the Numa Numa Trail with the East-West Trail where, if no time were wasted, it was anticipated that a main action could be fought with the Japanese before they could complete their defensive arrangements.<sup>140</sup>

Meanwhile, on 11 November, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, cutting in the lateral road, crossed the front of the 2d Battalion. That Battalion then advanced 1000 yards north of the road and covered it and the interval between the 37th Division and the left flank of the 3d Marine Division, now committed to cover the Numa Numa Trail. On 12 November, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, began a movement through the jungle which, by 15 November, placed them in a position south of the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, covering the trail junction captured only a few days before. By 16 November, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, was successful in effecting a junction with the Numa Numa

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 11.

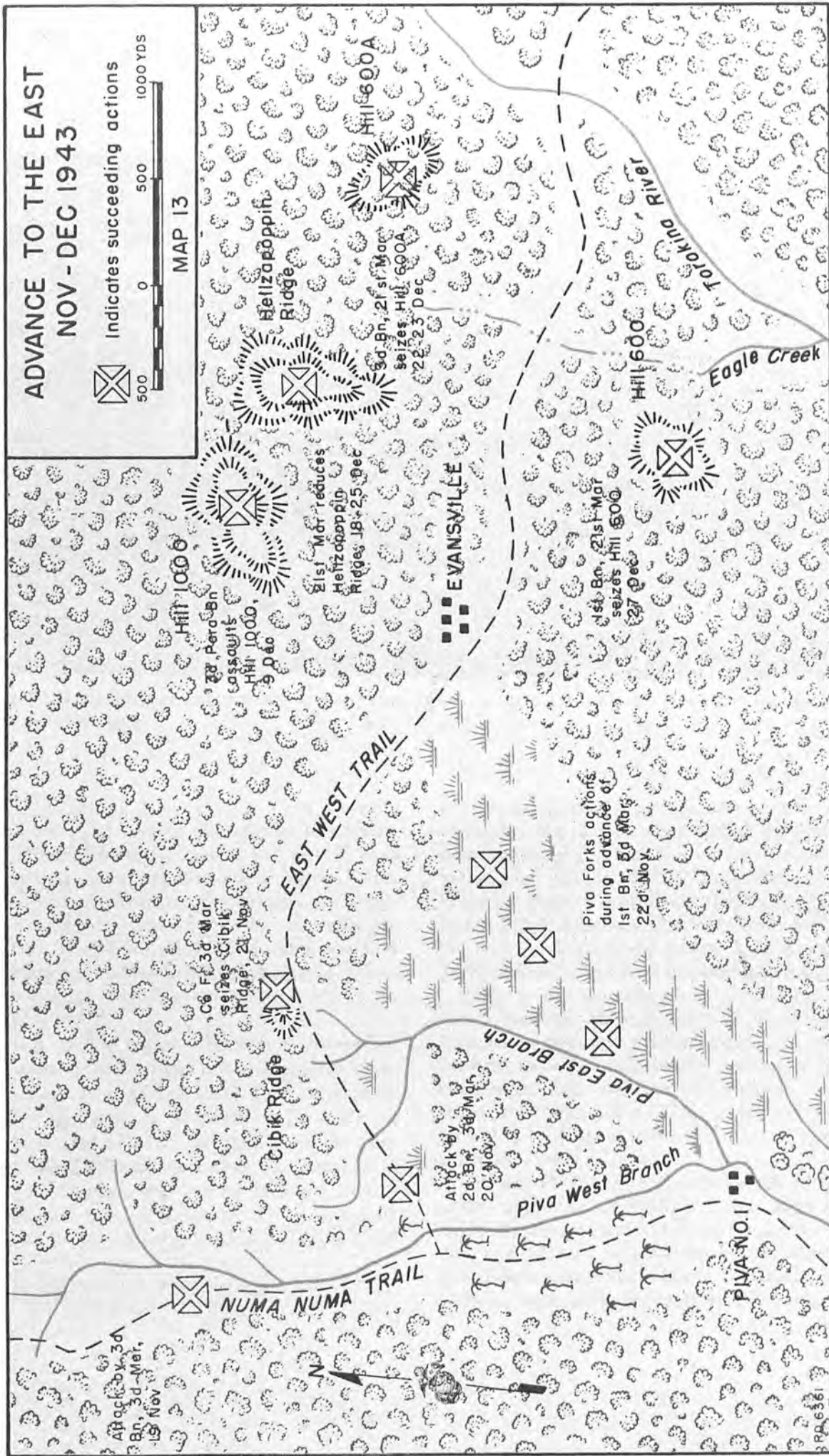
<sup>140</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 89.

# ADVANCE TO THE EAST NOV - DEC 1943

Indicates succeeding actions

500 1000 YDS

MAP 13





**EVACUATION OF CASUALTIES WAS DIFFICULT.** At times, it was necessary to detail a squad of men to carry one wounded man back to the aid station.

Trail of the trail it was cutting. Thus, a continuous road was created through the beachhead, for an amphibian tractor trail had already been built that connected the end of Numa Numa Trail with the beaches. Accordingly, the supply problem of the units on the line was vastly improved. The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, now took position north of the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, which in the meantime passed to control of the 3d Marines.<sup>141</sup>

As a result of patrol activity on 17 November, an unoccupied road-block was discovered along the Numa Numa Trail about 1000 yards north of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. To make the battalion available for occupation of the position, the 3d Raider Battalion was attached to the 3d Marines and moved into the lines.<sup>142</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Ralph M. King, commanding the 3d Battalion, ordered a platoon of Com-

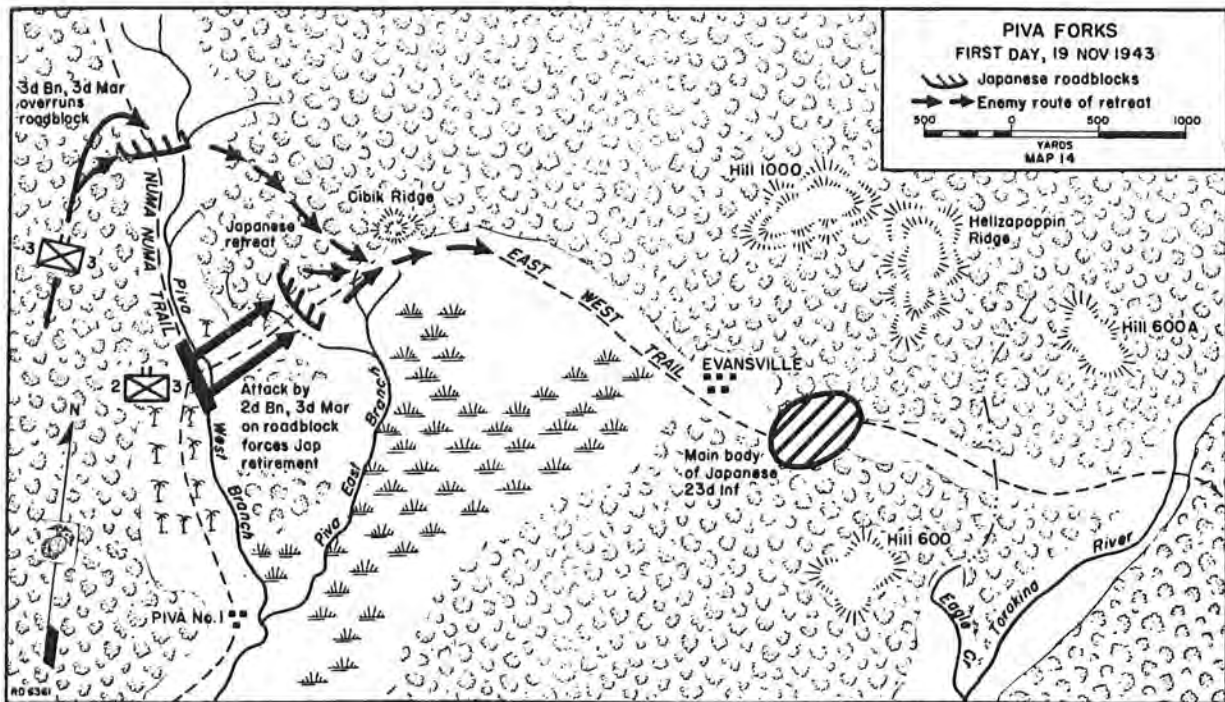
pany L to occupy the position immediately. Accordingly, the platoon commanded by Second Lieutenant John O'Neil moved forward, to be joined later in the day by the Company K Weapons Platoon, commanded by Second Lieutenant Frank Railsback. The Marines organized the area for defense, and settled down to await developments. These were not long in coming.

Early in the morning of 18 November, the enemy, unaware of the presence of Marines, attempted to reoccupy their road-block. A short fire-fight ensued; an uncounted number of Japanese were killed, and from the body of an officer a map was taken. This acquisition later proved to be of great value to American intelligence sections.

On the morning of 19 November, the 3d Battalion, accompanied by light tanks, advanced astride the Numa Numa Trail. No opposition was met, and O'Neil's and Railsback's platoons rejoined their companies without incident. The battalion then advanced another 500 yards, set

<sup>141</sup> For disposition of the 3d Marines see map 14.

<sup>142</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 89-90.



up a perimeter defense, and spent the remainder of the night unmolested.<sup>143</sup>

The next day several patrols were sent out. Two of these met with disaster. As Second Lieutenant Arthur J. Hendershaw's platoon (Company L) was patrolling in front of the battalion lines with the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Edwin L. Hamilton, it was hit by Japanese mortar fire. Both officers and many men were wounded as a result. Another patrol, made up of First Lieutenant Edward R. Messer's First Platoon, Company K, was attacked by enemy riflemen, resulting in the death of three Marines.

On 21 November, King's battalion crossed the Piva River's west branch without mishap. As it advanced northeast astride a foot trail up a very steep cliff, its front narrowed to two squads abreast. At the moment the forward elements reached the crest of the hill, Japanese were sighted. First Lieutenant Lowell H. Smith of Company K, who was then with the scouts, quickly maneuvered the two leading squads, and with guns blazing drove the enemy from the hill. King immediately set about organizing the posi-

tion, but before consolidation was complete, Japanese 90 mm mortars began registering. Although seven men were killed, the battalion held its newly won position. That night passed without incident.<sup>144</sup> The Marines now occupied a mass of high ground overlooking the main Japanese position which was east of the east branch of the Piva and astride the East-West Trail. In addition, the position held by King's battalion placed the Marines across the Japanese line of communication and supply between the Numa Numa Valley and the Jaba district.<sup>145</sup>

At noon the next day the battalion was relieved in its positions by the 2d Raider Battalion.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, had reached its new lines in its assigned zone of action, and the 9th and 21st Marines advanced to their new lines without resistance.<sup>146</sup>

On 19 November, the 37th Division extended its lines to the northeast, thus releasing the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, which was therefore car-

<sup>143</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 12.

<sup>144</sup> Capt. Richard C. Peck ltr to CMC, dtd 3Jun48.

<sup>145</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 90.

<sup>146</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 12. Attainment of the new lines marked fulfillment of IMAC Opn O #3, which General Geiger has issued on 11 November.

marked for the attack on the outpost located on the East-West Trail. The battalion approached an assembly area behind the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, and on the morning of 20 November passed through the lines and reduced the enemy position.<sup>147</sup> Having completed its mission the battalion continued across the west branch of the Piva and set up defensive positions; reconnaissance patrols were sent out.<sup>148</sup>

In the meantime the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, reverted to its parent organization, and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, reinforced by Company L, 3d Raider Battalion, and elements of the Regimental Weapons Company, 3d Marines, assumed responsibility for the sector vacated by the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines.<sup>149</sup>

While on combat patrol, the 1st Platoon, Company F, 3d Marines, commanded by First Lieutenant Steve John Cibik, engaged in a fight for possession of a ridge 400 feet long, later to be named in honor of the platoon leader.

Although this action was comparatively small, it had important aspects.

During the afternoon of 20 November, First Lieutenant Willis L. Kay, Intelligence Officer of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, had spotted Cibik Ridge while on patrol. This was the first high ground to be discovered near our front lines. Kay had rushed back to the battalion command post and reported his discovery to the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Hector de Zayas. de Zayas immediately ordered Major Donald M. Schmuck, commanding Company F, to occupy the ground. Cibik's platoon got the call. Reinforced by a section of heavy machine guns, the platoon followed Kay, acting as guide, and made its way through the jungle to a spot where Kay could point out the approximate location of the hill. Laying field-telephone wire behind them, the men then followed Cibik up the steep slope. Fortunately they found the hill deserted, so, because night was fast approaching they immediately turned to in order to prepare

defenses. Early next morning Cibik put out patrols and discovered that the crest had been organized for defense by the Japanese. The hill appeared to have been used throughout the day as an observation post; during the night the enemy would pull out in order to escape U. S. artillery fire.

Just after daybreak a Marine sighted Japanese approaching the hill. Promptly he opened fire. The enemy seemed to be surprised, but they attempted to retake the hill about noon-time and were repulsed. Later that afternoon Kay returned with communicators who had laid new lines to the position, for the wire laid on the preceding day was out. With communication restored, Cibik requested Schmuck to send mortars. About 1630, First Lieutenant Herbert G. Young and ten men from Company F's mortar section arrived, and two 60mm mortars were emplaced. There were now 62 men on the ridge. By mid-afternoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, had closed the gap between Cibik's position and the left flank of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. There was no more action that night.

At dawn 22 November, an outpost set up by Cibik along the East-West Trail opened fire on a group of Japanese approaching the ridge. Soon thereafter about 70 Japanese were seen forming for an attack, mortar fire was placed in that area. Toward the end of this barrage, Schmuck arrived. An enemy mortar opened on the ridge, but counterbattery fire from 2d Battalion 81mm mortars silenced it. Several succeeding Japanese attempts to retake or harass the position were quelled. That evening some 30 men of the Weapons Company, 3d Marines, arrived, originally to relieve Cibik's platoon, but, due to the fact that an attack was planned for the next day, Cibik was ordered to hold his position until the regimental line could be built up to it.

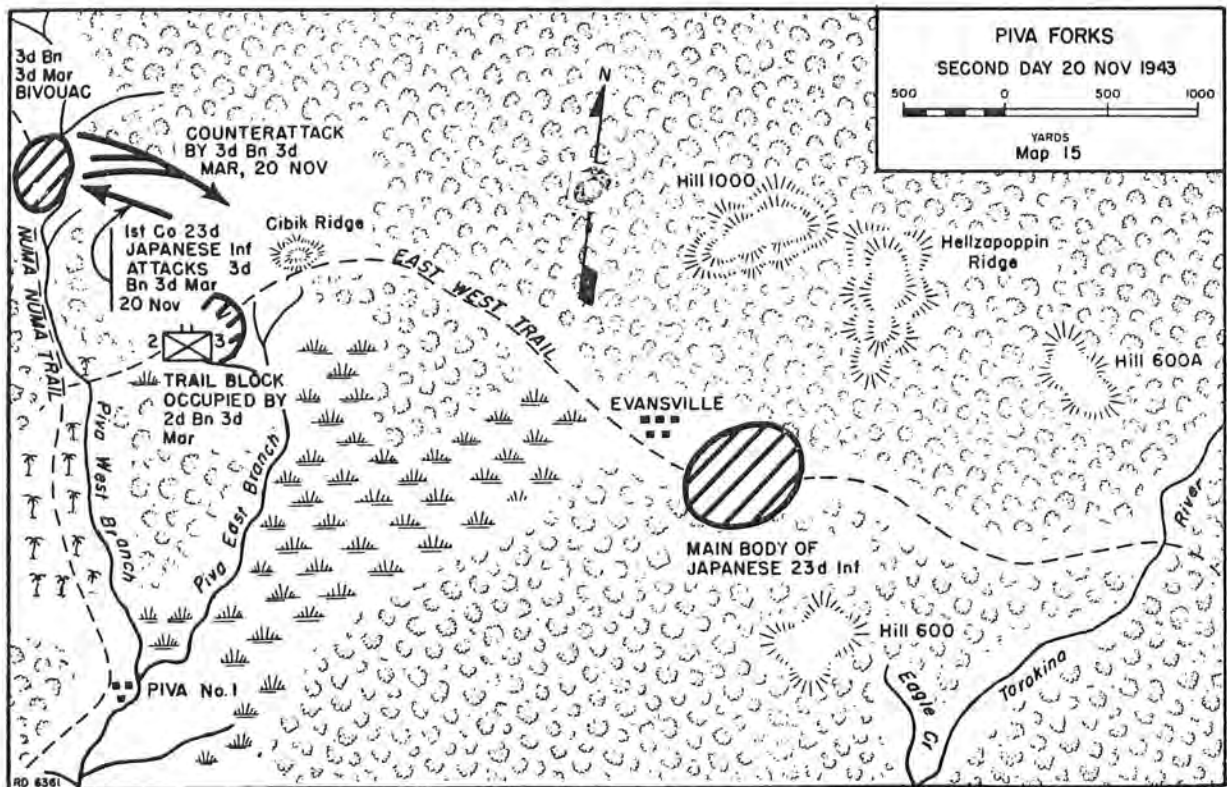
The following day (23 November), the enemy launched an organized attack against the ridge but were driven back when succeeding assault failed. In this action, two Marines were killed and two more were wounded. Late that afternoon, Cibik's platoon was relieved, as the remainder of the regiment built its line up to his

<sup>147</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, *loc. cit.*, goes into detail concerning employment of these units. However, details concerning the fight itself are omitted.

<sup>148</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 2.

<sup>149</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 90.





position.<sup>150</sup> Cibik was awarded the Silver Star as a result of this action.<sup>151</sup>

There is no doubt that the Japanese felt pressed to regain control of this commanding piece of terrain, for it afforded observation of the Empress Augusta Bay area, and in U. S. hands, it cut communications to the Numa Numa Valley.<sup>152</sup>

While the action was underway on Cibik's Ridge, the remainder of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, was conducting a reconnaissance in force, with a view to defining and reducing the strong Japanese positions east of the Piva's east fork. When it was discovered that the enemy was organized in considerable strength, Lieutenant Colonel de Zayas decided to withdraw his bat-

talion through the line built up by the 1st Battalion. This was done with the utmost difficulty, for the wounded, of whom there were many, had to be evacuated, and the terrain was most difficult. Furthermore, the enemy, in more than battalion strength, attempted to prevent a disengagement.<sup>153</sup>

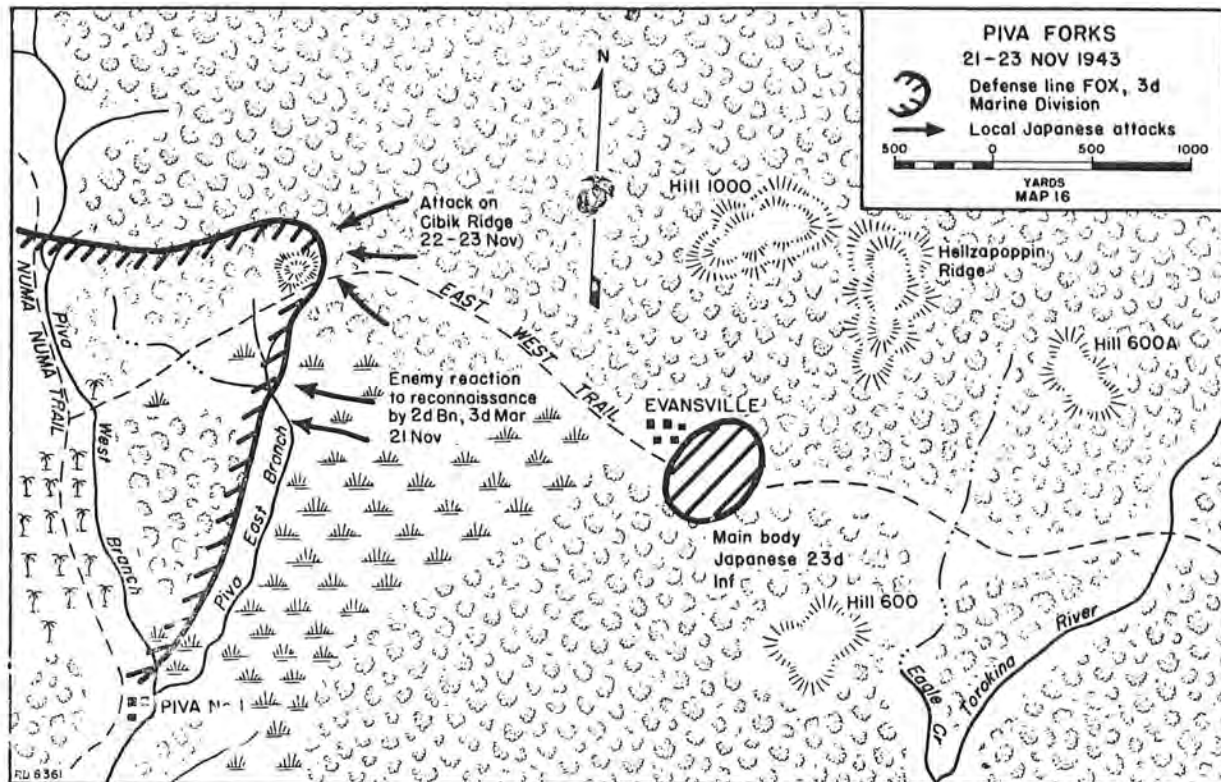
While the 2d Battalion's movement to its assembly area was in progress, the Japanese suddenly attempted a double envelopment of the 1st Battalion's newly acquired positions, and it was necessary to recommit the 2d Battalion to the line immediately. Fortunately, however, the enemy followed the obvious routes of approach and his effort was destroyed in front of machine-guns sited for just such an eventuality. This turning movement was a spectacular affair, in which

<sup>150</sup> Monks, *op. cit.*, 156-159, 171-172, and 182-195, is probably the best account of this action, for official reports fail to mention personalities. A popularized version of this action appeared in *Saturday Evening Post* in the fall of 1944, but it treated the first part of the fight very poorly.

<sup>151</sup> Decorations and Medals Division, File on Cibik, 0055.

<sup>152</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Monks, *op. cit.*, 154-198. Some officers acquainted with this engagement are in disagreement in so far as the purpose of de Zayas' action is concerned (see Schmuck-McMath letter and Cf. Van Orden letter). Among most officers who participated, however, the consensus is predominately that given in the text here.



the gunner of a light machine-gun of Company A, 3d Marines, killed 74 of the 75 Japanese within 20 to 30 yards of his gun; only one enemy escaped.<sup>154</sup> At this very time, a combat patrol of Company A, 21st Marines, under First Lieutenant Henry Helgen came up to join in the fight. Thereafter, and until the 21st Marines advanced their lines abreast of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, this patrol remained in a position covering the right flank of the 1st Battalion.<sup>155</sup>

On the morning of 22 November, a plan for decisive action against the enemy had been formulated: as the first step in executing it, the 2d Battalion, 2d Raiders (now attached to the 3d Marines), advanced and relieved the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, in position. By evening, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, had moved to an assembly area in rear of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, abreast of the 2d Battalion but north of the East-West trail.

<sup>154</sup> Van Orden letter.

<sup>155</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 92.

The 3d Marines were now in a position to attack.

The enemy position, consisting of rifle pits and small bunkers, and supported by artillery, had been found to be disposed as if to resist an attack from the south towards the hills. But the Marine plan of attack contemplated an assault from west to east, enfilading the Japanese lines and paralleling the hill mass which the enemy apparently thought we would attempt to occupy. Intelligence had developed that the enemy force, consisting of the 23d Regiment, was estimated to have a strength of 1200 to 1500 men.<sup>156</sup>

During 23 November, from posts on Cibik Ridge, artillery forward observers registered on all probable enemy positions, and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, moved every available machine-gun into the line, even including several Japanese Nambu and Hotchkiss machine-guns, previously captured from the enemy. By evening, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 3d Marines, had completed

<sup>156</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 12.

patrols in preparation for the following day's attack.<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile, the 37th Division, except on the limiting point with the 3d Marine Division, had advanced without opposition to inland defense line How, its final defense line.<sup>158</sup>

The 3d Marines scheme of maneuver for the projected attack was that the 2d and 3d Battalions, following an artillery preparation, would advance abreast pass through the lines of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, and attack to the east for a distance of 800 yards beyond the east branch of the Piva. The East-West Trail was to be the boundary between battalions.<sup>159</sup>

By dark, all was in readiness; seven battalions of artillery (four from the 12th Marines, and the 135th, 136th, and 140th Field Artillery Battalions, 37th Division Artillery) were to fire several thousand 75 and 105mm rounds in a 20-minute preparation, into an area about 800 yards square; 155mm guns and howitzers were ready to silence distant targets; the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, had sited 44 machine-guns and coordinated the fires of 12 81mm and nine 60mm mortars for a close-in preparation across the zone of action of attacking battalions.<sup>160</sup>

H-hour was 0900, 24 November (Thanksgiving Day).

From H minus 26 minutes to H minus 3 minutes, the seven battalions of artillery fired 5760 rounds on the Japanese positions in front of the 3d Marines, the heaviest preparation that had ever before been delivered prior to a Marine attack in this war; the assault battalions of the 3d Marines advanced to the line of departure to the accompaniment of a continuous rattle and roar of machine-guns, mortars and artillery. At the same time, however, the Marines were subjected to a Japanese artillery barrage which inflicted the heaviest casualties of the campaign. Twice the enemy fire walked up and down the attacking Marines with great accuracy. This successful use of artillery by the Japanese seemed to Marines the worst feature of the entire fight.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>157</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 93.

<sup>158</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 13.

<sup>159</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 92.

<sup>160</sup> Artillery Group, 37th Division, USA., After Action Report, 51. See IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, *passim*.

<sup>161</sup> Schmuck-MacMath letter; see IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 13, for a complete account of this fight.

Fortunately, however, a forward observer of the 4th Battalion, 12th Marines, spotted the enemy battery as it was delivering its devastating fire, and brought prompt, effective counter-battery fire on the Japanese battery, silencing it and destroying two of its guns, parts of which were discovered by our patrols on the succeeding day.

When the battalions entered the Japanese lines, they were met with awe-inspiring silence; neutralization of the enemy within the beaten zone of the preparation had been complete. As the advance continued to its objective, however, Japanese survivors rallied and some reserves were committed. Enemy artillery again began to rake the Marine line and many Marines fell.

By the time the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, now on the left, had moved forward about 500 yards, the Japanese were ready; a counterattack was launched against our left flank. The 3d Battalion met the attack in full stride and continued its advance in a hand-to-hand, tree-to-tree struggle which ended with destruction of the enemy's flanking force. As the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, on the right, neared its objective, it, too, closed with Japanese reinforcements coming forward to make a stand.

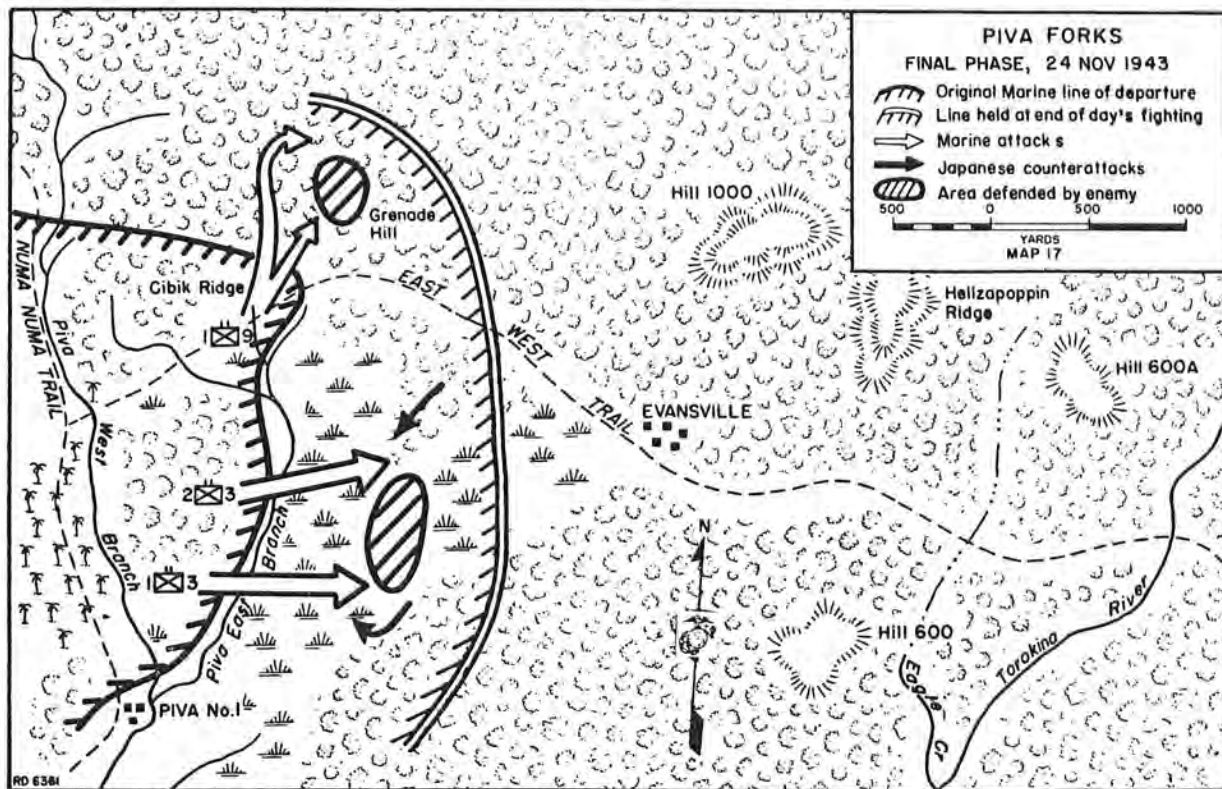
The two battalions remained on their initial objectives only long enough to reorganize and reestablish contact: again they started forward, this time to a final objective 350 yards to the front, supported by 60mm and 81mm mortar concentrations. The Japanese here made a final desperate effort, but as our leading elements came to a halt about 1150 yards in front of the original line of departure, all resistance came to an end.<sup>162</sup>

The Japanese 23d Infantry, leaving 1107 dead on the field, had been virtually destroyed.<sup>163</sup>

The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines had met par-

<sup>162</sup> Monks, *op. cit.*, 213. During the attack, Company L, 3d Marines, had suffered very heavy casualties (three killed, 47 wounded), and had to be reorganized under fire. This company had taken the brunt of Japanese attacks on the left flank.

<sup>163</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 93. Personal reports submitted later by officers engaged in this action, state this figure is greatly exaggerated.



ticularly heavy resistance as it advanced about 500 yards over the ground in which it had conducted its reconnaissance several days before. In an area where the tributary streams of the Piva meandered back and forth through the jungle to form an intricate network of natural barriers, the Japanese had organized a maze of pillboxes, slit-trenches, and foxholes. At each stream bend, at least three mutually supporting pillboxes were emplaced. This is only one instance of the formidable difficulties encountered.<sup>164</sup>

On 25 November, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, was withdrawn to an assembly area near the Piva river; the 2d Battalion extended its lines to the southeast to make contact with the 21st Marines on its right; the 3d Battalion organized a defensive position on the left flank of the 2d Battalion; the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, and the 2d Raider Battalion, plus two companies of the 3d Raider Battalion, went into

<sup>164</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 14; see also Monks, *op. cit.*, 212.

the line in the eastern sector; the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, was attached to the 3d Marines and moved into a reserve position in the 3d Marines sector; and the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry, was attached to the 9th Marines. The remainder of the 2d Raider Regiment reverted to control of IMAC.<sup>165</sup>

In the meantime, in order to continue the advance, it was decided to commit the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines (Lieutenant Colonel Carey A. Randall), then occupying a regimental reserve position. Accordingly, at 1600, 24 November, the battalion was ordered to move to a position within the sector of the 3d Marines, prepared to attack the following day. This order was executed, and, in position some 200 yards south of the 3d Marines command post, the battalion spent the night preparing for the assault.

Next morning at 1000 the battalion crossed Cibik Ridge, now occupied by Company L, 3d Raider Battalion, and Weapons Company, 3d

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14.

Marines, and attacked on a front of 400 yards. The 2d Raider Regiment, on the left, attacked across a front of 800 yards. Preceding the attack, the artillery had fired a ten-minute preparation, and the mortars of the 3d Marines lent further support. The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, attacked with Company A (Captain Conrad M. Fowler) on the left, Company C (Captain Frank K. Finneran) on the right, and Company B (Captain Burtis W. Anderson) in reserve. Mortar positions were selected in the vicinity of Cibik Ridge, and machine-gun platoons were attached to each company. As leading elements of the assault companies moved down the steep side of Cibik Ridge, they came under the fire of Japanese automatic weapons, and, having advanced only 250 to 300 yards, quickly became pinned down. Fowler and Finneran attempted to maneuver their reserve platoons in order to develop the enemy positions. The prolonged fire-fight lasted until late in the evening.

The enemy was well dug in, having organized an all-around defense of a ridge running perpendicular to Cibik Ridge. On this ridge were an estimated 60 to 70 Japanese, armed with at least four heavy machine-guns, 12 light machine-guns, and plentifully supplied with grenades. Assault companies attempted again and again to carry the position, but each try was unsuccessful. Since the fight was conducted at distances varying from five to 50 yards, it was impossible to use the mortars emplaced on Cibik Ridge, for fear of endangering our own troops. Consequently, the fight had to be conducted almost exclusively with rifles, automatic rifles, and grenades. All around the hill, Marines would advance within a few yards of the crest, only to be thrown back each time by a hail of grenades. Many enemy dugouts below the crest were cleared out in the fighting. When the 1st Platoon of Company A reached the right rear of the enemy position, it found a trail. By fighting its way up this trail the platoon was almost able to reach the Japanese positions, but was unable to hold the ground it had won. Other platoons encountered similar situations in their sectors. The Japanese utilized grenades to such

an extent that the Marines, in referring to this action later, called it "Grenade Hill."<sup>166</sup>

By 1530 the advance had stalled completely, and a gap existed between the right flank of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, and the left flank of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, which by this time had made considerable progress. Since night was fast approaching, Randall therefore placed Company B in position to cover the gap. In moving up, Company B encountered opposition and was forced to fight until after dark. Close tying in of the lines was impossible.

Next morning, 26 November, scouts reported that "Grenade Hill" had been evacuated by the Japanese, and Companies A and C, 9th Marines, quickly occupied the ridge. At 1015 the attack was once again underway; a junction with Company B was effected; and the final objective, a small ridge astride the East-West Trail, was reached. In this action the Marines lost five killed and 42 wounded, while 32 Japanese bodies were found.<sup>167</sup> Meanwhile, the 2d Raider Regiment had reached its objective on the left, after an advance of 600 to 700 yards.

During the period 18–26 November, 1,196 enemy dead were counted. This brought the counted enemy dead since D-day to 2,014: total enemy casualties, however, must have considerably exceeded that figure.<sup>168</sup>

This battle, known as the Battle of Piva Forks, marked the temporary decline of serious opposition to the occupation and development of the Empress Augusta Bay area as an American base; the enemy, with the exception of small detachments and patrols, was driven east of the Torokina River, and the high ground west of the river from which he had controlled the site which was to become the Piva bomber field, and from which he could harass the entire beachhead, was now occupied by our forces.<sup>169</sup>

It was not until March, 1944, some two months after withdrawal of the 3d Marine Division that the Japanese, in considerable strength, again attempted to breach our lines and drive

<sup>166</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 175–176.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>168</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 14.

<sup>169</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 93.

the U. S. forces into the sea. All attempts were stopped by the 37th Infantry and Americal Divisions of the XIV Corps, U. S. Army, then holding the beachhead.

## KOIARI BEACH

By 15 November, IMAC had pushed out the perimeter to limits previously determined, and which were still further extended after 27 November as a clearer picture of the situation and terrain evolved. By that date, defenses were well organized and threats of effective Japanese counteraction appeared to be decreasing.

As the beachhead extended, Japanese resistance in strength materialized on 20 November to the north and east of the Piva River Forks and north of the East-West Trail. This was to develop into the Battle of Piva Forks which continued through 25 November.<sup>170</sup>

Having attained inland defense line Easy, General Geiger decided to take inland defense line How from 23 to 30 November. Accordingly, he ordered the 37th Division, which had been encountering little opposition, to attack on 23 November at 0800, seizing its objective—inland defense line How—by 1800 on 24 November. In the meanwhile, the 3d Marine Division, which faced the preponderance of Japanese troops and had fought several sharp actions during the advance to inland defense line Easy, was to attack at 0800 on 23 November and advance to inland defense line How by 1800 on 30 November. The Marine division was to be prepared to seize additional inland defense lines Item or Jig on order. The Artillery Group was once again placed in general support, and COMAIRNORSOLS was called upon for support, by operational control of aircraft and anti-aircraft defense. Aggressive front line reconnaissance and patrol activity was ordered, and extensive use of dummy installations was enjoined. In the event the Japanese launched a counterattack, no ground within line How was to be given up. Ground taken was to be organized for defense, protective wire was to be erected and trail blocks

<sup>170</sup> IMAC C-2 Periodic Reports for period 1-13 November, and 18-25 November.

were to be established on all trails leading into the positions.<sup>171</sup>

It was necessary to modify this order, however, for upon moving into position for the main attack, elements of the 3d Marine Division encountered opposition along the Piva River, the Popotana (East-West), and Numa Numa Trails, and by 22 November, the engagement at Piva Forks, the phase of which was later to be known as Cibik Ridge, was developing. Furthermore, artillery duels were being fought in the north-east sector. Although this stubborn Japanese resistance was eventually wiped out after considerable casualties on both sides, it was decided to have the 37th Division anchor its right flank on the limiting point on the boundary, and advance to its objective at discretion, while the 3d Marine Division anchored its left flank on the limiting point and advanced to inland defense line Fox.

On 23 November, General Turnage ordered the 3d and 9th Marines to exchange sub-sectors, thereby allowing the latter, which had been only lightly engaged at any time thus far, to take over an active sub-sector and the 3d Marines, which had been heavily engaged on several occasions, to occupy the relatively quiet sector on the right (south) flank of the beachhead. This exchange was completed by 26 November. The 21st Marines remained in the center of the 3d Marine Division line, while the 2d Raider Regiment reverted to Corps reserve. The 3d Marines had been so badly depleted as a result of battle casualties, sickness and utter exhaustion, that the regiment was reinforced in its new area by the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry (which became the Regimental Reserve) and other special units.<sup>172</sup>

On 25 November the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines and six companies of the 2d Raider Regiment passed through the 3d Marines and, against light retiring resistance, occupied the hill mass east of the Piva River dominating the East-West Trail. Reconnaissance to the Torokina River was initiated immediately.

The 37th Division encountered no opposition as it moved toward its objective, and by 27 November it had reached line How and had com-

<sup>171</sup> IMAC Opn O #4, 21 November 1943.

<sup>172</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 9.

pleted about 50 percent of its installations and 25 percent of its protective wire. On the other hand, the 3d Marine Division moved forward in spurts against varying degrees of opposition, finally reaching part of its new objective on 28 November.

Air support was used extensively throughout the period, both to defend the beachhead against Japanese assaults by air and to soften Japanese strong points in the northeastern sector by bombing and strafing missions. Spotting planes and fighters were on station during daylight, while two night-fighters supplied air cover after darkness. Frequent strikes were made on targets in the Jaba and Piva River areas.

About noon, 24 November, men working on the still incompletd airstrip were amazed to observe a Marine SBD preparing to land. Hurriedly clearing equipment from the strip, Marines and Seabees made preparations to receive the incoming plane. A successful landing was made, and Captain John C. Richards, COM-

AIRSOLS Strike Command, climbed out of his plane. Richards' plane had been damaged by flak during a raid on the northeast coast of Bougainville, and had been forced to make an emergency landing.<sup>173</sup>

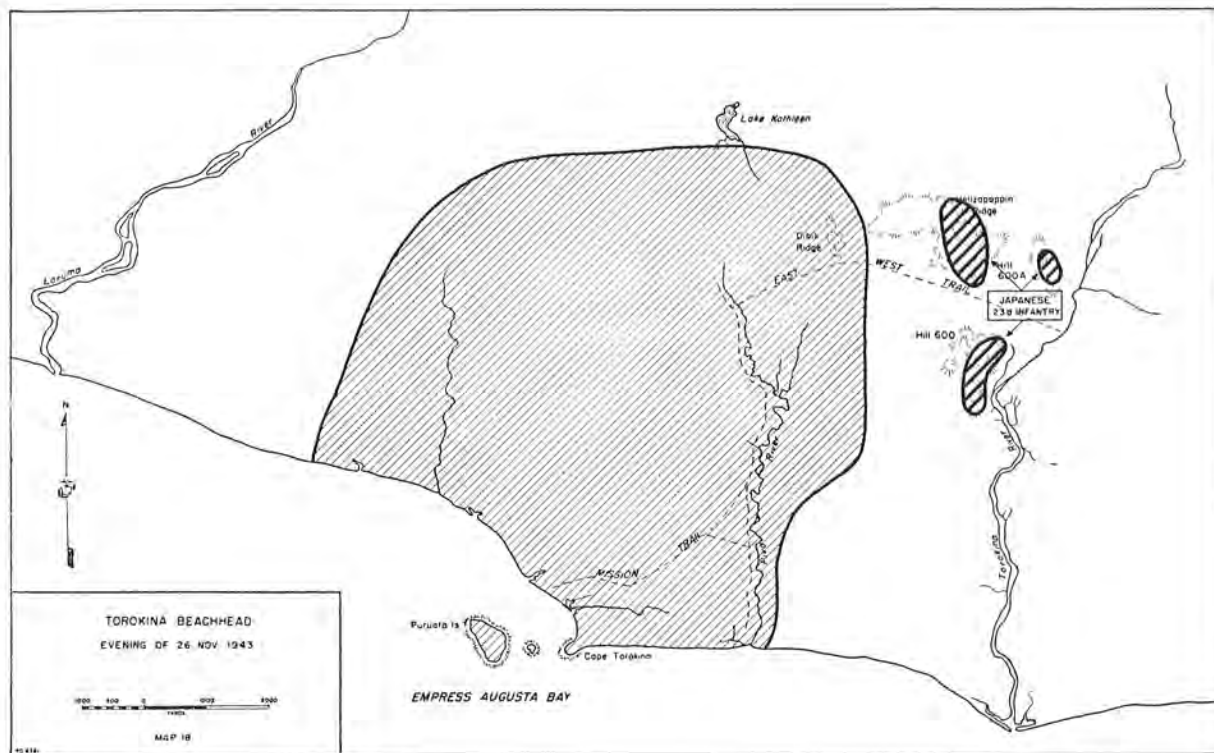
The advance naval base gave support to operations during the month of November with its motor torpedo boats (PT's or MTB's) ranging along the coasts to the north, east, and south as far as Buka and Ako. LCI gunboats augmented the PT patrols, while destroyers accompanied succeeding convoys and conducted bombardment runs on areas along the coast of southern Empress Augusta Bay.

Throughout November the Japanese launched nightly air attacks against our beachhead, reaching greatest intensity on 20 and 21 November, in each of which 50 to 60 bombs were dropped and the beachhead strafed. During the final at-

<sup>173</sup> War Diary, Strike Command, 20 November 1943-13 March 1944, entry for 24 November. See VMSB-243.



**FIRST PLANE TO LAND** on the still uncompleted airfield at Cape Torokina was this Marine Corps Scout Dive Bomber. Piloted by Captain J. C. Richards, this plane made an emergency landing at noon on 24 November 1943.



tack on 21 November all five of the attacking planes were shot down by our fighter cover. Six men were killed and 26 wounded as a result of these attacks.<sup>174</sup>

During the month of November, our troops were subjected to 90 air raid alerts, 22 of which resulted in bombings. Bombings, along with strafing attacks, caused a total of 24 deaths and 96 other casualties.<sup>175</sup> Damage included hits on both Division command posts, hits on several gun-positions, and other minor hits which produced negligible results. On the morning of 20 November, however, a well placed stick of enemy bombs demolished a 3d Defense Battalion 90mm gun, killing five and wounding eight of the crew. Fires started in the nearby fuel dump, which burned spectacularly all night. Again on the morning of 21 November the same area was struck and fires again lasted all night, this time destroying a trailer loaded with 3,000 rounds

<sup>174</sup> IMAC C-2 Periodic Reports.

<sup>175</sup> The totals here are derived from an analysis of casualty reports for Marine Corps personnel for the month of November, 1943.

of mortar ammunition and artillery propelling charges.<sup>176</sup> While the Japanese seemed to be utilizing their air to a greater extent than any of their other capabilities, the relative damage which they inflicted was negligible as a return for their losses.

Few attempts were made to bomb the beach-head area during hours of daylight. On several occasions early in November the Japanese came in over the Crown Prince Range, diving out of the sun in order to plant bombs on the most rewarding targets, but the heavy losses inflicted on these daylight raiders was so severe that the enemy was quickly dissuaded from attempting further daylight raids. Credit for turning the raiders away must be given jointly to the effective air cover and the intense anti-aircraft fire that anti-aircraft defenses were able to throw up.<sup>177</sup> Through this period the Japanese made some determined attempts to counter our artillery and

<sup>176</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 39.

<sup>177</sup> C-2 Periodic Reports, November and December. Barrage balloons, used on LST convoys, accounted for one enemy plane which struck a guy cable.





**PURUATA ISLAND FUEL DUMP** goes up in flames as a result of a successful Japanese bombing raid, 20 November 1943.

succeeded in inflicting relatively heavy casualties among our assault troops. Some damage was done to our gun positions; a few landing craft were hit, and work on air strips was interrupted for brief periods. But Japanese shelling was almost invariably silenced quickly by counter-battery fire from the Artillery Group or by our planes flying over their positions. Artillery and air bombing was employed, and DD's made many sorties down the coast of Empress Augusta Bay to shell, with good results, Japanese gun-positions and ammunition and supply dumps. On those sorties air spotting was used and fire from destroyers was directed by Marine naval gunfire officers.

At 1200, 23 November 1943, the 1st Parachute Battalion, commanded by Major Richard Fagan, arrived at Bougainville, and landed on Beach Yellow One, where it was attached to the 2d Raider Regiment (then in the Corps Reserve

Area), being thus designated part of the Corps Reserve.<sup>178</sup>

Since enemy capabilities included the possibility of reinforcement of the 23d Infantry Regiment, a raid into the Japanese lines in the southern part of Empress Augusta Bay was proposed for the purpose of disrupting communications, destroying the enemy, his installations and supplies and gathering information. Consequently, on 27 November, General Geiger issued Operation Order No. 5, which directed the 1st Parachute Battalion to conduct such a raid. For this operation Company M, 3d Raider Battalion, a communication detachment of IMAC Signal Battalion, two forward observer parties of the Artillery Group, and native guides, were attached to Major Fagan's force.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>178</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 336.

<sup>179</sup> IMAC Opn O #5, 27 November 1943.

Although little was known of Japanese strength or dispositions in this area, Fagan was ordered to land on a beach approximately 3000 yards northwest of Koiari,<sup>180</sup> where he was to establish a temporary base from which he could conduct raids along the coast and as far inland as the East-West trail. The order envisaged a stay ashore of not less than four days, and it expressly forbade Fagan to undertake any decisive engagement with a superior Japanese force; with a further proviso that, if such resistance were met, the battalion should return to the Torokina beachhead.<sup>181</sup>

Embarking at Beach Blue Two aboard LCM's and LCVP's, the battalion sailed at 0300 and landed as planned, about 0400, 29 November, virtually on top of a Japanese detachment.<sup>182</sup> The Japanese were apparently expecting a landing of their own troops, for an officer, unarmed except for his sword, walked out and began an abruptly terminated conversation with the first Marines ashore,<sup>183</sup> who quickly established a beachhead which included some 350 yards of beach and extended inland approximately 180 yards.

Fagan soon realized that his battalion had landed in the middle of a large supply dump, and that a substantial force of enemy was close at hand. For these reasons, the only possibility was to dig in and hold. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Company M, 3d Raider Battalion and a large portion of the Parachute Battalion Headquarters Company had been landed about 1000 yards east of the beachhead, in fact failing to rejoin Fagan's main body until about 0930, after having engaged other enemy forces and suffered 13 casualties.<sup>184</sup>

In the meantime, radio communication had been established and was being maintained with IMAC. By mid-morning, however, the radio with which the battalion was equipped failed to receive, although messages it transmitted con-

tinued audible at Cape Torokina. The resultant one-way communication therefore caused much subsequent confusion as some messages sent by IMAC did not get through to Fagan.

Soon recovering from the shock of discovering that the landing was being conducted by Americans rather than their own people, the Japanese began subjecting the beachhead to heavy fire from 90mm mortars, machine-guns and small arms. At daybreak, an undetermined number of enemy attacked the Marines, but were repulsed. Japanese fire increased steadily, and it soon became evident that the mission could not be successfully accomplished; by 0800, believing that the action might end in disaster unless the battalion were evacuated, Major Fagan excitedly requested that his unit be withdrawn.<sup>185</sup> General Geiger shortly took steps to grant this request, but his reply to Fagan concerning the plan for withdrawal did not get through.<sup>186</sup>

The 1st Parachute Battalion was now in a tight spot. Fagan felt that he was facing a considerably stronger Japanese force and that he had become fully engaged. He believed that he was unable to maneuver, and that the enemy had a fair estimate of the size of the Marine force.

The only thing Fagan could do was to dig in and hold.

This he ordered, and the Marines turned to erecting hasty defenses under fire as companies established contact.

The combat efficiency of the command left little to be desired; the men responded quickly, intelligently and bravely to all orders. Lines never gave ground despite severe casualties and determined enemy assaults. No panic existed at any time, although all hands knew that ammunition was greatly depleted and that the chances of withdrawing in the face of a night or dawn attack (which was considered inevitable) were slim.

The rescuing boats twice attempted to beach, but each time the enemy laid heavy concentrations of fire on the landing area, and the craft were driven off. Excellent spotting from the

<sup>180</sup> About ten miles east of Cape Torokina.

<sup>181</sup> IMAC Opn O #5; 1st Para Bn Unit Rpt, 29 November 1943, 1.

<sup>182</sup> 1st Para Rgt, *War Diary*, November Supplement, 1943.

<sup>183</sup> There is no official record of the subsequent proceedings of this Japanese officer.

<sup>184</sup> 1st Para Bn Unit Rpt, 29 November 1943, 1.

<sup>185</sup> IMAC Opn Rpt, II, 15.

<sup>186</sup> 1st Para Bn Unit Rpt, 29 November 1943, 3.

beach enabled Fagan's artillery forward observers to direct concentration from the 155mm guns emplaced in the Torokina beachhead to great advantage.<sup>187</sup> The destroyers *Fullam*, *Lansdowne*, and *Lardner* and an LCI-gunboat arrived about 1800 and delivered excellent naval gunfire support covering the right and left flanks of the beachhead.<sup>188</sup> General Geiger had requested air support; this was furnished intermittently throughout the day.<sup>189</sup> Finally, at 1920, boats were able to get ashore. Even then—with rescue in

<sup>187</sup> 1st Para Rgt, *War Diary*, November Supplement, 1943. A Marine battery of 155 mm (M1) guns fired some 375 rounds at super charge in executing this mission.

<sup>188</sup> For the naval phase of the evacuation see the action reports of the *Fullam*, *Lansdowne*, and *Lardner*.

<sup>189</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 15.

sight—it was necessary to draw the slowly retiring lines down to the beach.

Because the first two approaches by the boats had occasioned heavy concentration of enemy fire, a repetition was naturally expected when the boats finally made the beach, but inexplicably the enemy held his fire. However, it was momentarily expected, up to the time that the last craft cleared the beach, that the enemy would again open up, but despite about 20 minutes delay—to be sure that no men were left behind—he failed to do so. During most of this period artillery and naval gunfire concentrations were continuous. The night was now pitch dark; visibility on the open beach was no more than a few feet, while in the jungle it was zero. This situation inevitably resulted in the loss of con-



**KOIARI BEACH LANDING.** Troops of the 1st Parachute Battalion were under heavy fire the moment they reached the beach.

siderable equipment, for few men were able to find their packs, while many damaged weapons, which had been put aside and replaced with those from dead and wounded Marines, were not found in the darkness. All crew-served weapons except the few destroyed by direct hits, were evacuated. By 2040 the evacuation was completed, and the boats retracted and began the return to Cape Torokina, which fortunately, was uneventful.<sup>100</sup>

The primary mission of the Parachute Battalion had not been accomplished. The net result of the Koiari battle was unfavorable. The very fact that our forces had landed in the middle of an enemy supply dump should have led to destruction of three large medical supply dumps, large quantities of ammunition, and a considerable quantity of foodstuffs. This did not happen. Inasmuch as advance inland was impossible, no accurate count of Japanese casualties could be completed, but a conservative estimate of at least 145 Japanese dead was made after careful investigation and interrogation of Marines who returned. It also is probable that additional casualties were inflicted by artillery, air support, and naval gunfire. Marine casualties consisted of 15 killed and 95 wounded (of whom two later died as a result of their wounds).<sup>101</sup>

## THE 37TH DIVISION

It might appear that the 37th Infantry Division should already have received more mention, but the landings had been made and the initial beachhead pretty firmly established before arrival of any but their initial echelons. Further, after repulse of the attack on the west flank of the perimeter at Koromokina Lagoon in early November, fighting shifted to the other flank. In consequence, it so happened that, in taking over the western sector, the 37th Division found itself little in actual contact with the enemy, whose efforts were then bent toward breaking through the lines of the 3d Marine Division, in the east-

<sup>100</sup> 1st Para Bn Unit Rpt, 29 November 1943, 1.

<sup>101</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 15; 1st Para Bn Unit Rpt, 29 November 1943, 2.



MAJOR GENERAL ROBERT S. BEIGHTLER, USA, 37th Infantry Division Commander.

ern portion of the beachhead. Marines, therefore, during November and December, 1943, bore the brunt of all hostile attacks in force, giving the 37th Division opportunity, in large measure unmolested, to advance its lines and strengthen its defenses.

The 37th Infantry Division had been made a part of the XIV Corps, U. S. Army, in July, 1943, and as such had participated in the seizure and final conquest of the New Georgia Group, in conjunction with the Marine Raider Regiment, 9th Marine Defense Battalion, 2d Marine Air Wing, and other Army troops. By late summer island after island had been occupied, Kolombangara had been by-passed and Japanese troops on Vella Lavella had been rendered impotent. In September the Division was attached to Task Force 31, and by command of Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson (CTF-31) was later attached to IMAC.

The Division Commander, Major General Robert S. Beightler, had, as the chief elements under his command the following:

129th Infantry—Colonel John D. Frederick;

145th Infantry—Colonel Cecil B. Whitcomb;

148th Infantry—Colonel Lawrence K. White; and,

the 6th, 135th, and 140th Field Artillery Battalions (105mm howitzers) and the 136th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm howitzers). The 145th and the 148th Infantry Regiments already possessed considerable combat experience.<sup>192</sup>

First elements of the Division were ordered to embark from Guadalcanal on 6 November and succeeding echelons were transported to Cape Torokina a few days apart, the last reaching the area of operations on 19 November. On arrival, the 148th Combat Team was attached temporarily to the 3d Marine Division. As the

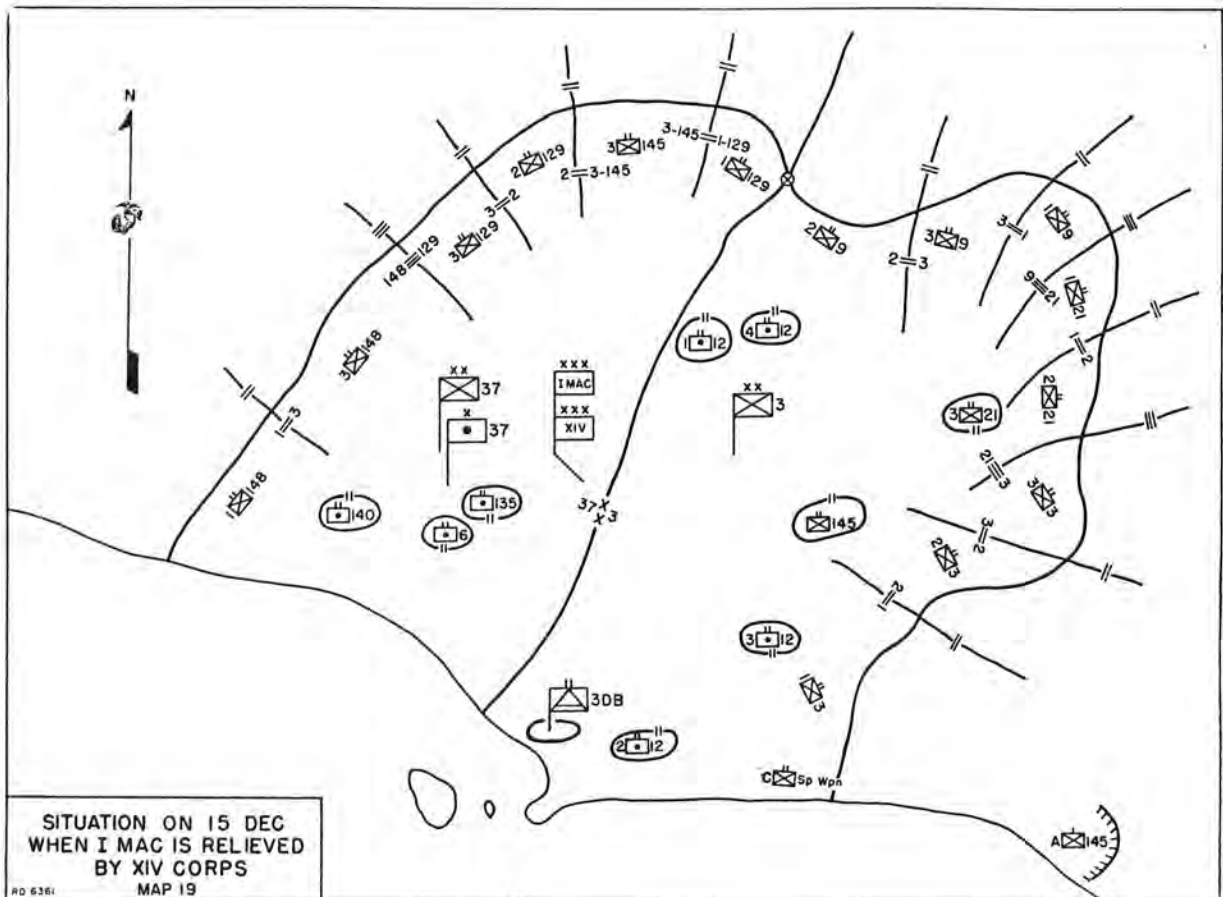
37th Division was gradually built up to strength, it was assigned the western sector of the beachhead, directed to send out extensive patrols, and to dig in defenses as the perimeter was pushed forward. Lines Dog and Easy were successively reached without opposition on 15 and 21 November, but, as the 3d Marine Division on the limiting point between divisions, had been unable to accomplish a similar advance, in order to maintain contact, the right flank of the sector was refused by the 129th Infantry.<sup>193</sup>

Orders to advance to line How were modified verbally on 23 November because of heavy opposition in front of the 3d Marine Division; General Beightler was ordered to anchor his right at the limiting point and to gain line How at his discretion.<sup>194</sup> The Division, however, was able

<sup>192</sup> War Department files: After Action Report, XIV Corps, Bougainville, #3715, file 337-334, Section I, p. 2. Hereinafter cited as War 3715.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 4, 8, 9.

<sup>194</sup> IMAC Opn O #4.



to occupy this line on 25 November without meeting enemy opposition.<sup>105</sup>

Over the next few days, while heavy fighting was taking place to their right, the 37th Division's sector remained comparatively quiet, and advantage was taken of the breather to send out long reconnaissance patrols in an endeavor to feel out the enemy and accumulate further information concerning the terrain. On 29 November, a patrol of the 129th Infantry made contact with a small Japanese force, an incident recorded

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<sup>105</sup> War 3715, III, 9.

with interest as the first combat action of the regiment in the war. After withdrawal of the enemy to the hills following his severe defeats on the northeastern portion of the perimeter, the activities of the 37th Division continued to be confined to distant patrolling and the installation of tactical wire and emplaced positions in the main line of resistance. Combat outposts of considerable strength were likewise set up well outside the perimeter.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-12.



## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER III

# Defense of the Beachhead

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#### EXPANSION OF THE PERIMETER

CONTINUED uncertainty seemed to mark the Japanese position throughout December. It became increasingly evident that:

1. Our air superiority was no longer in dispute south of Rabaul.

2. The enemy was not preparing to accept a naval challenge in the Northern Solomons, whatever the nature of his plan for the defense of Bougainville.

3. The enemy had been so thoroughly thrown off balance as to be capable only of day-to-day counteraction.

4. Enemy morale must have been strained to a point not heretofore envisaged.<sup>1</sup>

In the progressive enlargement of the perimeter, therefore, no engagements comparable to those of mid-November occurred. Intelligence reports, however, and constant long patrols showed the enemy to be digging in the hills beyond U. S. artillery range, with the presumed possibility of preparing a counteroffensive against our right flank, or of resisting our conceivable attempts on southern Bougainville.<sup>2</sup>

The exchange of regimental sectors, prescribed by General Turnage on 23 November, was completed on 26 November.<sup>3</sup> During this

<sup>1</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, III, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. See also IMAC C-2 Estimate of the Situation, dated 19 December 1943.

<sup>3</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 8, 96-97. The 3d Marines, sadly depleted by battle casualties, sickness, and fatigue, had to be reinforced in its new sector by the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry. On 27 November, in order to allow the

period, active patrolling by all elements of IMAC was undertaken in all sectors. As a result of these patrols, outposts were set up in those areas which appeared to offer likely targets for Japanese infantry action. A vantage point was sighted in front of the lines held by the 21st Marines.

rifle battalions to rest and reorganize their troops, some of whom had been on the go for 27 consecutive days and had been heavily engaged on four separate occasions, Colonel George McHenry, the regimental commander, organized a Composite Battalion from among the Regimental Weapons Company, the Scout Company, the several Headquarters Companies, and from available service troops. This unit was assigned a position in the lines which it occupied from 28 November to 3 December, when, with the exception of the Scout Company, units forming the Composite Battalion were returned to their normal duties. The Scout Company remained in the lines until the Regiment was relieved of the sector.

From 28 November to 22 December the 3d Marines occupied the extreme south flank of the 3d Division position, with its right anchored on the sea and its left tied in with the 21st Marines on Hill 500. This sector bordered on deep swamps, fingers of which cut across supply routes, causing the old problem of maintaining men in position to once again confront the command group. Needless to say, this problem was once again surmounted. Though numerous patrols traversed the swamps daily and searched the east banks of the Torokina River from time to time, no evidence could be discovered that the Japanese intended to do more than keep this sector under observation. A number of sharp skirmishes were fought between small patrols which came upon each other in the cane-filled swamps.

In time the enemy stopped sending his parties across the river and contented himself with attempts to maintain observation posts on the beach areas across the Torokina.

For further details concerning the exchange of sectors, see Chapter II, note 172, *supra*.

On 27 November, Colonel Evans O. Ames of the 21st Marines ordered an officer and 21 enlisted Marines equipped with a TBX radio to establish a detached post on the newly discovered site. On 1 December General Turnage directed that this detail be increased to a reinforced rifle platoon.<sup>4</sup> On 3 December Colonel Ames requested that the strength of this detail be reduced to that originally prescribed on the ground that it was an observation post only and its relatively large size made concealment difficult. Colonel Blake, the Division chief of staff, approved this request. Meanwhile, communication wire was laid to the location to augment the facilities offered by the TBX radio. Supply of the detachment was so difficult, due to the poor

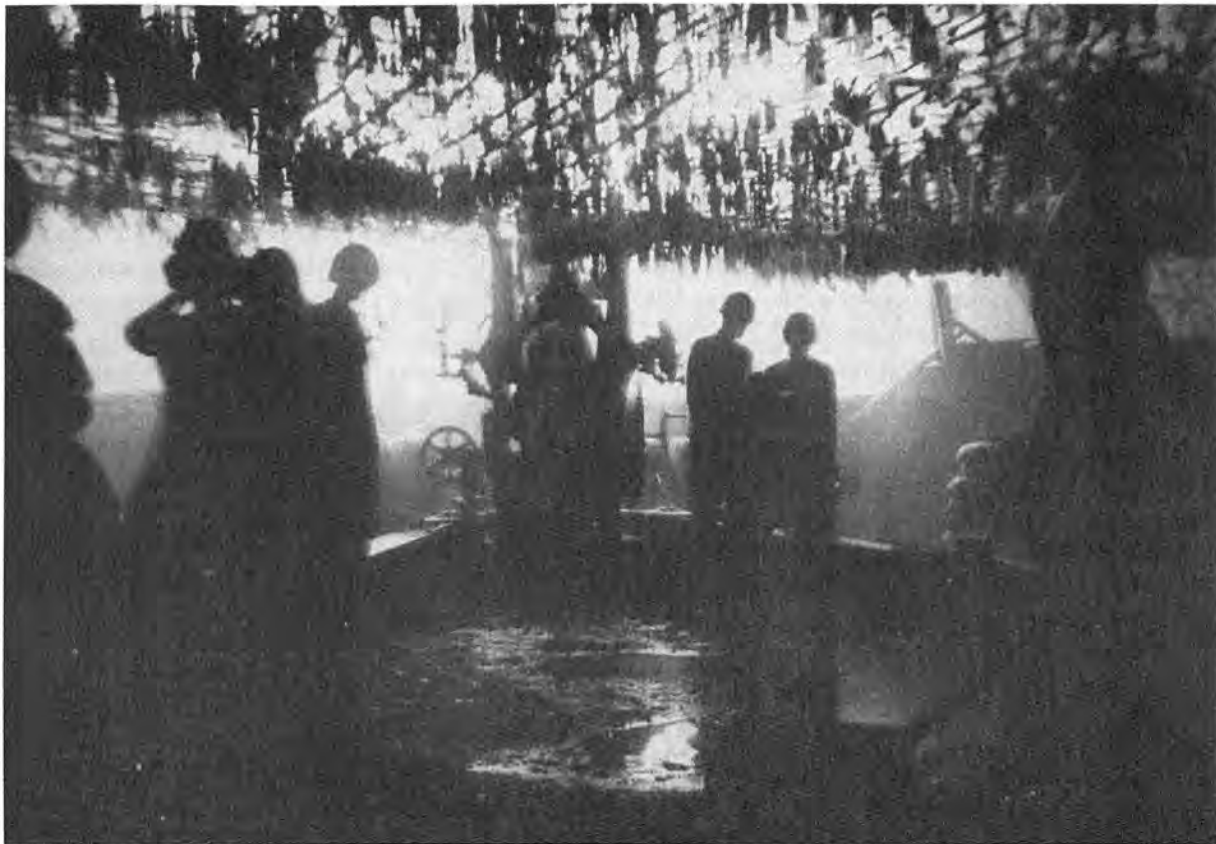
<sup>4</sup> This platoon was reinforced with light machine-guns and 60mm mortars.

condition of the trail leading to it, that food, water, and ammunition had to be carried forward by hand.<sup>5</sup>

After the battle at Piva Forks, when reconnaissance disclosed that the enemy was not occupying the hill mass just west of the Torokina River, General Turnage, despite the obvious supply and evacuation difficulties, decided to occupy a general line stretching from Hill 1000 in the north to Hill 600A in the south, along a ridge running westward from Hill 1000 and through Hill 600A, thus forming a barrier parallel to the Torokina River west bank.

First step in this plan involved occupation of an outpost line by the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment (Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams), less the 1st and 2d Battalions, with units of the 3d, 9th, and 21st Marines in support.

<sup>5</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 181.



**GUNS OF THE 2D 155MM BATTALION** supported the advance of the 3d Marines at Piva Forks. This picture, taken during a harassing mission the night before the attack, shows one gun crew silhouetted by the muzzle flash.



This force was given explicit instructions to avoid, if possible, a major engagement.<sup>6</sup>

Carrying one-half a unit of fire and three days' rations, the Marines pushed forward pending construction of amphibian tractor routes for supply and evacuation. Difficulties encountered in this proposed construction, however, prevented expeditious completion of the project. On the fourth day in the advanced position, therefore, the Parachutists were supplied by air-drop in order to relieve the critical shortage of rations.<sup>7</sup>

In accordance with 3d Division plans to advance the final force beachhead line to the high ground overlooking the Torokina River, and to make the next move to that line, General Turnage on 5 December increased the Hill 600 detached post to a rifle company, reinforced by a machine-gun and a rocket platoon. The rifle company and machine-gun platoon went forward from the 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, while the rocket platoon was attached from Corps Troops.<sup>8</sup> On 6 December, the remainder of the battalion moved forward to a previously reconnoitered outpost line along the Torokina, just east of Hill 600. In the meantime, Colonel Williams had formed a Provisional Battalion from personnel of the Parachute Regiment Headquarters and Company I, and had assigned responsibility for the occupation of Hill 1000 to the battalion. The 3d Parachute Battalion covered a line from Hill 1000 to the junction of East-West Trail and Torokina River. Thus, with approximately 900 men, the 1st Parachute Regiment covered a front of about 3000 yards. Minor patrol clashes of increasing intensity began on 5 December.

On 7 December 3d Parachute Battalion patrols discovered abandoned enemy positions on the eastern spur of the ridge which they now occupied, and which commanded the Marine

lines. A captured operation map indicated that a reinforced company (235 men) of the Japanese 23d Infantry defended this area.<sup>9</sup> Major Robert T. Vance, commanding officer, 3d Parachute Battalion, therefore decided to straighten his lines to include the spur. For this purpose he ordered a patrol forward the following morning, but this unit was stopped by enemy fire. The Japanese apparently had reoccupied their positions during the night. Again on 8 December reconnaissance patrols met resistance on the spur. Vance therefore decided to attack with Company K and drive the enemy from his front. At 1000, 9 December, Company K launched its attack and penetrated the Japanese positions, but, due to heavy casualties and continuing resistance, was forced to withdraw to its original lines. Vance then tried to outflank the enemy with Companies I and L, but these units could make no headway up the steep slopes.<sup>10</sup>

Reinforcements were requested to strengthen weak points caused by casualties and the overextended line. Company C, 21st Marines, which was in process of occupying a bivouac area in the vicinity of Evansville to prepare for the movement of the 21st Marines to line How (final force beachhead line) the next day—10 December—was therefore attached to the 3d Parachute Battalion and moved forthwith into line, while the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines occupied a supporting position to the right rear.<sup>11</sup>

In accordance with plans, on the morning of 10 December, the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines (less Company C) moved forward under enemy fire, from line Fox to occupy the left flank of the 21st Marines sector on line How, and relieve the Paramarines. Relief was completed at 1645, and the 21st Marines assumed responsibility for driving the enemy off the spur of Hill 1000. The 3d and 9th Marines meanwhile had moved forward as planned, encountering no opposition during displacement.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Historical Section, Division of Public Information, HQMC, interrogation of LtCol Robert T. Vance, 2 December 1947. The Parachute Regiment had arrived on 4 December and was subsequently attached to the 3d Marine Division.

<sup>7</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 9; cf. Vance Interrogation, *supra*.

<sup>8</sup> The Experimental Rocket Platoon participated in the operation for the purpose of using rockets under combat conditions.

<sup>9</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 182.

<sup>10</sup> Vance Interrogation.

<sup>11</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 9, 156, 182.

<sup>12</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 9, 182-183; Vance Interrogation.

# HELLZAPOPPIN RIDGE

ATTACK BY 21st MARINES  
18 DEC 1943

— Japanese Defensive Position

— Marine Assault

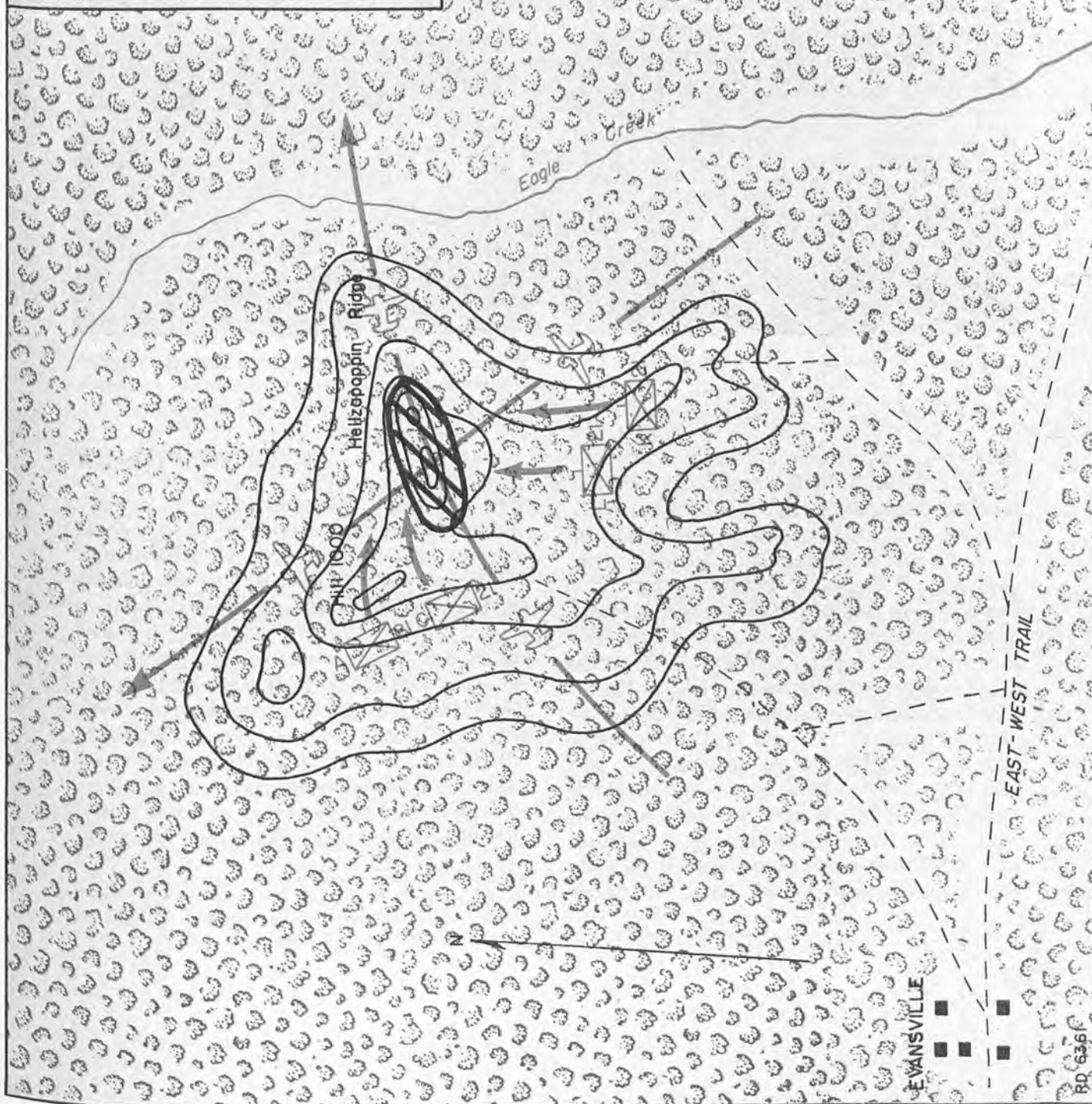
— Airstrike by VMTB-143



500 0 500

YARDS

MAP 20



EVANSVILLE

EAST-WEST TRAIL

RD 636



**BITTERLY DEFENDED GROTTOS**, such as that shown here, were utilized by the Japanese on Hellzapoppin Ridge. Dense underbrush and steep slopes made the fighting especially difficult.

### HELLZAPOPPIN RIDGE<sup>13</sup>

From 12 to 18 December, operations were carried out by various elements of the 21st Marines to drive the enemy from his positions confronting the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, so that it could occupy and organize its portion of the force beachhead line.

Reconnaissance by several patrols, and the fortunate capture of a Japanese situation map, disclosed that the enemy occupied a well dug-in, all-around position located primarily on the eastern spur of the ridge now occupied by the 1st Battalion and commanding the present lines of that Battalion, being only about 100 yards to the north. The captured map indicated that the

<sup>13</sup> In some accounts this encounter has been called the "Battle of Fry's Nose" for LtCol E. W. Fry, Jr., CO of 1st Bn, 21st Marines, or "Snuffy's Nose", for Colonel Evans O. Ames, Commanding Officer, 21st Marines.

area was manned by a reinforced company (235 men) of the Japanese 23d Infantry.<sup>14</sup>

That this location came to be known as Hellzapoppin Ridge testifies to the bitter character of the fighting which resulted in its capture. It was a natural fortress, perhaps 300 yards long, with very sharp, almost vertical, slopes on two sides and a crest averaging only 40 yards in width. The whole was covered with giant trees rising from the wild tangle of the jungle. On the part of the Marines there was little familiarity with the lay of the land, and, as fresh information was brought by successive patrols and skirmishers, the rough little sketches which they prepared showed only the ground within the immediate vicinity of their limited observation, often serving to obscure, rather than clarify, the geographic detail. In consequence, neither air

<sup>14</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 182.

nor artillery and naval gunfire bombardment could be put down with the pinpoint precision essential in this instance. As is so often the case in jungle warfare, it was impossible to determine just what to shoot at.<sup>15</sup>

Japanese reverse slope defenses were encountered at Hellzapoppin Ridge. All companies of the 21st Marines launched attacks against the Japanese; but the enemy was well dug in, had overhead cover, and a carefully prepared all-around defense, with interlocking bands of automatic weapons fire covering all approaches to the position. Enemy riflemen in trees offered close-in protection, and the very nature of the terrain precluded maneuver on the part of the Marines. Company commanders, due to insufficient space, were forced to push forward one platoon at a time to attack frontally, while employing another platoon in partial envelopment. However, the all-around defense employed by the Japanese repeatedly prevented envelopment, turning it eventually into yet another frontal assault.<sup>16</sup>

As was later discovered, the enemy had burrowed extensive dugouts, often underneath the very roots of trees, impervious to anything but a direct hit by artillery or a bomb, the effect of which might be minimized by a tree-burst. The whole defensive system was skillfully concealed; at the same time, no emplaced position could be approached without ample warning to its defenders. But the Marines fought on, returning time after time to the assault, gaining a precarious foothold only to yield it to seemingly insuperable odds—pushing forward once more, forcing the enemy back yard by yard until his exhausted troops no longer had the resolution to endure.<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese had constructed their foxholes at the foot of a knoll, a factor which offered them only a ten-yard field of fire, but the fire lanes from these positions were so cleverly constructed that the Marines did not know where the foxholes were until they stumbled into them. Furthermore, natural camouflage afforded by the thick jungle undergrowth had obliterated all

evidence of enemy fortification. Marines utilized 60mm mortars in their attacks, but these proved ineffective, for they did not pack the punch necessary to open holes for our infantry. The use of the 81mm mortar was extensive, but neither could it put the infantry across. Artillery was employed, but since the Japanese position was located on a reverse slope, and since the huge trees along the crest of the ridge caused tree bursts, it, too, was ineffective. Planes were called upon to bomb and strafe the area, but due to the difficulty of observation, these often missed their targets, on one occasion even firing into the lines of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, just to the north of Hill 600.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, on 18 December, after repeated infantry attacks supported by artillery, and three air strikes which did little more than blast trees and undergrowth so that infantry could see, an attack was planned that pushed the enemy off the ridge that night. A heavy artillery concentration was first placed on the area in order to stun the Japanese; a fourth air strike was made after careful coordination between air and infantry officers;<sup>19</sup> and units of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 21st Marines launched an attack from two sides of the ridge, squeezing the Japanese positions as a nut-cracker squeezes a nut. The repeated artillery and bombing concentrations brought the Japanese to the surface, where they were dealt with easily.<sup>20</sup>

In the final air attack made on Hellzapoppin Ridge, six Marine TBF's from VMTB-134 dropped 48 100 pound bombs 75 yards forward of front line positions. Passes were made in succession by individual planes from tree-top height, parallel to our front lines, and strafing was combined with bombing. Colored smoke grenades marked out front lines, while 81mm mortars fired white phosphorus shells at the target area to mark it for the planes. The 21st Marines, throughout, were in close communication with the planes via radio, and after planes had completed attacks, each would make sev-

<sup>15</sup> Patrick O'Sheel, *MSS* news-story prepared for release by Headquarters, USMC.

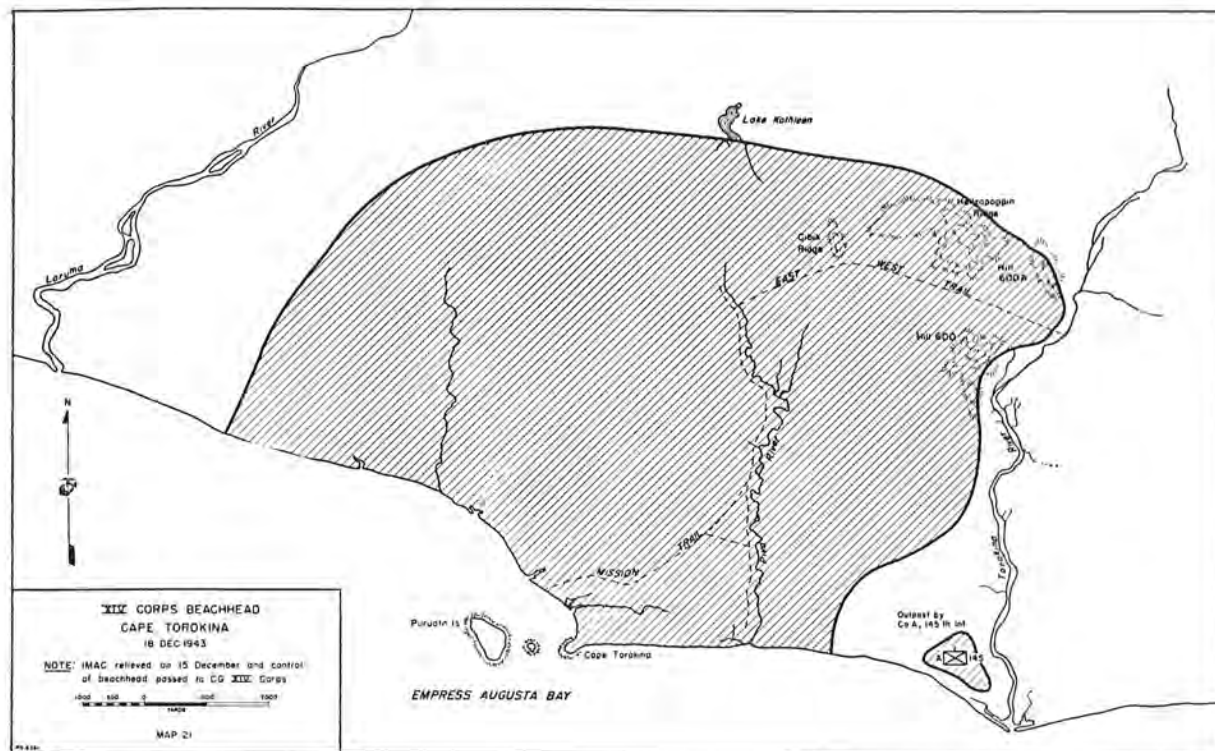
<sup>16</sup> 3d Mar Div *Opn Rpt*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> O'Sheel, *loc. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 157, 185.

<sup>19</sup> 6 TBF's of VMTB-134 were used in this attack. These used 4-5 second delay fuses on their 100 pound bombs. See USMC, *An Evaluation of Air Operations Affecting the U. S. Marine Corps in World War II*, III-30.

<sup>20</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 182, 185, 186.



eral false passes at the target area in order to deceive the enemy and cause him to stay under cover.<sup>21</sup>

Capture of Hellzapoppin Ridge had cost the 21st Marines 12 killed and 23 wounded. Over 50 Japanese bodies were found in the area.<sup>22</sup>

Following the successful completion of these attacks, the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, pushed forward to the Eagle River (a tributary of the Torokina) on the morning of 19 December, and work was begun on organization of a line of deliberate defense.<sup>23</sup>

### THE FIGHT FOR HILL 600A

From 19 December 1943 to 1 January 1944, Marine operations consisted largely of patrol missions between the Eagle and Torokina Rivers.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186, 187. The 21st Marines Executive Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur H. Butler, accompanied the flight leader of the attacking planes during this flight in order to point out Marine lines and target.

<sup>22</sup> 21st Marines Daily Action Reports, 12-18 December 1943.

<sup>23</sup> 3d MarDiv *Opn Rpt*, 182.

There was considerable Japanese activity in the area, but the enemy undertook no offensive measures during this period. Several three-day reconnaissance patrols were sent across the Torokina, deep into enemy territory, but these returned after difficult but uneventful struggles with the rough terrain. The Japanese periodically shelled our lines with 75mm guns and 90mm mortars, but this fire proved ineffective for the most part since the bulk of the concentration fell in the vicinity of Evansville, where we had supply dumps only. Consequently, few casualties resulted.<sup>24</sup>

On the morning of 21 December a reconnaissance patrol of the 21st Marines contacted a force consisting of 14 to 18 Japanese in the vicinity of Hill 600A and immediately returned to our lines with the information. That afternoon Lieutenant Colonel Eustace R. Smoak was ordered to dispatch a combat patrol from his 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, to attack the enemy force. This force moved out as ordered, again made contact, and at 1545 drove the enemy

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.



**DENSE JUNGLE CLOAKED THE POSITIONS OF JAPANESE RIFLEMEN.** In this picture two Marines prepare to flush a sniper from his well-hidden location.

from the hill, losing one Marine killed and one wounded. Upon completing the mission, the patrol returned to our lines before dark.

When the report of this action reached the 3d Division command post, it was decided to order the 21st Marines to establish and maintain an outpost consisting of one reinforced platoon and an artillery forward observer team on Hill 600A during the hours of daylight. When Colonel Ames received this order, he directed that the 3d Battalion, 21st Marines, then in regimental reserve, provide troops for this post. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Archie V. Gerard, selected one platoon of Company I, and reinforced it with a heavy machine-gun platoon.

Early in the morning of 22 December this unit moved out toward Hill 600A, but when it neared the top of the hill, it unexpectedly met strong resistance from the Japanese, who had re-

occupied the position during the night. The outpost detachment was unable to advance, for the enemy had moved into covered emplacements at the foot of the reserve slope of the sharp crest of the ridge-line. Since the Marines had been laying communication wire for the artillery forward observer party as they advanced, a description of the situation was immediately passed to the rear, whereupon the 3d Battalion was directed to reinforce the platoon with the remainder of Company I.

Company I moved out as ordered and quickly came up to its engaged platoon. The company commander therefore made a hasty estimate of the situation, and without verification by reconnaissance or conference with the platoon leader in contact, decided that the Japanese were holding the crest of the hill. He immediately decided to attempt a double envelopment which got underway at once. Unfortunately, however, due

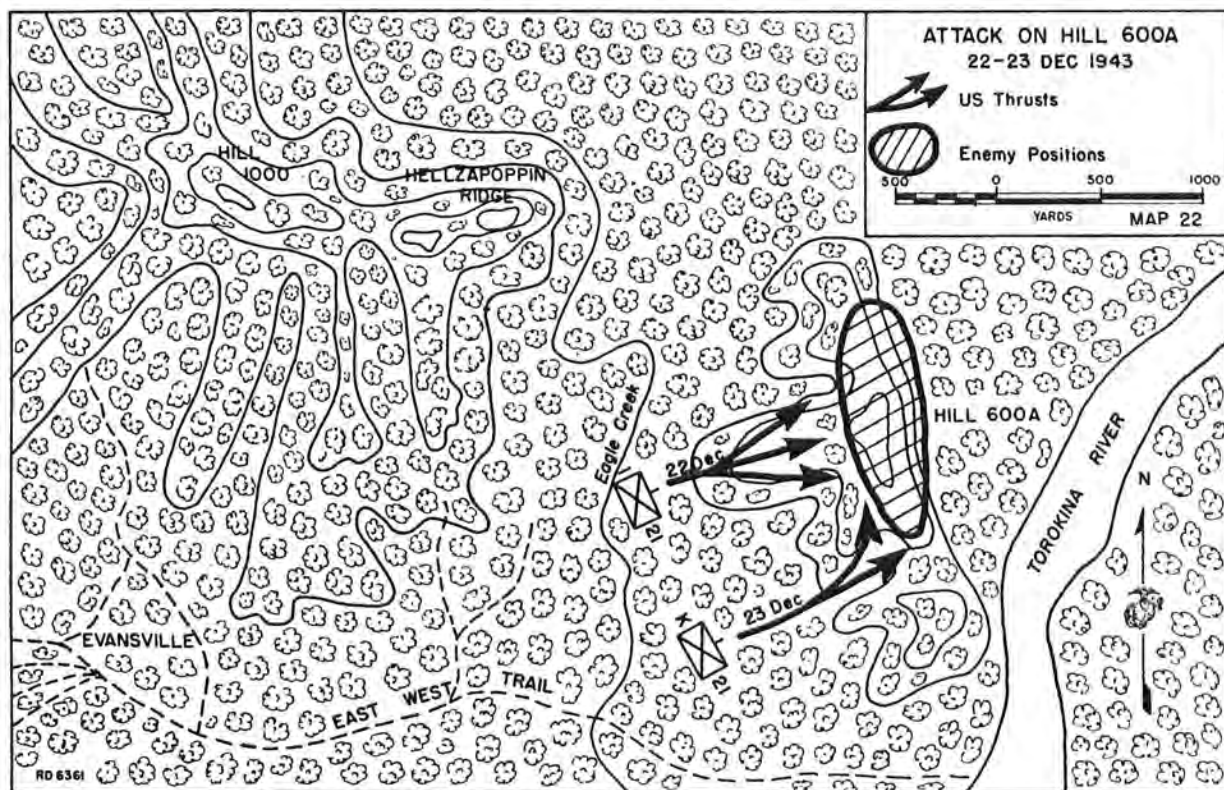
to the lack of adequate information, the enveloping platoons moved into the flanks of the platoon in contact with the enemy rather than the flanks of the Japanese position. Shortly thereafter, the entire company was under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from the Japanese positions, so the company commander decided to draw back slightly in order to utilize artillery support. This failed to dislodge the enemy, however, and Company I had to withdraw into our own lines before dark.

On 23 December, Company K, reinforced by a heavy machine-gun platoon, moved out and attempted to attack the Japanese position. The company commander ordered one platoon to move along the narrow steep ridge in order to determine the exact location of the Japanese positions, but this platoon received such heavy fire that it was forced to withdraw without accomplishing its mission. Artillery fire was placed on the area for 30 minutes, but this was ineffectual, for large trees on the ridge caused shells to burst harmlessly in the air, and a second platoon, when

it attempted to move along the ridge, was driven off by enemy fire. The second platoon was withdrawn and a ten-minute artillery and mortar concentration was called down, following which the company attacked, with one platoon attempting to envelop the Japanese. The preparation however, had again been ineffective, for heavy machine-gun fire was still preventing forward movement. The company again had to be withdrawn into our lines as night was falling.

The following day, reconnaissance patrols were sent forward to scout the enemy positions from several different directions, and these found that Hill 600A was unoccupied by the Japanese. It appeared that the enemy had withdrawn during darkness. Inspection revealed that the position had been well organized for defense, with about 25 covered emplacements, some of which had been partly destroyed by artillery fire; one dead Japanese found. The Marines lost four killed and eight wounded in several engagements fought for possession of Hill 600A.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 183 et seq.



## RELIEF OF IMAC AND THE 3D DIVISION

With minor adjustments, the enlargement of the perimeter was now completed. The enemy having retired to areas east and northeast of the Torokina River, and further activities being limited to patrolling, deliberate organization of the ground was initiated immediately, together with continued construction of roads and trails over the swamp and hills of the subsectors. These projects were 85 percent completed at the time of relief of the 3d Marine Division by the Americal Division.<sup>26</sup>

As additional elements of the U. S. Army continued to arrive, Admiral Halsey directed the Commanding General, XIV Corps, Major General Oscar W. Griswold, to relieve the Commanding General, IMAC (General Geiger), about 15 December, and the Army assumed control of the beachhead at 0800 on that date.

A gratifying acknowledgement of a job well done came to General Geiger in the following dispatch:

On the occasion of your relinquishing command at Torokina I desire to express to you and to the officers of our staff my appreciation for your magnificent efforts in taking and holding a spot so vital to our efforts. You have literally succeeded in setting up and opening for business a shop in the Japs front yard. The competition is making them most unhappy. Halsey.<sup>27</sup>

Relief of front line elements of the 3d Marine Division began 21 December 1943, with relief of the 3d Marines by the 2d Raider Regiment and attached units, and continued as the Americal Division grew steadily up to strength. The Commanding General, 3d Marine Division relinquished command of the eastern sector to Major General John R. Hodge, of the Americal Division, at 1600, 28 December 1943. The 37th Infantry Division retained responsibility for the relatively quiet western sector.<sup>28</sup>

In closing his report, General Turnage said:

It is believed that seldom have troops experienced a more difficult combination of combat, supply and evacuation, than was encountered. From its very inception it was a bold and hazardous operation. Its success was due to the planning of all echelons and the indomitable will, courage, and devotion to duty of all members of all organizations participating.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> *IMAC Opn Rpt*, III, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *3d MarDiv Opn Rpt*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

He was in a position to know and did not exaggerate. Although General Vandegrift was the senior officer present and exercised overall tactical command, General Turnage had landed and was in immediate tactical command of ground forces ashore in the Empress Augusta Bay area from D-day until D plus nine days. It had fallen to the lot of the 3d Marine Division (reinforced) to seize the initial beachhead line on D-day and to destroy or overcome the main forces of the enemy from D-day until seizure of the force beachhead line. This task had been accomplished aggressively and expeditiously.

## AIR ACTIVITY DURING EXPANSION OF THE PERIMETER

The importance of air support to the success of the Bougainville operation was recognized by all arms of service which participated in the operation. Within ten days after the landing on Bougainville, Rear Admiral Robert B. Carney, Chief of Staff to Admiral Halsey, stated that the Bougainville landings had been successful beyond fondest hopes and expectations. He attributed a good measure of this success to the work of Marine aircraft; he stated further that there were practically no enemy planes operating off Bougainville airfields, and that those few Japanese planes which had attacked our positions at Cape Torokina, had come either from Rabaul or other areas of New Britain.

Air support for the Bougainville beachhead, during the period when the perimeter was being extended under IMAC, consisted of daily flights over the Cape Torokina area and strikes at such vital points as Kahili, Kieta, Matchin Bay, Atsimina Bay, and Shortland, Ballale, Faisi, and Buka Islands. During the first half of November alone Marine and Allied aircraft, in support of the beachhead, operating out of airfields further south in the Solomon Islands chain, flew a total of 407 sorties with a loss of only seven planes, while the enemy, during the same period, lost approximately 59 aircraft. Our air superiority remained virtually unchallenged, except at night when Japanese "hit and run" bombers dropped explosives on our ground positions and on our shipping. These night attacks were only annoy-





**MAJOR GENERAL RALPH J. MITCHELL AND BRIGADIER GENERAL FIELD HARRIS**, Marine air commanders, conducted air operations against the Japanese from Torokina fields.

ing; occasionally enemy planes scored hits on command posts, supply dumps, ships, or small craft in Puruata Harbor (between Puruata Island and Cape Torokina), and on airfields which were under construction within the American perimeter. During daylight hours the enemy was never able to get through to bomb or strafe our positions effectively, and he soon stopped trying.

That the Japanese were potentially dangerous from the air, however, even after our beachhead had been more or less secured, was revealed to Admiral Halsey by General Mitchell in a memorandum of 20 November in which he estimated that 15 known enemy airfields with a radius of 250 miles of Empress Augusta Bay, were either under construction in new locations, or back in

use or being repaired after having been destroyed by Allied air blows.

Completion of airstrips within the Bougainville perimeter became more and more important, and work on those strips was continued at a feverish rate. Simultaneous with airfield construction and extension of the perimeter by combatant units, roads were being built and improved constantly, communications facilities were being strengthened, stocks on hand in supply dumps were growing, and the boat pool, established soon after initial landings, was operating daily at Puruata Harbor. Of all construction and repair projects being conducted within the perimeter, however, completion of airfields was generally assigned highest priority.

Since 9 November the Naval Construction

Regiment had been working on the fighter strip, situated in the old Torokina Plantation area, immediately east of Cape Lorokina and paralleling the shoreline. At dawn on 10 December, just one month later, a Marine Squadron (VMF-216, consisting of 17 F4U's, six SBD's and one R4D) landed to make the field their base. The following day three TBF's landed and joined the squadron. Seven days later, on 17 December, a flight of four P-39 aircraft of the 70th Army Fighter Squadron commenced operations from the Torokina strip. Two additional flights, including P-38 night fighters, began operations from the strip during the last week in December.

It was evident, particularly at Hellzapoppin Ridge and shortly thereafter at Hill 600A, that the close coordination between Marine air and ground forces on Bougainville was worthy of note. Under direction of General Turnage, the 3d Marine Division Air Officer, Lieutenant Colonel John T. L. D. Gabbert, supervised the employment of close-in air support by infantry units.

Particularly after 10 December, Gabbert was fortunate to have available on call, well trained Marine air units thoroughly acquainted with the tactics employed by Marine ground troops and ready, willing, and able to provide whatever air support those ground forces needed. Complete understanding of mutual problems, on the part of both Marine ground and air enabled General Turnage to make the most of the air units he had available, and put them to the best possible use.

Since air and ground components were a part of the same service, Gabbert could brief pilots and ground liaison personnel in one language. There was little opportunity for misunderstanding. Furthermore, since all interested parties to any given mission were physically present in the Torokina area, it was possible to assemble officers from supported rifle units for the briefing of pilots. Thus, infantry officers could orient flyers on particular problems of terrain, land-marks, enemy dispositions, and other local considerations before an air attack was launched. Ground officers often would accompany flight leaders during a strike, while air officers were stationed with rifle units to be supported.



**COMMAND OF THE TOROKINA PERIMETER PASSED** from Major General Roy S. Geiger (right) to Major General Oscar W. Griswold, USA, on 15 December 1943, as XIV Corps began relief of 1 Marine Amphibious Corps.

Long before inception of the campaign, the 3d Marine Division had evolved and practiced new techniques for close air support. By employing Marine aircraft, using colored smoke to mark front line positions and white smoke to mark target areas, and setting up a workable liaison between supporting and supported units, a technique developed that eventually became (with modifications) Fleet Marine Force doctrine for later campaigns.

During the Bougainville operation, the 3d Marine Division requested close air support on ten separate occasions. Each of these required that the strike be run within 500 yards or less of our front lines; three at 500 yards, three at 200 yards, one at 120 yards, one at 100 yards, and two at 75 yards.

Aside from the immediate tactical importance of having Marine planes on hand to assist troops occupying front-line positions on Bougainville it-

self, opening of the fighter strip on Cape Torokina had great strategic value. The Torokina field was only 220 miles from Rabaul; fighter support could now be furnished from this strip to bombers conducting strikes against Japanese bases on New Britain and New Ireland from fields south of Bougainville in the Solomon Islands.

With the opening of a field at Torokina, the entire weight of Allied air power was shifted forward, further north in the Solomons. The 339th Fighter Squadron and Headquarters of the 347th Fighter Group (both Army units) left New Caledonia on 20 December to commence operations from the new air-strip on Stirling Island in the Treasury Islands. Two flights of the Army's 69th Bomber Squadron moved north from New Caledonia to the Russell Islands on the same date. Air echelons of three Army heavy bomber squadrons began operations from Munda on New Georgia on 23 December.

The primary aim of the Bougainville operation had been successfully achieved.

#### XIV CORPS DEFENDS THE BEACHHEAD

On 15 December 1943, when command of the Torokina Area passed from IMAC to XIV Corps, elements of the Marine force began to be withdrawn as the Americal Division (Major General John R. Hodge) moved in to take their place. Much of this replacement was accomplished by 28 December.<sup>30</sup>

The Americal Division had been activated in May, 1942 in New Caledonia, and shortly thereafter adopted the name by which it was known, never having been assigned a numbered designation. It was the first U. S. Army Division to take offensive action against the Japanese in the Pacific war, having participated with distinction in the latter phases of the Guadalcanal campaign. The regiments of Infantry constituting its base were the 132d, 164th, and 182d originally recruited from elements of National Guard Regiments in the States of Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Illinois.

Elements of the Division came forward to Bougainville from Guadalcanal in echelons; units of the 164th Infantry relieving the 1st, 2d, and 3d

<sup>30</sup> War 3715, III, 9.

Battalions of the 9th Marines on Christmas Day, 1943.<sup>31</sup>

The Division was assigned that sector of the beachhead occupied by the 3d Marine Division but, as the Marines were gradually relieved, the 37th Division extended its right flank and took over some 2,000 additional yards of perimeter.

The 132d Infantry arrived at Cape Torokina on 9 January and relieved the 3d Marine Parachute Battalion, the 3d Battalion of the 2d Marine Raider Regiment, and units of the 145th Infantry, which then reverted to the 37th Division. It took over that portion of the perimeter paralleling the Torokina on the extreme right flank and engaged in patrolling and in strengthening defensive positions.

By this time, all Marine Corps elements except the 3d Defense Battalion had been withdrawn from Bougainville. The XIV Corps now commanded the Empress Augusta Bay perimeter and continued its defense, engaging in a number of bitter and hard-fought major actions against Japanese attacks during early 1944. Since these were fought chiefly by units of the Army, under Army command, it is not within the province of this Marine Corps narrative to describe them, important and gallantly fought though they were. It is sufficient to note that, by 24 April 1944, XIV Corps had crushed the last important enemy counter-offensive against the Bougainville perimeter. After that date, the situation crystalized into that patrolling and observation sufficient to keep the Japanese impotent for further operations. His offensive potential exhausted, the enemy on Bougainville was now effectively bottled up, and movements of U. S. forces for the invasion of the Philippines could be made without fear of retaliation from the Northern Solomons.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> War 2543, 30 Amer 70.1, 1.

<sup>32</sup> The 3d Defense Battalion, FMF, which had landed with assault elements on 1 November 1943, remained on Bougainville until 21 June 1944. LtCol Edward H. Forney, Commanding Officer of the Battalion, had been responsible for coordination of beachhead anti-aircraft protection from the time of the landing until February 1944, when he was relieved by an Army officer. During the Japanese attacks in March and April, Forney formed a 500 man infantry unit which—although never used as such—was to protect the shoreline against expected enemy landings. Artillery Groups of the battalion supported the Army's defense of the beachhead during this period.



## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

# CHAPTER IV

# Subsidiary Operations

## TREASURY ISLANDS OPERATION

IN HIS operation plan issued 12 October 1943, Admiral Halsey directed Admiral Wilkinson, in addition to other operations, to "seize and hold Treasury Islands on Dog minus 5 days, capture and destroy enemy forces, and establish thereat radars and minimum facilities for small craft as necessary."<sup>1</sup> On 15 October Admiral Wilkinson designated Rear Admiral George H. Fort, USN, as Commander Southern Force, and placed him in over-all command of the Treasury Islands operation.<sup>2</sup> IMAC had previously been assigned responsibility for land operations in conjunction with the Fleet against the Northern Solomons, and the 8th New Zealand Brigade Group of the 3d New Zealand Division had been attached to IMAC for the purpose of executing the Treasury Islands landings.

Admiral Wilkinson ordered motor torpedo boats (MTB's or PT's) based at Lambu Lambu, Vella Lavella and at Lever Harbor on northern New Georgia, to screen the approach of the convoy from its staging area to its target, by patrolling a picket line from the Shortland Islands to the island of Choiseul.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime Admiral Halsey directed the task force under the command of Admiral Merrill to cover the operation against surface attack. He also directed shore-based aircraft to provide

air cover and support, and neutralize Japanese airfields in the Bougainville area.<sup>4</sup>

The 8th New Zealand Brigade Group arrived at Guadalcanal from New Caledonia on 14 September 1943, having conducted, enroute, landing exercises at Efate, New Hebrides. These exercises were carried out from APA's (much larger ships than those actually used for the final operation),<sup>5</sup> which provided valuable lessons eventually put to good use, for the units had never experienced combat action, to say nothing of a landing operation.<sup>6</sup>

Headquarters of the 3d New Zealand Division, parent organization of the Brigade, was already established at Guadalcanal when the Brigade arrived. When the Brigade commander, Brigadier R. A. Row, NZEF, reported to his commanding general, he discovered that his unit had been assigned the task of seizing and occupying the Treasury Islands on or about 1 November. Shortly after receiving this information, Brigadier Row was informed that his Brigade would come under the command of IMAC, and that the overall operation would fall under the direction of Commander, Task Force 31 (Admiral Wilkinson).<sup>7</sup>

On 28 September 1943, General Barrett, then commanding IMAC, informed Brigadier

<sup>1</sup> COMSOPAC Opn Plan 16-43.

<sup>2</sup> Task Force 31 Operation Plan A14-43, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> COMSOPAC Opn Plan 16-43.

<sup>5</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Row Rpt, 16. The APA Action Report, 4 (see bibliography), and *Combat Narratives*, 12, erroneously report that these troops had had experience in Greece, Crete, and Libya.

<sup>7</sup> Task Force 31 Operation Plan A14-43.

Row of the general nature of the proposed operation, and made a tentative assignment of troops to be attached to the brigade. At this stage of planning it was proposed that the Corps should effect simultaneous landings on Treasury Islands and at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, but, as has been seen, this plan was later altered by advancing the date for the Treasury Islands operation to 26 October, and ultimately to 27 October.<sup>8</sup>

Brigadier Row received General Barrett's letter of instruction concerning the operation on 29 September, and immediately began his detailed planning. At this stage, all intelligence regarding the Treasury Islands had not yet been collected, but sufficient was available, however, for the formulation of a plan in broad outline.<sup>9</sup>

Since only eight APD's (destroyer transports), two LST's, three LCT's, and eight LCI's were available for transportation of the first echelon of the Brigade (which numbered approximately 7,700 officers and men), it was determined that supplies and equipment would be cut to the barest minimum, and that only about 50 to 60 percent of the troops could be taken in the first echelon.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the first meeting of General Barrett and Brigadier Row, intelligence concerning the Treasury Islands had been gleaned mainly from the report of the Navy and Marine patrol which had landed on Mono Island on 22 August 1943, and had reconnoitered until withdrawn 28 August.<sup>11</sup> Further information was obtained from the reports of American aviators who had been shot down in that vicinity, and had made their way to the Treasury Islands, whence they later escaped. Latest information available at this time was dated 6 September, but aerial photographs were being taken daily, while IMAC worked hurriedly to prepare hasty terrain maps.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> IMAC LofI, 28Sep43.

<sup>9</sup> Row Rpt, 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 2.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter I—"Accumulation of Intelligence."

<sup>12</sup> IMAC D-2 Miscellaneous Reports, 1-6. Cf. Row Rpt, 4. The IMAC document cited here appears to have been mistitled. These reports are bound in a jacket with the title cited here, but there is no explanation for the designation "D-2" having been assigned to what are primarily Corps (C-2) documents.

Evaluation of intelligence indicated that the only beaches suitable for any type of landing craft were located on Mono Island between the Saveke River and Falamai Point. There also were beaches at Maisi and Soanotalu and one 1200 yards west of Toalomo Point, but none of these seemed capable of accommodating LST's. There appeared to be two adequate shallow-draft beaches on the northern shore of Stirling Island.<sup>13</sup>

While the topographical intelligence was fairly extensive, information concerning the enemy was meager. There were said to be about 135 Japanese, armed with rifles and light machine guns, quartered at Falamai. These were presumed to be maintaining observation posts at various points, mainly on the south side of Mono.<sup>14</sup>

To obtain up-to-the-minute information, therefore, Sergeant W. A. Cowan, of the Brigade Intelligence Section, Corporal Nash, of the Australian Naval Intelligence Service, and two native members of the British Solomon Islands Defense Force, landed on Mono Island from a PT boat during the night of 21-22 October, and were evacuated by the same means the following night. This patrol reported that the Japanese had recently landed reinforcements and that their total strength was now about 225 men; that the Japanese Headquarters area was situated just west of the Saveke River; that there was an observation post on Laifa Point; that guns—probably 40mm dual purpose guns—had been emplaced on both sides of the main beach at Falamai; and that there were no enemy on Stirling Island. When it withdrew, the patrol brought with it several friendly Treasury Island natives, to serve as guides for the landing force. Immediately utilizing information gathered by this patrol, adjustments were made in landing plans.<sup>15</sup>

During the night of 25-26 October, Sergeant Cowan and three enlisted men, accompanied by two natives, again landed on Mono Island from a PT boat, this time with the triple mission of

<sup>13</sup> IMAC Estimate of the Situation, Treasury Islands, 1-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5. Actually about 250 Japanese troops defended the Treasuries. These formed the 1st Japanese Base Force, which consisted of the 7th Combined SNLF, Kure #7 SNLF, 16th AAA Tai (Company), 17th AAA Tai, and Sasebo #6 SNLF.

<sup>15</sup> Row Rpt, 6.

cutting lines of communication between the Japanese Headquarters and Laifa Point observation post, of establishing at 0400 on 27 October an observation post between Falamai and Malsi in order to observe enemy movements, and finally of organizing the natives as guides and make them available to combat units. Sergeant Cowan successfully carried out all assigned tasks.<sup>16</sup>

The Brigade received IMAC Operation Order No. 1 on 16 October and immediately began preparations for the operation. It was clear at the outset that the main assault should, if possible, be made in the vicinity of Falamai, because that was the only beach suitable for LST's, possessing sufficient dispersal areas for the large quantities of supplies and equipment that had to be carried. Provided the Japanese could be subdued by supporting fires during approach of landing craft, and assault at Falamai was also the best way of engaging the enemy quickly. It was, however, necessary to land also on Stirling because that island offered the only positions from which field artillery could effectively support infantry on Mono Island. Furthermore, areas on Stirling could be utilized as positions for anti-aircraft guns covering Blanche Harbor. Although LST's could not beach on Stirling Island, it appeared that with a little engineering work, a suitable beach for those ships could be created. Subsequent events proved this estimate to be correct, for by the time the Brigade had been withdrawn from the Treasury Islands, two good landings had been built, while several less satisfactory ones were available.<sup>17</sup>

Initial plans did not provide for any landings other than those at Falamai and Stirling. However, the detachment of COMAIRNORSOLS, responsible for establishment of long range radar in the Treasury Islands, reported on 14 October that radar, to be of benefit to the Bougainville operation, would have to be established on the north or northeast side of Mono Island. At about the same time Brigade was informed by CTF-31 through IMAC that establishment of this radar was to be given a high priority in planning the

Treasury operation.<sup>18</sup> It was consequently necessary to plan a subsidiary landing to provide a covering force for the group which was to set up the radar. From reconnaissance reports and aerial photographs it appeared that a small beach at Soanotalu would be sufficient for beaching an LCT. The commander of Argus Unit No. 6 (the unit responsible for erection and operation of the radar) was of the opinion that the radar could be put ashore and sited effectively in that vicinity. CTF-31 arranged to divert an APD (the ill-fated *McKean*) to Soanotalu, and the plan was modified. One company of infantry, reinforced with one section of machine-guns, the radar personnel, and a detachment of Company A, 87th NCB would now land as a separate unit known as "Loganforce," under the command of Major G. W. Logan, NZEF. Radar and engineering equipment were to be brought to Mono on an LCT in the main convoy, and be sent to Soanotalu during the night of 27-28 October, if the situation there should be reported favorably.<sup>19</sup>

As finally determined, the order of battle for the operation included about 7,700 officers and men.<sup>20</sup>

Final allocation of shipping consisted of eight APD's; eight LCI's; two LST's; and three LCT's. Cargo was to be loaded on eight LCM's and two APC's. This number of ships required that the Brigade be transported in echelons. The first echelon was made up of approximately 3,700 troops and about 1700 tons of cargo.<sup>21</sup> Nearly all embarked units were well below normal strength; infantry battalions, for example, were reduced to about 600 men each.<sup>22</sup> There was room for but one battery of field artillery, one battery of anti-aircraft artillery, and a nucleus of the command groups. Each infantry battalion was allowed only two trucks and four jeeps, a paucity of transportation which later caused much delay and confusion during unloading phases of the operation. Succeeding

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. See Chapter I, section entitled "Accumulation of Intelligence."

<sup>17</sup> IMAC Concept of Operations Plan I, 3. See also Row Rpt, 9.

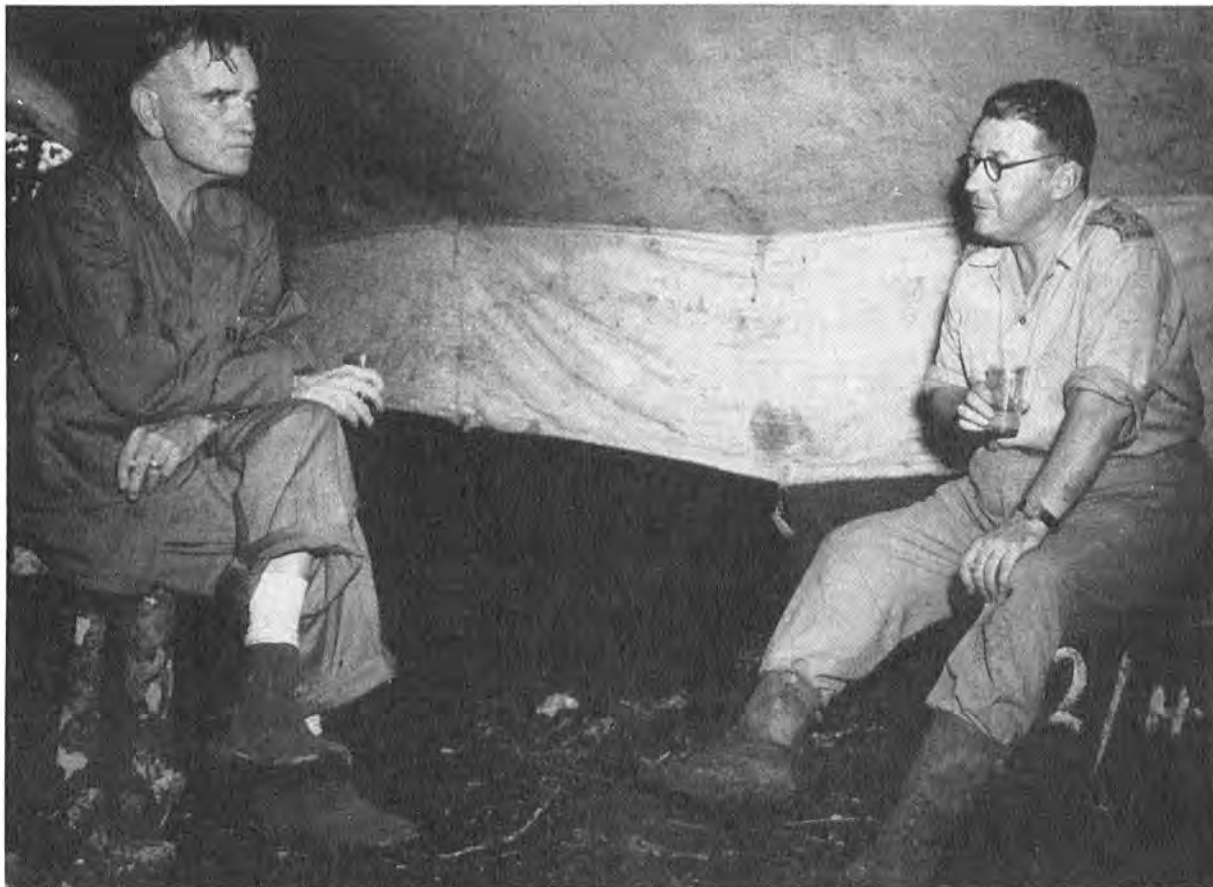
<sup>18</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Task Force 31 Operation Plan A14-43, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Row Rpt, 8.



**ADMIRAL HALSEY AND BRIGADIER ROW, NZEF,** confer in a tent on Guadalcanal during the planning phases of the Treasury Islands operation.

echelons were scheduled to come forward to the Treasury Islands at intervals of five days.<sup>23</sup>

Final orders for the operation were issued by Brigade on 21 October 1943. These directed an assault landing on Beaches Orange 1 and 2, located between the Saveke River and Falamai Point on Mono Island, by the 29th and 36th Battalions, with the 29th Battalion landing on the right at Beach Orange 1. The LST's of the second wave of the attack force were to land on these beaches. The 34th Battalion was to land on Stirling Island on Beaches Purple 2 and Purple 3, with the Brigade Headquarters landing in the Second Wave on Purple 3. A simultaneous landing was to be effected on Beach Emerald at Soanotalu by Loganforce, while field and anti-aircraft artillery, loaded on LST's, was to be

trans-shipped to Stirling Island as speedily as possible. Beach Purple 1, Stirling Island, would be developed later.<sup>24</sup> The administrative order, issued in conjunction with the Brigade operation order, set up the beach organization, to include working parties, loading of bulldozers, and pooling of transportation in order to facilitate unloading operations.<sup>25</sup>

During the planning stage considerable difficulties were encountered because of the great distance and lack of suitable communication between the headquarters of IMAC and the Brigade. In addition, roads on Guadalcanal were most difficult, while distance caused weak and inefficient telephonic communication.<sup>26</sup> There

<sup>23</sup> Task Force 31 Operation Plan A14-43, 4-6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 19-20.

<sup>26</sup> Row Rpt, 8.

was no centrally located joint staff or planning group, although the presence of a liaison officer (Lieutenant Colonel J. Brooke-White, NZEF) at Corps Headquarters helped the Brigade considerably. Furthermore, some supporting units were not assigned to Brigade until a very late date.<sup>27</sup> In most cases these units were still in the process of organization. The high degree of cooperation demonstrated by attached units went far, however, toward surmounting most of these difficulties.<sup>28</sup>

From 14 to 17 October, the Brigade practiced final landings on Florida Island. Four APD's and eight LCI's were used. The value of this training was amply demonstrated a few days later when loading of supplies and embarkation of troops for the operation proceeded without incident.<sup>29</sup>

Transport units under Admiral Fort were divided into five groups, each with its own tactical commander. Having loaded, these departed independently, timed to arrive at Blanche Harbor on 27 October from 0520 (time of arrival for the first group), to 0830 (time for arrival of the fifth group).<sup>30</sup>

The several groups made independent passages without incident except that a flare was dropped near the LCI gunboats between Simbo and Treasury Islands,<sup>31</sup> which area the groups passed before dawn as scheduled. The element of surprise was very important, since about 25,000 Japanese were reported in the Buin-Shortland area with 83 barges at their disposal.<sup>32</sup> These forces could reinforce the Treasury Islands in a few hours. Complete radio silence was therefore maintained except for three orders by very

high frequency voice radio, which included an order delaying H-hour by 20 minutes.<sup>33</sup>

Practically every unit venturing west or north of Vella Lavella at night previous to this operation had been detected by Japanese "snoopers" (reconnaissance float-planes). It was therefore considered almost certain that our approach would be discovered during the night; but despite the flare dropped near the LCI gunboats, it seems probable that the Japanese made no contact, and that surprise was complete. The covering cruiser group under Admiral Merrill, to the westward, was spotted by "snoopers", however, and many flares and float lights were dropped near that formation.<sup>34</sup>

At 0540<sup>35</sup> seven APD's of the 1st Transport Group lay to 1,300 yards off Cummings Point, Stirling Island, bearing 060° T., just south of the entrance to Blanche Harbor, and commenced debarkation of troops.<sup>36</sup> Upon arrival of this group, the weather was overcast, heavy rain was falling, and visibility was poor. Sunrise was approaching, however, and there was a moderate northeast wind. Within the next two hours the weather cleared and remained fine for most of the day, but in the late afternoon, and again during the night, heavy rain fell.<sup>37</sup>

The *Eaton*, which had been designated as fighter director ship, proceeded to her station, while the *Pringle* and *Philip* began their scheduled shore bombardment within five minutes after the transport group arrived.<sup>38</sup> The air spotter was already over the targets, and at 0600 a fighter cover of 32 planes arrived on station.<sup>39</sup>

Since it was impracticable to operate destroyers in the narrow waters of Blanche Harbor, the fire support area was located west of the en-

<sup>27</sup> For example, Company A, 87th NCB was not assigned to this operation until 14 October, and did not arrive at Guadalcanal from the Russell Islands until 18 October.

<sup>28</sup> Row Rpt, 9. Because units were not as yet formed in several instances, officers in charge could not furnish the Brigade staff with requisite information concerning numbers of personnel, equipment, tonnage, or shipping space necessary for their units.

<sup>29</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 11. For information regarding organization of transport units see: COMTRANSDIV 12 AR, 1; TG 3d AmphFor AR, 4; and, *Combat Narratives*, 79-80.

<sup>30</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>32</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Twenty minutes late, due either to adverse currents, inaccurate charts, or faulty navigation. The radar of Admiral Fort's flag-ship *Eaton*, had given a false range, probably due to a rain-squall (TG 3d AmphFor AR, 5). H-hour was to have been 0606, but due to tardiness, it was delayed 20 minutes by Admiral Fort (TG 3d AmphFor AR, 1). See preceding page and *cf.* *Combat Narratives*, 14.

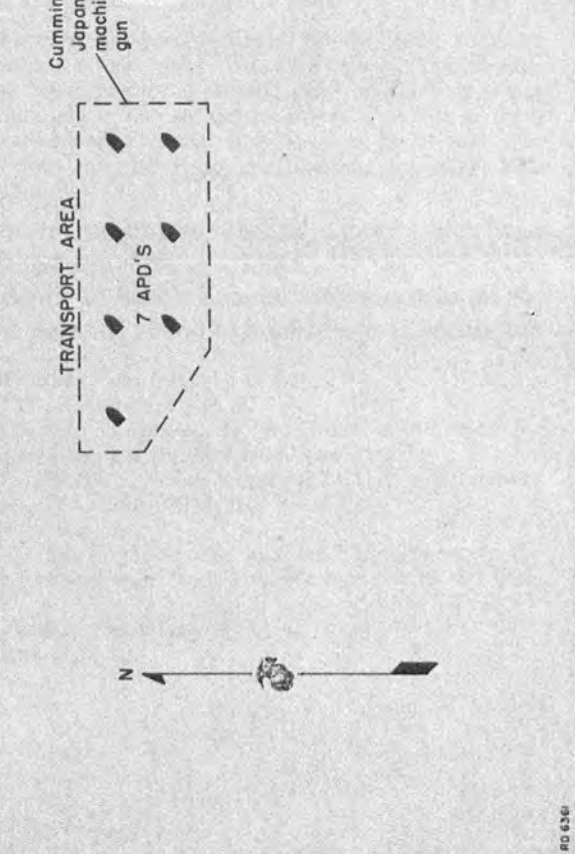
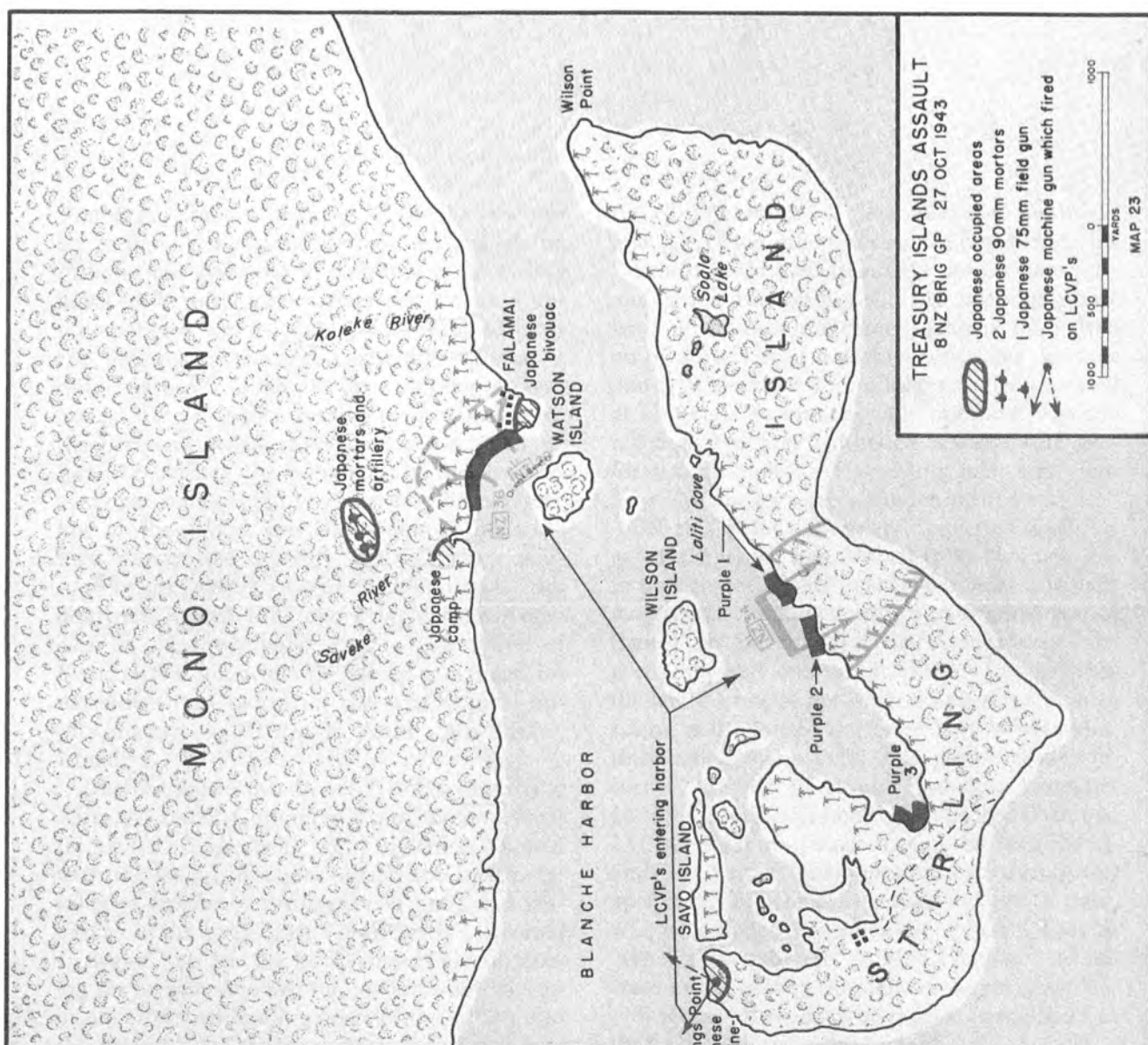
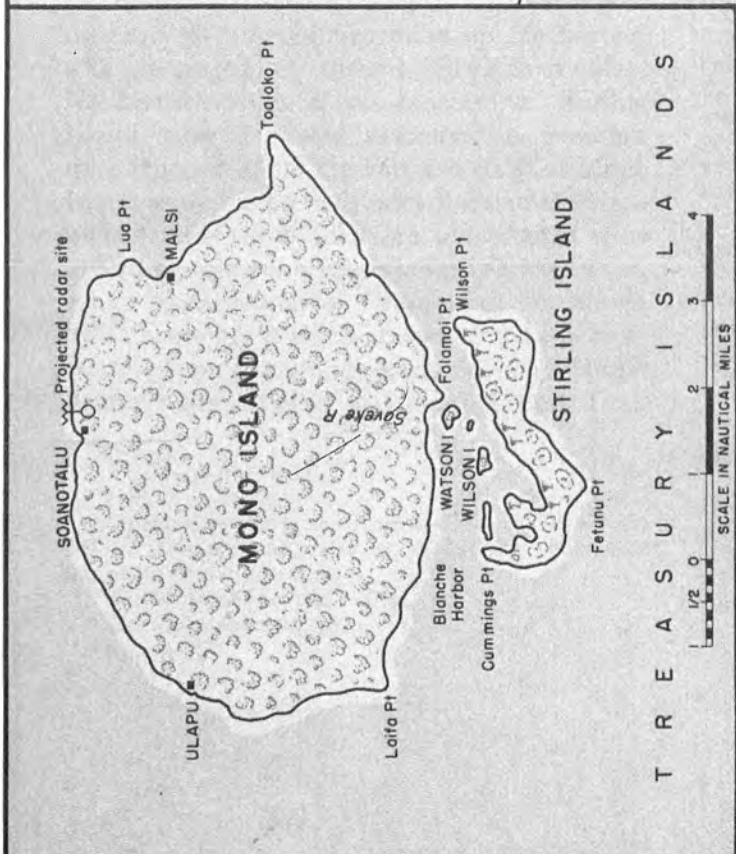
<sup>36</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Lcc. cit.*, 7, indicates that this fire began at 0545.

<sup>39</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 6; see also TG 3d AmphFor AR, 9.





trance. All firing at this stage of the landing was on prearranged targets. Preparatory fire of the *Pringle* was delivered approximately according to schedule, with good battery performance, but no assistance, unfortunately, was obtained from the air spotter, who subsequently reported a radio failure.<sup>40</sup> While it later developed that much of the *Pringle's* fire was too far back from the beach to be effective for the combined effort, she covered the remainder of the assigned area reasonably well, nevertheless. Preparatory fire of the *Philip* was disappointing in accuracy, timing, and quantity. At 0623, three minutes before assault waves hit the beach, the destroyers ceased fire. The *Pringle* maneuvered clear of the fire support area to patrol west of Blanche Harbor, while the *Philip* proceeded independently to patrol on east-west courses approximately 6,000 yards south of Stirling Island.<sup>41</sup>

In the meantime, loaded boats from the APD's rounded Cummings Point under arched tracers of 5-inch shells, sight of which coupled with the sound of explosions on the beach, instilled a feeling of confidence in personnel embarked in the small craft.<sup>42</sup> Two newly-converted LCI gunboats left the 2d Transport Group during the night and joined the 1st Transport Group in time to escort landing boats of the APD's into the harbor.<sup>43</sup> In order to reach Falamai it was necessary to proceed two miles up the harbor, which averaged only about 1,000 yards in width. No enemy resistance was expected on Stirling Island, and Japanese machine-gun positions were reported along the southern coast of Mono Island as well as on both sides of Falamai Peninsula. Assault waves therefore were routed close to Stirling to a point just beyond Watson Island, where boats bound for Orange beaches turned left.<sup>44</sup> These waves received unexpected machine-gun fire from Cummings Point, Stirling Island.<sup>45</sup> Before Watson Island was reached, craft from

the *Stringham* and *Talbot* turned to starboard and proceeded independently to Beaches Purple 2 and 3. Despite air bombings the previous day, and bombardment by the fire support group, landing craft approaching Falamai were fired on by a number of machine-guns, some mortars, and a twin-mount 40mm automatic gun located at Falamai. Fortunately only one boat was disabled by gunfire,<sup>46</sup> although several were perforated by bullets.<sup>47</sup> Five Navy men and eight New Zealanders were wounded on the way in.<sup>48</sup>

At this point the newly converted LCI(L) gunboats, which had arrived from Noumea just in time to participate in this operation, saw their first action. Equipped with 3-inch guns, two of these craft accompanied the assault boats, one preceding and one on the flank. Just prior to the landing one of the gunboats rounded Watson Island and knocked out the 40mm twin-mount, thus saving many lives. The gunboats also returned the fire of several Japanese machine-guns.<sup>49</sup> On one occasion, however, fire from one LCI(L) held up the advance of the 36th Battalion's left flank.<sup>50</sup> Their performance during this operation, for which they had no time to train, was nevertheless described by Admiral Fort as "especially creditable".<sup>51</sup> They continued to operate in the harbor throughout the morning.<sup>52</sup>

Brigadier Row likewise paid a compliment to the LCI gunboats when he said,

The close support rendered by the LCI gunboats undoubtedly kept down casualties during the assault. These boats protected the left flank of the first wave, and in addition shot at opportunity targets. One of them proceeded past Falamai peninsula and raked that area with fire just prior to the landing [of the] 29th Battalion.<sup>53</sup>

In the meantime, the *McKean*, which had left the formation at 0430 and proceeded independently to Beach Emerald at Soanotalu on the north coast of Mono to land troops to secure the

<sup>40</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> ComDesDiv 90, Action Report, Treasury Islands, 1; TG 3d AmphFor AR, also is enlightening concerning this phase of the operation.

<sup>43</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>46</sup> This boat was from the *Crosby*.

<sup>47</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 16. Additional information for this statement was obtained from Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>49</sup> LCIFLOT 5, Action Report of LCI(L)'s at Treasury Islands, 27 October 1943, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>51</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, and 1st Endorsement to the APD Action Report both give much credit to the LCI(L)'s.

<sup>52</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Row Rpt, 10.

radar site, returned to the transport area at 0708 and reported that the landing had been unopposed.<sup>54</sup>

The 2d Transport Group, completed its approach by 0630, and its LCI(L)'s, under Commander J. McDonald Smith, USN, rounded the west end of Stirling Island in two columns, preceded by the minesweepers, *Adroit*, *Conflict*, and *Daring*. These columns on their way up the harbor passed Higgins boats of the APD's returning from the beach. Shore fire was observed converging on gunboats accompanying the landing craft, all of which were vigorously returning the fire. The LCI(L)'s in the right column swung to starboard and grounded on the Purple beaches of Stirling Island, while those of the left column swung to port and grounded on the Mono Island's Orange beaches at about 0647. These LCI(L)'s were under rifle and mortar fire throughout the unloading period, but despite this opposition 1,600 troops and 150 tons of cargo were debarked in less than 35 minutes. By 0730 the LCI(L)'s had gotten underway in company with the AM's and were headed for Guadalcanal.<sup>55</sup>

About 0715 the LST's of the 3d Transport Group stood into Blanche Harbor preceded by two auxiliary minesweepers. Since the LST's could not sight an unloading party on shore, the ships' commanding officers each selected his own beach, and beached at 0735, according to schedule. Five minutes later both ships were subjected to heavy fire from mountain guns, mortars, and small arms, which caused some damage and wounded eight men.<sup>56</sup>

LST 399 found herself in especially difficult straits. She was bracketed by a score of shells and received two direct hits from a mortar. Furthermore a large, well-covered, active pillbox, previously considered knocked out,<sup>57</sup> was located only eight yards from her port bow door, and Japanese riflemen were active. During a lull in the firing, the ramp was lowered, but the first man off the ship was shot down, and the two

who followed him dropped in their tracks mortally wounded. It became necessary to close the ramp for protection. Several New Zealanders standing on shore beyond the arc of enemy fire, ineffectually fired their Bren guns at the pillbox. None of the LST's forward automatic weapons could be brought to bear. Personnel aboard ship opened fire on the enemy but at that point they received orders from the beach to cease firing. It was apparent that the men on the beach were not going to silence the pillbox, which had become so active that all hands aboard ship had to take cover, and delay unloading until the pillbox was reduced.<sup>58</sup>

At 0815 the LST requested permission to leave the beach, but received the reply, "Not granted". Whereupon, a resourceful New Zealander mounted a D-8 bulldozer, and with the blade raised high to protect him from fire, he rolled heavily down the ramp, several New Zealanders covering him with Bren guns as he came out. Working to the blind side of the pillbox, he lowered the blade, and plowed the pillbox and its occupants under the earth, "tamping it down well all around, effectively silencing its fire".<sup>59</sup>

During the initial shelling of the LST's, the *Eaton*, with Admiral Fort aboard, entered the harbor in an attempt to silence the mortar fire. Unfortunately, the destroyers could not locate the battery, which ceased to fire when the *Eaton* approached. The *Philip*, on station south of Stirling Island, was assigned a target by the shore fire control party, and fired five salvos. After this bombardment there was no more mortar fire for almost three hours.<sup>60</sup>

Both LST's began unloading operations at approximately 0830, having been on the beach for almost an hour, and under fire for a portion of that time.<sup>61</sup> Although Brigade had provided for working parties and had organized a beach

<sup>54</sup> U. S. S. *McKean*, Action Report—Treasury Islands Landings, 3.

<sup>55</sup> LCIFLOT 5, Action Report of LCI(L)'s at Treasury Islands, 27 October 1943, 9.

<sup>56</sup> LST Group 15, Action Report, Treasury, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Row Rpt, 8.

<sup>58</sup> LST 399, Narrative Account of the Action, 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; see also LST Group 15, Action Report, Treasury, 7. *Time* (20 December 1943) gives credit for this act to F 1/c Aurelio Tassone, Company A, 87th NCB. No official record appears to confirm this, all stating that the act was performed by a New Zealander.

<sup>60</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 9.

<sup>61</sup> LST Group 15, Action Report, Treasury, 8. It appears that the pill-box mentioned *supra* had been the cause of the delay.

party,<sup>62</sup> a lack of proper understanding of respective functions was apparent.<sup>63</sup> In addition, LST 485, for lack of a bulldozer, road, or unloading area, had to resort to unloading by hand.<sup>64</sup> Also, not to be discounted, was the fact that the initial shelling of the ships by the Japanese had demobilized the unloading details. These factors, coupled with fascinating aerial dog-fights going on overhead during unloading operations, caused discharge of cargo to proceed inexcusably slowly. LST 399 was especially adversely affected. Here the unloading progressed rather well at first, but after the mobile equipment was ashore unloading came to "an almost abrupt halt",<sup>65</sup> for thereafter LST 399 never had more than three trucks and few jeeps.<sup>66</sup>

At 1120 Japanese mortar and mountain gun fire was reopened from new positions on the high ground west of the Saveke, about 500 yards off the bow of LST 399, which was bracketed and then hit on the port side. Shells continued whizzing over the forecandle and striking the beach. At 1123 another shell struck the ship on the port side, this time in the capstan control room, wrecking the capstan machinery.<sup>67</sup> At approximately 1149, on about the 20th salvo, the mortar registered a direct hit on a large ammunition dump at Falamai. A violent explosion knocked men off their feet on Beach Orange 2, fired the native village, and set off some nearby small arms dumps.<sup>68</sup> Burning debris, fragments from exploding 90mm shells, and exploding pyrotechnics covered the forward part of the ship, so that the whole forecandle seemed to be on fire. Heat grew so intense that the forward guns

had to be abandoned, and when it was noticed that the heat was blistering paint on the starboard bow, the forward magazine was flooded. Hoses were manned, and several clusters of fire on deck were extinguished.<sup>69</sup> The Commanding Officer of LST Group 15, Commander Vilhelm K. Busck, USN, then signalled LST 399 to retract and rebeach 50 yards to the west, which she promptly did.<sup>70</sup> On the beach Japanese fire destroyed one 90mm antiaircraft gun, a Bofors gun, some ammunition, medical supplies, and other equipment. One 25-pounder gun was badly damaged.<sup>71</sup>

At 1155 the *Philip* and the two LCI gunboats entered the channel in an attempt to silence the mortar fire, but by the time they had established contact with the shore fire control party, the mortar had ceased firing. Mortar fire was never resumed.<sup>72</sup>

After getting unloading started again on LST 485, Busck proceeded to LST 399 where he found unloading details demoralized by the previous shelling. With the aid of a New Zealand officer he finally got some work under way even though slowly. Upon rebeaching LST 399 found that her forward electrical circuits had shorted out, and that the ramp had to be lowered by hand. At 1515 Commander Busck was again called back to the ship by an appeal for him to use his authority to speed work of discharging cargo.<sup>73</sup> A few minutes after he arrived bogies were reported; a Zeke came over pursued by two P-38's, and DD's off shore opened a gun-plane duel. For a time it was again impossible to control the unloading parties.<sup>74</sup>

By 1600 the Japanese planes were driven off, and unloading continued until after dark. At 1841, LST 485, having completely unloaded and retracted, lay to off the stern of LST 399 to protect her sister ship. LST 399 reported at 1902 that unloading was at a standstill, although she still had about 20 tons of cargo aboard,<sup>75</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Brigade Administrative Order No. 1 had provided for men and equipment for this task.

<sup>63</sup> Principal difficulty seems to have been lack of suitable arrangements for a shore-party, and a complete lack of understanding on the part of LST personnel and New Zealand working parties. The LST crew could not convince the New Zealanders, few of whom were veterans, that unloading was a troop responsibility. *Combat Narratives*, 19-20.

<sup>64</sup> LST Group 15, Action Report, Treasury, 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> LST 399, Narrative Account of the Action, 7.

<sup>67</sup> LST 399, Narrative Account of the Action, 10. See also Row Rpt, 9, for an account of this action.

<sup>68</sup> Row Rpt, 8-10.

<sup>69</sup> LST 399, Narrative Account of the Action, 10.

<sup>70</sup> LST Group 15, Action Report, Treasury, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Row Rpt, 9.

<sup>72</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> LST Group 15, Action Report, Treasury, 8.

<sup>74</sup> LST 399, Narrative Account of the Action, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Row Rpt, 9, states that there was a total of 34 tons of rations and some equipment left aboard.

and was under orders to unload completely. Finding it impossible to resume unloading, she retracted at 1943 and both LST's stood out into the channel, led by the *Philip* and accompanied by the two YMS's. When the group was about 1,000 yards from the beach it received reports of bogies and heard planes overhead. Soon thereafter the beach from which LST 399 had just retracted went up in a mass of flames, eight or ten bombs having fallen in that vicinity.<sup>76</sup>

The 5th Transport Group, consisting of one APC, six LCM's, and an aircraft rescue boat, arrived off the west entrance to the harbor about 1830; while the 4th Transport Group, composed of one APC, three LCT's, and a screen of two PT's, arrived about 1850. Both groups were ordered to report to the Commander of the Naval Base, Treasury Islands, for beaching and unloading assignments.<sup>77</sup>

The major assault was made on the Orange Beaches near Falamai, on the southern coast of Mono Island,<sup>78</sup> with the 29th Battalion on the right and the 36th Battalion on the left, just as had been planned. Assault waves hit the beach exactly at H-hour (0626) amid mortar and small arms fire.<sup>79</sup> This wave consisted of 16 LCP(R)'s from the APD's, carrying a total of 640 men to the Orange Beaches. The APD's remained in the transport area for about two hours, during which time they disembarked approximately 1,600 men and at least 80 tons of supplies and equipment.<sup>80</sup> At 0800 the APD's departed under escort of the *Conway* and *Renshaw*.<sup>81</sup>

All battalions quickly cleared their respective beaches, although, as previously noted, the left flank of the 36th Battalion was held up for a short time by fire from one of the LCI gunboats; otherwise the advance continued according to plan.<sup>82</sup>

Opposition was not strong at this stage. There were pillboxes which had to be reduced, and a

fair amount of rifle and machine-gun fire was being received from the left flank; but generally the Japanese had withdrawn from their beach positions, probably as a result of the shore bombardment.<sup>83</sup>

The 24th Battalion landed at H-hour on the Purple Beaches of Stirling Island with no opposition. Although the beaches were bad, no difficulty was encountered. However, it had been observed during the approach of the landing boats that a machine-gun on Cummings Point was contesting the landing. Quickly securing its beaches, the 34th Battalion advanced to its beachhead line, meanwhile sending out a patrol to deal with the machine-gun post on Cummings Point. This unit did not contact the Japanese, although it did discover their positions. It was later presumed that the enemy withdrew when they saw the New Zealanders approaching, hid until nightfall, and then crossed over to Mono Island.<sup>84</sup> Further extensive patrols were carried out during the day by the 34th Battalion, and an observation post was established on Wilson Point, but no Japanese were observed.<sup>85</sup> One group was sent to Watson Island, and when it reported that island clear, two sections of 3-inch mortars were sent there to support operations of the 29th and 36th Battalions at Falamai. Late that afternoon, a platoon of the 34th Battalion was dispatched to Mono Island and attached to the 36th Battalion to plug a gap in the lines of the latter. By the end of D-day, artillery was supporting troops on Mono Island and furnishing defensive antiaircraft fire from positions on Stirling Island.<sup>86</sup>

As the *McKean* had reported, our landing at Soanotalu was not opposed. Loganforue established a perimeter covering Emerald Beach, and immediately instituted a thorough reconnaissance of the area to determine the eventual location of the radar, the mission of this force. The beach was suitable for the landing of an LCT, and arrangements were therefore made to

<sup>76</sup> LST Group 15, *op. cit.*, 9 and LST 399, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 18-19.

<sup>78</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 6.

<sup>79</sup> COMTRANSDIV 12 AR, 2-4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> Row Rpt, 7. See also note 55 and the text thereto *supra*.

<sup>83</sup> IMAC, C-2, Periodic Reports, 26, 27, 28 October 1943.

<sup>84</sup> IMAC, *loc. cit.*, 27 October 1943.

<sup>85</sup> Row Rpt, 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

send in the radar and engineering equipment from Blanche Harbor during the night.<sup>87</sup>

We return now to the scene at Falamai after the initial landing.

At approximately 0735, when the LST's beached, the Japanese had begun laying down mortar and mountain gun fire which damaged the LST's and disrupted unloading operations. Shortly after the Japanese fire started, Company A, 36th Battalion, launched an attack on the Japanese Headquarters area west of the Saveke River, supported by 3-inch mortars, and fire from the *Philip*, on station south of Stirling Island. As the attack developed, mortar fire ceased temporarily, and it was assumed that the Japanese had moved their positions to higher ground northwest of the Saveke River. A heavy machine-gun post sited on the beach was destroyed, and a considerable quantity of rations and equipment was captured as a result of this action. Survivors were observed retiring to higher ground northwest of the Saveke.<sup>88</sup>

Japanese mortar and mountain gun fire on the beach was resumed at approximately 0900 and was again accurate. Although it was extremely difficult to ascertain the origin of this fire, it appeared likely that it was coming from the area to which the enemy had retired, i. e. high ground northwest of the Saveke. Accordingly, at 1000, two platoons of the 36th Battalion were ordered to proceed to that locality to search for suspected gun positions, find them, and destroy them. At about 1100, one of these platoons, under Second Lieutenant L. T. G. Booth, NZEF, discovered a spot from which two Japanese 75mm mountain guns were firing. Mounting a determined attack, the platoon carried the position, and captured the guns; the enemy gunners fled. Leaving a detail to guard the area, Booth led the remainder of his platoon to still higher ground, and some 500 yards farther on he heard the sound of a mortar being fired. By following the sound of the firing, Booth located the mortar position and led his men in another assault, and at 1210 captured this position as

<sup>87</sup> Row, *loc. cit.*, gives a complete description of this action.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

well. A 90mm mortar and a considerable quantity of ammunition were captured as a result of this second attack. Nine Japanese were killed, while the New Zealanders lost seven wounded. The other platoon, which had advanced from the beachhead perimeter by a different route, did not contact the enemy, but observed the second attack of Booth's platoon, being too far away at the time, however, to render support.<sup>89</sup>

There was no material enemy resistance during the afternoon, and by 1800 both the 29th and 36th Battalions had secured their perimeter and dug in. The platoon from the 34th Battalion arrived shortly thereafter and was placed in the lines of the 36th Battalion, while mortars of the 34th Battalion were in general support of the other two Battalions from positions on Watson Island. Artillery registered at 1730, and a field hospital was set up on Stirling Island. As many casualties as possible were evacuated on the LST's, while the Brigade settled down for the night.<sup>90</sup>

On the whole it had been a successful day. The Brigade attained its first objective, yet suffered comparatively few casualties in view of the fact that the landing was opposed. Twenty-one New Zealanders and nine Americans were killed, while 70 New Zealanders and 15 Americans were wounded. No estimate of Japanese casualties could be made.<sup>91</sup>

Fighter cover throughout the day had been excellent, and the troops were not attacked from the air, although the ships were not quite so fortunate.<sup>92</sup> Since threat of counter-landings from the Shortland Islands, only 18 miles away, had concerned Brigadier Row from the beginning, it was deemed to be essential to hold the Blanche Harbor area as strongly as possible.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, he placed his 6-pounder anti-tank guns in position to cover entrances to the harbor, and assigned all other guns a secondary mission of engaging any Japanese surface craft that

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>91</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 9.

<sup>92</sup> The *Cony* was badly hit about 1534 by two bombs from dive bombers. See TG 3d AmphFor AR, 9.

<sup>93</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 30 October 1943.

should appear. An additional sense of security was felt because of the presence of Lieutenant Commander R. B. Kelly's MTB<sup>94</sup> Squadron 9, which patrolled west and northeast of Mono Island, prepared to deal with any Japanese attempt to come across from the Shortland Islands. Furthermore, this squadron could give ample warning of any such attempt.<sup>95</sup>

During the night of 27–28 October, the enemy were quite active on the perimeter's left flank and to a lesser extent on the right flank. Beach areas were taken under fire by knee mortars,<sup>96</sup> rifles and machine-guns. However, no determined attack developed at any point; the enemy seemed rather to be endeavoring to ascertain the Allied dispositions. They had, of course, lost most of their supply of rations when they lost their Headquarters area,<sup>97</sup> although the 36th Battalion had not had time during the day to remove them. Since this area was outside the defensive lines, the Battalion placed a number of booby-traps and covered the area with plotted mortar concentrations. When the Japanese attempted to re-enter their old Headquarters area, they suffered casualties.<sup>98</sup>

As this was the first experience that the troops had had in night fighting, there was a considerable amount of indiscriminate shooting. Our men had not as yet become accustomed to jungle sounds and, of course, could not distinguish these sounds from those made by men.<sup>99</sup> This shooting, plus several air raids during the course of the night, resulted in two men killed and nine wounded.<sup>100</sup>

On the following day, the 29th and 36th Battalions made extensive searches forward of the lines, but none of these contacted Japanese. Patrols did find, however, evidence to indicate that enemy had recently been in the vicinity of

high ground up the Kohele River and also high ground northwest of the Saveke.<sup>101</sup> Since it was felt that the Japanese were capable of using these areas from which to infiltrate New Zealand positions, artillery and mortar concentrations were arranged to cover those localities and likely approaches nearer the perimeter. These concentrations were fired from time to time during the night. During the afternoon, Company A, 29th Battalion, was sent on a combat patrol to Malsi and its place in line was taken by a company of the 34th Battalion, which had come over to Mono from Stirling.<sup>102</sup>

Heavy rain fell during the day; the ground became muddy. That night small parties of Japanese managed to infiltrate the perimeter at a point near the boundary of the 29th and 36th Battalions, working across to the New Zealand water point on the Saveke, probably with the intention of gaining access to the old Japanese Headquarters area.<sup>103</sup> They did not succeed in this, however, for they finally were driven out by firing that was going on behind the lines. In addition to this activity, the Japanese launched one low level strafing attack and several bombing raids, in which 30 to 40 bombs were dropped, but no damage or casualties resulted. One Japanese aircraft was shot down by the 208th Light AA Battery.<sup>104</sup>

Although the troops were extremely worried by snipers behind their lines on 29 October, it appears that there were fewer of these than the amount of excitement they caused would indicate. However, the 36th Battalion definitely accounted for several. Throughout the day patrols again operated forward of the perimeter, but again with negative results.<sup>105</sup>

Brigadier Row made a personal reconnaissance at Soanotalu on 29 October, and as a result decided to reinforce that area with a company of the 34th Battalion. Accordingly, during the night of 29–30 October, a Company Headquarters and two platoons were sent to Logan-

<sup>94</sup> Motor torpedo boat, sometimes called a PT or patrol torpedo boat.

<sup>95</sup> Row Rpt, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Grenade dischargers. The term "knee mortar" is used herein as a descriptive term which was adopted by American troops in the Pacific theater to describe this particular weapon.

<sup>97</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Report, 30 October 1943.

<sup>98</sup> Row Rpt, 10.

<sup>99</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 29 October 1943.

<sup>100</sup> Row Rpt, 10.

<sup>101</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 29 October 1943.

<sup>102</sup> Row Rpt, 11.

<sup>103</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Report, 30 October 1943.

<sup>104</sup> Row Rpt, 11.

<sup>105</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 30 October 1943, and Row Rpt, 11.

force via boat, where the radar was almost ready for operation.<sup>106</sup>

There was little Japanese activity in the Falamai area during the night of 29–30 October, and once again it occurred principally on the left in the vicinity of the old Japanese Headquarters area.<sup>107</sup> Although the New Zealanders claimed to have inflicted casualties on the enemy, no bodies were found the following day; it was therefore presumed that the Japanese had removed their dead and wounded. Air activity was less than it had been the previous evening, only three bombs being dropped; these fell in the 29th Battalion area without effect.<sup>108</sup>

On 30 October there was little or no activity near Falamai. Opportunity was therefore taken to adjust the perimeter by shortening the front of the 36th Battalion and drawing it nearer to the Saveke River. This was a good natural line of defense, and the alteration was a considerable improvement to the left flank, which had been active the past three nights.<sup>109</sup>

Company A, 29th Battalion, reached Malsi at 1100, having made no contact with the enemy during the preceding two days. During the day a 36th Battalion patrol, proceeding towards Laifa Point, found a Japanese 37mm antitank gun and 500 rounds of ammunition in a beach position west of the Japanese Headquarters area.<sup>110</sup> This weapon was in perfect order, and apparently had been abandoned hurriedly upon the patrol's approach. That night a single aircraft bombed and strafed the Falamai area three times, without causing damage or casualties; but there were also some other enemy planes in the vicinity for a lengthy period, a factor which prevented artillery from firing its prepared concentrations, for fear of betraying their positions.<sup>111</sup>

It was now 31 October, and the situation appeared to be well in hand. The perimeter at Falamai was secure, Malsi had been occupied, and at Soanotalu good defense positions covering both radar and beach had been prepared. Brig-

ade then ordered a series of patrols in strength determined to seize high ground at the head of the Saveke and Kohele Rivers, and to sweep every piece of country into which the Japanese may have gone.<sup>112</sup>

The experience of Loganforce was in sharp contrast to that of the troops at Falamai. The landing at Beach Emerald was unopposed and only minor contacts were made with the enemy during the first few days; but, when these occurred, they were with a substantial opposing force.<sup>113</sup>

At day-break, 28 October, the LCT carrying the radar and engineering equipment arrived safely at Beach Emerald. An immediate start was made on construction of a roadway up the steep incline between beach and radar site. The LCT was unloaded and departed without incident. Apparently the Japanese had never discovered the exact nature of New Zealand activities at Soanotalu, particularly the fact that a radar was being established there. There followed several days of hard work, and by 31 October the radar was fully operating with an adequate radius.

Meanwhile, the infantry company set up a perimeter defense covering the beach and was now sending out patrols to the east and west. Early on 30 October the 34th Battalion reinforcements arrived, whereupon Major Logan established a separate perimeter covering the radar site. On 28 and 29 October, there had been several minor contacts with small enemy parties toward the west. Mortar and artillery fire effectively prevented infiltration at night.<sup>114</sup>

During the night of 1–2 November, a Japanese force estimated to number between 80 and 90 men, made a determined effort to break through New Zealand positions and seize landing craft on the beach. A captured diary indicated that this force had retired from the Falamai area to high ground northwest of the Saveke, thence to the Soanotalu River Valley, on 28 October. The enemy had carried with them all their mortars, knee mortars, grenades, and am-

<sup>106</sup> Row Rpt, 11.

<sup>107</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 1 November 1943.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 October—2 November 1943.

<sup>109</sup> Row Rpt, 11.

<sup>110</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 1 November 1943.

<sup>111</sup> Row Rpt, 11.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>113</sup> Row Rpt, 13.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.



munition. While traveling down the Soanotalu River Valley, they found the Soanotalu beaches occupied by our forces. Stopping, they then sent out patrols in an effort to determine Allied strength and dispositions. This resulted in the previously mentioned minor clashes.<sup>115</sup>

When Major Logan became aware that the Japanese knew of his presence at Soanotalu, he had already been apprised of the experiences of the Falamai forces during the first few nights. Accordingly he issued instructions that his men were to fire only in cases of emergency. New Zealand 3-inch mortars were registered close in to the perimeter on likely avenues of approach. Grenades were issued. New Zealanders were alerted for an attack. This was the situation in which Loganforce found itself on the night of 1–2 November, when the enemy attacked.<sup>116</sup>

The Japanese assaulted our perimeter in two groups, one numbering about 60, the other numbering about 30. New Zealanders tossed grenade after grenade at the enemy in an effort to prevent a breakthrough, but part of the first group succeeded in penetrating the lines and reaching the beach. On the beach, however, the Japanese were engaged by a New Zealand detachment under Captain D. J. Kirk, and were wiped out before they could do any damage. The remainder were unable to penetrate the Allied lines, but many died in the attempt. In this encounter, which lasted for some five hours, the Japanese lost a minimum of 50 killed while our losses were one killed and nine wounded.<sup>117</sup>

On the following night (2–3 November), the Japanese again attacked the perimeter, although not with the same intensity that they had attacked the preceding night.<sup>118</sup> Once again they were beaten off by the use of grenades, and once again they suffered severe casualties. This was

<sup>115</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 2 November 1943.

<sup>116</sup> Row Rpt, 14.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. The Japanese probably had more than 50 men committed in this engagement; the New Zealanders were able to count only bodies that were on or behind their lines, and it is safe to assume that some enemy died in front of the lines while others may have escaped.

Captain Kirk himself was wounded in this engagement and subsequently died of wounds.

<sup>118</sup> IMAC, C-2 Periodic Reports, 4 November 1943.

the last organized attack on Soanotalu. Succeeding days were spent by New Zealand patrols in mopping up the remnants of the Japanese forces.<sup>119</sup>

By 12 November, when civil administration was reestablished, the Treasury Islands were fully secured, and as we have seen, on 1 November, the day of the Cape Torokina landing, the flank of the forces advancing toward Bougainville was secured by the radar on the Treasury Islands, and the PT's based there.

The mission upon which the Brigade had set out was accomplished.<sup>120</sup>

## CHOISEUL DIVERSION

The 2d Parachute Battalion raised a great deal of smoke with but very little fire by the Choiseul diversionary raid which was mentioned in Chapter I. The primary mission of this operation, it will be recalled, was to create a screen behind which IMAC could execute its principal assignment—an assault on Bougainville.

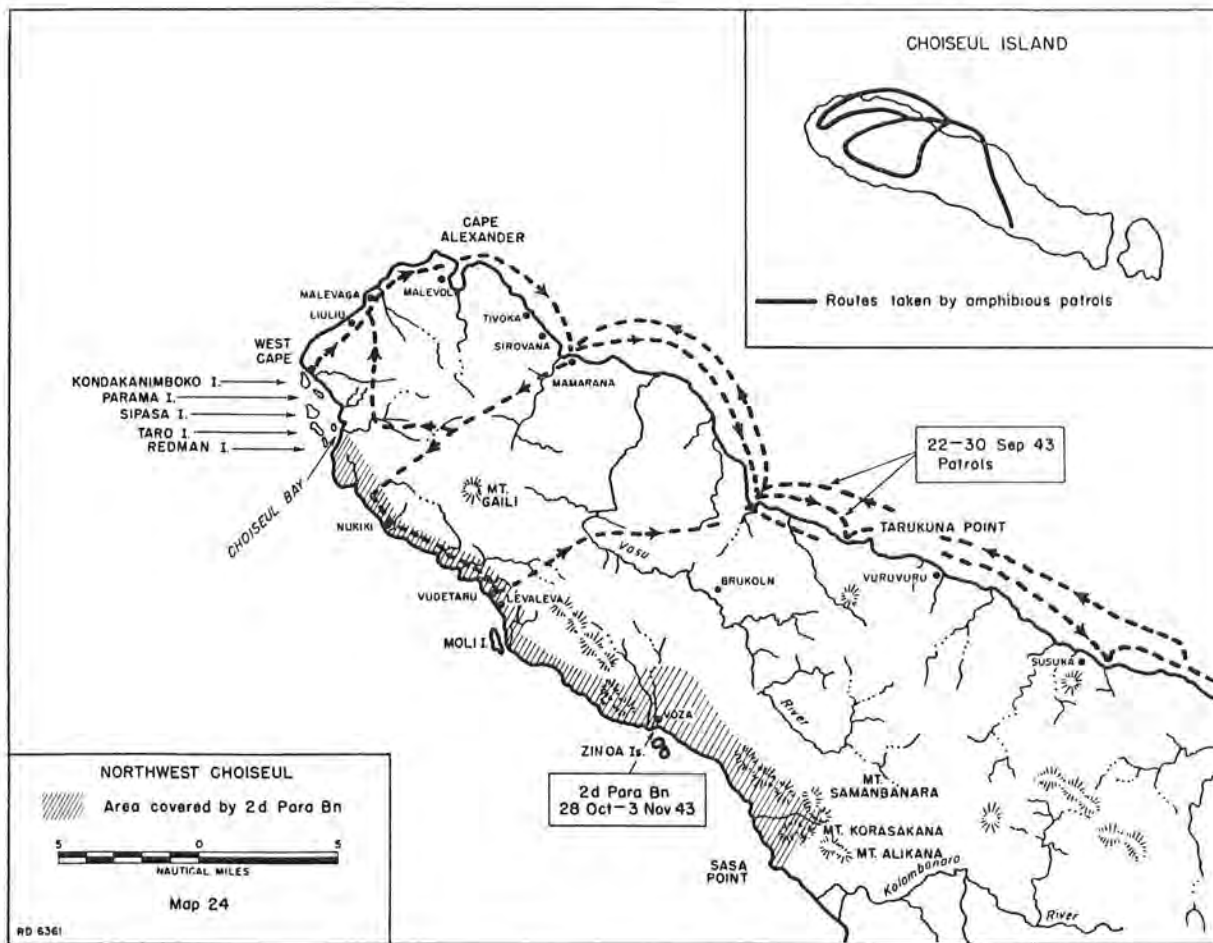
A Choiseul landing had been suggested in the early stages of planning of the Northern Solomons campaign as a main assault—an intermediate step before further landings on the east coast of Bougainville.<sup>121</sup> Subsequent patrol reports on the area indicated few suitable sites for airfields and motor torpedo bases.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore the tremendous attrition to Japanese air forces had become increasingly apparent, and Japanese shipping therefore came to be considered more vulnerable than ground forces. Finally, in September, after Admiral Halsey learned of General MacArthur's objections to a landing on Choiseul, he ordered that planning

<sup>119</sup> TG 3d AmphFor AR, 11. Casualties for the Treasury Islands operation were as follows: Japan, 205 killed, 8 captured; New Zealand, 40 killed, 145 wounded; U. S., 2 killed, 29 wounded.

<sup>120</sup> 3d AmphFor AR, 12. Although not originally planned, an airfield, erected on Stirling Island, was put into operation on 25 December.

<sup>121</sup> Memorandum for COMSOPAC from Fitch, Harmon, Barrett, and Wilkinson, dated 7 September, 1943. See note 74, Chapter I, *supra*.

<sup>122</sup> 3d MarDiv Patrol Reports—Choiseul. See also Chapter I, section entitled "Accumulation of Intelligence".



be directed toward a landing on Bougainville proper without going through any intermediate steps.

The concept of a landing on Choiseul was therefore abandoned in principle, but certain elements of the scheme were retained at the suggestion of Major James C. Murray (then Staff Secretary, IMAC), who maintained that it was necessary in order to throw the Japanese off the scent of our intended landing on Bougainville. Since U. S. intentions in that general direction were obvious, it became essential to conceal the particular point of attack as long as possible, thus preventing the Japanese from taking anticipatory countermeasures.

The original plan for a landing in force on Choiseul was therefore modified to that of a landing in simulated force by a small but energetic

unit, which would conduct raids to mislead the Japanese as to our real intentions. Further, if necessary, the tiny beachhead on Choiseul could be exploited, and patrol torpedo boat bases and fighter fields could be established there. This landing, it was hoped, would lead the enemy to believe either that it was our intention to attack the Choiseul area only, or to attack the east coast of Bougainville. In light of all these considerations, the proposed plan was submitted to Admiral Wilkinson who approved the idea. Accordingly, IMAC issued Operation Order No. 2 on 22 October 1943, providing for a landing on Choiseul by the 2d Parachute Battalion (Reinforced) on 27 October 1943.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>123</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, II. The battalion was then encamped at Vella Lavella. 1stLt. Paul Jansen, of Headquarters, XIII Fighter Command, was attached to the Battalion for the purpose of finding a suitable airfield site.

Two amphibious patrols had been sent to Choiseul while that island was being considered as a main objective for our attack. One group had scouted the central portions of the southwestern and northeastern coasts, while the other had scouted the north, northwestern and northeastern coasts of the northern portions. In addition to information which these units had gathered, coastwatchers on Choiseul were able to provide a great deal of valuable information and advice.<sup>124</sup>

The commanding officer, 2d Parachute Battalion, 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Victor H. Krulak, was summoned from Vella Lavella to IMAC Headquarters on Guadalcanal several days before the operation was to take place.<sup>125</sup> There he conferred with General Vandegrift, Admiral Wilkinson, Colonels Wade, Snedeker, Linscott, and Coleman.

For a period of several weeks prior to this meeting, a Choiseul-based coastwatcher, Sub-Lieutenant C. W. Seton, of the Royal Australian Navy,<sup>126</sup> had been gathering intelligence information and forwarding it to IMAC headquarters.

As a result of the conference, it was decided that the actual landing should be made on beaches in the vicinity of Voza Village, on the northern portion of the island's southwest coast. Seton had reported a good beach there; natives were friendly and could be organized to help invading forces, and nearest Japanese positions were lightly held. Furthermore, approaches to the beach were easily accessible, and in the vicin-

<sup>124</sup> Feldt, *loc. cit.* gives the most complete information of activities of the coastwatchers.

<sup>125</sup> Marine Corps, Division of Public Information, Historical Section, Interrogation of LtCol Warner T. Bigger, USMC, 1 May 1947. Hereinafter cited as Bigger Interrogation. See also same agency, Krulak Interrogation (22 March 1948) which states that LtCol Robert Williams, Commanding Officer, 1st Parachute Regiment, had received a dispatch on the night of 20 October 1943, directing him to bring Krulak to IMAC Headquarters. Krulak states that he and Williams flew to Guadalcanal the following day.

<sup>126</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 107, 108, 111-114, 157-159; *Loc. cit.* Seton is called a sergeant of Australian Imperial Forces. When war broke out, Seton immediately enlisted in the Australian Army, was sent to New Guinea, and was promoted to Sergeant. Upon organization of the coastwatching unit by the Australian Navy, Seton was recalled to Australia and was commissioned in that organization.

ity were inlets that might be suitable for establishment of a patrol torpedo boat base.

Upon taking leave of General Vandegrift, Krulak was told, "I desire an immediate and credible appearance of a large force. Take immediate action. Get ashore where there are no Japs."<sup>127</sup>

On his return to Vella Lavella, Krulak summoned his company commanders and staff, showed them the orders, and gave detailed instructions for the operation. For the next four days officers and men labored to assemble equipment, make final plans, and digest all available information. Study of the area was facilitated by the arrival of Seton, who had been taken out of Choiseul by PBY on 24 October. To facilitate loading, arms, ammunition, and supplies were placed on the beach in four individual stacks. Eight LCM's were borrowed from the Vella Lavella boat pool, and arrangements were made to have these proceed to the battalion's beach in separate pairs.<sup>128</sup> Since Japanese planes were active daily at this time, embarkation was set for dusk.

Late in the afternoon of 27 October, Marines of the Parachute Battalion loaded one-half of their equipment and supplies into their borrowed LCM's and at 1080, when the APD's *Kilty*, *Ward*, *Crosby*, and *McKean*<sup>129</sup> lay to off the mouth of the Juno River, the LCM's were promptly brought alongside. As a result of detailed planning, and by dint of hard work on the part of all hands, the 725 men of the battalion, with all equipment and supplies, embarked in 45 minutes.<sup>130</sup>

With the destroyer *Conway* acting as escort, the convoy sailed at 1921, and proceeded in

<sup>127</sup> Krulak then went to the airstrip to wait for the plane to take him back to Vella Lavella. While waiting he wrote the Battalion Operation Order.

<sup>128</sup> This was done so as not to alert the enemy, who conducted daily air patrols over the Vella Lavella area.

<sup>129</sup> Transport Division 22, which, under command of Commander Robert H. Wilkinson, USN (with his flag in the *Kilty*), had just participated in the Treasury Islands Landings.

<sup>130</sup> COMTRANSDIV 12 AR, 4; 2d Para Bn Opn O 1-43; *Combat Narratives*, 24-25. See also Krulak Interrogation.

column through dark night and over calm sea.<sup>131</sup> At 2310 a single enemy plane dropped a bomb near the rearmost APD in the column. The force of the explosion caused the ship to shudder and shake. A young Marine standing near the ship's rail, thinking as did many other Marines aboard that the ship's guns were firing, asked, "What are they shooting at?" "My boy," answered one of the battalion's officers, "you have just been bombed."<sup>132</sup>

At a point about 2,000 yards off the southwest coast of Choiseul, near the little village of Voza which lay behind an islet known as Zinoa, the convoy hove to, while the *Conway* took up a patrol station about 3,000 yards to seaward. In accordance with the battalion operation plan, a boat with a reconnaissance party under First Lieutenant Rea E. Duncan went ashore at 2352, followed at 0019 by the first wave of the landing force (Company F).<sup>133</sup>

A night fighter had been assigned to the force, but remained at so high an altitude that it was unable to intercept either the first air attack or the Japanese twin-float plane (a Jake) which crossed over the *Conway* at an altitude of about 200 feet, dropping two bombs which exploded off the port quarter at about 0145. The enemy plane did not renew its attack, and the destroyer did not take it under fire because, as was duly reported—

(1) it was thought at first to be our night fighter until bombs were dropped and it was very close aboard, (2) the proximity of TransDiv 22 which was dead in the water and evidently undiscovered and (3) another close-in attack was not made on this vessel.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>131</sup> USS CONWAY AR, 27-28 Oct 43, 1, 5-6; *Combat Narratives*, 24. Commander J. H. Pahl, USN, commanded the convoy; LtComdr Harold G. Bowen, Jr., USN, was captain of the *Conway*.

<sup>132</sup> Bigger Interrogation. During the trip Seton was in constant radio communication with his colleague, the District Officer for Choiseul, Nick Waddell.

<sup>133</sup> *Conway* AR, 6 and Krulak Interrogation. Duncan's patrol was to scout the beach and guide the battalion ashore by light signal if the beach were clear. Should the patrol encounter enemy, the battalion planned to go ashore one mile to the southeast. Companies F and G were ordered into landing boats while Duncan was on the beach, and headed shoreward as soon as the signal had been received. Since Company G was to have formed the first wave (according to the battalion operation order), this new situation constituted an on-the-spot change of plan.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, see especially paragraph 15 and the log enclosed.

At 0120 the battalion, with the bulk of its supplies and equipment, was ashore. By 0209 the convoy was ready to retire, leaving behind four LCP(R)'s with Navy crews for the Battalion's use.<sup>135</sup>

With the aid of some 80 native bearers under Seton's direction,<sup>136</sup> the Marines moved off the beach into the jungle to the rear thereof. At 0600 a base of operations was established on a high jungle plateau about a mile to the northwest of Voza, and outposts were set up on the beach north and south of the village.<sup>137</sup>

During initial establishment of the beachhead, enemy reconnaissance planes discovered the landing and bombed the area without effect. This reconnaissance was repeated after daylight—apparently without success due to a combination of factors. In the first place, troops and supplies were well dispersed and camouflage discipline was exercised; second, a dummy beach was set up quite some distance away from the actual location of our force; third, after all supplies and equipment were ashore and the transports departed, natives carefully obliterated every sign of a landing by brushing out the very footprints in the sand.<sup>138</sup>

During the night of 28 October, Japanese planes strafed the Marine boat-hideout at Zinoa Island on two occasions, but were unsuccessful in causing damage.<sup>139</sup>

The natives immediately confirmed IMAC intelligence reports that the nearest enemy installations were a barge staging and replenishing base at Sangigai, about eight miles to the south, and a defensive outpost for the Choiseul Bay area at the Warrior River, about 12 miles to the

<sup>135</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 13.

<sup>136</sup> Seton, accompanied by his personal servants, Petacari and Petanui, had joined the battalion at Vella Lavella on 24 October at 1200. The native bearers were not at Voza when the battalion landed. Seton, therefore, moved out in the pitch black night, found them and led them to the beach.

<sup>137</sup> Krulak Interrogation. This area had been previously selected as the camp site. Here a stream runs around three sides of a sheer cliff—a very defensible place.

<sup>138</sup> 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 28 Oct 43; Bigger Interrogation; Krulak Interrogation.

<sup>139</sup> 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 28-29 Oct 43; Bigger Interrogation; Krulak Interrogation; 2d Para Bn War Diary, 28 Oct 43.

north. Nevertheless, confirmatory reconnaissance patrols were dispatched to the north and south at 0630 on the morning of 29 October and again the following day. Reports of these patrols verified the information on hand. In the meantime, however, Seton's scouts reported that the Japanese to the north were withdrawing behind the Warrior River.<sup>140</sup>

In order to locate the PT boat base-site as ordered, a Navy officer (Lt. (jg) Keresey) who had been assigned to the battalion to make tentative selection, accompanied an overland patrol to Moli Point. No suitable area was located.<sup>141</sup>

On the same day a reconnaissance patrol moved southward with the dual intention of further apprising the Japanese of our presence on Choiseul, and of gaining information for use in planning an attack on Sangigai. This patrol, led by Lieutenant Colonel Krulak, consisted of Major Tolson A. Smoak (Operations Officer of the battalion), 17 enlisted men, and several native guides. Just short of Vagara River, Krulak directed four Marines, led by Platoon Sergeant Frank J. Muller, and four natives, to move inland, take up positions in the hills behind Sangigai, and there make sketches of the area. He further directed Muller to calculate time and space factors involved in a move over the reconnoitered route. The remainder of the patrol continued onward along the beach. As the latter group approached the mouth of the Vagara River, the party discovered a detachment of about ten Japanese unloading a landing barge. This appeared to be an excellent opportunity of apprising the enemy of the presence of Marines on the island. Accordingly, the Marines, unobserved by the enemy, took up firing positions and selected targets. At Krulak's signal, each man opened fire. In less than a minute no enemy were left on the scene, and the barge was sinking. Before the Marines returned to their base camp, they counted seven Japanese on the beach.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>140</sup> 2d Para Bn Opns Map; Krulak Interrogation; CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 14; 2d Para Bn Unit Journal 28-29 Oct 43.

<sup>141</sup> 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 28, 29, 30 Oct 43; Bigger Interrogation; Krulak Interrogation.

<sup>142</sup> 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 29 Oct 43; 2d Para Bn War Diary, 29 Oct 43; Krulak Ltr 5 Nov 43.

In the meantime, Sergeant Muller's detachment, reconnoitering Sangigai, had worked its way into position. Complete and accurate field sketches were made of the area, and a detailed calculation of time and space factors were submitted upon return to the base.<sup>143</sup>

At dusk the same day, a squad of Marines under Sergeant Norman F. Law, Company F, proceeded southward to locate a position in the vicinity of Vagara River from which to signal ashore the LCP(R)'s bearing the force which was to strike Sangigai the next day. This patrol was also to serve as an advance guard, and to set up an ambush for any Japanese patrols which might have been dispatched as a result of the action at Vagara River on the preceding day. When Law's group had cleared our lines by some 2000 yards, it ran head-on into just such a patrol proceeding toward the Marine positions. Firing broke out immediately and the Japanese retired. When the fight was over, Law attempted to locate his men, but could find only two. These three then returned to our lines and reported to Krulak.<sup>144</sup>

An attack on Sangigai had been under consideration as early as 22 October when first plans for the Choiseul diversion were being made. Krulak laid final plans for this attack following his patrol of 29 October, and requested an airstrike for dawn the next day on located enemy positions about one-quarter mile northwest of Sangigai. At 0610, 30 October, 12 TBF's and 26 fighters dropped about two tons of bombs.<sup>145</sup>

The primary purpose of the Marine attack on Sangigai was to make the Japanese believe that Americans were present on the island in force, while the secondary mission was to destroy the local base facilities and disrupt the regular barge route built up along the coast of Choiseul by the enemy, and which depended in considerable measure on Sangigai as a replenishing point.<sup>146</sup>

Although it was estimated that 150 Japanese

<sup>143</sup> Krulak Interrogation. To the work of this patrol LtCol Krulak attributes a large share of credit for the success of the Sangigai attack.

<sup>144</sup> Krulak Ltr 5 Nov; Krulak Interrogation.

<sup>145</sup> 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 28 Oct 43; *Combat Narratives*, 78.

<sup>146</sup> 2d Para Bn War Diary, 29, 30 Oct 43.

# THE SANGIGAI RAID

30 OCT, 1943

Marine attacks and maneuvers

Kruiak's command post

Rocket-section firing-position

Enveloping movement by main body

2d Para Bn

Enemy positions

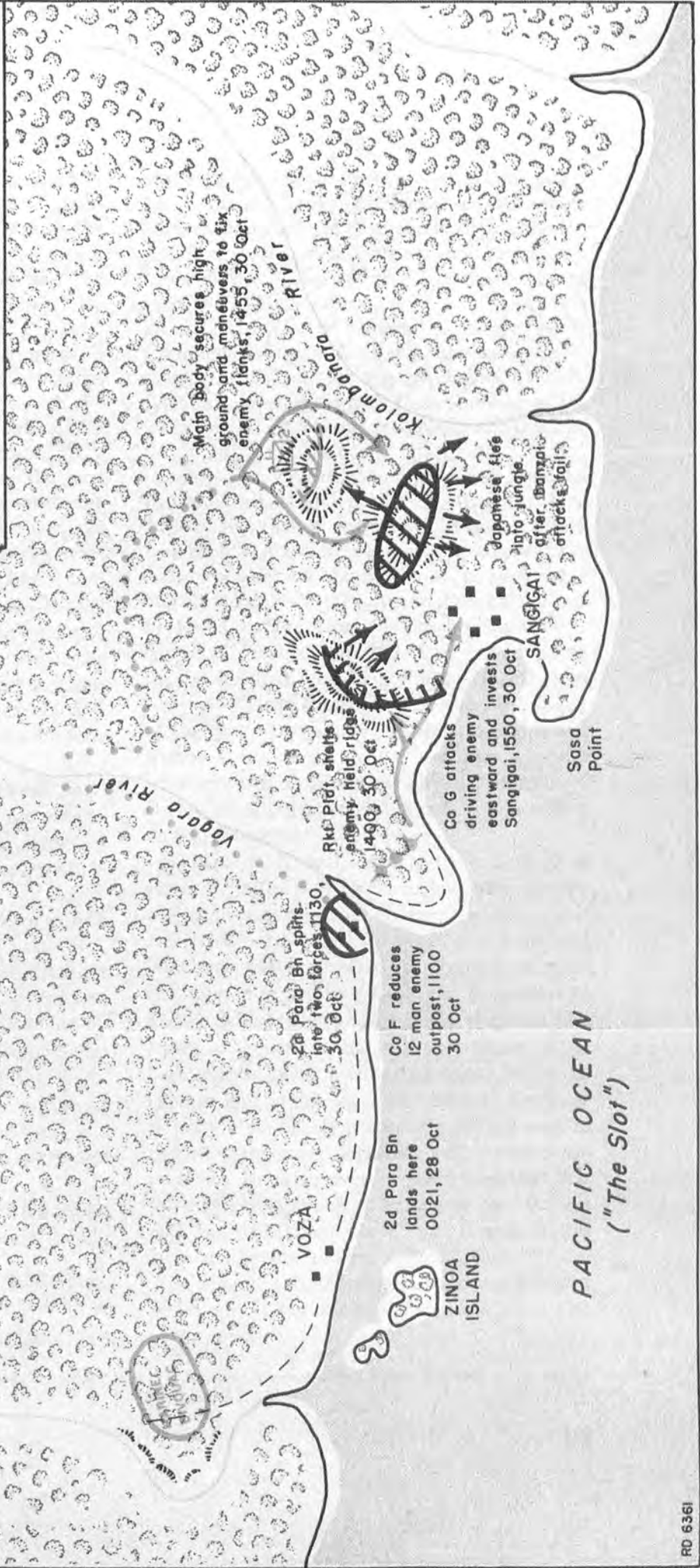
Japanese banzai attack



3000 0 3000 Yds

Approximate Scale

MAP 25



were based at Sangigai, and the coastwatchers had warned that the enemy could—and probably would—reinforce the area shortly from the southeast, Krulak decided to launch the attack nevertheless, for he realized that he had “to make credible appearance of a large force.” He therefore issued the attack order.

About 0400, the battalion (less Company G and small headquarters detachments) left camp. As it entered Voza contact was made with the remainder of Sergeant Law’s squad—which had spent the night in Voza village outpost. Since this group has suffered no casualties, the men rejoined the battalion. Moving to the beach, the force waited for landing boats to move it to the vicinity of the Vagara River. Before the craft could leave the boat pool on Zinoa Island and join the Marines, several Allied planes strafed them, damaging one boat. One of the Marines, however, had an American flag which he promptly displayed. Upon recognizing their error, the fliers “buzzed” our force and executed a “thumbs-up”. Fortunately no Marines were hurt in this encounter.<sup>147</sup>

Due to disablement of the landing boat, however, it became necessary to abandon the plan to move afloat to the Vagara River. An order of march was therefore made on the spot. Company F (Captain Spencer H. Pratt), with a section of regimental machine-guns and a section of an Experimental Rocket Platoon<sup>148</sup> attached, led the advance while Company E (Captain Robert R. Manchester), and remaining attached units followed. The entire force, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Krulak, was guided by Seton and two native scouts.<sup>149</sup> At about 1100, Company F hit Japanese outposts in the vicinity of the Vagara River. After a short fire-fight, the enemy withdrew into their main base at Sangigai.

At this point Krulak put into effect his attack plan. In essence this was a small-scale double

<sup>147</sup> Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Interrogation of Major Spencer H. Pratt at HQMC, 13 Oct 47.

<sup>148</sup> This platoon, a part of Corps Troops, IMAC, had been attached to the battalion for the operation.

<sup>149</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 157–159; Krulak Interrogation; Pratt Interrogation.

envelopment. Company E would proceed down the coast and launch an attack on the village from the north, while the remainder of the force would circle inland around Sangigai and attack from the east.<sup>150</sup> As ordered, Company F moved to the left front (inland) and headed for high ground immediately behind the village, while Company E continued down the coast. Movement was difficult for the enveloping column. Its route, passing through the mountainous interior of the island, encountered numerous fast flowing streams and heavy rain forest. Weighed down by heavy rocket ammunition and impeded by trailing lines and slippery footing, the Marines inched their way forward. H-hour (1400) was rapidly approaching, and the column was still a considerable distance from its designated assault position. At the appointed time there was no sound of firing from the beach column. This disturbed Krulak, who therefore moved up to the point; there he found Pratt, evidently also worried. Shortly thereafter, however, the sound of Company E’s rockets reached the group, and within a few moments the two native guides who were with the point signaled the presence of enemy ahead, although Company F was almost an hour away from its objective.

Company E had launched an attack as planned, initially firing its rockets and mortars into Japanese positions on high ground about 500 yards northwest of Sangigai. A few minutes later the company entered the enemy base without opposition and found that the Japanese had hastily withdrawn toward their prepared defenses in the mountains to the northeast of the base, either in an attempt to flank the beach column and attack its open (inland) flank, or to occupy previously prepared positions sited to defend Sangigai’s northern and eastern approaches. In either event it later developed that this movement brought the enemy face to face with our enveloping force, and it was at this moment that the natives sighted enemy.<sup>151</sup>

At about 1430, therefore, a vigorous fire-fight broke out and continued almost an hour. The

<sup>150</sup> MCS, AWS, SC-97, L, IP, 15.

<sup>151</sup> Krulak Interrogation; Pratt Interrogation; Krulak ltr 5 Nov 43.

enemy had reached the vicinity of their positions, and immediately began to occupy them. Some Japanese riflemen climbed trees; others fired from rifle pits and bunkers built among the roots of banyan trees. As soon as the extent of the enemy position was determined Krulak ordered Pratt to attempt an envelopment of the enemy left. For this purpose Pratt dispatched the 2d Platoon (Lt. W. E. King). Its movement was supported by the attached regimental machine-gun platoon which had worked two guns forward, and placed them in immediate operation.<sup>152</sup> The enveloping attack met with some success, and the Japs were forced either to abandon their forward positions or be trapped in them. During this phase of the fighting both Colonel Krulak and Captain Pratt were wounded. After having been driven back about 150 yards, the Japanese undertook two "Banzai" rushes, which, though they penetrated the Marine positions, resulted in great loss. Immediately thereafter the 3d Platoon Co F (Lt. W. F. Naylor) was directed to move around the enemy right flank and prevent any further withdrawal. This was generally successful, although about 40 survivors were observed running southward in most non-Samurai fashion.<sup>153</sup> A final count showed 72 enemy bodies after the fight.

In the meantime, Company E had occupied Sangigai. Utilizing demolitions, Manchester's men completely destroyed the base, with all supplies stored there, sank a new barge, and captured a number of important Japanese documents in the local headquarters, among them highly important charts of the minefield and barge routes in the Bougainville-Choiseul area.<sup>154</sup>

Upon completing Sangigai's destruction, Company E retired to the Vagara River where it

boarded our landing boats (now again all operational) and returned to Voza.

After the enemy had broken off the fighting north of Sangigai late that afternoon, Company F buried its dead, and excess rocket ammunition, and retired along its route of approach to the Vagara River mouth, where Krulak deduced the homeward movement of Company E.

Krulak then decided to remain where he was for the night, because it was already dark. The Vagara area was defensible, and the troops, having moved some 12 miles through the jungle and fought a sharp battle, were fatigued. Furthermore, with him were 12 men wounded in the fighting—two seriously—who needed immediate attention. Therefore the troops dug in, while base camp was contacted by radio and arrangements made for the boats to return the next morning to pick up the remainder of the Sangigai force.<sup>155</sup> The night passed without event. Shortly after dawn the boats arrived as requested and by 0730 31 October the entire battalion was again re-assembled at the Voza base. The six dead Marines who had been buried west of Sangigai were later exhumed by the natives and reburied on the beach near Vagara.

At 1500, 1 November, a Dumbo plane landed near the beachhead at Voza and evacuated the wounded men. The pilot of this plane was made an officer-messenger and the charts, captured at Sangigai, were entrusted to him for delivery to Admiral Halsey.<sup>156</sup>

Immediately following the return of the Sangigai force on 31 October, patrols were dispatched and ambushes erected to thwart the almost certain Japanese counteraction. Meanwhile a reconnaissance patrol from Company G, led by Major Warner T. Bigger (Battalion Executive Officer), moved via boat as far north as Nukiki, but encountered no enemy in that direction. Natives reported, however, that not only were there installations to the north, but also that immediately after the fight to the south—at Sangigai—the Japanese had begun to re-occupy the village. This latter report was apparently confirmed by virtue of several brisk patrol actions fought on

<sup>152</sup> Krulak Interrogation. The man carrying one tripod was hit and the tripod lost. The gunner, however, held his weapon in his arms and fired it "movie style."

<sup>153</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 157-159; Pratt Interrogation; Krulak Interrogation; Krulak ltr. 2 Nov 43.

<sup>154</sup> Krulak ltr 5 Nov; Krulak Interrogation. These charts were deemed highly important by Admiral Halsey, who directed that the minefield information contained thereon be radioed to him immediately since the Empress Augusta Bay convoy had already put to sea. Several days later, coastwatchers in the Shortlands area reported the sinking of two Japanese ships in the midst of their own channels, which Halsey had mined based on information contained in this chart.

<sup>155</sup> 2d Para Bn War Diary, 31 Oct 43.

<sup>156</sup> Pratt Interrogation.



1 November and the fact that Marine ambushes were successful in trapping and killing a number of enemy, particularly in the vicinity of Vagara.<sup>157</sup>

Since rice for the natives was running low, and the supply of hand grenades and demolitions was below the minimum required for combat, the battalion now requested resupply by air drop. This was accomplished on 1 November with the dropping of 250 hand grenades, 500 pounds of TNT, and 1,000 pounds of rice.<sup>158</sup>

Following the negative report of Major Bigger's patrol the day before, a force commanded by Bigger and consisting of 87 Marines—mainly from Company G plus several from Headquarters Company—and two natives, was dispatched on 1 November to Nukiki in two boats. This force was instructed to proceed from Nukiki to the northwest side of the Warrior River, destroying enemy troops and installations along the way and, if possible, to come within bombardment range of the Japanese base in the vicinity of Choiseul Bay in order that this locality could be shelled with 60mm mortars. If the base at Choiseul Bay could not be shelled, then Guppy Island, south of the Bay, was to be used as an alternate target.<sup>159</sup>

The attack proceeded generally as planned.

The Company G patrol moved into the mouth of the Warrior River, which according to available hydrographic information was deep enough for small schooners. To his surprise, however, Bigger found that the boats continually grounded and the coxswains were forced to gun the motors. Because it was impossible to hide the craft in the river mouth as had been planned, troops were disembarked and the boats were sent back to a cove near Nukiki to be hidden. The patrol now felt sure that the Japanese were aware of its presence, because of the noise made by the motors when the landing craft had grounded.

Landing on the east bank of the Warrior, Bigger ordered his radio set up and communi-

cations established with base camp. All excess gear, including demolitions, was cached near the radio, and a detachment of four men guarded it. After mortar ammunition was distributed among all the troops, Company G set out along the river toward its objective. By mid-afternoon Bigger realized that the natives guiding the patrol were hopelessly lost, so he decided to bivouac in the middle of a swamp for the night.<sup>160</sup> Having made this decision, he sent First Lieutenant Rea E. Duncan and a squad of men back along the route of approach to the base on the point at the Warrior River mouth, in order to radio information concerning the day's activities to Krulak, and to direct the boats to return to Voza for the night. In the meantime, a native, acquainted with the Choiseul Bay region, reported to Seton. Seton, of course, realized that Bigger's native guides were unfamiliar with the area, so he in turn sent the new man to contact and assist the patrol.

Duncan made his way back to the mouth of the Warrior, over tortuous trails, where, upon arrival, he set up a bivouac for the night.

Upon waking in the morning, Duncan discovered, to his consternation, that the enemy had moved in behind the main body of his patrol, and that he, the cache and the TBX radio had been surrounded. Duncan and his squad slipped through the enemy and made their way back to Nukiki, where they embarked in the boats. Upon arrival at Voza, he informed battalion of Major Bigger's plight. Upon receiving this information, Lieutenant Colonel Krulak requested that fighter support and PT boat cover be given to the boats engaged in the withdrawal of the force from the Nukiki area.

During all this, Major Bigger was unaware

<sup>157</sup> 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 31 Oct 43.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Oct-1 Nov; LtCol Krulak reports that this mission was performed so accurately that nothing was lost in the drop and that all containers and parachutes were returned when the battalion reached Vella Lavella.

<sup>159</sup> Krulak ltr 5 Nov 43; Bigger Interrogation.

<sup>160</sup> In all fairness to the natives, it should be said here that Choiseul is divided into compartments by spurs jutting out toward the coast from the main mountain range running along the entire length of the island. Natives seldom leave their individual compartments, so know little or nothing of the terrain in other areas of their island. Only two natives, familiar with the Choiseul Bay area, were attached to the battalion for this operation. Of these one had been injured in an accident and the other was out on another mission when Bigger's unit left camp. Consequently, the guides that Bigger had with him were unacquainted with the Choiseul Bay region.

that Japanese were behind him. On the next morning (2 November), Major Bigger—oblivious of the situation in his rear—set out again for Choiseul Bay. The native sent by Seton joined shortly thereafter. Upon reaching the coast, Bigger sent Sergeant Rahland Wilson, Corporal Winston Gallaher, and several other men back to the Warrior River mouth by way of the coast to have the TBX radio instruct the boats to proceed westward from the river mouth to meet and pick up the patrol that afternoon. This group also discovered the presence of enemy and had in turn to fight its way through to Nukiki (losing one man, Corporal Gallaher) where, late that afternoon, it met Duncan's group, returning in boats from Voza—en route to the Warrior River area.

The remainder of Bigger's patrol followed the new guide to the coast, which, they discovered, was only a short distance away, and proceeded up the coast toward Choiseul Bay. Just as the southern tip of Redman Island (the southernmost island in the chain stretching across the front of Choiseul Bay) came in sight, an outpost of four Japanese was sighted. A short burst of fire killed three immediately, while the fourth fled into the jungle. The patrol now pushed on hurriedly, and it soon became evident that the jungle was thinning and that detection was therefore probable.

Major Bigger accordingly decided to execute his alternate mission and shell Guppy Island, the barge replenishing-center and fuel base for the Choiseul Bay area. Overhanging vegetation, however, extended to the water's edge. It was necessary, therefore, to set up the mortars in the sea with only their muzzles protruding from the water's surface. The shelling was accordingly accomplished as ordered, with 120 rounds of high explosive shell,<sup>161</sup> and large fires were observed to have been started, one of which was obviously a fuel dump.

Return to the mouth of the Warrior River was uneventful. Upon arriving on the west bank, and after establishing local security, Major Bigger gave permission to several men to go in the water to bathe. These had entered the water

and had proceeded no farther than 15 to 20 yards from shore, when they were fired on by Japanese who were then upstream on the same bank of the river. This was the first indication to Bigger of enemy in the vicinity.

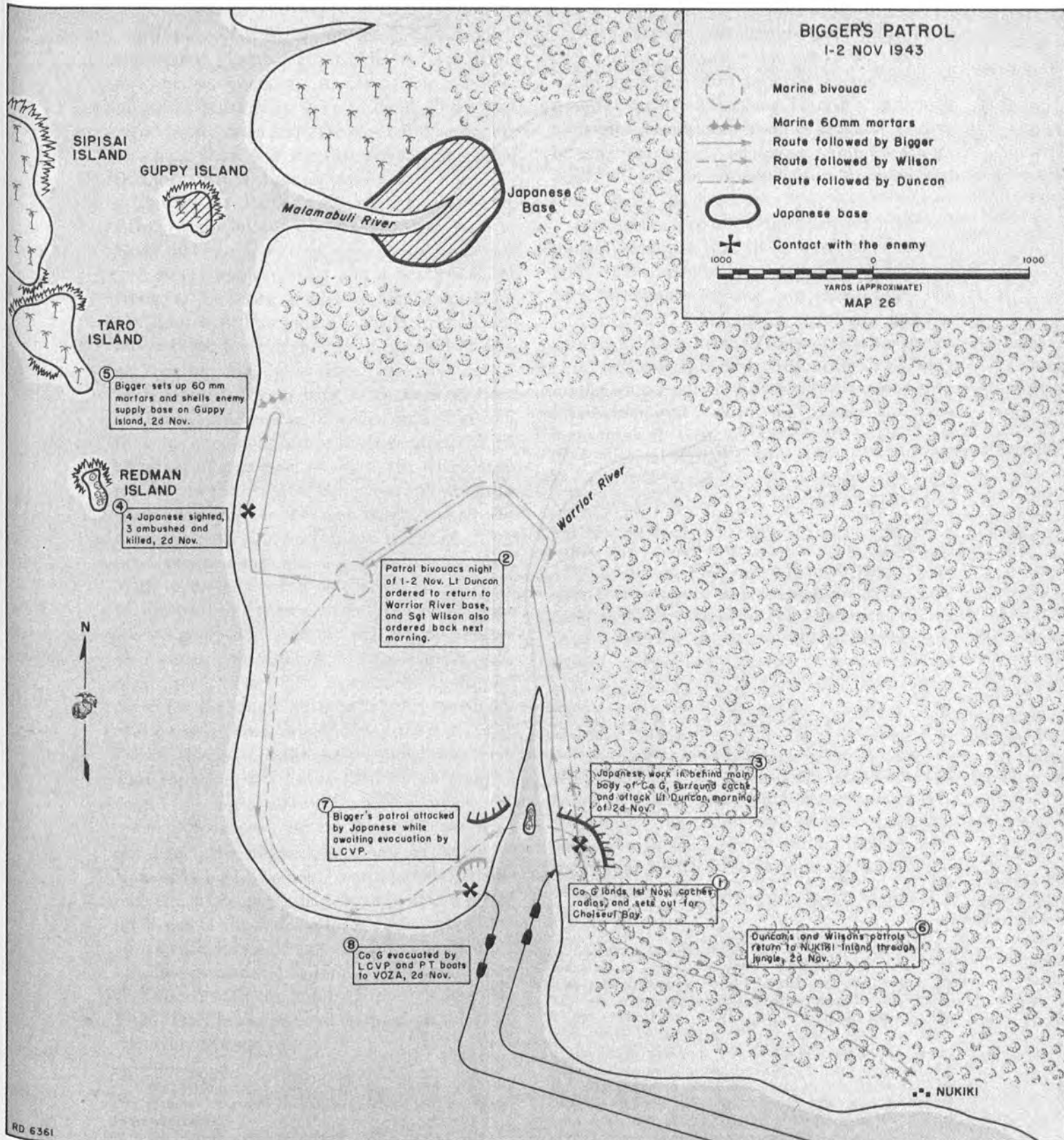
The Japanese closed on the Marines. A fire-fight broke out, in which no Marine casualties resulted, while the enemy withdrew leaving behind a number of dead. Now believing that it would not be feasible to land boats in the river itself, Major Bigger sent First Lieutenant Samuel M. Johnston, Platoon Sergeant Frank J. Muller, and Private Paul Pare across the river to the east bank (where Duncan's patrol was believed to be located), with the mission of bringing the boats to the east bank when they arrived. Just as the three men reached the east bank of the river they were fired on by Japanese on that bank, one of the men (Platoon Sergeant Muller) being killed instantly, and Johnston being wounded. Pare, who fortunately was not quite so strong a swimmer and had not reached the east bank was able to escape and return to the west bank, but before he made his way back, he observed two Japanese running out in the water and capturing the injured Johnston. Muller's body sank beneath the water; Johnston's body was found later and buried by the Coast-watchers.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>162</sup> There appears to be some element of doubt concerning this particular incident. An officer in a position to know (Bigger) says Johnston, Muller, and Pare, volunteered to swim the stream and that the action as described in the text took place. Official records indicate that Johnston swam over alone, contacted Andrew Sivokana (a native of the coastwatcher group), and reconnoitered the Japanese positions. He then proceeded toward Nukiki and en route was confronted suddenly by a party of Japanese to whom he surrendered.

Official records state that Corporal Winston C. Gallaher also was able to swim to the opposite side of the stream. In any event—Johnston and Gallaher were the only Marines who crossed the river and remained on the other side. Lt. Seton reported that two Marine bodies were found on the east side of the river and buried. The only identification available to Seton at the time of the burial was a stenciled GALLA on the jacket worn by one of the bodies. Headquarters, Marine Corps, presumes that this was Gallaher, and since Johnston was the only other Marine known to have crossed the river, the other body must have been that of Johnston, since Muller's body was observed sinking in the water. Sivokana definitely states that Johnston was captured, yet mentions nothing about wounds. At any rate it is apparently safe to assume that one of the bodies later found by Seton's group was that of Johnston. (Records at HQMC).

<sup>161</sup> Krulak letter of 5 November 1943.

**BIGGER'S PATROL**  
1-2 NOV 1943



Believing that the fire on the Johnston detail was from the Duncan group, who had not identified the swimmers, an American flag was displayed by Marines on the west bank. Thereupon vigorous fire came from the east bank wounding one man. This was the first definite indication that the patrol was cut off from Voza.

During the above fire fight, the boats were sighted south of the east bank of the Warrior River.

A storm was gathering and a heavy sea was rising, as the boats, guided by Lieutenant Duncan, approached the mouth of the Warrior. These received the fire that had been directed at Bigger's patrol. The Navy officer in charge of the boats wanted to turn back when fired on from the beach, but Duncan prevailed on him to continue his approach. Marines ashore attracted the attention of personnel in the boats, which then moved toward the west bank, with all available weapons firing on the east bank causing the enemy to cease fire. Surf was so rough when the boats beached that one was seriously damaged. With its motor flooded out, it was being blown in towards the enemy shore. When all hope seemed gone, a PT boat arrived. Marines scrambled aboard, the LCP(R) being scuttled on a coral head. The PT's continued to furnish cover for the surviving boat for the remainder of the trip to Voza, where they arrived at 2130. During this journey the one wounded man died. The Japanese had lost a total of 43 counted dead as a result of all this.<sup>163</sup>

On 1 November, the day Bigger left for Warrior River, the Marines launched an attack on Vagara Village, now held by an aggressive enemy unit which seemingly had become aware of the small size of the Marine force on Choiseul, and appeared determined to cut it off. The Marines (a platoon under Lt. John J. Richards) succeeded in driving this unit back towards Sangigai. Eight dead Japanese were counted on the field, while one Marine was lost.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> All information concerning the patrol described above, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from the Bigger Interrogation.

<sup>164</sup> Krulak letter of 5 November 1943.

Strong combat patrols were therefore sent out the following day, to the northwest and the southeast in an effort to strike enemy columns now apparently advancing in order to launch an attack against our forces. Japanese patrols became increasingly aggressive. Ambushes were prepared, and one succeeded on trapping and killing three Japanese.

Intelligence reports from coastwatchers and natives indicated that there were between 800 and 1000 Japanese at Sangigai and some at Moli with more moving into that locality. By late afternoon, 3 November, the enemy had advanced to the general vicinity of Kuluni in the north and to within 500 yards southeast of Voza in the south. After analysing the accumulated information and realizing that mission had been accomplished, General Vandegrift ordered the 2d Parachute Battalion to withdraw during the night of 3-4 November. In order to defend the beachhead selected for the scheduled withdrawal, the raiding forces began to install mine fields and booby-traps. Two fields, including 1100 pounds of TNT and 243 booby-traps, were laid. During hours of darkness prior to the time scheduled for arrival of the evacuating LCI's these protective measures became audibly apparent to the raiding force. It was presumed that customary enemy infiltration was taking place, somewhat hampered in this instance by the placed charges.<sup>165</sup> Three LCI's under Commander James McD. Smith, USN, beached at about midnight of 3 November; reembarkation of troops and supplies, which began about 0138, was uneventful.<sup>166</sup> All supplies and equipment were brought back by the raiding force excepting rations, which were given to the faithful native carriers, who had done a magnificent job

<sup>165</sup> Krulak letter of 5 November 1943.

<sup>166</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 24, 79. One of the most amusing incidents of the entire action took place at this time. The sailors, having been informed previously that the Marines were being hard pressed, assumed that the evacuation would take place under fire. Consequently the crews were armed with rifles and standing at the ready as the ships beached. When the Marines began to reembark their equipment, the sailors became quite excited, for they expected to be attacked at any moment. The Marines ignored their comrades in arms and proceeded with their task of loading the gear much to the disgust of the seamen. (Bigger Interrogation.)

for the force. Embarkation was completed in 12 minutes, and the battalion was returned to Vella Lavella by 0730, 4 November 1943.<sup>167</sup>

The Battalion accomplished its mission in a highly satisfactory manner.<sup>168</sup> Since operations had been conducted on a wide front (25 miles), and since COMSOPAC had issued a communique which indicated the landing of a larger force, the Japanese command, it appears, thought that a strong American move was underway in the Choiseul area.<sup>169</sup> Further it was definitely ascertained that about 180 tons of supplies had been destroyed at Sangigai, to say nothing of the undetermined destruction wrought by the shelling of Guppy Island. Two barges were sunk and the permanent buildings at Sangigai were burned. Immensely valuable minefield charts of the Shortland area were captured at Sangigai. In addition, the battalion disrupted the barge withdrawal of Kolombangara refugees along the coast of Choiseul, by cutting the overland routes from the southeast to the Choiseul Bay embarkation point.<sup>170</sup>

Our losses in this campaign were nine killed, 14 wounded, and two missing (later declared dead).<sup>171</sup> A minimum of 143 Japanese dead were counted, while others probably died unobserved.<sup>172</sup>

Most important of all, however, Japanese forces had gathered to counter a supposed Allied effort on Choiseul, while in fact the Northern

Attack Force had landed at Cape Torokina to strike an enemy now off-balance.

## A STEP UPWARD—GREEN ISLAND

After establishing the Bougainville beachhead, Admiral Halsey took under consideration the additional steps designed to complete the conquest of the Northern Solomons for containment of Rabaul. At that time the Joint Chiefs of Staff plans indicated that the next move for South Pacific forces would be the neutralization of Kavieng, a Japanese stronghold on New Ireland in the Bismarcks.<sup>173</sup>

Prospective operations in the Central Pacific, namely, those in the Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas, however, appeared to preclude the availability of necessary fleet support for any such proposed landing until approximately 1 May 1944.

Obviously, provision for shore-based fighter cover over the Kavieng area and for shore-based air strikes preliminary to an amphibious assault was highly desirable. To this end, intermediate targets were sought which would offer suitable sites for the required landing-strips. By the same token, the objective finally selected would have to fall within the range of planes flying from our most advanced airstrip—Torokina—in order that a continuous land-based fighter cover could be maintained over the beachhead as well as the supply lines. This requirement was rendered essential because of the non-availability of carrier air-support.<sup>174</sup>

On 20 December 1943, therefore, at a conference between members of Admiral Halsey's staff<sup>175</sup> and General MacArthur, it was suggested that the Green Islands be seized first, and, later on, islands of the St. Matthias Group. At

<sup>167</sup> Krulak Letter of 5 November 1943. Removal of equipment was complete except for ammunition of the rocket detachment, which was left ashore. This ammunition was found by Mr. Seton after departure of the battalion, and he dumped it into the sea so that it would not be captured by the Japanese.

<sup>168</sup> CTF-31 *Opn Rpt*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> Krulak Interrogation.

<sup>170</sup> Combat Narratives, 24.

<sup>171</sup> The muster rolls of the battalion indicate that nine men were killed in action, 12 were wounded in action, and five were missing. Of those missing, four were later indicated as missing, believed dead, and one (1stLt Samuel Johnston) as missing, believed a prisoner of war. *Combat Narratives*, 24, states our losses thus: nine killed, 15 wounded, two missing—one of whom was captured.

<sup>172</sup> Krulak letter of 5 November 1943; Muster rolls of 2d Para Bn for October, November, and December, 1943; Muster Rolls of Prisoner of War Detachment for October, November, and December, 1943 and January and February, 1944

<sup>173</sup> JCS, *Elkton III*, 1-5.

<sup>174</sup> 3d AmphFor, Seizure and Occupation of Green Islands, 15 Feb to 15 Mar 44, FE25/A16-3(3) over 00176, dated 24 March 1944, p 1-2. Hereinafter cited as 3d AmphFor Green AR.

<sup>175</sup> Rear Admiral Robert B. Carney, USN, Commander H. Douglas Moulton, USN, Colonel William E. Riley, and Captain W. F. Riggs, USN. The conference was held at Port Moresby.

this time, MacArthur made it clear that he did not intend to take Manus Island (one of his next primary objectives), until such time as the South Pacific was prepared to undertake operations against Kavieng or the St. Matthias Group.<sup>176</sup> In view of the fact that a delay in launching either of these was imminent, MacArthur suggested that Admiral Halsey land in the Green Islands or engage in any offensive move that he saw fit.

When informed of MacArthur's proposal, Admiral Halsey sent the following letter to Admiral Fitch, Admiral Wilkinson, and General Geiger:

As you already know, present estimates indicate the FOREARM [Kavieng] operations cannot start much before 1 May 1944 due to inability of Cincpac to make available to us the necessary Fleet support. This delay in the execution of FOREARM will work more to the advantage of the Jap bastards than to us as it gives them an additional two months in which they can strengthen their defenses.

As an alternate plan, I am entertaining the thought that we can accomplish our mission of denying Kavieng as well as other Jap installations in the South thereof by occupying one or more of the islands in the St. Matthias Group. Of course, it is readily apparent that such occupation cannot be initiated until such time as Cincpac can make certain required Fleet support available to us. Simultaneously with our occupation of these islands, the Southwest Pacific Force should occupy MERCANTILE [Manus].

In the meantime, I want to occupy one of the islands to the north of Buka, from which PT boats can operate against the Bougainville supply line and from which air can operate against Kavieng. Green Island appears to provide these requirements. This operation should not require much more than a reinforced regiment and possibly two CB Battalions plus 1 Acorn. It might be advisable to employ a portion of the New Zealand Division, staging either from Treasury or possibly from Vella Lavella.<sup>177</sup>

To some officers, substitution of the St. Matthias Group as an alternate objective for the principal effort appeared of little value with respect to the isolation of Kavieng and Rabaul. Furthermore, they believed it doubtful that fighters stationed at a base in the Green Islands would be able to cover Kavieng. Admiral Wilkinson, therefore, with the concurrence of Admiral Fitch and General Geiger, suggested that the proposal be abandoned, and that plans be

<sup>176</sup> Memorandum for Admiral Halsey from Admiral Carney, dated 21 December 1943.

<sup>177</sup> Letter, Halsey to Wilkinson, dated 22 Dec 43.

laid for a landing either at Borpop or Boang Island.<sup>178</sup>

On 28 December, however, after analysing the situation, Colonel William E. Riley, Admiral Halsey's War Plans officer, made the following observation:

There is no doubt but that the occupation of this area [Borpop] and the utilization of air facilities thereat would assist materially in the neutralization of both Rabaul and Kavieng. However, the grave possibility that such an operation would result in the employment of approximately two divisions and additional naval support, not now available and will—in all probability—not be made available in time for this type intermediate operation, makes it necessary to eliminate Borpop as a possible intermediate operation.<sup>179</sup>

Colonel Riley went on to point out that a fighter umbrella could be thrown over Green during a landing, an accomplishment impossible in regard to Boang. Furthermore, he said:

Though Green Island is not as far advanced as Boang Island, yet it is quite possible to provide fighter cover for strikes on Kavieng. In addition, dive bombers, based on Green Island can operate most effectively against shipping at Kavieng.<sup>180</sup>

After weighing the advantages against the disadvantages of each proposed operation, and after taking into consideration his concept of a future landing in the St. Matthias Islands, Admiral Halsey decided to follow Colonel Riley's recommendation, and directed that plans be made for an attack on Green Island.

Situated northwest of Buka Island and only 117 miles directly east of Rabaul, the Green Islands constitute a circular atoll about four miles in diameter. In 1943, the Japanese were known to have been using the area as a barge replenishing and staging point. Little else was known of the topography or hydrography of the islands; less of the enemy based there.

To assure a thorough survey despite the presence of the enemy, a reconnaissance in force was ordered. To avoid betraying our intentions, the date of the reconnaissance was set as 31 January

<sup>178</sup> Wilkinson memorandum dated 25 December 1943.

<sup>179</sup> Riley, Memo for Admiral Halsey, 28 December 1943, 2.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. A fact that later became obvious to all was already apparent to Riley: Rabaul-based Japanese air would but sporadically interfere with strikes not aimed at the Rabaul area; consequently, U. S. fighters equipped with wing tanks could fly from Green to Kavieng on a direct line without resorting to fuel-consuming evasive tactics.

1944, the last moment when resultant information would assist in preparation or final attack plans.<sup>181</sup>

Even before the 31 January raid, however, it was necessary to know whether or not landing craft could effect passage of channels entering the lagoon. Accordingly, during the night of 10 January two PT boats conducted a hydrographic reconnaissance of the islands and discovered that the southernmost of the channels was suitable.<sup>182</sup>

On 31 January, therefore, about 300 troops of the 30th New Zealand Battalion,<sup>183</sup> embarked aboard three destroyer-transports, landed and conducted operations ashore for 24 hours. During this period excellent landing beaches and a promising airfield site were discovered.<sup>184</sup>

Just one week previously (24 January), Admiral Halsey had issued his operation order, which set D-day as 15 February and designated the 3d New Zealand Division (less the 8th Brigade), which had until 4 January been under operational control of IMAC,<sup>185</sup> as the attack and garrison force. Admiral Wilkinson, as CTF-31, was placed in overall command,<sup>186</sup> while General Barrowclough was in tactical command of the landing forces.

Provision was made for operation details by subordinate commanders, and by 12 February all was in readiness and ships began loading.<sup>187</sup>

Although successive echelons of the attack group were heckled without result by enemy planes during the approach, the New Zealanders arrived safely at their destination and by 0641, 15 February 1944, landing boats of the APD's crossed the line of departure and headed for the beach.<sup>188</sup>

While the landing craft were making their initial run toward shore, Marine pilots of VMF-212 and VMF-216 patrolled the air overhead.

At 0645 about 15 Japanese dive bombers<sup>189</sup> were sighted approaching to attack the shipping lying just offshore. Without hesitation, the VMF-212 flyers dived through the ships' protective anti-aircraft fire to intercept the enemy. In the ensuing melée First Lieutenant Phillip C. DeLong destroyed three Vals in quick succession, while Captain William C. Carlton, First Lieutenant Theodore J. Horner, and First Lieutenant Thaddeus J. Trojnar each accounted for another. The remaining attackers with bombs still in their racks were driven off by VMF-216. This success was achieved by the Marines without sustaining damage or loss to themselves. For the remainder of the day, 38 F4U fighters from VMF-217, VMF-218, and VMF-222 continued to furnish cover for the landing forces, but no further enemy air opposition ensued.<sup>190</sup>

Meanwhile, assault units landed as planned on beaches inside the lagoon at Pokonian and Tangalan Plantations. Within two hours, 5800 men, with all their supplies and equipment, were ashore. Combat and reconnaissance patrols quickly pushed out, but no resistance, other than slight fire from two enemy barges, was encountered. By nightfall a secure perimeter was established beyond the southern boundaries of the plantations.

The following day, the New Zealanders moved southward from their positions and discovered a small Japanese garrison of about 70 troops near the Catholic mission on the south end of Nissan Island. For the next three days operations continued in the vicinity of the mission, culminating in elimination of the enemy resistance on 19 February. In this area, the New Zealanders captured several 20mm guns, machine-guns, mortars, and large quantities of small arms. Sixty-two dead Japanese were counted, while New Zealand forces sustained a loss of three killed and 11 wounded.<sup>191</sup>

In the meantime other operations continued elsewhere. On 17 February, a small landing party was placed on Sirot Island, from which LCI gunboats had received small arms fire on D-day. A

<sup>181</sup> CTF-31 Opn O 1-44, dated 25Jan44.

<sup>182</sup> 3d AmphFor Green Ar, 4.

<sup>183</sup> Of the 14th NZ Brigade, 3d NZ Division.

<sup>184</sup> Comdesron 45, Action Report, serial 0048, dated 10 February 1944.

<sup>185</sup> The 3d NZ Div (Maj Gen H. E. Barrowclough) was composed of the 8th and 14th Brigade Groups. See Section entitled "Treasury Islands", *supra*. See also note 65, Chapter I, *supra*.

<sup>186</sup> COMSOPAC Opn Plan 5-44, 24 January 1944.

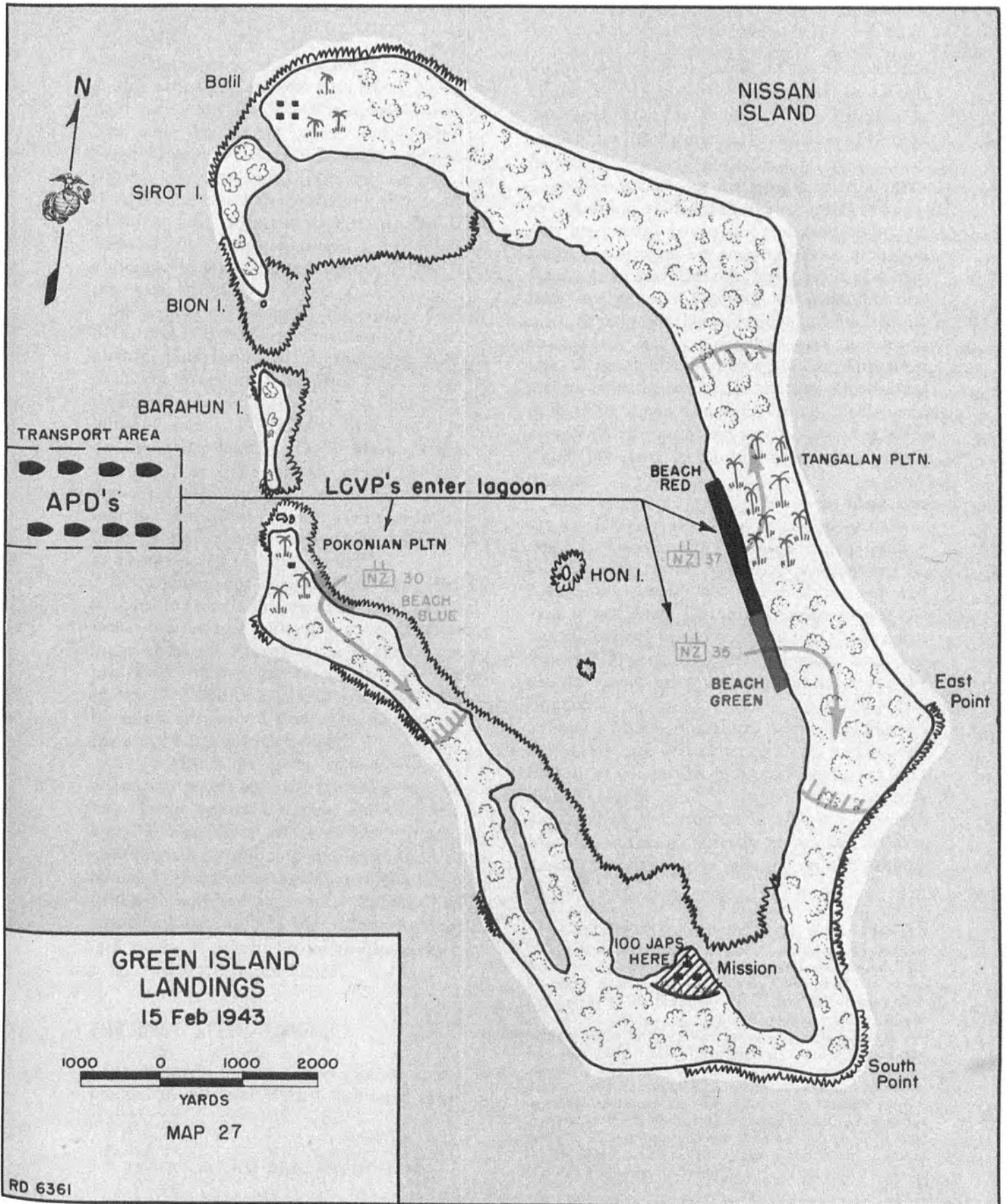
<sup>187</sup> CTF-31 Opn O 2-44, dated 5 February 1944 and 3d NZ Div Opn O 101, dated 4 February 1944.

<sup>188</sup> 3d AmphFor Green AR, 7.

<sup>189</sup> Val type.

<sup>190</sup> Daily Intelligence Summary, COMAIRNORSOLS Fighter Command, 15 February 1944. See also VMF-212 War Diary, 15 February 1944.

<sup>191</sup> 3d AmphFor Green AR, 9.





small enemy group was contacted and in the resulting action 29 Japanese were killed. New Zealand forces lost five killed and four wounded. The same day a boat patrol, sent around the neighboring small island of Pinipel found and destroyed two unmanned Japanese barges. Two days later a patrol discovered 14 enemy on the island of Sau, adjacent to Pinipel, and killed them all. This completed mopping up operations, although for several days afterwards stray Japanese were found.<sup>192</sup>

As combat troops fought the enemy, the 33d, 37th, and 93d Seabees labored to construct an airstrip, tank farms, roads, and other base installation. Work on these projects proceeded so rapidly that by 4 March, only 18 days after the initial assault, an Allied plane was able to make an emergency landing. On 7 March, the strip was ready to stage aircraft for strikes against Rabaul. Concurrently, a bomber strip was being laid and naval base facilities were rapidly taking form. A PT squadron arrived on 17 February and commenced nightly patrols.<sup>193</sup>

To counter our activity, the Japanese attempted to launch air attacks against our beachhead, but entirely without success. During the night of 17–18 February, for example, enemy planes sortied over the Green Islands. Marine planes of VMF(N)-531, however, proved to be an effective cover, destroying at least two of the attacking planes that night.<sup>194</sup>

By 15 March the Green Islands position was completely secure and was operating as a major base in the neutralization of Rabaul. Aircraft and PT boats based at Green were continually attacking enemy shipping and barge traffic, thus adding to the slow strangulation which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had planned for Rabaul. The intermediate base to be seized before the final attack of the Northern Solomons-Bismarcks campaign was firmly in our hands.

## THE LAST STEP—EMIRAU

As planning for the Green Islands operation proceeded, Admiral Halsey continued develop-

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>194</sup> VMF(N)-531 War Diary, February 1944.

ing his concept of a landing on one of the islands of the St. Matthias Group. In late December, therefore, Admiral Wilkinson was directed to prepare for the seizure and occupation of Emirau Island.

While working out his solution of this problem, Admiral Wilkinson received orders to abandon his present endeavors and concentrate on framing a scheme for an amphibious attack on Kavieng. In early March, however, it was realized how strongly Kavieng was defended and held. To reduce such a stranglehold would require more troops and material than were then available to South Pacific Forces. Along with these factors came the realization that the effectiveness of Kavieng would be nullified if the Allies should occupy islands north and west of that area, since Cape Gloucester to the south had already been secured.

Another reason for this change of plans was the 1st Cavalry Division's successful reconnaissance in force on 29 February, which resulted in establishment of American positions in the Admiralty Islands. We now had the required area to the west; all that remained to seal the fate of Kavieng was to occupy a spot to the north whereby Japanese in the Solomons and Bismarcks would be completely cut off from the Empire.

On 14 March, therefore, Admiral Halsey directed Admiral Wilkinson to "seize and occupy Emirau at the earliest practicable date, not later than 20 March. . . ." <sup>195</sup> In view of the urgency indicated by the progression of events, the 4th Marines—although already earmarked for another campaign—were selected as the landing force.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>195</sup> COMSOPAC dispatch to CTF-31, dated 14 Mar 44.

<sup>196</sup> A new, independent regiment, made up of recently disbanded Raider Battalions, had been designated "4th Marines" in honor of the famous China unit lost in the Philippines at the beginning of the war. Lieutenant General H. M. Smith earmarked this regiment as part of the landing force for the Marianas campaign. Since it was the only fully trained Regimental Combat Team immediately available for action, it was used at Emirau, despite Smith's objections. Admiral Halsey, however, promised to return the 4th Marines to Smith's control as soon as the Emirau task was completed. True to his promise, Halsey returned the regiment to Smith in time for the Guam landings. (See Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, pp. 188–191.)

Since it was essential to bring the staffs of various echelons of command together immediately for detailed planning, it was fortunate that Headquarters of IMAC and CTF-31 were both in close proximity to that of the 4th Marines. The staffs gathered. Emirau Island landing plans, previously discarded, were now reassembled and studied. Final plans were quickly formulated.<sup>197</sup>

Operation orders evolving from these plans envisaged a simultaneous landing of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 4th Marines, on two southern coast beaches of the island's eastern tip, while the 3d Battalion would remain afloat, serving as a reserve to support either landing.<sup>198</sup>

Although no preliminary naval gunfire bombardment or air bombing was projected, provision was made for both should either become necessary. Boat assignment tables, landing diagrams, logistics data, and other details were worked out.<sup>199</sup>

Emirau,<sup>200</sup> the target, is an irregularly shaped island located in the southwest portion of the St. Matthias Group (1°38' S—150°0' E), about 75 miles northwest of Kavieng, and about 250 miles north of Cape Gloucester (in March, 1944, the closest Allied base). Approximately eight miles long by four miles wide, the island is relatively level, the maximum elevation being about 120 feet. Undulating and densely wooded, Emirau, nevertheless, possessed several suitable sites for airstrips. Many smaller islets and reefs surround

<sup>197</sup> Admiral Halsey approved these plans during a visit to Guadalcanal on the afternoon of 15 March, an indication of the celerity and dispatch with which the Marine and Navy planners worked. Commodore Lawrence F. Reifsnider, USN, was designated Attack Group Commander.

<sup>198</sup> The Emirau landing force consisted of a command group from the 3d Marine Division and IMAC, a Signal Detachment from IMAC Signal Battalion, a detachment of COMAIRNORSOLS, a Naval Advance Base Unit, and the 4th Marines (reinforced). Reinforcing elements included Company A, 3d Tank Battalion; a Composite Automatic Weapons Battery, 14th Defense Battalion; Company D, IMAC Medical Battalion; Company C, 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion; a detachment of the 3d Motor Transport Battalion; and the Pioneer Company, 19th Marines. Brigadier General Alfred H. Noble commanded this force.

<sup>199</sup> COMSOPAC Operation Plan 7-44, 18 March 1944; CTF-31 Operation Order 5-44, 16 March 1944; IMAC Operation Order No. 7, 15 March 1944.

<sup>200</sup> Sometimes called Emira, or Squally.

it. On the south coast is a fringe of mangrove swamp.<sup>201</sup> In 1941 approximately 320 natives lived on the island.

In general, embarkation plans provided for the transportation of the two assault battalions in nine destroyer-transport, and a reserve battalion (3d Battalion, 4th Marines) plus part of the service troops in an APA (transport). Remaining service troops and supporting elements would be carried to the target in LSD's.<sup>202</sup>

Cargo and equipment was distributed throughout the various ships of the force. Nine destroyers and two tugs were furnished to provide the gunfire support and act, enroute, as escort of the landing force.

Although the Marines were ready to embark on schedule, their equipment and supplies previously prepared for the proposed operation against Kavieng, had to be reorganized and segregated for loading. Despite this difficulty, loading proceeded expeditiously.

D-day was set for 20 March 1944.

Shortly after dawn on D-day, a flight of fighters from VMF-218 made a perimeter search of Mussau Island, 12½ miles to the northwest, for enemy float planes, radar or radio installations; likewise an air reconnaissance of Emirau was made. Results of both of these flights proved negative, as no Japanese activity was observed.

No definite information concerning the enemy was available. Although believing Emirau to be unoccupied, the assault battalions were prepared to deal with any eventuality, landing with rifles loaded and bayonets fixed. Upon reaching shore, the Marines established beachheads in the immediate vicinity of their separate landing points and shortly joined forces, thus securing the eastern end of the island before nightfall. Concurrently with the main landings, a small detachment went ashore on Elomusao, a small island off the eastern tip of Emirau covering the approaches to the right flank beach. During the approach of this detachment, the amphibian tractors in which the Marines were embarked, fearing opposition, opened fire—shortly augmented by fire from a destroyer. One man was

<sup>201</sup> Hydrographic Office 165, Pacific Islands, vol. II, (Washington, 1938), 446.

<sup>202</sup> Landing ship, dock.

# EMIRAU LANDINGS

4TH MARINES (REINF) 20 MAR 1943



MAP 28



CAPE BALLIN

BUILEAL VILLAGE

HAMBURG BAY

ELEONUSA PLANTATION

TABELU

HOMESTEAD

LUCILE IS

WEEZE IS

TASAGINA VILLAGE

BEACH GREEN

ELOMUSAD IS

ELEOA

BEACH RED

SANILU IS

INUSAU IS

BOATED RESERVE



wounded as a result. It was later learned that this precaution on the part of the amphibians was unnecessary, since no Japanese had been on Emirau since January.

Despite the fact that the tanks were not landed promptly,<sup>203</sup> they arrived in time to scout the island as far west as Pakane and Homestead.

In the meantime the reserve battalion had been put ashore, and preparations were made for the occupation and defense of the island.

Occupation was completed early the next morning. General Noble organized his troops for the defense of Emirau: anti-aircraft defenses were coordinated, protective trenches dug; trails cut; fields of fire prepared; and all other installations such as the creation of an artificial beach,<sup>204</sup> were progressively developed.

A night reconnaissance patrol from Emirau discovered that the Japanese had established a garrison of approximately 46 officers and men on Mussau Island for the purpose of operating a small seaplane base. On 23 March, therefore, two destroyers and a spotting plane were dispatched to Eloaue, an islet off the southwest coast of Mussau, where the base was reported to be located. After a four-hour shelling, the destroyers retired, leaving a fuel dump in flames.<sup>205</sup> Four days later a patrolling destroyer intercepted a native canoe 40 miles south of Mussau. Upon

<sup>203</sup> The LSD *Lindewald* failed to launch her tank bearing LCT's until 0930.

<sup>204</sup> Initial reconnaissance suggested that no beaches suitable for landing craft existed on Emirau. Further reconnaissance, however, revealed a 75 yard wide coral shelf, two feet under water at high tide, on the southeast coast.

<sup>205</sup> No other results could be ascertained.

approaching the canoe, the destroyer received machine-gun fire, which it was forced to return. After a brief engagement, the canoe was brought along-side; in it were the newly dead bodies of one officer and 26 men of the Japanese Special Navy Landing Force. The following day (28 March), a reconnaissance patrol of Mussau was informed by natives that 46 Japanese had abandoned the island in two native canoes early in the morning of 24 March, hoping, apparently, to reach Kavieng.<sup>206</sup>

As succeeding echelons continued to arrive, responsibility for maintenance of the position was gradually shifted to the Army. On 11 April, therefore, the 147th Infantry assumed control as garrison force of the "Emirau Island Command."<sup>207</sup>

With the occupation of Emirau, the campaign in the Northern Solomons was concluded. Considered with operations in New Guinea and New Britain, the Emirau operation may be characterized as the cork placed in a bottle containing Rabaul and Kavieng.

Enemy reinforcements and matériel could no longer be poured into or out of these positions. At Emirau forces of the South and Southwest Pacific came together, there to unite for a drive through the Philippines toward Japan. After Emirau, neither Rabaul nor Kavieng could be regarded as effective barriers to our advance toward ultimate victory.

<sup>206</sup> A. H. Noble, *Operations of the Emirau Landing Force, 15 March-9 April 1944*, dated 20 April 1944, pp. 1-7.

<sup>207</sup> Island Commander was Major General James T. Moore, USMC, who assumed command on 9 April.



## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### CHAPTER V

# Conclusions

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IT IS POSSIBLE to review the Northern Solomons campaign in terms of three aspects from which operations may be observed. High-level planners, such as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, study the campaign in terms of strategic considerations. Individuals who were attached to lower levels of the command structure—for example, Corps and Division Commanders and their staffs—are interested in the operations from the standpoint of the overall tactics employed. The third point of view is that seen by the battalion commander, company officer, or the rifleman whose small unit faced numberless individual difficulties and hazards.

Only in light of these three levels can we appraise the Northern Solomons campaign in an honest, all-around perspective; a perspective neither clouded by exaggerated interest in one or two rifle companies, nor, on the other hand, so bound up with strategic theorizing that it is blind to the exertions of slogging riflemen and cannoneers.

#### STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

From the viewpoint of high-level planners, any undertaking in the Northern Solomons involved manifold risks and perils. To embark on the Bougainville venture not only meant an attack under the guns of a well defined objective—Rabaul, but it also exposed our forces in the South and Southwest Pacific by committing an

important segment thereof to a hazardous operation. Only after careful weighing of possible gain and loss, of benefits or disadvantages, could the Joint Chiefs order—or South Pacific forces execute—such a stratagem.

An operation in the Northern Solomons involved an expansion of our Solomons front, which, by 25 September 1943, was firmly established along a line running between Choiseul to the north, and Vella Lavella and Santa Isabel to the south. The design predicated an advance deep into enemy-held territory, which would therefore result in further stretching of already considerably extended supply lines. Such lengthening, coupled with an already limited amount of shipping, could conceivably result in disaster, should the ever-present possibility of a major shipping-loss materialize. Only about eight transports and four cargo vessels were available for sea-going supply in the South Pacific. To these could be added a small number of landing craft with lower cargo-carrying capacity. This consideration necessitated establishment of a supply base forward of the main source at Guadalcanal. Operations in the Northern Solomons could not be launched until the new, advanced base was ready to function.

Similarly, an inadequacy of surface forces existed in the South Pacific. Not only would this hinder complete protection of our supply lines, but would also preclude the possibility of complete coverage for our forces ashore.

Balanced against these factors, however, was the realization that the United States enjoyed overwhelming superiority in the air. In addition to providing an umbrella over almost any proposed beachhead, convoy, or task force, our air could strike at enemy bases, shipping, and surface units. The probability of an enemy counter-attack from the sea, and surface raids on our supply lines, nevertheless, remained to confront the planners.

Another problem which faced the Joint Chiefs and South Pacific planners was how and when to attack in a strongly defended area. Rabaul, southern bastion of Truk—a principal objective during this phase of the war—was well protected by outlying positions at Buka-Bonis and in the Shortland-South Bougainville areas. The immediate goal of a campaign in the Northern Solomons was neutralization of Rabaul. The purpose of an attack in turn was to establish airfields from which this goal could be achieved. Considering the paucity of shipping and the lack of adequate surface forces, success of a venture into such a strongly defended area was uncertain. Further, in the summer of 1943, when planning was underway, it was believed—not without reason—that Japan would spare no effort to defend Rabaul, using for this purpose, if necessary, the Combined Fleet.

The Japanese, moreover, were known to have deployed approximately 50,000 troops in the Northern Solomons, and were capable not only of employing this considerable strength for defense, but also for counter-attack.

Upon conclusion of hostilities, to be sure, it was discovered that Japan had intended to protect the Bougainville area only with local garrisons and naval forces.

The "Z" plan<sup>1</sup> had assumed that Rabaul would be a stronghold for defense of the Empire, and that outlying bases thereabout would be strengthened locally as necessary. Due to lack of shipping, however, these aims were never accomplished, and, in September, 1943, it was necessary to modify the "Z" plan, admitting that Rabaul could no longer be considered wholly ef-

<sup>1</sup> See page 6 for discussion of this plan.

fective. Because of this, together with the fact that Combined Fleet carrier divisions in the Truk area were not ready for operations (due to the devastating losses suffered at Midway and in the Solomons), the Japanese fleet was not committed."<sup>2</sup>

Although the Japanese had become convinced by the fall of 1943 that their Rabaul position was untenable, and had withdrawn their outer line of defense from that area, the Allies had, of course no way of knowing this.

Selection of a target for attack, therefore, was based on the premise that Rabaul was still in full activity, and must be neutralized.

Confronting the South Pacific command, accordingly, was the final decision of the exact target (short of Rabaul) to be selected. Many suggestions were propounded, most of which had merit and warranted close study and analysis. All these evolved into two schools of thought—the one favoring a landing on the east coast, following preliminary operations on Choiseul, the other advocating a landing in the vicinity of Empress Augusta Bay following seizure of the Treasury Islands.

A landing on the east coast would have necessitated a major operation in the Choiseul region, which would not in itself contribute to the eventual neutralization of Rabaul, and would result in needless expenditure of troops and matériel. Further, when compared with Empress Augusta Bay, a landing at Kieta, Numa Numa, or Tenakau (on the east coast) would require a necessarily longer line of supply at a time when shipping was at a premium. These facts, coupled with the fact that flying time from the east coast to Rabaul was greater than flying time from the west coast,<sup>3</sup> dictated selection of the west coast target.

Tactical considerations likewise dictated that, if a landing were to be made in the Northern Solomons, then it should be made at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville. Compared with positions on the northern and southern extremities of that island, this area was poorly defended,

<sup>2</sup> *Campaigns*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Caused by the necessity of flying over or around Bougainville mountains.

and further, was so located that pressure could be placed on Rabaul from Torokina airfields. This presented still another problem. If the landing were made at Cape Torokina, then our forces would face almost impenetrable jungle and steaming swamp, either of which would necessitate inclusion of vast amounts of engineer equipment and personnel in the attack force, for the purpose of building roads and landing-strips. Taking into account the amount of shipping available, inclusion of much engineering equipment conversely would reduce the quantity of ammunition and rations that could be carried by assault echelons.

Confronted by all these risks, the Allied high command decided, nevertheless, to undertake the Northern Solomons campaign, for it was even then realized that the advantages to be gained through securing positions on Bougainville by far outweighed the dangers which an attacking force faced.

Of paramount importance in selection of a target area, was the availability of local cover in the form of air and sea support. Cape Torokina was found to be within range of fighters based at Munda and bombers based at Guadalcanal.

Also desirable was an airstrip between the target and the supply source from which Allied planes could intercept enemy air and surface attacks against our shipping. The Treasury Islands appeared to offer suitable sites for an intermediate landing field and small boat refuge. By landing at Cape Torokina, South Pacific Forces assured themselves, therefore, of continuous air cover. Likewise, by landing in the Treasury Islands, adequate air and surface protection of our supply line was obtained.

An additional advantage derived by landing in the Treasury Islands was the capability of erecting and operating, prior to D-day, a long-range radar covering the target area.

In the meantime, as these conclusions were being reached, our operations were so timed that the Japanese were kept unaware of the next point of attack and were continually off balance. This prevented concentration of their forces in any area with definite knowledge that they could be committed. This American strategic policy

was made possible by an ever increasing superiority of our air and surface forces over those of the Japanese. It prevented the enemy from supplying by-passed garrisons, which otherwise could have constituted a threat to the rear of our forward areas.<sup>4</sup>

When we finally made our attack on the Northern Solomons, culminating at Bougainville, the enemy was not surprised; he expected a landing there. He was surprised, however, by the fact that we landed in the swampy area.<sup>5</sup>

As has been shown, the Bougainville operation, though it was planned, directed, and executed in the South Pacific Area by South Pacific Forces, was undertaken principally as a flank security measure for Southwest Pacific Forces advancing along New Guinea's northern coast. Rabaul was a hornet's nest to Allied troops in New Guinea, for from this base the enemy could launch counterattacks by land, sea, or air; could cut Allied lines of supply and communications; or could continually harass front line positions to the extent of making them nearly untenable.

The Northern Solomons campaign was designed, therefore, to neutralize Rabaul's effectiveness. Its ultimate success resulted from coordination of effort on the part of individuals, branches of the armed services, and theaters of operations. The effect of this cooperation was the accomplishment of the given purpose—neutralization of Rabaul—with the greatest possible economy of force.

The strategic goal was reached at a cost far below the expected minimum of lives lost and matériel expended.<sup>6</sup>

## TACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

Responsibility for carrying out the actual combat operations required in the Northern Solomons was vested in IMAC, and the tactics of the campaign were those of IMAC.

<sup>4</sup> King, *op. cit.*, 103-104.

<sup>5</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I, 2.

The U. S. advance up the Solomons ladder by progressive steps from Guadalcanal to New Georgia to Vella Lavella, led in normal course to the Treasury Islands and Bougainville. In the original tactical planning for the Northern Solomons, it was early realized that it would be necessary to mislead the enemy in order that he might not be prepared for our assault on Bougainville, the keystone of the campaign.

One of the most astute moves made by IMAC was the diversionary landing on Choiseul, designed to lead the Japanese to believe that our final objective in the Northern Solomons would be the east coast of Bougainville. This operation formed the screen behind which IMAC moved toward its primary objective, Empress Augusta Bay.

Observed from every aspect, therefore, IMAC's Choiseul diversion was well conceived, excellently planned, and skillfully executed. It was the feint which drew the enemy off-balance—the jab which caused him to lower his guard and expose himself to the power-punch at Empress Augusta Bay.

Viewed from the tactical level, seizure of the Treasury Islands was sound. These islands, if held by the Japanese, would be a thorn in our side, requiring a long line of supply and communication between the Southern and Northern Solomons. Conquest of these islands denied this opportunity to the Japanese and, moreover, placed our forces in position to cover the flank of our own supply and communications lines.

A second tactical attainment in the Northern Solomons was the high degree of tactical cooperation demonstrated throughout the campaign. Cooperation evinced by Allied air, sea, and land forces was of a high order, and was thoroughly appreciated by all in command. In closing his operation report, Admiral Wilkinson stated:

All elements of the Attack Force performed splendidly throughout the operation. The landing force was well led by an experienced and able officer. . . . It has been a pleasure to share in an operation so characterized by team work and cooperation between troops, ships and crews.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 3d AmphFor *Opn Rpt*, 17.

Notable among the examples of tactical cooperation evinced down to the lowest echelons, was that displayed by the infantry-artillery team. It was not always necessary to have an artillery forward observer present on the front lines, for it had been demonstrated that infantry officers could, if necessary, adjust the fires of the batteries supporting them. The artillery gave unstintingly of its efforts.

Cooperation of Marine aviation with ground troops was notable. In attacking positions, Marine ground and air cooperated as a team in accordance with the traditional and long established doctrines of Marine Corps close air support.

Effective cooperation enabled field commanders in all Northern Solomons operations to practice another basic principal of war—economy of force. No additional troops, other than those absolutely necessary to accomplish the mission, were requested or used in the Northern Solomons, and at no time while IMAC was in control of the beachhead on Bougainville, were more than two divisions employed.<sup>8</sup>

From the day of landing, 1 November, to the day that IMAC was relieved by XIV Corps, all troops available to General Geiger were kept constantly at work. For the first month, the perimeter was undergoing progressive expansion in all directions. During early December, the perimeter was being made more secure in the west by the 37th Division, while, in the east, the 3d Division was continuing to push onward and outward to secure dominate hills northeast of its sector, thereby assuring added security for airfields then under construction.

In considering economy of force (not to speak of deception), operations of the 2d Parachute Battalion on Choiseul from 28 October to 3 November 1943, afford us an interesting case for study. Although only a small unit, its maneuvers along a front of some 25 miles caused the Japanese to believe that a much larger force was

<sup>8</sup> This is in itself amazing when it is considered that the Japanese had approximately 50,000 troops in the Northern Solomons, and were not unwilling to use them. The strength of an American division at this time was less than 18,000 men.



established on that island. This battalion enticed a large number of enemy aircraft to the Choiseul area to seek out a suppositious (but non-existent) U. S. invasion fleet. It was not until some time after the landing at Empress Augusta Bay that the enemy finally began to divine our true intentions concerning the Northern Solomons.

There is no doubt that Generals Vandegrift (who had received more than his share of experience in practicing economy of force at Guadalcanal) and Geiger were exponents of such economy and that they used it advantageously at Bougainville. Initially because of lack of shipping only a portion of one division executed the landing. Covering forces were stationed at Guadalcanal and Velle Lavella, from whence they could be summoned at appropriate times to support the original beachhead or establish a new one. Further, they were in such a position that they could be used, if necessary, to exploit sudden or unexpected gains which might be made by our forces in the Treasury Islands or Choiseul.

In a final tactical matter, that is, determination of the landing beaches, IMAC faced a unique problem. It was known that those in Empress Augusta Bay were generally poor, and, prior to 1 November, amphibious patrols had failed to penetrate to the exact beaches finally chosen. Those at Cape Torokina were selected, nevertheless, because Japanese troop concentrations were known to be located in the vicinity of the better landing areas to the south. Nothing suitable appeared to exist to the north. Had it not been for damaging surf, D-day difficulties would have been confined to the limited enemy reaction and the selection of Cape Torokina beaches would have been entirely vindicated.

Conversely, to pick a landing area where turbulent surf edged the shore, and tangled jungle covered murky swamps immediately inland, was a tactical decision which the enemy believed us incapable of making.

## TECHNICAL CONCLUSIONS

In writing the story of the Northern Solomons the main emphasis, of course, has been placed on front-line action. It is, unfortunately, the fate of artillerymen, engineers, pioneers, Seabees,

communications and service troops to remain in the background. Yet it is they who carry out the myriad, extremely difficult, and sometimes thankless tasks necessary in every military undertaking.

Of the hundreds of Japanese killed at Bougainville, which, technically speaking, epitomized the problems of the Northern Solomons at their worst, it is estimated that about half died as a direct result of artillery shelling. The preparation fired before the battle for Piva Forks constituted a new high for an artillery bombardment in the South Pacific theater. Miles of torn jungle and pockmarked ground bear testimony to the devastating artillery fires. A total of 72,643 rounds were fired by the 12th Marines alone during the action. General Turnage, in his final report, wrote, the artillery is "probably the most accurate I have ever known."

The engineers also performed their mission efficiently. It will be remembered that many troops of the 19th Marines landed with assault echelons on D-day so that the tremendous job of unloading and engineer construction could begin immediately. The 19th Marines included pioneers, engineers, and Seabees. At first, their main function was to provide a shore party, but, in many cases, personnel, particularly those of the 1st Battalion, served as active reserves or to fill gaps in the front lines at night. As it became apparent, however, that our beachhead was there to stay, the 19th Marines began performing the duties for which they were primarily intended.

Where there had been only a single trail into the interior, knee-deep in slime and impassable for vehicles, a network of roads was built. Literally torn out of the jungle by hand, these roads provided vitally necessary supply routes and made possible rapid movements of reserves to any part of the line. Bridge-building, bomb disposal, water purification, equipment-maintenance—these were only a few of the additional duties performed by the engineers and Seabees.

Had it not been for the amphibian tractors (LVT), supply problems would have been practically insurmountable. Comment is frequent by unit commanders that they proved "invaluable" in the most literal sense. Twenty-nine tractors had landed on D-day; in 15 days more, the num-

ber had increased to 124. Amid swamps through which rifle units advanced, no wheeled vehicle could pass. As amphibian tractor trails were broken, tractors brought up a constant stream of rations, water, ammunition, weapons, engineer equipment, barbed wire, medical supplies, and many other essentials.

The 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion, working in close coordination with supply troops, front-line infantry, and other units, deserves high praise. The commanding officer, 3d Medical Battalion, for example, commended the Amphibian Tractor Battalion for its outstanding performance in evacuation of wounded and delivery of supplies to forward stations. Without the tractors, the division's situation would have been critical in so far as evacuation was concerned. Many a Marine had cause to bless them.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 3d Marines AR, VIIIa.

Without amphibian tractors—a prewar development of the Marine Corps—the campaign might not have accomplished its objective. Extension of the beachhead could have dragged out over months simply because supply and evacuation problems were an insurmountable impediment to advancing troops. Operating a total of 3,832 tractor-days, the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion transported an estimated 22,992 tons of supplies and matériel. Amphibian tractors were the vital link in the all-important supply chain. Napoleon said that an army travels on its stomach; it may be said that the 3d Marine Division, during the Bougainville operation, traveled on a stomach transported by amphibian tractors.

As roads were painfully squeezed up from the surrounding sloughs, however, the amphibians' tasks lessened and, like some giant prehistoric animal, they lost power to survive on land, while



**MARINES WERE EXCEEDINGLY GRATEFUL TO SEABEES** as this sign attests. Highways, such as that which appears in the background were painfully squeezed up from surrounding sloughs.



**ONLY VEHICLE WHICH COULD TRAVERSE THE SWAMP** was the amphibian tractor, a pre-war development of the Marine Corps. These tractors were used to supply front line units as well as to evacuate casualties.

tracked and wheeled traffic gradually drove them from the traveled ways. Some were lost in the surf; others broke down under stress of running on a firm foundation. Signal units reviled them for damage to precious wire communications, maintained only with extreme difficulty. Despite efforts of drivers to coax them into running beyond limits of mechanical endurance, all suffered from continuous use without proper opportunity for even the most cursory repairs. Yet withal, the machines and their devoted crews, in the preliminary stages of the Bougainville enterprises, proved themselves to be among the Marines' best friends.<sup>10</sup>

The 3d Defense Battalion, which had loaded and unloaded Embarkation Group C, one-third

<sup>10</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, II, 348-388. Many commanders reported on the value of the LVT's, e. g., CO 3d Med Bn Rpt, CO 9th Mar Rpt, *et al.*

of the assault shipping, not only participated in the D-day landings but also was the last unit to be withdrawn from the island—not leaving until 21 June 1944. During this extended period of time the battalion had been responsible for the antiaircraft defense of the beachhead—1 November to 1 February—and had supported infantry units by firing artillery missions. Before being withdrawn to Guadalcanal the battalion had experienced 114 bombing runs, during which it fired 940 tons of ammunition to destroy 12 enemy planes and score probable kills on two others.

The 3d Medical Battalion achieved a magnificent job at Bougainville. Only a short distance behind the lines, aid stations and field hospitals did their work so well that less than one per cent of battle casualties died of wounds.

Situated near the beach, the Division Hospital was subjected to daily air raids and twice

to artillery shelling during the first three weeks of the campaign. Company E, for example, proved that delicate work could be carried out even under the most adverse conditions. On 7 November, during the battle of Koromokina Lagoon, the field hospital was attacked by infiltrating enemy riflemen. While surgeons performed operations in water-filled dugouts, small arms fire ripped through protecting tents. Some personnel were wounded. A hasty defensive line was erected by cooks, bakers, drivers, Navy Hospital corpsmen, and ambulatory patients. During the night of 7-8 November the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines, established a perimeter around the hospital. Despite the confusion that reigned during that day, not one patient died, although over 50 operations were completed under fire during the attack.

At Bougainville it early became apparent that supplies were rapidly being depleted through inability of troops, under existing conditions, to

handle and transport extra rations, ammunition, and clothing. A changing tactical situation requiring frequent and (relatively) rapid reposition of combat elements, combined with the impassability of thick jungle-swamp, resulted in many units moving inland with only what they could carry (which was little). Before long, beaches were literally smothered with all classes of supplies and equipment.

Matériel continued to pour in, however, with the arrival of each echelon of LST's, although the troops were fighting miles from shore-party dumps and on opposite sides of the beachhead from those on which they had first landed. As a result, the initial regimental shore-party dumps were practically abandoned and became a source of supply on a help-yourself basis to Corps troops, Seabees, engineers, and other elements in the wake of the assault, to the ultimate detriment of Marines in the front lines. In consequence, the 3d Marine Division Supply Officer (D-4) re-



**ENGINEERS MOVE UP ALONG A MUDDY TRAIL.** Faced with swamp drainage, road building, airfield construction, and similar tasks, engineers played a vital part in the establishment of the advance base at Cape Torokina.

vised on the spot his entire original supply and evacuation plan. All shore party dumps and all stores, except those actually with the combat teams, reverted to Division control.

Then began an almost endless task of recovering Division materiel from along the entire beach, receiving incoming supplies and distributing them to using troops.

It has been stated that the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion transported an estimated 22,992 tons of essentials to the front lines. It is safe to say that the 3d Service Battalion handled those four times. The newly-organized 3d Motor Transport Battalion, employed directly under

the Division Quartermaster, obtained daily credits of all classes of supply from the 5th Field Depot. As roads were constructed inland, the 2½ ton 6x6 trucks of the Motor Transport Battalion were employed initially to augment and later to relieve the amphibian tractors in transporting materiel to Division intermediate and advanced dumps or distributing points (DP's) established as the beachhead increased in depth. Amphibians, however, continued to be the last link in the supply chain—moving supplies from advance DP's to the troops—and the first link in the evacuation chain which, of course, operated in the opposite direction.



**MOVING ARTILLERY AMMUNITION FROM DUMP TO FIRING BATTERY** was a major task.

It is of interest that, at one stage of the operation, a Division dump and distributing point actually was established and operating in one area before that area had been secured. During the movement of the 9th and 21st Marines to the ultimate main line of resistance, a Division dump went into operation at Evansville before the Battle of Hellzapoppin Ridge (See Map 20). Supplies were moved at the outset into this dump by amphibian tractor from an intermediate DP in the vicinity of Piva No. 1.

Thus, in one way or another, Marine service troops met and handled what was probably the most difficult amphibian logistical situation in the Pacific war.

After the operation, a number of units recommended that the shore party set up before the operation consist of personnel not essential to operation duties elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> There were many complaints regarding impressment of personnel for shore party duties. It is understandable that each organization should feel it imperative that its equipment should be landed in the first wave, and its personnel employed solely in unloading that particular gear. This would be a splendid plan were it possible to place all equipment simultaneously on an "A" priority, but all supplies must be unloaded as they come ashore, no matter to which organization they have been assigned.

As an over-all matter, furthermore, analysis of the Northern Solomons campaign leads, ultimately, to one salient technical conclusion. Lumped together, the various operations of the campaign were primarily battles of technique—U. S. techniques against nature and the Japanese; enemy techniques against nature and the Americans. In this three-cornered struggle, the superiority of U. S. techniques, matériel, and technical organization inevitably won out.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

By 2 November the initial assault phase of Bougainville—major Northern Solomons operation—was completed, and all immediate objectives had been attained. The Japanese naval

task force—major threat to the landing itself—had been met, crippled, and routed. Enemy air on Bougainville beyond and to the rear of our Torokina beachhead had been at least temporarily neutralized or weakened to such an extent that his bases held no immediate threat to our landing. U. S. air supremacy made Japanese counter-landings and reinforcement impossible. Reinforcement of the enemy by land from southern Bougainville presented grave difficulties.

In order to exploit the advantages thus achieved, the defensive perimeter of the Bougainville beachhead had to be expanded, airstrips constructed, and a naval base established. The beachhead had to be supplied and reinforced by routes which followed a course within close range of several enemy airfields. Numerous enemy airfields had to be kept neutralized, and a constant guard maintained against enemy surface attack.

The purpose of a campaign in the Northern Solomons was to contain Rabaul. To accomplish this mission the decision to attack Bougainville was an ideal solution. The succeeding and antecedent operations at Treasury, Choiseul, Green and Emirau rounded out the whole entity of a successful campaign.

In March, 1944, Japanese officials stated:

. . . owing to the advance of the enemy sea and air bases, the constant bombardment of our bases from sea and air from enemy airplanes and PT boats and the interception of our rear supply route, supplies by transports were cut off from mid-October last year on. Since the end of December, some urgent matériel has been supplied by submarines. However, the movement and loading of submarines became impossible due to damage inflicted on Rabaul Naval Base by enemy bombing in late February, the sowing of magnetic mines in the neighboring sea, and continuous and persistent enemy air raids. Thus, supply by submarine was practically non-existent this month.<sup>12</sup>

The Northern Solomons campaign laid the foundations for a U. S. naval and air base deep in enemy territory, athwart Japanese lines of sea and air communications. This base would enlarge the number of available targets far beyond immediate objectives, to include New Britain and New Ireland. In by-passing the heaviest concentration of enemy troops, we had avoided a long ground campaign such as those necessarily fought at Guadalcanal and New Georgia.

<sup>11</sup> 12th Marines Action Report, Bougainville, 2.

<sup>12</sup> CIG 87424, 6.

Thousands of Japanese troops were left behind in southern Bougainville, the Shortlands and Choiseul, cut off from their sources of supplies.<sup>13</sup>

Full credit for the success of the boldly conceived and well planned campaign must be given to Admiral Halsey. He alone was ultimately responsible, not only for the conception, but also, with Generals Barrett, Vandegrift and Geiger, for the execution of the attack on Empress Augusta Bay.

The story of Bougainville and the Northern Solomons is perhaps not so arresting nor so stark as those of Tarawa or Iwo Jima, and received comparatively scant attention at the time, being forced to inner pages of the press by more dramatic contemporaneous events in the Gilberts and in Africa. The Northern Solomons was an essential campaign nevertheless, and it was as difficult and hard-fought in its own way as any that had preceded or any of those that followed. For more than two months the Marines fought not only the Japanese, but also swamp and jungle. There was intense opposition to the original landing not only from the Japanese, but even more so from nature.

In terms of the European war, it was a series of skirmishes between forces rarely larger than platoons, with difficulties of terrain and jungle making each advance doubly difficult. Yet, with all due sense of proportion, the principal engagements have the right to be called battles from the fierceness and bravery with which they were fought, and the important benefits gained from their favorable outcome.

Very few successful forces in the long history of warfare have been called upon to exhibit greater endurance and courage or more cohesion of effort. Our troops met and conquered not one but three enemies: Japanese, jungle, and swamp. From start to finish it was a slugging match in which one force was able to concentrate more power at a given point at a given time than another force.

Barring the inevitable derangements of warfare, which no amount of planning can nullify, the campaign was completely successful as an entity and in detail. Things went wrong at times,

<sup>13</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 71, 75-76; *Campaigns*, 152.

but situations were never so desperate that they could not be restored by suitable and determined action.

Nothing can be more certain than, once conceived and crystallized, the plan as carried out produced results of utmost importance. Operations on the Treasury Islands, Choiseul, Bougainville, Green, and Emirau, were additional markers on the highway that led to the quarterdeck of the *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

The enemy fought with his customary tenacity and guile; his resistance in defended positions won the grudging admiration of our troops. But the Japanese were outguessed, outfought, and outnumbered at all crucial points in the disputed area.

In an effort to prevent the neutralization of Rabaul and stem our advance through the Northern Solomons, the Japanese had expended in excess of 10,000 lives, a minimum of 863 aircraft, 24 destroyers, two cruisers, one aircraft carrier, and numerous other vessels. On the other hand, to attain their goal, the U. S. forces sustained less than 1,000 killed and 2,834 wounded. Only 148 Allied planes and two destroyers were lost in combat. These figures furthermore, fail to take into account the 30,000 or more enemy who were by-passed by our forces, and allowed to wither on the vine.

In summing up the effects of the Bougainville operation, Admiral Sentaro Omori said:

When considered with the other actions of this campaign it appeared to me to be the climax of your advance up the Solomon Islands. After the battle you were able to establish bases in Bougainville which permitted you to maintain constant air assault on Rabaul, which prevented us from providing support and air cover to our bases on New Guinea and New Britain.<sup>14</sup>

The general mission assigned forces of the South Pacific Area had been accomplished. From airfields on Bougainville, Rabaul was neutralized, and the air arm of Japan was contained, enabling units of the Southwest Pacific Area to

<sup>14</sup> *Interrogations*, II, 337-338, 566. Vice Admiral Sentaro Omori, I. J. N., was a regular officer of 30 years service. As commander, 5th cruiser division and officer in tactical command, he led the night cruiser action at Empress Augusta Bay, 1-2 November 1943. He was Commander in Chief of the Rabaul assault force from 15 October to 15 November 1943, and as such was thoroughly acquainted with Japanese dispositions in that area.

advance along the northern coast of New Guinea and into the Philippines. In speaking of the overall result of the operation, Admiral Halsey said:

The Bougainville campaign was intended to accomplish the destruction of enemy air strength in the Bismarcks; not only was this accomplished, but the by-products of the campaign were so extensive that the subsequent operations at Green Island and Emirau were accomplished virtually without enemy opposition, and the entire enemy offensive potential in the Bismarcks area was destroyed. In the matter of ultimate achievement and importance in the Pacific War, the Bougainville operation was successful beyond our greatest hopes.<sup>15</sup>

The campaign for the Northern Solomons virtually ended as the Bougainville operation came to a close. The top of the Solomons ladder had been reached, and a junction of forces of the South and the Southwest Pacific was effected.

With the coming of spring, in 1944, U. S. forces could again begin operations northward against undefended and isolated spots with a minimum of exposure. Within a year, Americans would land in the Philippines. Victories of Marines in the Northern Solomons had assured other American troops of easier going elsewhere.

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<sup>15</sup> Halsey, *SoPac Narrative*, 12.



**HIS SOUVENIR A JAPANESE FLAG**, this Marine has finished his part in the establishment of the perimeter and now heads toward the beach to leave the island. Although some serious fighting took place months later, the work of troops especially trained for amphibious operations was completed.





## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX I

## Bibliography

IN THE PREPARATION of this monograph, some 5,000 separate documents have been consulted. This bibliography contains a selected list of the more important and useful of these. The majority are on file in the archives of Marine Corps Headquarters, where they have been assigned a number which appears in parentheses in the list hereinafter following. Most of these documents also possess a file number and a serial number, both of which, when available, follow immediately after the title of the document. Documents in the files of the Central Intelligence Group, War, and Navy Departments have been used; in these instances the documents are listed with the agency indicated and that agency's file number used. For the convenience of students, the title of the file jacket in which each document is filed appears with the citation of the individual document. The current security classification of documents is also shown.

As a means of further clarification an example is cited:

IMAC. Operation Report, Phase I, Section A. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1; 21 Mar 44. (36905). Bougainville 1-A-1, Section A. Secret.

IMAC indicates a document distributed under the authority of the Commanding General, First Marine Amphibious Corps. "Operation Report, Phase I, Section A" is the title assigned to the document by IMAC. 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1 is the file and serial number of the document and appears thus on the document:

1660  
5/184-whf  
00203-1

Ordinarily this number appears in the upper left hand corner of the first page of the document. The date, 21 Mar 44, is that which appears on the document. The figure (36905) indicates the archives number assigned to the individual document by the Marine Corps Historical Section. "Bougainville 1-A-1, Section A" of the Marine Corps archives title of the jacket in which the document is filed.

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- IMAC. Annex A-1 to Administrative Order No. 1, Engineer Plan. Serial 9/48-bgr; 22 Nov 43. (36905) Part 2 (Enclosure "G") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Annex B to IMAC Operation Order No. 4. Serial 13/123-lfs; 21 Nov 43. (36905) Part 2 (Enclosure "D") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Bougainville Beachhead, Phase I. No date or serial. (36905) Part 1 Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Narrative of campaign in 45 pages, including five annexes.
- A C-2 Report, pp 15-24
  - B C-3 Report, pp 24-28
  - C C-4 Report, pp 28-33
  - D Engr Report, pp 33-36
  - E Sig Cos Report, pp 36-45
- IMAC. Bougainville Beachhead, Phase II. (Narrative of Campaign. Undated and without serial (36905) Part 2. Bougainville Id-1 Section A. 84 pages including 9 annexes.
- A C-2 Report, pp 17-23
  - B C-3 Report, pp 23-26
  - C Ordnance Report, pp 26-37
  - D C-4 Report, pp 37-42
  - E Engr Report, pp 42-50
  - F MT Report, pp 50-53
  - G Sig Com Report, pp 53-60
  - H 3d Def Bn Report, pp 60-70
  - I 2d 155mm Arty Bn Report, pp 70-84
- IMAC. Bougainville Operation Report, Phase III. Undated and without serial. (36905). Part 3 Bougainville IG-1 Section A. Narrative of Campaign. 96 pp including 12 annexes.
- IMAC. Change No. 1 to Operation Order No. 1. 13/93-lfs; 15 Oct 43. (36905). Part 1, Enclosure 1. (Enclosure "O") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Change No. 2 to Operation Order No. 1, 13/123-ge; 22 Oct. 43. (36905). Part 1. (Enclosure "P") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. C-2 Estimate of the Situation: Empress Augusta Bay and Treasury Islands. No serial or date. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "B") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. This document is unsigned.
- IMAC. Concept of Operations Plan I. 13/93 over SN 002A; 27 Sep 43. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "D") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. C-2 Estimate of the Situation. No serial or date. Secret. No MarCorps file number; in an unmarked jacket. A 35 page document including a survey of opposing strengths. A carbon copy of the typed original, with maps.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 23-27 Nov. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1068. Bougainville 3-A.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 3-15 Nov. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1069. Bougainville 3-B.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 16-22 Nov. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1070. Bougainville 3-C.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 23-27 Nov. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1071. Bougainville 3-D.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 27 Nov-4 Dec. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1072. Bougainville 3-E.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 4-10 Dec. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1073. Bougainville 3-F.
- IMAC. C-2 Journal, 10-15 Dec. No serial; dates are dates of entry on journal. No classification. MarCorps Historical Division 1074. Bougainville 3-G.
- IMAC. C-2 Periodic Reports. No serial; dates are dates of reports. Secret. (45124). Bougainville 3-I. Covering period 21 Oct 43 through 26 May 44, inclusive.
- IMAC. C-2 Periodic Reports. No serial; dates are the dates of reports. Secret. No MarCorps Number. Bougainville 3-H. Covering period 26 Oct through 12 Dec, inclusive.
- IMAC. Corps Training Bulletin No. 3-44. Serial 13/150-lfs; 15 Jan 44. Restricted. (32670). Choiseul 2-a.

- IMAC. D-2 Miscellaneous Reports—Treasury Islands. No serial; undated. No classification. No MarCorps Number. Filed in unnumbered folder entitled IMAC D-2 Misc Reports—Treasury Is. (Sun & moon rise-set tables; distance tables). This document appears to be titled incorrectly in MarCorps Archives. The title should read "C-2" rather than "D-2".
- IMAC. Estimate of the Enemy Situation. No serial; 12 Dec 43. Secret. (024418). Filed in unnumbered jacket entitled "IMAC Est of Enemy Situation—Bougainville."
- IMAC. Letter of Instruction (to OinC, 77th NCB). No serial; 30 Sep 1943. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "Y") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Amplification of instructions given OinC, Vella Lavella Det 77th NCB for preparation of bivouac-storage area.
- IMAC. Letter of Instruction (to OinC, Vella Lavella, Det, 77th NCB) 9/48-bgr; 21 Sep 43. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "X") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. (Instructions for preparation of bivouac-staging-storage area on Vella Lavella).
- IMAC. Mailbrief (to CG, 3dMarDiv; H&S Bn; CO, Corps TRS & Staging Area, Guadalcanal). 00111; 1 Nov 43. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "P(b)") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Changes to task organization of 3d Mar Div and Corps Res.
- IMAC. Mailbrief (to CG, 3dMarDiv; H&S Bn IMAC; 1st Corps Sig Bn; CO, Corps TRS, Staging Area, Guadalcanal). 00103 Undated. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "P(a)") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Changes to the task organization of the 3dMarDiv.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 1 with annexes. Serial 13/123-ato; 15 Oct 43. Secret. (29392). Bougainville 2-A.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 1, 13/123-ato. 15 Oct 1943 Secret. (29392). Bougainville 2-A.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 1 13/123-ato. 15 Oct 1943. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "A") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 2. Serial 13/123-lfs over 0086; 22 Oct 43. Secret. (29390). Choiseul 2-b. Also in MarCorps 36905 part 1 (Bougainville 1-a-1 Section A) as Enclosure "F".
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 3. Serial 1975-100-50 over 13/123-lfs; 11 Nov 43. (36905). Part 2 (Enclosure "C") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Estimate of the Situation, Plan II. No serial; dated 2 Oct 43. Secret. Filed in MarCorps Archives unmarked folder entitled "Est of Situation, II." Concept for a landing on Choiseul.
- IMAC. Estimate of the Situation—Treasury Islands. No serial; dated c. 1 Oct 43. No MarCorps Number. Filed in folder entitled, "Estimate of the Situation, Bougainville." The first page of this document leads the reader to believe that it refers to Bougainville, but upon further perusal he discovers that it refers to Treasury.
- IMAC. Hasty Terrain Maps, 180, 181, 199, 200. 2d Edition; Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, Solomon Islands. Confidential. Filed in MarCorps Hist Section Bougainville Map Drawer.
- IMAC. Letter of Instruction (to CG, 3d MarDiv). 5-lfs over 001A. 27 Sep 43. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "M") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Letter of Instruction (to CG, 3d MarDiv) 5/128-whf. 25 Aug 43. (36905). Part 1 (Enclosure "M") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Warning order to plan for a contemplated operation.
- IMAC. Letter of Instruction (to CO, 8th (NZ) BrigGp) 13/EWS ato over 008A. 28 Sep 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "N") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Memorandum For: CO 19th Marines. No serial 31 Aug 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "W") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Instructions for preparation of bivouac-staging area on Guadalcanal.
- IMAC. Miscellaneous Reports, Treasury Islands. No serial; undated. No MarCorps No. No jacket No. No classification. Contains a distance chart, sunrise, moonrise, sunset, moonset tables.
- IMAC. Letter of Instruction (to CO, IMAC, NCB). 9/48-bgr; 14 Oct 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "Z") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Establishment of a sawmill on Vella Lavella.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 4. Serial 13/123-lfs; 21 Nov 43. Secret. (29987). Bougainville 2-A.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 4. Serial 13/123-lfs; 21 Nov 43. (36905) Part 2 (Enclosure "D") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Operation Order No. 5. Serial 13/123-lfs; 27 Nov 43. (36905) Part 2 (Enclosure "E") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Operation Plan No. 1-43, Annex A, Intelligence. Marine Corps Schools file 0557-23 over 5475-575-5(2).
- IMAC. Operation Report, Phase I, Section A. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1; 21 Mar 44. Secret. (36905) Bougainville 1-a-1 Section A. Containing 14 pages of narrative; 5 annexes; 27 enclosures. Duplicate copies available in the file.
- IMAC. Operation Report, Phase I, Section B. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1; 21 Mar 44. Secret. (36905) Bougainville 1-c, Section B. Containing 15 maps, charts, overlays, diagrams, tables. Duplicate copies available.
- IMAC. Operation Report, Phase II, Section A. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1. 21 Mar 44. Secret. (36905). Containing 17 pages of narrative; 9 annexes; 8 enclosures. Bougainville 1-d-1, Section A. Duplicate copies available in the file.
- IMAC. Operation Report, Phase II, Section B. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1. 21 Mar 44. Secret. (36905). Bougainville 1-f, Section B. HistDiv 2030. Containing 27 maps, charts, overlays, diagrams, tables. Duplicate copies available in the file.
- IMAC. Operation Report, Phase III, Section A. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1. 21 Mar 44. Secret. (36905). Bougainville 1-g-1, Section A. Hist. Sec 1988. Containing 7 pages of narrative; 11 annexes; 14 enclosures. Duplicate copies available in the file.
- IMAC. Operation Report, Phase III, Section B. Serial 1660 over 5/184-whf over 00203-1. 21 Mar 44. Secret. (36905) Bougainville 1-1, Section B. Hist. Sec. 2031. Containing 23 maps, sketches, overlays, charts, diagrams, tables. Duplicate copies available in files.

- 1st Para Bn. Historical Record for month of November, 1943, Supplement to. Serial 1975-50 over 152-43; 15 Dec 43. Secret. MarCorps Unit File: 34089.
- 1st Para Bn. Unit Report (Koiari Beach Raid). No serial indicated; 30 Nov 43. (36905). Part 2 (Enclosure "F") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- 1st Para Rgt. War Diary for First Marine Parachute Regiment for November, 1943. No serial; dated 30 Nov 43. Restricted. Unit File; 31093.
- FITCH, HARMON, BARRETT, and WILKINSON. Memorandum to COMSOPAC. No serial; 7 Sep 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "J") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- U. S. S. *George Clymer*. Report of Action. APA27/A16-3 over 0123; 3 Nov 43. Secret. (31907). Bougainville 1-R.
- XIV Corps. G-2, Annexes to Report on Lessons Learned, Bougainville Operation. The intelligence annex to the official report of General Griswold; filed in War Department files, G-3, AGO, Historical Records Section, War Department Records Branch, Washington.
- U. S. S. *Guest*. Report of Action, 4 Dec 43. DD472/A16-3 over 078; 6 Dec 43. Confidential. (31265). Bougainville 1-EE.
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- U. S. S. *Hudson*. Bombardment of Japanese Positions in Empress Augusta Bay, November 28, 1943. DD-475/A16-3 over 061; 30 Nov 43. Confidential. (38045). Bougainville 1-AA.
- JCS. "ELKTON I OPERATION PLAN" No serial; 28 Feb 43. Top Secret. In War Department Files.
- JCS. "ELKTON III OPERATION PLAN." No serial; 26 Apr 43. Top Secret. In War Department Files.
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- U. S. S. *Lardner*. Shore Bombardment of Bougainville, 29 Nov 43. DD 487/A16 over 012; 3 Dec 43. Confidential. (37806). Bougainville 1-BB.
- IMAC. Patrol Report on Empress Augusta Bay Area, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, 23 September 1943 to 26 September, 1943. 1 Oct 43. No document number; filed in folder entitled "IMAC—Patrol Report on Emp. Aug. Bay—Bougainville." Unsigned but probably written by Capt. Harry B. Barker, of the 3d MarDiv.
- IMAC. Preliminary Report, Operation Blissful. 00118 over 13/VHK-wha. 5 Nov 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "Q") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A. Letter from CO, 2d Para Bn to CG, IMAC written from memory at Corps Hq on Guadalcanal after the operation; the Bn., meanwhile, was on Vella Lavella.
- IMAC. 2d Para Bn Unit Journal, 27 Oct 43 to 4 Nov 43. Serial 2430 over 15/170-wrn; 10 Jan 44. Secret. Choiseul 1-b.
- IMAC. Sketches Showing Typical Emplacements Encountered During the Landing on Cape Torokina. 11/145-rg; 4 Dec 43. No classification. No MarCorps Serial. Bougainville 3-H-1.
- IMAC. Summary of the Enemy Situation. No serial; 12 Dec 43, 1200. Secret. MarCorps Intelligence Section 024418; in an unmarked folder.
- IMAC. Task Organization (Letter of Instruction to CG, 3d MarDiv; CO, 8th Brig Gp, 3d (NZ) Div). 13/93-ge over 0036. 8 Oct 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "L") Bougainville, Ia-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Technical Instructions (Engineer) No. 1-43. No serial indicated; 17 Nov 43. (36905) Part 2 (Enclosure "H") Bougainville Id-1 Section A.
- IMAC. Tentative Plan for Operations—Shortlands. Serial 0-569 over 13/124-lfs; 4 Aug 43. Secret. No MarCorps file No.; filed in unnumbered jacket entitled "IMAC Tentative Operation Plan—Bougainville."
- IMAC. Tentative Shipping Assignment. 13/93-lfs over 005A; 27 Sep 43. Secret. (36905) Filed in Bougainville 1-A-1 as enclosure "D" to enclosure "M".
- IMAC. Warning Order 18043. 13/93-lfs; 17 Sep 43. (36905) Part 1 (Enclosure "K") Bougainville Ia-1 Section A.
- LCIFLOT 5. Action Report of LCI's at Treasury Island, 27 October, 1943. Serial FE25/LCIFlot5/A 16-3 over 009; 30 Oct 43. Secret. (33573). Treasury 1-b.
- USS LCI (L) 21. Action Report, November 29, 1943. No serial; 1 Dec 43. Secret. (37632). Bougainville 1-CC.
- USS LCI (L) 23. Action Report, 29 November, 1943. No serial; 3 December 43. Confidential. (31815). Bougainville 1-DD.
- LCI (L) 23. Action Report, Treasury, 27 Oct 43. No serial; dated 28 Oct 43. Confidential. (31814). Treasury 1-c.
- LST Gp 15 (CTU 31.1. 3). Action Report, Treasury, 27 Oct 43. LSTGRP15/A16-3 over 0024; 2 Nov 43. Secret. (32674). Treasury 1-a.
- LST 399. Narrative account of action of 26 Oct, 1943 at Mono Island of the Treasury Island Group. No serial; 30 Oct 43. Secret. (28940). Treasury 1-c. Contains eight pages.
- McHenry, George W., Colonel. Letter to CMC. No file; 5 Dec 43. Filed in jacket entitled "Comments on Bougainville Campaign" in Historical Section files.
- U. S. S. *McKean*. Action Report Involving the Loss of the U. S. S. *McKean* as a Result of Enemy Action on November 17, 1943. No serial; 20 Nov 43. Secret. (30248). Bougainville 1-Z.
- McMath, Sydney S., LtCol., and Major Donald M. Schmuck. Memorandum to OinC Historical Section, P. I. No serial; 17 Nov 44. Filed in jacket entitled "Critique". See Historical Section, USMC, Files.
- 9th Marine Regiment. Operations Order 57-43. No serial; 24 Oct 43. Filed in unnumbered folder entitled 9th Mar 00 57-43.
- U. S. S. *President Adams*. Action Report for Landing at Torokina Point, Bougainville Island on 1 November 1943. APA19-A16-3 over 129; 7 Nov 43. Secret. (29514). Bougainville 1-T.

- U. S. S. *Saratoga*. Action Reports: Buka/Bonis Raid of 1-2 Nov 43 and Strike on Enemy Shipping, Rabaul, 5 Nov 43. Filed in Naval Records Section.
- 2d Para Bn. A chronological history of the 2d Parachute Battalion. Prepared by Lt. H. F. Gardner. No serial; no date. No classification. (45124). Covers period May 41-Feb 43. MarCorps Archives Unit Filed.
- 2d Para Bn. Operation Order No. 1-43. No serial; 23 Oct 43. Secret. (34089), Choiseul 2-c.
- 2d Para Bn. Preliminary Report, Operation Blissfull. Serial 00118 over 13/VHK-wha; 5 Nov 43. Secret. (39605). Bougainville 1-A-1, enclosure "Q".
- 2d Para Bn. Report of Operations. 22 Nov 43. Secret. S & C Files, HQMC. (Letter to CMC).
- 2d Para Bn. War Diary. No serial; covers period 1 October 1943 to 1 January 1944. Secret. HQMC Archives Unit Files.
- 2d 155mmArty Bn. Employment of the 155mm gun. Special Report to CMC; in USMC Archives, unit file.
- 2d Raider Regiment. Periodic Report of Front Line Operations (with patrol report and IMAC Patrol Order #1 enclosed). AS/fvh; 10 Dec 43. Confidential. (45124). Bougainville 1-P.
- 2d Raider Regiment. Special Action Report, Bougainville. No file or date. HQMC Archives Unit File.
- Task Force 31 (3d AmphFor). Operation Plan A14-43. Serial FE 25/A16-3(1) over 00465; 15 Oct 43. Secret. No Mar Corps No. Filed in unnumbered jacket entitled "TF 31 Op Plan A14-43—Bougainville."
- Task Group 31.1. Report of Occupation of the Treasury Islands. 27 Oct 43. FE25-2/A16-3(1) over 0061a; 10 Nov 43. Secret. (29941). Treasury Islands I-D. Constitutes Admiral Fort's Action Report.
- 3d Amph Force. Reconnaissance Report: Report of patrol on NE coast of Bougainville, 23-27 Sep 43. No Serial; 3 Oct 43. No document number. Filed in folder entitled "III Amph Force—Recon Report—Bougainville". Probably written by Captain Behrens of Co "D" Scouts, but is unsigned.
- 3d Amph Force. Seizure and Occupation of Northern Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, November 1 to November 13, 1943. Serial FE25/A16-3(3) over 00572; subserial 02/my; 3 December, 1943. Se ret. Filed in unnumbered folder entitled "3d Amph Force—Seizure and Occup. No. Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville." Constitutes the Action Report of Admiral Wilkinson, Bougainville folder Iw, has a duplicate.
- 3d Def Bn. Special Section Report, Cherryblossom Operations 5 October-15 December, 1943. No serial; 10 Jan 44. Secret. (33927). Bougainville 1-Q.
- 3d Def Bn. Employment of 90mm and 40mm guns in direct ground fire missions, 14 March-15 April, 1944. MCS files—0158—2 over 5475-60.
- 3d Def Bn. War Diary. November 1943 through June 1944. Dated in each succeeding month. MarCorps Archives, Unit File.
- 3d MarDiv. Action report of 3d MarDiv for period 1-11 Nov 43. No serial; 18 Dec 43. Secret. (31339). Bougainville 1-L.
- 3d MarDiv. Cherry Blossom to Bevy. (A collection of orders and plans for the evacuation of the 3d MarDiv; Miscellaneous serials, numbers, signatures, etc., gathered in one folder, with this title).
- 3d MarDiv. Combat Reports (Operation Reports). Serial destroyed; 21 March, 1944. Secret. (39198). Bougainville 1-K. Has been photocopied. A 350 page narrative, numbered in pencil, including the reports of each staff section and each component element of the command. A preliminary report exists containing the same information. It is dated 17 Mar 44 and the file number is 1975 over JAS/vn.
- 3d MarDiv. D-2 Periodic Reports, 4 Nov-28 Dec inclusive. No serial; dates are dates of reports. Secret. (MarCorps Historical Division 3186). Bougainville 3-1.
- 3d MarDiv. D-2 Special Section Report. No serial; 1 Feb 44. Filed in unnumbered folder entitled "D-2 Special Action Report." A report of the activities of the Intelligence Section during the operation.
- 3d MarDiv. D-2 Terrain Study (For inclusion in Estimate of the situation). No serial; 4 Oct 43. Prepared by Intelligence Section, 3d MarDiv. Secret. No Mar Corps file number. In an unmarked jacket.
- 3d MarDiv. D-3 Journal, 31 October-28 December, 1943. No serial; daily dated. Secret. No MarCorps file number; filed in unmarked jacket.
- 3d MarDiv. Intelligence Data—Shortland Islands. (Includes also info on Treasury Islands). Serial MF/jrb; no dates. Confidential. No MarCorps file number; filed in an unmarked jacket.
- 3d MarDiv. Intelligence Data, Shortlands. In actuality, a terrain study, with some mention of hydrographic conditions. Undated, unsigned, with no document number, filed in an unnumbered folder entitled "3d Div-Intelligence Data-Shortland Is (Bougainville)".
- 3d MarDiv. Operation Orders 15, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21. No serials; dated respectively 27 Sep, 5 Oct, 6 Oct, 8 Oct, 10 Oct, and 15 Oct. All secret. (36905) Bougainville 2-C.
- 3d MarDiv. Operation Plan No. 1. No serial; 15 Oct 43. (36905) Secret. Bougainville 2-B. Includes annexes, appendices, and Administrative Plan 1-43.
- 3d MarDiv. Patrol Reports (Reports of Various division patrols from 28 Nov to 29 Dec 43). No serial; dates are the dates that the reports were written. No classification. No MarCorps jacket or file number. Filed in folder entitled "3d Div Patrol Rep. & Overlays Bougainville".
- 3d MarDiv. Report of 3dMarDiv Patrol to Rekata Bay, Santa Isabel Island 3 Sep-9 Sep 43. Serial 11-rg; 13 Sep 43. Secret. (MarCorps Historical Division 2944). Bougainville 1-L-1.
- 3d MarDiv. Patrol Reports—Choiseul. No classification. (27111). Filed in unlabeled jacket, titled "3d Div Patrol Reports and Photos, Choiseul. Contains reports of patrols of 6-13 Sep ("K" Patrol) and 22-30 Sep. (IMAC Patrol).
- 3d MarDiv. Unit Journal. No serial; dates are dates of entry. Filed in unnumbered folder entitled "3d MarDiv Journal." Covers period 27 October, 1943, to 17 January 1944.

- 3d MarDiv. War Diary. No serial; dates are dates of entry (Prepared on the 1st day of each succeeding month). (33308). Secret. Unit File.
- 3d Marine Regiment. Combat Report. GOVO/lep; 20 Jan 44. Confidential. (38712). Bougainville 1-N.
- 3d Marine Regiment. Operation Report, Bougainville. No serial; undated. (39198). Filed in MarCorps 39198 as Enclosure F. Bougainville I-K.
- 3d Marine Regiment. Unit Journal. No serial; dated from 1 Nov 43 to 27 Dec 43. No classification. MarCorps Hist Sec. (1067). Bougainville 1-0.
- 36th Division. Operation Report—Bougainville, Serial 337-33.4; 6 Nov 43 to 30 Apr 44, War Department. (3715).
- 37th Infantry Division. Lessons Learned in the Bougainville Campaign. The official report of General Beightler; filed in War Department files, G-3 AGO, Historical Records Section, War Department Records Branch, Washington.
- 37th Infantry Division. G-2 Periodic Reports, 12 Nov-13 Dec 43. No serial; dates are dates of reports. Secret. (45124). Bougainville 3-J.
- 37th Infantry Division. Periodic Reports of Front Line Operations. No serial; dates are dates of reports. Secret. (45124). Bougainville 1-M.
- Transport Group, 3d Amph Force. Report of Landing Operations Northern Empress Augusta Bay area, Bougainville Island, 1-2 November, 1943, FC14/A4/A16-3(2) over 00194; 22 Dec 43. (32673). Bougainville 1-T. Secret.
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- USAFISPA. Memorandum: Report of Conference with General MacArthur at Port Moresby, 1400L, 17 Sep 43. No serial. 19 Sep 43. Secret. No MarCorps number. Unfiled; kept in working files of MarCorps Historical Section.
- USAFISPA. Memorandum for Admiral Halsey (from General Harmon). No serial; dated 19 Sep 43. No MarCorps file or jacket numbers assigned. A report of Conference with General MacArthur at Port Moresby, 17 Sep 43.
- USAFISPA, HEADQUARTERS, Objective Folder; Bougainville Island, Solomon Group, Parts I & II. Reference No. SPOF 9. Dated 1 August, 1943. Prepared by A C of S, G-2 APO #502. Confidential. No MarCorps file number. In an unmarked jacket.
- V AMPH FORCE, INTELLIGENCE SECTION. Distance Chart—Pacific Ocean. 64th Engr. Top. Bn. USAFICPA No. 390. In office of Historical Section, USMC.
- Van Orden, George O, Colonel. Letter to Director, Historical Division USMC. No file; 9 May 1943. Filed in jacket entitled "Comments on Bougainville Campaign" in Historical Section files.
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BOUGAINVILLE AND THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS

APPENDIX II

Casualties

IMAC CASUALTIES—BOUGAINVILLE<sup>1</sup>

	KILLED		WOUNDED		TOTAL	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
<i>Corps Troops:</i>						
Corps Troops . . . . .		6	1	30	1	36
<i>1st Parachute Regiment:</i>						
H&S and Weapons . . . . .	1	5	1	10	2	15
1st Bn . . . . .	1	18	5	60	6	78
3d Bn . . . . .	2	18	2	43	4	61
<i>2d Raider Regiment:</i>						
2d Raider Bn . . . . .	2	29	6	97	8	126
3d Raider Bn . . . . .		33	9	92	9	125
<i>3d Defense Battalion:</i>						
3d Def Bn . . . . .		13		40		53
<i>3d Marine Division:</i>						
Division Troops . . . . .	3	16	5	69	9	85
<i>3d Marines:</i>						
H&S and Weapons . . . . .			2	3	2	3
1st Bn . . . . .	4	47	9	178	13	225
2d Bn . . . . .		24	2	116	2	140
3d Bn . . . . .	2	34	5	160	7	194
<i>9th Marines:</i>						
H&S and Weapons . . . . .	1	5	2	14	3	19
1st Bn . . . . .	1	14	4	98	5	112
2d Bn . . . . .		13	10	36	12	47
<i>12th Marines:</i>						
1st Bn . . . . .		3		14		17
2d Bn . . . . .		3	1	4	1	7
3d Bn . . . . .	1	2	3	8	4	10
4th Bn . . . . .	1	1	1	8	2	9
<i>19th Marines:</i>						
1st Bn . . . . .		4		18		22
2d Bn . . . . .		5		20		25
<i>21st Marines:</i>						
H&S and Weapons . . . . .		2	1	5	1	7
1st Bn . . . . .	1	21	4	63	5	84
2d Bn . . . . .	5	23	3	76	8	99
3d Bn . . . . .	1	58		80	1	138

<sup>1</sup> Supplied by Casualty Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 12 November 1947.



## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX III

### Chronology

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1942		1943	
23 January	Japan seizes Rabaul; lands at Kieta, Bougainville	18 October	Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., U. S. N., relieves Admiral Ghormley as COMSOPAC
12 March	Japanese forces invade Bougainville and raise their flag after a short struggle	26 October	Battle of Santa Cruz Island; U. S. planes and surface units inflict severe damage on the Japanese
20 April	The South Pacific Command established	13-15 November	Battle of Guadalcanal; final Japanese attempt to engage in naval action in the southern Solomons ends in disaster for Japanese navy
8 May	Battle of Coral Sea; further Japanese advances to the south halted	30 November	Battle of Tassafaronga, Guadalcanal; a naval meeting engagement ending in a draw
19 June	Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley, USN, assumes command as COMSOPAC	9 December	Major General Vandegrift, USMC, relieved by Major General Patch, USA, of command at Guadalcanal; 5th Marines relieved by Army troops preparatory to their withdrawal
7 August	1st Marine Division lands on Guadalcanal; first American land offensive undertaken in the war against Japan		
8-9 August	Battle of Savo Island; U. S. Fleet suffers a defeat while protecting Guadalcanal		
23-25 August	Battle of Eastern Solomon Islands; U. S. Carrier forces turn back Japanese attempt to bring reinforcements to Guadalcanal		
2 October	U. S. Marines occupy Funafuti	7-8 February	Japanese Naval feint enables Japan to deceive U. S. Fleet and facilitate the final evacuation of Japanese forces from Guadalcanal
5 October	U. S. carrier aircraft raid Buin-Faisi-Tonelei area, Bougainville	21 February	3d Raider Battalion and Army troops seize the Russell Islands
11 October	Battle of Cape Esperance, Guadalcanal; U. S. fleet turns back another Japanese attempt to retake Guadalcanal from the sea	1-4 March	Battle of the Bismarck Sea
		5-6 March	Vila-Munda bombarded by U. S. DD-CA Task Force

12-13 May	Vila-Munda bombarded by DD-CA Task Force; Kolombangara coast mined	26 July	Plan of 11 July slightly modified, in that the area to be attacked is designated to be Southern Bougainville, Shortland, Kieta, Faisi
21 June	4th Raiders and Army troops land at Segi Point, New Georgia	5 August	Plan of 26 July modified in that the target area is limited to Shortland-Faisi due to insufficient troops for large attack
29-30 June	Vila-Munda and Shortland-Faisi areas bombarded by DD-CA Task Force; Shortland Harbor mined	5 August	Munda airfield falls to Americans
30 June	Initial landing of 1st Raider Battalion and 43d Inf. Div. (Maj. Gen Hester) captures Rendova Island, Wickham Anchorage, Segi, and Viru, all in the New Georgia Area	6-7 August	Battle of Vella Gulf
30 June	12th Defense Bn. and Army troops occupy Trobriand and Woodlard Islands	15 August	Allied forces (including Fleet Marine Force units) occupy Vella Lavella
1 July	9th Defense Battalion FMF, shells Munda	17-18 August	Battle of Vella Lavella
4 July	9th Defense Battalion, FMF, establishes new record for 90mm AA fire	22-23 August	Three Marine amphibious patrols landed on Shortland and in the Treasurys for the purpose of conducting reconnaissance missions
4-5 July	1st Raiders land at Rice Anchorage on north coast of New Georgia	3 September	Marine amphibious patrol lands on Santa Isabell. Returns to base on 9 September
5-6 July	First Battle of Kolombangara; Beginnings of Japanese attempts to evacuate Central Solomons	6 September	Marine amphibious patrol lands on Choiseul and returns to base on 12 September
11 July	Admiral Halsey issues directive to his subordinate units to prepare for an attack on an unannounced position in the Bougainville area	7 September	Rear Admiral Wilkinson, Lieutenant General Harmon, Major General Barrett, and Vice Admiral Fitch propose landings on Treasury Islands and Choiseul with purpose of launching further attacks on either northeast or southwest coast of Bougainville
11 July	Lieutenant General Vandegrift makes an examination of forces available for a Northern Solomons operation	11 September	COMSOWESPAC requests Admiral Halsey to strike in the Northern Solomons in accordance with JCS directives
11-12 July	Munda bombarded by CA-DD Task Force	15 September	Maj. General Charles Barrett relieves Lieutenant General A. A. Vandegrift as CG, IMAC
12-13 July	Second Battle of Kolombangara; Japanese attempting to evacuate Central Solomons intercepted and defeated	17 September	COMSOPAC requested by COMSOWESPAC to strike at Bougainville on pin point target to be selected by Admiral Halsey

- |              |   |               |   |
|--------------|---|---------------|---|
| 17 September | IMAC Warning Order #18-43 directs all IMAC units to be prepared for a movement to a forward area  | 9 October     | Central Solomons Campaign ends  |
| 22 September | Two Marine amphibious patrols land on Choiseul to make a reconnaissance of the north-west coast in preparation for a proposed landing   | 15 October    | IMAC issues Operation Order #1; orders 3d Marine Division to seize Cape Torokina                          |
| 22 September | Admiral Halsey issues directive to prepare study of a proposed landing at Empress Augusta Bay. Places Wilkinson in overall command of the proposed operation                              | 21-22 October | New Zealand amphibious patrol lands in the Treasury Islands   |
| 23 September | Two Marine amphibious patrols sent to Bougainville; one to north coast, the other to the south coast, in order to conduct reconnaissance for suitable landing beaches and air-field sites | 22 October    | IMAC issues Operation Order #2, directing the 2d Parachute Battalion to conduct the Choiseul diversion    |
| 27 September | General Barrett completes ground forces conception of the operation. Informs subordinate units of the plan  | 22 October    | Major General Geiger named Deputy Corps Commander IMAC  |
| 27 September | General Barrett instructs the 3d Division to be prepared to undertake the Bougainville operation  | 25-26 October | New Zealand advance party lands in the Treasury Islands   |
| 28 September | General Barrett instructs the 8th New Zealand Brigade to be prepared to undertake the Treasury Islands operation  | 27 October    | Advance party of Marines landed at Atsinima Bay to prepare for the assault landing of the 3dMarDiv        |
| 1 October    | Low level reconnaissance flights, with ground officers acting as observers, made over the Cape Torokina region  | 27 October    | 8th New Zealand Brigade lands on the Treasury Islands   |
| 7 October    | Admiral King approves 1 November 1943 as D-day Empress Augusta Bay  | 28 October    | 2d Parachute Battalion lands on Choiseul for a diversionary raid shortly after 0001; withdrawn 4 November |
| 8 October    | General Barrett sets up the Task Organization for the ground forces   | 31 October    | Buka-Bonia at northern end of Bougainville bombarded by Admiral Merrill's <i>Montpelier</i> Task Force    |
| 8 October    | Lieutenant General Vandegrift resumes command of IMAC upon the death of Major General Barrett   | 1 November    | Shortland-Faisi area bombarded by Admiral Merrill's <i>Montpelier</i> Task Force                          |
|              |   | 1 November    | IMAC lands at Cape Torokina with 3d and 9th Marines and 2d Raider Regiment in assault                     |
|              |   | 1-2 November  | Battle of Empress Augusta Bay; U S Fleet turns back Japanese attempt at naval counteraction               |
|              |   | 5 November    | Rabaul bombarded by U S carrier planes  |
|              |   | 7 November    | Elements of the Japanese 54th Infantry land near the mouth of the Laruma River; join our forces in battle |

- |             |  |             |   |
|-------------|--|-------------|---|
| 7 November  | Battle of Piva Road Block (Piva Trail), units of Japanese 23d Infantry attack of 3d Raider Battalion   | 26 November | 3d Marine Division advances to Piva River line, having defeated the Japanese 23d Infantry in the battle of Piva Forks   |
| 8 November  | First elements of 37th Division arrive at Bougainville   | 29 November | 1st Parachute Battalion conducts Koiari Beach raid  |
| 9 November  | End of Battle of Koromokina Lagoon; Japanese 54th Infantry defeated by 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, and 1st Battalion, 21st Marines | 10 December | Fighter field on Bougainville becomes operational   |
| 9 November  | Major General Geiger relieves Lieutenant General Vandegrift of command of IMAC. Vandegrift ordered home to become 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps        | 15 December | IMAC relieved by XIV Corps; Major General Geiger relieved by Major General Griswold   |
| 10 November | Japanese 23d Infantry defeated at Piva Road Block by 3d Raider Battalion, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, and 1st Battalion, 9th Marines                          | 22 December | 3d Marines relieved on the lines by the 2d Raider Regiment  |
| 11 November | Rabaul bombarded by U S carrier planes   | 25 December | The 164th Infantry begins relief of the 9th Marines on the lines  |
| 12 November | Beginning of Battle of Coconut Grove; Company E 21st Marines, contacts elements of the Japanese 23d Infantry   | 27 December | 9th Marines relieved on the lines by the 164th Infantry   |
| 14 November | 2d Battalion, 21st Marines, secures Coconut Grove and East-West Numa Numa trail junction for IMAC  | 28 December | 3d Marine Division relieved of responsibility for eastern sector at 1600 by the Americal Division   |
| 19 November | Beginning of Battle of Piva Forks  | 28 December | 9th Marines withdrawn from Bougainville   |
| 19 November | Final elements of 37th Division arrive at Bougainville   |             | 1944  |
| 20 November | Cibik Ridge discovered and seized  | 1-2 January | 21st Marines relieved on the lines by the 182d Infantry   |
| 23 November | Buka-Bonis bombardment by Admiral Merrill's <i>Montpelier</i> Task Force   | 9 January   | 21st Marines withdrawn from Bougainville  |
| 24 November | Battle of Cape St. George, New Ireland; defeat of the "Tokyo Express"  | 9 January   | The 132d Infantry arrives at Cape Torokina and relieves the 3d Parachute Battalion and the 3d Raider Battalion on the lines   |
| 25 November | Kavieng, New Ireland, bombed by U S carrier planes   | 16 January  | Final evacuation of 3d Marine Division personnel from Bougainville  |
|             |  | 31 January  | 78,000 men and 130,000 tons of supplies delivered to Bougainville by eight echelons of landing craft since 1 November. 14,700 men and 28,000 tons of supplies delivered to Treasury Islands since 27 October by six echelons of landing craft |
|             |  | 15 February | Green Islands fall to 3d (NZ) Division  |

8 March	Japanese begin attack on 37th Division sector	15 June	South Pacific Command turned over to Vice Admiral Newton by Admiral Halsey. COMSOWESPAC assumes command of all forces west of longitude 159 East. The South Pacific Campaign against the Japanese virtually ended
20 March	4th Marines (Reinforced) seize Emirau		
24 March	Japanese attacks on 37th Division reach greatest intensity with Japanese 13th, 23d, and 45th Infantry Regiment elements in the fight. Certain elements of the 53d, 54th, and 81st Japanese Infantry Regiments appear	21 June	3d Defense Battalion, FMF, which landed 1 November 1943 on Bougainville, and was the last FMF ground unit in active South Pacific area, withdrawn to Guadalcanal
1 April	End of the Japanese attacks on the 37th Division. Americans begin advance against no resistance up the Numa Numa trail		



**BOUGAINVILLE AND THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS**

**APPENDIX IV**

**Abbreviations**

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED  
IN THIS MONOGRAPH**

ADV.....	Advance	Com.....	Communications
AK.....	Cargo Vessel	COMAIRNORSOLS	Commander, Air, Northern Solomons (General Harris)
AM.....	Mine Sweeper	COMDESRON.....	Commander of De- stroyer Squadron
AmphFor.....	Amphibious Force	COMSOPAC.....	Commander, South Pa- cific Area (Admiral Halsey)
AP.....	Transport	COMTRANSDIV....	Commander of Trans- port Division
APA.....	Attack Transport	Cont.....	Control
APC.....	Coastal Vessel	CT.....	Combat Team
APD.....	Destroyer-Transport	CTF.....	Commander of Task Force
Bn.....	Battalion	CV.....	Aircraft Carrier
Brig.....	Brigade	DD.....	Destroyer
Btry.....	Battery	Def.....	Defense
CA.....	Heavy Cruiser	Det.....	Detachment
CFF.....	Compare	Ech.....	Echelon
CG.....	Commanding General	<i>et al</i> .....	And others
CIC.....	Combined Intelligence Center	<i>et seq</i> .....	And the following
CINCPAC.....	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Ocean Area (Admiral Nimitz)	Exec.....	Executive
CINCSOWESPAC.....	Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area (General Mac- Arthur)	8th Brig.....	Eighth Brigade Group of the Third New Zea- land Division
COMSOWESPAC.....		ff.....	Following
CL.....	Light Cruiser	FMF.....	Fleet Marine Force
CMC.....	Commandant Marine Corps	IMAC.....	First Marine Amphibi- ous Corps
CO.....	Commanding Officer	Gp.....	Group
Co.....	Company		

H&S	Headquarters and Service
<i>Ibid</i>	The same source as that immediately preceding
Ind	Independent
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JIGPOA	Joint Intelligence Group, Pacific Ocean Area
LCI	Landing Craft, Infantry
LCM	Landing Craft, Mechanized
LCP	Landing Craft, Personnel
LCT	Landing Craft, Tank
LCV	Landing Craft, Vehicle
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle-Personnel
<i>Loc Cit</i>	In the same place mentioned
LST	Landing Ship, Tank
LT	Landing Team
LVT	Landing Vehicle, Tracked
Mar	Marines
Mal	Malarial
Med	Medical
MT	Motor Transport
Mun	Munitions
NCB	Naval Construction Battalion
NZEF	New Zealand Expeditionary Force
O	Order
<i>Op Cit</i>	The same work by this author mentioned before
Opn	Operation
Ord	Ordnance
Para	Parachute
<i>Passim</i>	Here and there
Plat	Platoon
Rgt	Regiment
Rpt	Report
SoPac	South Pacific
SoWesPac	Southwest Pacific

SNLF	Special Naval Landing Force (a battalion of picked Japanese naval troops performing functions and missions similar to those of the USMC)
S&S	Supply and Service
Sig	Signal
Sp	Special
<i>Supra</i>	Above
TBF	Torpedo bomber
TF	Task Force
TG	Task Group of Transport Group
3dMarDiv	Third Marine Division
Trac	Tractor
USAFISPA	U S Army Forces in the South Pacific Area
VF	Fighter
Wpns	Weapons

The term "sniper" is used herein in the sense that became common usage as the war progressed. By "sniper" we mean any individual rifleman who delivers fire as an individual, and not as a part of a unit fire plan. A "sniper", therefore, need not be especially trained to serve a specific purpose. He may be located in any position—a tree, a hole in the ground, behind bushes, in buildings or equipment. He may choose any target that presents itself. He need not be guided by a time element in delivering his fire. His primary mission is to inflict the greatest number of casualties upon opposing forces, causing attrition in the ranks. Thus, any man spasmodically firing a rifle or similar weapon at another individual or group of individuals immediately becomes a sniper.

The term "knee mortar" as used herein refers to the Japanese grenade discharger.

The term "Val" used herein refers to the standard Japanese Navy dive bomber. This particular plane is properly known as Aichi 99. It had a fixed landing gear, elliptical wings, a slim fuselage, and a radial engine which protruded well forward of the wings. American forces has adopted a system of nicknames to facilitate identification of Japanese aircraft.





## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

### APPENDIX V

# Geography and History

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BOUGAINVILLE, largest of the Solomon Islands chain, is approximately 125 miles long and has an average width of 30 miles. It is shaped somewhat like an exclamation point stretching from southeast to northwest, with Buka island at the northwest tip representing the dot. In area, it contains about 3,500 square miles. The island is located at the extreme northwest end of the Solomons group, its center being located about 6°23' S., 155°49' E.<sup>1</sup> Cape Torokina is located on the central part of the southwestern coast of the island. In nautical miles<sup>2</sup> by the shortest sea route, this point lies 360 miles northwest of Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, 2,657 miles southeast of Yokohama, 3,227 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor, 190 miles northwest of Munda Point, New Georgia, 660 miles north of Port Moresby, New Guinea, 310 miles northwest of the Russell Islands, 150 miles northwest of Vella Lavella, and 210 miles east of Rabaul, New Britain.<sup>3</sup>

Bougainville, and the lesser islands Buka and Nissan, before World War II, was administered by Australia under mandate from the League of Nations. It is a mountainous, heavily wooded, and well watered region, having a relatively large population. Its normal exports are: copra, tro-

chus shell, timber, ivory nuts, green snail shell, beche-de-mer, and turtle shell.<sup>4</sup>

Along the entire length of the island runs a high, forest covered range of mountains known in the northwest end as the Emperor range, and in the southeast end as the Crown Prince range.<sup>5</sup> The highest point in the Emperor range is Mount Balbi which soars to 10,171 feet, while in the Crown Prince range the highest point is 7,743 feet above the sea. In both ranges many of the peaks are active volcanoes.<sup>6</sup>

Except by some natives and a few Japanese, mountainous regions of the interior generally have been unexplored by man. However, the island has been crossed several times in recent years by Australian government patrols, and in a few instances higher peaks have been scaled.<sup>7</sup>

Around the circumference of the island, from foothills to coast, there is a large, relatively flat, alluvial plain, which to a large extent along the southwest coast is covered by almost impenetrable mangrove swamps, where stands water from three inches to six feet in depth, and in which live a myriad of insects and other creatures which contrive to make life uncomfortable. On this plain, soil is generally rich and deep, a result of the

<sup>1</sup> V Amphibious Force, *Distance Chart—Pacific Ocean*. Prepared by the 64th Engr. Top. Bn, USAFICPA. No. 390.

<sup>2</sup> 6,080.27 feet; there are 5,280 feet in a statute mile.

<sup>3</sup> IMAC *Opn Rpt*, I (B), 19-20; see also Headquarters USAFISPA, Objective Folder; Bougainville Island, Solomon Group T, 3. For the latter document see the bibliography in appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne Daniel, *Islands of the Pacific* (New York, 1943), 134.

<sup>5</sup> R. W. Robson, *The Pacific Islands Handbook, 1944* (New York, 1945), 240.

<sup>6</sup> Hydrographic Office, USN, *Sailing Directions For the Pacific Islands*, Vol. I (Washington, 1938), 416-423.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, 135-136.

humus produced by ages of tropic growth.<sup>8</sup> Through the plain run innumerable short, swift-flowing, unnavigable streams which often overflow their banks and change their mouths, sometimes as much as a mile, adding not only to the size and number of stagnate pools within the swamp and marsh, but also to the difficulty of charting the courses of the various waterways for cartographic purposes.<sup>9</sup> Streams carry so much silt and debris that they sometimes tend to build themselves up above the surrounding terrain.

Rivers of Bougainville are numerous and in general larger than those found on other islands of the Solomons Group. The largest streams are in the southern part of the island where the wide Buin-Siwai plain is braided with numerous rivers descending from the heights of the Crown Prince Range. Rivers of the northern half of the island are usually shorter than those to the south but, except on the extreme tip, are fully as numerous.

Streams typically empty into the sea through swampy areas. Sometimes sand bars built up at the mouth of the stream by coastal currents cause almost complete damming. A swift and heavy flow of water after a rain, however, will often wash the sand bar away. Birds-foot delta formations, with several outlets to the sea, are typical of larger rivers. Crocodiles are frequently encountered in these areas.

Smaller rivers are fringed with the mangrove, but larger ones are often bare along their banks due to the recurrent overflow at flood periods. Normally banks are quite steep, up to 20 feet in height in some places, and hence firm. There are several relatively small meandering streams which empty into the sea at Empress Augusta Bay. These are often tidal for some distance inland and invariably swampy at their mouths. The Mameru River, south of Mawareka is navigable only for canoes for some distance inland, and there are several good landing places along its shores. Main drainage systems in the Cape Torokina region are the Laruma and Torokina rivers, which respectively form the northwest and southeast boundaries of the area.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Frank O. Hough, *The Island War: The United States Marine Corps in the Pacific* (Philadelphia, 1947), 105.

<sup>9</sup> IMAC, C-2 Estimate of the Situation, 8.

<sup>10</sup> 3d MarDiv, D-2 Terrain Study, 1.

Here and there, on higher land of the plain, a few small plantations, for the most part devoted to raising coconuts (and in a few instances cocoa), and numerous tiny native gardens have been cut out of the jungle, while clearings on the higher ground along the coast bear the dubious title of village. A population of some 40,000 natives live in these settlements. Chief among these villages is Kieta on the northeast coast; this town serves as the site of government of the island, and has a white population of normally 180. Due to the war and the fact that the Japanese developed certain areas for military purposes, the village of Buka, on the southern tip of Buka Island, Bonis, on the northern tip of Bougainville, Numa Numa, on the northeast coast, and Kahili and Kara on the southern tip of Bougainville, assumed an importance greatly out of proportion to their size and economic productivity.<sup>11</sup>

The island is almost entirely blanketed by a heavy vegetation typical of many tropic islands. Luxuriant overgrowth forms a canopy beneath which thrive innumerable types of small plants and vines, woven thickly together to form a barrier almost impassable to humans striving to make headway through the jungle, and it is very easy to become lost without a guide.<sup>12</sup> There are a few areas of "Kunai" grasslands on the island such as are common on Guadalcanal. Rain-forest predominates elsewhere except in planted areas. Throughout the Buin-Siwai area are numerous native clearings which are abandoned garden plots. Small grassy areas exist on the northeast coast at Chundwin, and there are brushy spots near Puruata on the west side of the island, but all of these are of very limited extent. In populated areas old garden plots which have been allowed to revert to "bush" are common, and here growth is smaller but usually more dense.

Native timber of the island includes: Tulus, Kulia, Karfilum, Mangrove, and Towan. As a rule these native trees are not over three feet in diameter at breast height. Nipa Palm grows in the coastal swamps of the sea coast in dense masses. At times large clumps of these palms become detached from the mainland and float out

<sup>11</sup> Robson, *op. cit.*, 230.

<sup>12</sup> 3d MarDiv, D-2 Terrain Study, 2.

to sea. Navigators call these "floating islands". Average height of this tree is 20 feet. Casuarina trees grow along the coast west of Moila Point. These are rather low, spreading trees growing well apart and do not hinder travel. "Wait-a-bit" is a thorn bush with long streamers that usually grows along stream banks. It generally grows six to eight feet high, but the streamers are often much longer. Thorns on this bush make it difficult to move in its vicinity. Lawyer Vine, a trailer with main stems the size of a finger growing out some 30 to 40 feet, is used for binding by natives but offers no hindrance to travel. Kanda Vine is likewise a long strong trailer, utilized in making chairs and erecting guide ropes over river crossings.<sup>13</sup>

The few good trails that do exist generally follow the beaches with minor exceptions, and total no more than 200 miles in length.<sup>14</sup> Before the war, few trails were capable of bearing vehicles. By 1945, however, there had been developed a fairly good road along the northeast coast from Buka Passage in the north, to Toiumonapu in the southeast. In the Cape Torokina sector the only trails of importance were the Numa Numa trail and the East-West trail; the former led across the island through a gap in the mountain to Numa Numa; the latter joined the Numa Numa trail near Piva and ran eastward through Popotana and Evansville.<sup>15</sup>

There are two seasons on Bougainville: a wet and a rainy. Extremes of rainfall range from a recorded maximum of 23.81 inches in July to a recorded minimum of 2.60 inches in December. Average recorded monthly rainfall is 9.51 inches a month.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note here that rain fell on 17 of the first 18 days of the Bougainville campaign.<sup>17</sup> Although the annual rainfall is in excess of 100 inches, it is relatively evenly dispersed throughout the year, since heavy rains may occur in any month. On the northern end of the

island rainfall maximums occur during January and February at the time of high sun, but to the south a July-August-September maximum appears. Rainfalls up to seven inches in a 24-hour period have been recorded on the south coast. Typical tropical afternoon showers associated with convectional heating by the sun are characteristic. Travel is generally said to be easiest during the morning hours when streams are at their lowest levels.

Temperatures are uniformly high with little variation between seasons. At Kieta the maximum recorded temperature is 96° F. and the minimum 64° F. Shorter records for Buin show a maximum of 98° and a minimum of 70°. Daily range is low, averaging from 10° to 15°, and nights are uniformly warm. Humidity averages 75% to 85% in morning, 70% to 80% in the afternoon, and 85% to 95% at night.

Winds are distinctly seasonal, southeast trades prevailing from May to October, and northwest monsoons from December to March. Certain residents of the area insist, however, that winds of May to October are from the southwest rather than the southeast. Remaining months are transitional with variable winds. At height of the respective seasons short but severe squalls occur with wind velocities of 30 to 50 miles per hour. These are usually accompanied by heavy rain and thunder and are associated with passage of large cumulus or cumulonimbus clouds which descend almost to the ground. These are local, and usually blow from southeast or northwest. Ordinarily they last three to four hours.<sup>18</sup> Climate is not healthful for white men, since both humidity and heat are excessive, and malaria is endemic. Blackwater fever, dengue fever, and dysentery also occur. Among natives tuberculosis is common and leprosy is not uncommon. Acute poliomyelitis is not unknown and yaws and hookworm long have been troublesome.<sup>19</sup>

The southwest coast of Bougainville is low and fronted with islets and reefs, some of the latter being charted as much as 17 miles off shore. Several dangerous shoals exist in the Cape Torokina region, but the remainder of the coast of the

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. See also IMAC C-2 Estimate of the Situation, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, 136.

<sup>15</sup> Hough, *op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>16</sup> IMAC C-2 estimate of the Situation, 1. It should be noted here that the natives consider the two seasons to be determined by the direction of the winds and refer to them as the northwest and southeast seasons.

<sup>17</sup> Monks, *op. cit.* 134.

<sup>18</sup> IMAC C-2 Estimate of the Situation, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, 143.

island is generally free of reefs.<sup>20</sup> There are few anchorages and fewer harbors. The strait that separates Buka from Bougainville is probably the best anchorage in the area, but Blanche Harbor in the Treasury group south of Bougainville is also very good. Other harbors in the area, suitable only for small craft, are Rawa, located at Kieta on the northeast coast; Tonolai, on the southwestern corner of Bougainville; and the anchorage on the southeastern corner of the island off the coast of Buin.<sup>21</sup> Empress Augusta Bay, southeast of Cape Torokina, is sheltered only from southeast winds, but has the advantage of possessing from eight to 24 fathoms of water.<sup>22</sup>

Beaches of the island are generally of grey-black sand and vary in width from 15 to 200 yards. In some areas jungle growth extends over the beach to the water's edge, thus effectively blotting out any evidence of a beach, to such an extent that two bulldozers can not pass abreast between jungle and sea.<sup>23</sup> Often the inland side of a beach drops away into swamp, further limiting possibilities for using the beach for landing operations, this being particularly true of many of the beaches in the Cape Torokina area.<sup>24</sup> However, it must be said that the slope of beaches is gradual in many instances, and approaches to them are relatively clear of natural obstacles, giving an opportunity for grounding landing craft.<sup>25</sup> Some beaches in the Cape Torokina area are nevertheless so steep that landing craft cannot be beached along the entire length of keel. In addition a 12 foot bank exists at the surf line in this area. Surf is high and strong, so much so in the Cape Torokina area that many landing boats broached on D-day.<sup>26</sup> After the operation Admiral Halsey pronounced beach and terrain conditions "worse than anything ever encountered before in the South Pacific."<sup>27</sup>

An officer who participated in the campaign

<sup>20</sup> Hydrographic Office, *op. cit.*, 165, 421.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, 136.

<sup>22</sup> IMAC C-2 Estimate of the Situation, 2; *cf.* Hydrographic Office, *op. cit.*, 416-423.

<sup>23</sup> *Combat Narratives*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Josephy, *op. cit.*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> IMAC C-2 Estimate of the Situation, 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Burrus, *op. cit.*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> Halsey, *SoPac Narrative*, 9.

gives an appropriate description of the jungle as it applied to Bougainville:

A jungle is the practically impenetrable "green hell" of popular imagination, and an amazing variety of other things. It varies from mangrove swamps and scrub thickets to vine-draped, giant forests. It towers skyward, and it cowers at its own feet; it's as prolific as microbes, and it's as sterile as a stone; it's all embracing as quicksand and it's as repellant as nausea. The jungle is the enemy of all creatures; it devours its own young, and its young strangle it; the jungle is Moloch, the dark stench of whose corruption is overwhelming.<sup>28</sup>

This was the first—the greatest—enemy that had to be conquered by the Marines fighting for a beachhead at Bougainville.

At the outbreak of war there were said to be over 100 Asiatics, including two Japanese, on Bougainville and adjacent Islands. Many of the Chinese were interned at Kieta or impressed into service by the Japanese; several others were evacuated to Fiji by the Allies.

Almost all white residents of Bougainville Island, estimated to number 107 in April, 1942, were evacuated after the outbreak of war. One group came out by submarine as late as June, 1943.

Aside from District Officers at Kieta and patrol officers in the sub-districts, all permanent white residents were either planters or missionaries. Roman Catholic, Methodists, and Seventh Day Adventist denominations were active on the island. Catholics, under Bishop Wade, who was evacuated with his staff in April, 1943, were numerically the strongest. There were 22 Catholic mission stations on the island with a white personnel of 36 before the war. These included Americans, Germans and French. Half of these were reported missing and many were interned by the Japanese. Headquarters of the Methodist Mission was located at Kahili under the Rev. A. H. Voyce, while a second Methodist Mission was at Teop on the NE coast.<sup>29</sup>

A small detachment of Australian Imperial Forces personnel was operating on the island in conjunction with Australian coastwatchers in late June, 1943, but a radio message of 22 June reported that Japanese pressure on our patrols was forcing them to retire to the interior and that their

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Jenkins in an article in *Telephony*. See bibliography in appendix.

<sup>29</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 126-127.

activities would in the future be drastically curtailed. This group was finally evacuated in the submarine *Gardfish* in July.<sup>30</sup>

Economic development of Bougainville was almost exclusively confined to copra production. Coconut trees were planted, usually about 27 feet apart, on the better drained properties which were easily accessible from the sea.

Most European plantations were owned by Burns, Philp & Co., Ltd., through its subsidiary, Choiseul Plantations, Ltd. (CPL). More important CPL properties were Baniu, Paua, Tinputs, Teopasino, Inus, Kiriwina, Arigua, Toimonapu, Kunua and Sorakan. Excepting last named, all were located on the east coast. Behind Raua Bay a road led inland to a Dutch coffee plantation, controlled by Burns, Philp & Company, 800 feet above sea level.

Largest single block property before the war was the 5,000 acre Numa Numa coconut plantation, operated by Buka Plantation & Trading Co., Ltd. This organization also operated Bonis Plantation on the tip just across from Buka Air-drome. They employed a Japanese, Yatoshi, to operate their copra collecting vessel.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned properties there were numerous small, independently owned plantings, almost all of which were on the east coast. One at Toberoi, north of the Kieta Air-drome, was developed by a German, Dr. Kroning, former German Government physician at Kieta. Numerous mission stations also operated small plantations at many places along the coast.<sup>32</sup>

Native population figures for Bougainville have never been accurately established. A fairly complete 1940 census figure gives 39,309 "counted natives living in villages". There are no large settlements. Villages range from 50 to 200 in population, often with subsidiary settlements known as "half-line" villages a half-mile or more away. Largest concentrations of natives are found in the Buin-Siwai area of southern Bougainville; missionaries estimate total native population at 42,000 to 45,000.<sup>33</sup>

Bougainville natives are primarily of Mela-

nesian extraction with an admixture of Papuan-speaking peoples and some very black tribes along the coast, who may have been driven from New Guinea. All practice digging-stick agriculture. Of 18 distinct native languages which have been observed, half have predominantly Papuan affinities, these including the most populous districts.

Pidgin English, nearest approach to a universal language on Bougainville, is understood by the majority of natives in more accessible coastal areas; in almost all villages someone will be found who is able to speak it. Bougainville Pidgin is similar to that spoken on New Guinea and New Britain, and is much less closely related to English than is the Pidgin of the southern and central Solomons.<sup>34</sup>

In German times natives of the Kieta Administrative District, which included all of Bougainville Island, were very troublesome and in one year alone some ten punitive expeditions had to be dispatched to that area. During the decade prior to the outbreak of war, great strides were made in bringing the native population under government control and the island became a most important source of indentured labor for the Territory of New Guinea.

The native is characterized as small but strong, and an indefatigable worker when in the right mood. He is distinctly "moody". When content, he will carry on an incessant jabbering with his companions. Work is always going well when there is plenty of noise among native carriers, but a quiet one will bear watching as he becomes sullen, for he is apt to duck out. Of all inhabitants of Bougainville Islands those of the Buin-Siwai district have been said to be perhaps the most tractable. In former times plantations took large groups of natives on three-year contracts, and when their time was finished another group would go. In obtaining labor, legal procedure was to contract government appointed "Luluia" or "Kukari", whose compensation was exemption from an annual government tax of 10 shillings.<sup>35</sup>

Missionaries have reached all but a few in the far interior. "Teacher boys" have a reputation for being very faithful, especially the Methodists

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

<sup>31</sup> Robson, *op. cit.*, 236.

<sup>32</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 123.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 160.

<sup>35</sup> Sholefield, *op. cit.*, 50-73.

and Seventh Day Adventists, as they were trained by English-speaking missionaries. Where French and Germans have been operating it has been found more difficult to win the natives confidence.<sup>36</sup>

Natives of Bougainville and Buka are coal black in color. In contrast to brown skinned natives of other surrounding districts, these are eagerly sought after as plantation laborers, for they are energetic, efficient and cheerful. Furthermore, Bougainville natives are able to adapt themselves with facility to the white man's way of life.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, tribal fights sometimes occur, and raids are occasionally made on coastal villages by inhabitants of the mountains. This has caused the government much difficulty, even in recent years.<sup>38</sup>

Alvaro de Mendana, a Spanish explorer, sailing from Peru, in two ships *Los Reyes* and *Todos Santos*, is reported to have originally discovered the Solomon Islands, in 1567. Two centuries elapsed, however, before Bougainville Island was sighted in 1768, actual discovery occurring when the French navigator, Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811), sighted it on his voyage around the world (1766-1769) in the ships *Boudeuse* and *Etoile*. Later adventurers such as Quires, Shortland, d'Urville, Blackwood, Yule, Simpson, and Moresby sailed in the waters around the island. Buka island had been sighted a year earlier (1767) than Bougainville by Captain Philip Carteret of the British sloop *Swallow*.<sup>39</sup>

Little attention was paid to the Solomon Islands by western nations until the middle of the 19th century.<sup>40</sup> It was in quest of a colonial empire that the British and Dutch extended their authority and control over regions of the southwest Pacific. At about the same time, the German empire, under leadership of Bismarck, also evidenced an interest in this sphere. Between 1870 and 1880 imperial Germany began to take keen interest in Pacific territories.

As early as 1857, the widely known firm of Godeffroy und Sohn had entered Pacific trade

competition and over a period of some twenty years exercised an ever increasing influence over Pacific commerce. When international trading jealousies began to appear about 1875, Godeffroy und Sohn and several of its German cohorts found that they needed financial and moral assistance from their government. This aid Prince Bismarck, being interested in the colonial expansion of Germany, willingly gave. Where trading companies went, there they carried German sovereignty. Since there were but few planters and traders in the northern Solomons, and since the only governmental control exercised there was that of the natives, Germans went ahead with their plans for eventual colonization, by proclaiming on 3 November 1884 this area—to include New Ireland, New Britain and northeast New Guinea—to be a part of the German empire, having received opposition from neither the ill-organized natives nor from other colonial powers.<sup>41</sup>

This action naturally caused a furor in Australia, where German inroads were feared, for farsighted Australians even then realized that in the hands of an unfriendly power, these islands were a dagger pointing at the heart of their country—a springboard for invasion. Furthermore, Australia was denied the privilege of developing trade and commerce in the islands as long as they were not a British possession. Many representations were made by Australian nationals to Whitehall in London, but to no avail. The British government was adamant about causing trouble through making a claim in a sphere in which it was not particularly interested, so no action was taken.<sup>42</sup>

Finally by virtue of the Samoa Convention of 14 November 1899, Great Britain assumed responsibility for the southern Solomons, and recognized Germany's sovereignty over the northern Solomons.<sup>43</sup> In 1905 Kieta became the administrative center of the Bougainville District of the German protectorate.

As late as 1893, when the British first laid official claim to the Solomons, only 50 white men—traders and missionaries—lived in the entire archipelago. Prior to that time, with the excep-

<sup>36</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 60-67.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-163, 167-168.

<sup>38</sup> Robson, *op. cit.*, 232, 240.

<sup>39</sup> Robson, *op. cit.*, 224, 231.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-230.

<sup>41</sup> Scholefield, *op. cit.*, 97-107.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-124.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 324; *cf.* Robson, *op. cit.*, 225.

tion of Germany's claim laid on the northern islands, the islands as a whole were unclaimed by any civilized nation, and for the most part had been unvisited except by certain explorers and white "labor agents". Natives were often very badly treated by these "labor agents" who frequently kidnapped and literally enslaved them on plantations in other parts of the Pacific. As a result the natives became quite antagonistic toward white men.<sup>44</sup>

With the outbreak of World War I, Australian troops invaded Bougainville, and after a short skirmish in which one German officer and 30 German native troops, and two Australian officers and four other ranks lost their lives, the Australians, on 12 September 1914, raised their colors in place of the German. Finally in December 1920, the German islands Bougainville, Buka, Nissan, and lesser islands surrounding them, together with the Bismarck archipelago and a portion of New Guinea, were assigned by the League of Nations to Australia as a mandate; Australia set up a civil administration over the mandated area on 9 May 1921.<sup>45</sup>

The District Officer at Kieta, assisted by a small staff, worked under instructions received from administrative headquarters of the territory at Lae; headquarters having been moved thence from Rabaul. A line running through the Bougainville Straits between the Kahili coast on the southern part of Bougainville, and the Shortland-Faisi Islands to the south, separated the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, as the area became known, from the British Solomon Islands.<sup>46</sup>

Bougainville was occupied by the Japanese on 12 March 1942 and used as a supply base and fueling depot for the outposts in the Solomons. Both at its northern end and its southern tip, there are sheltered harbors for naval vessels and level areas on which airports could be constructed. Under Australian mandate civilian airports had been built which the Japanese tentatively planned to use.

After we had landed on Guadalcanal, especially after the naval defeat the Japanese suffered

off Guadalcanal on 13-14 November 1942, work was rushed on twin airports at both the northern and southern ends of Bougainville, one for fighter protection and one for bombers. Though the whole island had been kept under constant survey by aerial reconnaissance and night patrols during the Spring and Summer of 1943, few Allied attacks had been made against Bougainville, because all our available aircraft were being used in the conquest of the New Georgia Islands. By later summer, however, land bases had been established near enough to Bougainville to make possible its complete neutralization. To neutralize the island meant rendering the four airports on the island at least temporarily unusable, at the same time maintaining a constant inspection of secondary airports that the Japanese had under construction on the east coast at Kieta and elsewhere. The Japanese were desperately trying to retain possession of their barge routes from Rabaul southward.

The exact number of Japanese troops on the island was difficult to estimate but reconnaissance had placed the figure at 44,000. Almost all enemy troops were being used, however, as protective garrisons for airports, or to guard at a few coast defenses the former administrative center at Kieta harbor on the east coast and at Empress Augusta Bay on the west coast. Barge routes for supplies ran down around the coast from Rabaul, while many naval vessels had been sighted in a well-protected harbor at Shortland Island and in the large and sheltered bay at Buin at the south end of the island. Troops could be transported by night either south from Rabaul or north from Choiseul Island where the enemy held strong bases. In our favor, initially at least, was the discovery that the Japanese had not attempted to improve interior roads or trails but had relied largely on barge traffic and convoy to supply or transport their troops. When we took over control of both the sea lanes and air, they found it extremely difficult to mass troops against our stroke.<sup>47</sup>

Upon landing the Japanese apparently had begun immediate preparations for an assault on

<sup>44</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, 146-147.

<sup>45</sup> Robson, *op. cit.*, 228.

<sup>46</sup> Objective Folder: Bougainville, *supra*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Robson, *op. cit.*, 220.

Australia to the south.<sup>48</sup> Early months of the occupation were spent in building up a reserve supply of men and material for the planned campaign and also in constructing airfields and an advance naval base from which to launch that assault. From the Rabaul-Bougainville area the enemy time and time again struck Allied advance bases at Port Moresby and Darwin in attempt to neutralize those bases and in hope of catching the American South Pacific Fleet at anchor. Furthermore, they wished to imperil the American Australian life-line.<sup>49</sup>

During the period in which they occupied Bougainville, the Japanese succeeded in building air-

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<sup>48</sup> Robson, *loc. cit.* indicates this as the reason for Japanese occupation of the Solomons, but no indication can be found, after a thorough search of Japanese records, that the Japanese actually had an invasion of Australia in mind.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 465-466.

fields of great value to their cause in the Buka-Bonis area in the north and in the Kahili-Kara area to the south. Further they organized for defense every obvious landing beach in the vicinity of these positions. In addition, they spent much effort in cultivating friendship of natives, and were successful to the extent that they existed on Bougainville for a considerable period of time, even though cut off from the Japanese empire.<sup>50</sup> That the Allies recognized the fact that natives in certain instances may have become friendly to the Japanese, is evidenced by the fact that our troops were warned before they went ashore that many natives were unreliable. It would appear that Japan had succeeded in gaining some converts to her Greater East Asia Doctrine.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Feldt, *op. cit.*, 160-167.

<sup>51</sup> IMAC C-2 Estimate of the Situation, 27-28.





## BOUGAINVILLE AND THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS

# APPENDIX VI

# Task Organization

## ORDER OF BATTLE, CAPE TOROKINA ASSAULT

### 3d Marine Division Task Organization

By its operation orders of 6 and 8 October 1943, and its operation plan of 15 October 1943, the 3d Marine Division had divided itself into three "Task Units" for the purpose of conducting the landing operation. As modified by a change dated 18 October 1943, these units were formed as follows: <sup>1</sup>

#### *Task Unit A-1*—Col. George W. McHenry

- (1) 3d CT (as designated by Opn O 18-43)
- (2) 2d Raider Regt (less 3d Raider Bn)
- (3) Adv Ech Branch #3, 4th Base Depot (less Det's)
- (4) H&S Co 3d Med Bn
- (5) Com Unit #7 (less Det)
- (6) Det Adv Naval Base Unit #7
- (7) Det S&S Co 3d Serv Bn
- (8) Det Acorn 13
- (9) Det NCB IMAC
- (10) Det H&S Btry 12th Mar

#### *Task Unit A-2*—Col. Edward A. Craig

- (1) 9th CT (as designated by Opn O 18-43)
- (2) 3d Raider Bn
- (3) Adv Ech Hq IMAC

- (4) 1st Ech Comd Gp 3d MarDiv
- (5) 3d Sig Co (Incl Div Warning Center) (less Det)
- (6) 3d MP Co (less 3d Plat)
- (7) Det H&S Btry 12th Mar
- (8) 3d Hd Co (less Comd Gp & 3 Band (Sec's))
- (9) Co E 3d Med Bn (less Det)
- (10) Det H&S Co 3d Tk Bn
- (11) 4th Plat Co D (Sct) 3d Tk Bn
- (12) Det NCB IMAC

#### *Task Unit A-3*—Lt. Col. Edward H. Forney, Jr.

- (1) Det H&S Btry 3d Def Bn
- (2) 90mm Gp 3d Def Bn
- (3) Sp Wpn Gp H&S Btry 3d Def Bn
- (4) Btry H 3d Def Bn
- (5) Btry I 3d Def Bn
- (6) 1st Plat Btry A 3d Sp Wpn Bn
- (7) 4th Plat Btry A 3d Sp Wpn Bn
- (8) Det #1 Hq COMAIRNORSOLS
- (9) 602 Radar Team IMAC
- (10) Argus #5
- (11) Det Com Unit #7 (Incl 3d Separate Wire Plat)
- (12) Co A 3d Amph Trac Bn
- (13) Det NCB IMAC
- (14) Det 3d Mar

<sup>1</sup> See 3d MarDiv Opn Plan No. 1, dated 15 October 1943, and the modification thereto dated 18 October 1943.

- (15) Det 9th Mar
- (16) Det Boat Pool #11
- (17) Det 3d Sig Co

- (18) Det 3d Hq Co
- (19) Det Co E 3d Med Bn

The combat teams (CT) were made up as follows: <sup>2</sup>

*3d CT*

- (1) 3d Mar (less Det of 20)
- (2) 3d Bn 12th Mar
- (3) Det H&S Co 19th Mar
- (4) Hq Co 3d Bn 19th Mar (less 3 Co Hq Det's)
- (5) Co C 19th Mar
- (6) Co F 19th Mar (plus 1-10)
- (7) Co I 19th Mar (plus Co Hq Det)
- (8) Ep & Mal Cont Gp
- (9) Air Liaison Party #3
- (10) 3d Band Sec
- (11) 3d Plat Btry A 3d Sp Wpn Bn
- (12) 3d Plat Co D (Sct) 3d Tk Bn
- (13) Mun Sec Ord Co 3d Serv Bn
- (14) 3d Plat S&S Co 3d Serv Bn (less Bkry & Salv Sec's)
- (15) Co C 3d Med Bn
- (16) Co 3d MT Bn

*9th CT*

- (1) 9th Mar (less Det of 20)
- (2) 1st Bn 12th Mar
- (3) Hq Co 1st Bn 19th Mar
- (4) Co A 19th Mar
- (5) Co D 19th Mar (plus 1-10)
- (6) Co G 19th Mar (plus Co Hq Det)
- (7) Ep & Mal Cont Gp
- (8) Air Liaison Party #1
- (9) 1st Band Sec
- (10) 1st Plat Btry A 3d Sp Wpn Bn
- (11) 1st Plat Co D (Sct) 3d Tk Bn
- (12) Mun Sec 1st Plat Ord Co 3d Serv Bn

<sup>2</sup> 3d MarDiv Operation Order 18-43, 6 October 1943.

- (13) 1st Plat S&S Co 3d Serv Bn (less Bkry & Salv Sec's)
- (14) Co A 3d Med Bn
- (15) Co A 3d MT Bn

*21st CT*

- (1) 2d Bn, 12th Marines (pack howitzers)
- (2) Hq Co, 2d Bn, 19th Marines
- (3) B Co, 19th Marines
- (4) E Co, 19th Marines
- (5) H Co, 19th Marines
- (6) B Co, 3d Tank Bn
- (7) B Co, 3d Amphibian Tractor Bn
- (8) B Co, 3d MT Bn
- (9) B Co, 3d Med Bn
- (10) D Battery, 3d Special Wpns Bn
- (11) 2d Plat, Btry A, 3d Sp Wpns Bn
- (12) 2d Scout Plat, D Co, 3d Tank Bn
- (13) 2d Plat, 3d S&S Co (less Bakery and Salvage Sections)
- (14) Mun Sec, 2d Plat, 3d Ordnance Co
- (15) 2d Band Sec
- (16) Epidemic and Malaria Control Units

On 3 October 1943, the 2d Raider Regiment (Provisional), which was a unit of IMAC<sup>3</sup> had been attached to the 3d Marine Division for assignment to duty. The 3d Marine Division further attached the Regiment, less the 3d Battalion, to the 3d Marines, and the Raiders became a part of task unit A-1. The 3d Battalion was attached to the 9th Marines and became a part of task unit A-2.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 3d MarDiv Opn Plan, 1.

<sup>4</sup> 3d MarDiv Opn Rpt, 333.

## ORDER OF BATTLE, TREASURY ISLANDS OPERATION

### 8th New Zealand Brigade Group of the 3d New Zealand Division

#### *Headquarters:*

Hq, 8th NZ Brig Gp  
Joint Signal Section  
8th Defense Platoon  
Sec, 5th Pro Company  
64th LAD

#### *New Zealand Units:*

38th Fd Regiment  
29th Light AA Regiment (less 2 Batteries)  
54th Anti-tank Battery  
23d Fd Company  
29th Battalion  
34th Battalion  
36th Battalion  
8th Brig. Machine Gun Company  
4th Motor Transport Company  
Number 1 Receiving Section

7th New Zealand Ambulance Section  
2d Field Surgery  
10th Mobile Dental Section  
Malarial Control Section

#### *United States Units:*

198th CA (aa) Regt (less 1 Bn) prov.  
Co A, 87th NCB  
Detachment, Hq, COMAIRNORSOLS  
Air Warning Unit No. 2  
Argus No. 6  
Detachment, Advance Naval Base Unit  
No. 7  
Boat Pool No. 10  
Communication Unit No. 8  
2d Operation Platoon, Company A, IMAC  
Signal Battalion.

## ORDER OF BATTLE, EMIRAU LANDING

### 4th Marines Regimental Combat Team

Emirau Landing Force—Brig Gen A. H. Noble  
4th Marines (Reinforced)—LtCol Alan Shapley  
Pioneer Co., 19th Marines  
Co. D, IMAC Med Bn  
Det, MT Co  
Det, Service and Supply Platoon  
Co. A (Lt Tanks), 3d Tank Bn  
Co. C (Reinforced), 3d Amph Trac Bn  
2 Shore Fire Control Parties  
Det, IMAC Signal Bn  
1 Platoon, 40mm, 14th Defense Bn  
2 Platoons, 20mm, 14th Defense Bn  
Reconnaissance Detachment, COMAIRNORSOLS  
Air Command—Col W. L. McKittrick  
Hq, COMAIR EMIRAU  
Argus 13  
Naval Base Unit—LtComdr Kelly, USN  
Advance Echelon, NABU #8  
Boat Pool 14



**BOUGAINVILLE AND THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS**

**APPENDIX VII**

**Japanese Task Organization**

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**JAPANESE CHAIN OF COMMAND, CAPE TOROKINA, BOUGAINVILLE**

**1 November 1943**

Supreme Headquarters in Tokyo (The Emperor)  
6th Area Army (General Imamura)  
Seventeenth Army (Lieutenant General Hyakutake)  
6th Infantry Division (Lieutenant General Kanda)  
23d Infantry Regiment (Colonel Hamanoue)  
1st Battalion, 23d Infantry (Major Fukuda)  
2d Company, 1st Battalion (Captain Ichikawa)

Information gathered from CIC SoPac Interrogation #327 (2d Lt Tsuneo Yamamoto).



**BOUGAINVILLE AND THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS**

**APPENDIX VIII**

**Navy Unit Commendation Signal Battalion**

---

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

**III AMPHIBIOUS CORPS SIGNAL BATTALION**

for service as set forth in the following

**CITATION:**

"For extremely meritorious service in support of military operations, while attached to the I Marines Amphibious Corps during the amphibious assault on Bougainville, and attached to the III Amphibious Corps during operations at Guam, Palau and Okinawa, during the period from November 1, 1943 to June 21, 1945. The first American Signal Battalion to engage in amphibious landings in the Pacific Ocean Areas, the III Amphibious Corps Signal Battalion pioneered and developed techniques and procedures without benefit of established precedent, operating with limited and inadequate equipment, particularly in the earlier phase of these offensive actions, and providing its own security while participating in jungle fighting, atoll invasions and occupation of large island masses. Becoming rapidly experienced in guerrilla warfare and the handling of swiftly changing situations, this valiant group of men successfully surmounted the most difficult conditions of terrain and weather as well as unfamiliar technical problems and, working tirelessly without consideration for safety, comfort or convenience, provided the Corps with uninterrupted ship-shore and bivouac communication service continuously throughout this period. This splendid record of achievement, made possible only by the combined efforts, loyalty and courageous devotion to duty of each individual, was a decisive factor in the success of the hazardous Bougainville, Guam, Palau and Okinawa Campaigns and reflects the highest credit upon the III Amphibious Corps Signal Battalion and the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to the III Amphibious Corps Signal Battalion who actually participated in one or more of the Bougainville, Guam, Palau and Okinawa operations are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

**JAMES FORRESTAL,**  
*Secretary of the Navy.*



BOUGAINVILLE AND THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS

APPENDIX IX

Navy Unit Commendation, 12th Marines

---

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

TWELFTH MARINES, THIRD MARINE DIVISION

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Empress Augusta Bay Beachhead, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, from November 1, 1943, to January 12, 1944; and in the invasion and seizure of Guam, Marianas, July 21 to August 10, 1944. Divided for landing into small elements dispersed over 5,000 yards of beach at Empress Augusta Bay, the TWELFTH Marines overcame perilous surf and beach conditions and an almost impenetrable wall of jungle and swampy terrain to land their pack howitzers, initial ammunition and equipment by hand, to occupy firing positions, emplace guns, set up all control facilities and deliver effective fire in support of the THIRD Marine Division beachhead by afternoon of D-Day. In action for 73 days while under continual Japanese air attacks, the TWELFTH Marines aided in smashing an enemy counterattack on November 7-8, silenced all hostile fire in the Battle of Cocoanut Grove on November 13, and delivered continuous effective fire in defense of the vital beachhead position. At Guam, they landed in the face of enemy mortar and artillery fire through treacherous surf and, despite extreme difficulties of communication, supply and transportation, and the necessity of shifting from one type of fire to another, rendered valuable fire support in night and day harassing fires, counterbattery fires and defensive barrages, including the disruption of an organized counterattack by seven Japanese battalions on the night of July 26-27. By their individual heroic actions and their skilled teamwork, the officers and men of the TWELFTH Marines served with courage and distinction during the THIRD Marine Division's missions to secure the Empress Augusta Bay Beachhead and to aid in the recapture of Guam, thereby enhancing the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the TWELFTH Marines during these periods are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,  
*Secretary of the Navy.*



BOUGAINVILLE AND THE  
NORTHERN SOLOMONS

APPENDIX X

Command and Staff

I MARINE AMPHIBIOUS CORPS

15 OCTOBER-15 DECEMBER, 1943

Commanding General—

LtGen A. A. Vandegrift  
(to 9 November)

MajGen Roy S. Geiger  
(from 10 November)

Chief of Staff—

Col Gerald C. Thomas  
(to 9 November)

BrigGen Alfred H. Noble  
(from 10 November to 17 December)

BrigGen Oscar R. Cauldwell  
(from 18 December)

C-1—LtCol Joseph C. Burger

C-2—LtCol William F. Coleman

C-3—LtCol Edward W. Snedeker

C-4—LtCol Frederick L. Wieseman

CORPS TROOPS

15 OCTOBER-15 DECEMBER, 1943

*2d 155mm Artillery Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Joe C. McHaney

Executive Officer—Major William F. Kramer

Bn-3—Major Guido F. Verbeck, Jr.

*1st Corps Motor Transport Battalion*

Commanding Officer—

Major Franklin H. Hayner  
(to 22 October; from 3 November)

Captain Kenneth E. Murphy  
(23 October to 2 November)

Captain Ralph E. Palmer  
(to 2 November)

Bn-3<sup>1</sup>

*3d Defense Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Edward H. Forney

Executive Officer—Major David W. Stonecliffe  
Bn-3<sup>2</sup>

Maj Zedford W. Burriss  
(to 1 December)

Major John G. Bouker  
(from 2 December)

*1st Corps Signal Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Frederick A. Ramsey, Jr.

Executive Officer—Major Ralph H. Coyte  
Bn-3—Major Hubert C. Lattimer

*1st Marine Parachute Regiment*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Robert H. Williams

Executive Officer—Major Jackson B. Butterfield<sup>3</sup>

R-1—CWO Merl W. Smith

<sup>1</sup> This billet is not shown in the muster rolls for October, November or December.

<sup>2</sup> Muster rolls indicate this billet vacant until 19 November.

<sup>3</sup> Acting.

R-2

1stLt Harold F. Gardner  
(to 18 December)

2dLt Robert E. Murphy  
(from 19 December)

R-3—Major Walter S. Osipoff

R-4—Captain James M. Smith

*1st Para Bn, 1st Mar Para Rgt*

Commanding Officer—Major Richard Fagan  
Executive Officer—Major Robert C. McDonough

Bn-3

Captain William Montagna  
(to 30 November)

1stLt Thomas J. Eaves  
(from 1 December)

*2d Para Bn, 1st Mar Para Rgt*

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Victor H. Krulak  
(to 7 November)

Major Warner T. Bigger  
(from 8 November)

*2d Para Bn, 1st Mar Para Rgt*

Executive Officer—

Major Warner T. Bigger  
(to 7 November)

Major Tolson A. Smoak  
(from 8 November)

Major Tolson A. Smoak  
(to 7 November)

Captain William R. Day  
(from 8 November)

*3d Para Bn, 1st Mar Para Rgt*

Commanding Officer—

Major Robert T. Vance  
(to 9 December)

Major Harry L. Torgerson  
(from 10 December)

Executive Officer—

Major Harry L. Torgerson  
(to 9 December)

Captain Frederick J. Mix, Jr.  
(from 10 December)

Bn-3—Captain Thomas B. Pearce, Jr.

*2d Marine Raider Regiment (Provisional)*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Alan Shapley

Executive Officer—Captain Oscar F. Peatross

R-1—1stLt Charles T. Lamb

R-2—Captain James P. Jacobson

R-3—Captain Oscar F. Peatross

R-4—Major Robert S. Wade

*2d Marine Raider Battalion*

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Joseph P. McCaffery  
(to 1 November)

Major Richard T. Washburn  
(from 1 November)

Executive Officer—

Major Richard T. Washburn  
(to 1 November)

Captain Bernard W. Green  
(from 1 November)

Bn-3—1stLt Clinton B. Eastman

*3d Marine Raider Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Fred D. Beans

Executive Officer—Captain Arthur H. Haake

Bn-3—Captain Martin Levit

*Branch No. 3, 4th Base Depot*

Commanding Officer—Colonel Kenneth A. Inman

Executive Officer<sup>4</sup>—

Major Harlan E. Draper  
(to 17 October)

LtCol Walter A. Churchill  
(from 1 November)

Major Cedric H. Kuhn  
(from 1 December)

<sup>4</sup>No executive officer shown by muster rolls for period 18-31 October.



## 3D MARINE DIVISION

15 OCTOBER–28 DECEMBER, 1943

Commanding General—MajGen Allen Hal Turnage

Assistant Division Commander—BrigGen Oscar R. Cauldwell

Chief of Staff—Colonel Robert Blake

D-1—LtCol Chevey S. White

D-2—LtCol Howard J. Thurton

D-3—

LtCol James Snedeker

(to 11 November)

Colonel Walter A. Wachtler

(from 12 November)

LtCol Alpha L. Bowser

(from 17 December)

D-4—Colonel William C. Hall

### *3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion*

Commanding Officer—

Major Sylvester L. Stephan

(to 5 December; 8–9 December; and from 17 December)

Major Erwin F. Wann

(6–7 December and 10–16 December)

Executive Officer<sup>5</sup>—Major Erwin F. Wann

Bn-3—2dLt William G. Reid

### *3d Medical Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtComdr (MC) Gordon M. Bruce<sup>6</sup>

Executive Officer<sup>7</sup>

### *3d Motor Transport Battalion*

Commanding Officer—Major Stewart W. Purdy

Executive Officer—Captain Frank S. Matheny

Bn-3<sup>7</sup>

### *3d Service Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Ion M. Bethel

Executive Officer<sup>7</sup>

Bn-3<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> No executive officer is shown on the muster rolls for the periods in which Major Wann served as commanding officer.

<sup>6</sup> Promoted to Commander on 9 December, 1943.

<sup>7</sup> Not listed on muster rolls.

### *3d Special Weapons Battalion*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Durant S. Buchannan

Executive Officer—LtCol Walter S. Campbell

Bn-3—Captain William L. Cerutti

### *3d Tank Battalion*

Commanding Officer<sup>8</sup>—LtCol Hartnoll J. Withers

(to 15 November; from 10 December)

Executive Officer—

Major John I. Williamson, Jr.

(to 30 November)

Major Holly H. Evans

(from 1 December)

Bn-3—Major Holly H. Evans

### *3d Marine Regiment*

Commanding Officer—

Colonel George W. McHenry

(to 16 December)

Colonel Walter A. Wachtler

(from 17 December)

LtCol George O. Van Orden

(from 28 December)

Executive Officer—LtCol George O. Van Orden

(to 27 December)

R-1—2dLt Clyde T. Brannon<sup>9</sup>

R-2—1stLt John W. Foley, Jr.

R-3—Major Sidney S. McMath<sup>10</sup>

R-4—Major Grant Crane

### *1st Bn, 3d Marines*

Commanding Officer—

Major Leonard M. Mason

(to 1 November)

Major John P. Brody

(from 2 November)

Major Charles J. Bailey, Jr.

(from 19 November)

<sup>8</sup> The muster rolls fail to show a commanding officer for the period 16 November–9 December.

<sup>9</sup> Promoted to 1st Lieutenant 26 December 1943, effective 21 December 1943.

<sup>10</sup> Promoted to LtCol 26 December 1943, effective 20 December 1943.

Executive Officer<sup>11</sup>—

Major John P. Brody  
(to 1 November)

Major Charles J. Bailey, Jr.  
(from 2 November)

Captain Philip C. Roettinger  
(from 1 December)

Bn-3<sup>12</sup>

Major Charles J. Bailey, Jr.  
(to 1 November)

Captain Donald L. Weiler  
(from 7 November)

Major Robert D. Kenney  
(from 25 November)

*2d Bn, 3d Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Hector de Zayas  
Executive Officer—Major William A. Culpepper  
Bn-3—Captain John A. Scott

*3d Bn, 3d Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Ralph M. King  
Executive Officer—

Major Edwin L. Hamilton  
(to 20 November)

Major Wade M. Jackson  
(from 21 November)

Bn-3—Captain John A. Scott

*9th Marine Regiment*

Commanding Officer—Colonel Edward A. Craig

Executive Officer—LtCol James A. Stuart

R-1—Major Addison B. Overstreet

R-2—Captain Robert A. Campbell

R-3—LtCol Ralph L. Houser

R-4—Major Frank Shine

*1st Bn, 9th Marines*

Commanding Officer—

LtCol Jaime Sabater  
(to 18 November)

<sup>11</sup> No executive officer indicated on muster rolls for period 20-30 November.

<sup>12</sup> No Bn-3 listed for periods 2-6 November and 23-24 November.

LtCol Carey A. Randall  
(from 19 November)

Executive Officer—Major Harold C. Boehm  
Bn-3—Captain Francis H. Bergtholdt

*2nd Bn, 9th Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Robert E. Cushman, Jr.

Executive Officer—Major Wendell H. Duplantis<sup>13</sup>

Bn-3—Captain Lyle Q. Peterson

*3d Bn, 9th Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Walter Asmuth, Jr.

Executive Officer—

LtCol Carey A. Randall  
(to 18 November)

Major Marlowe G. Williams  
(from 19 November)

Bn-3—Captain Calvin W. Kunz

*12th Marine Regiment*

Commanding Officer—Colonel John B. Wilson

Executive Officer—LtCol John S. Letcher

R-1—1stLt Joe A. English

R-2—Major Claude S. Sanders, Jr.

R-3—LtCol William T. Fairbourn

R-4—Major Edmund M. Williams<sup>14</sup>

*1st Bn, 12th Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Raymond F. Crist, Jr.

Executive Officer—Major George B. Thomas

Bn-3—Major Edward L. Peoples

*2d Bn, 12th Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Donald M. Weller

Executive Officer—LtCol Henry T. Waller

Bn-3—Major Thomas R. Belzer

<sup>13</sup> Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel 1 November effective 5 October, 1943.

<sup>14</sup> Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel 14 December effective 5 October, 1943.

*3d Bn, 12th Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Jack Tabor  
Executive Officer—Major Robert H. Armstrong  
Bn-3—  
    Captain Haddon H. Smith  
        (to 7 December)  
    Major Thomas C. Jolly, III.  
        (from 8 December)

*4th Bn, 12th Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Bernard H. Kirk  
Executive Officer—Major Andrew H. Rose, Jr.<sup>15</sup>  
Bn-3—  
    Captain George L. Hays  
        (to 9 November)  
    Captain Robert E. Rain, Jr.  
        (from 10 November)

*19th Marine Regiment*

Commanding Officer—  
    Colonel Robert M. Montague  
        (to 6 December)  
    LtCol Robert E. Fojt  
        (from 7 December)  
Executive Officer—  
    LtCol Robert E. Fojt  
        (to 6 December)  
    Major William V. D. Jewett  
        (from 7 December)  
R-1—  
    Major William V. D. Jewett  
        (to 6 December)  
    Major George D. Flood  
        (from 7 December)  
R-2 & R-3—Captain Minstree Folkes, Jr.  
R-4—Major Virgil M. Davis

*1st Bn, 19th Marines*

Commanding Officer—Major Ralph W. Bohme  
Executive Officer—Captain Kenneth M. King  
Bn-3—Captain Joseph W. Beckenstrater

<sup>15</sup> Major Rose served as commanding officer from 8-13 December; no executive officer is listed for this period.

*2d Bn, 19th Marines*

Commanding Officer—  
    LtCol Harold B. West  
        (to 6 December)  
    Major Halstead Ellison  
        (from 7 December)  
Executive Officer—  
    Major Halstead Ellison  
        (to 6 December)  
    Captain Victor J. Simpson  
        (from 7 December)  
Bn-3—  
    Captain Charles E. Ingrain  
        (to 6 December)  
    Captain James R. Ovington  
        (from 7 December)

*21st Marine Regiment*

Commanding Officer—Colonel Evans O. Ames  
Executive Officer—LtCol Arthur H. Butler  
R-1—Major Irving R. Kriendler  
R-2—1stLt Blair A. Hyde<sup>16</sup>  
R-3—Major James W. Tinsley  
R-4—Major Malcolm K. Beyer

*1st Bn, 21st Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Ernest W. Fry, Jr.  
Executive Officer—Major Eugene H. Strayhorn  
Bn-3—Captain Leslie A. Gilson, Jr.

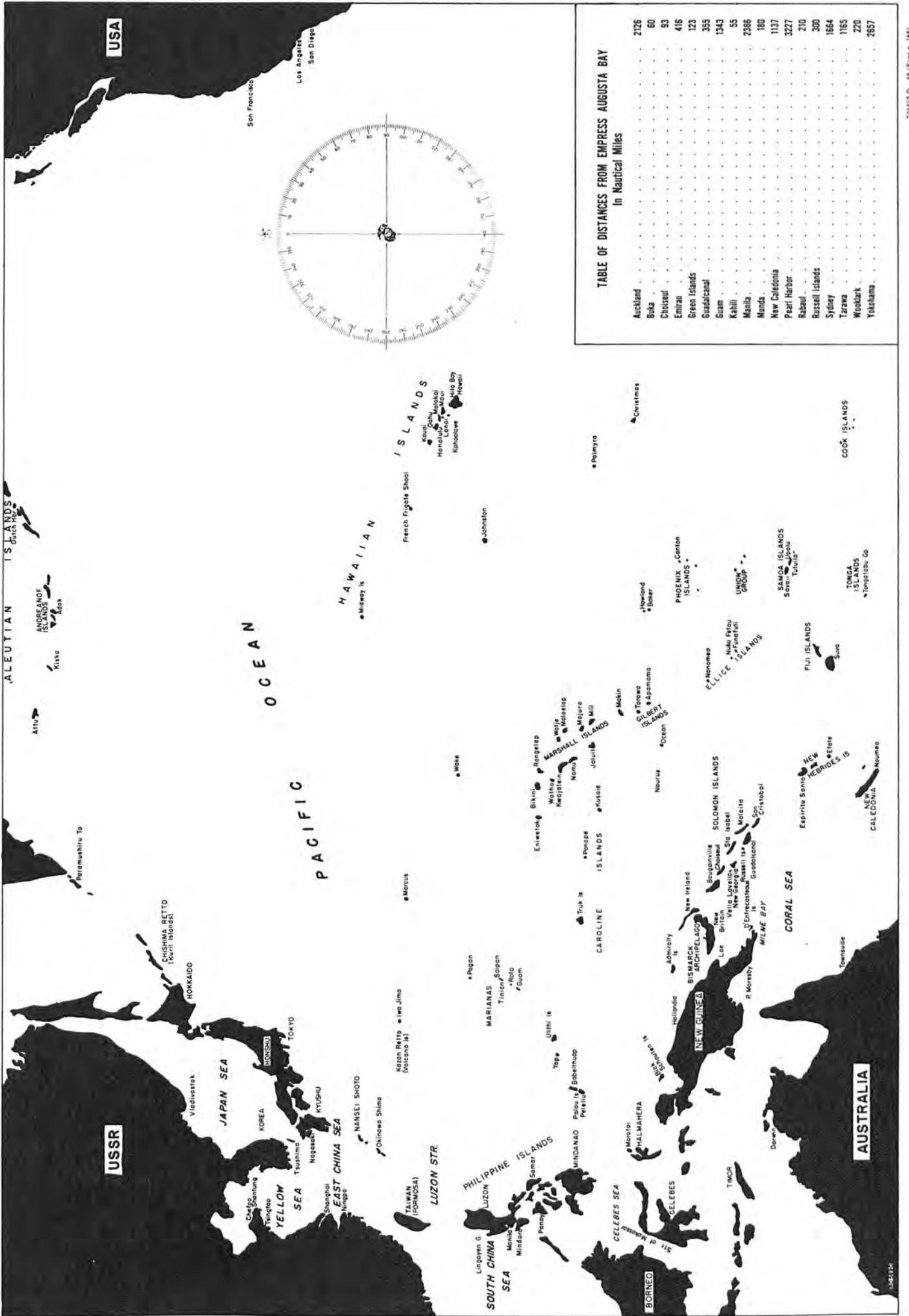
*2d Bn, 21st Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Eustace R. Smoak  
Executive Officer—Major Glenn E. Fissel  
    (to 13 November)  
Bn-3—Captain Andrew Hedesh

*3d Bn, 21st Marines*

Commanding Officer—LtCol Archie V. Gerard  
Executive Officer—Major Henry S. Massie  
Bn-3—Captain Julius H. Flagstad

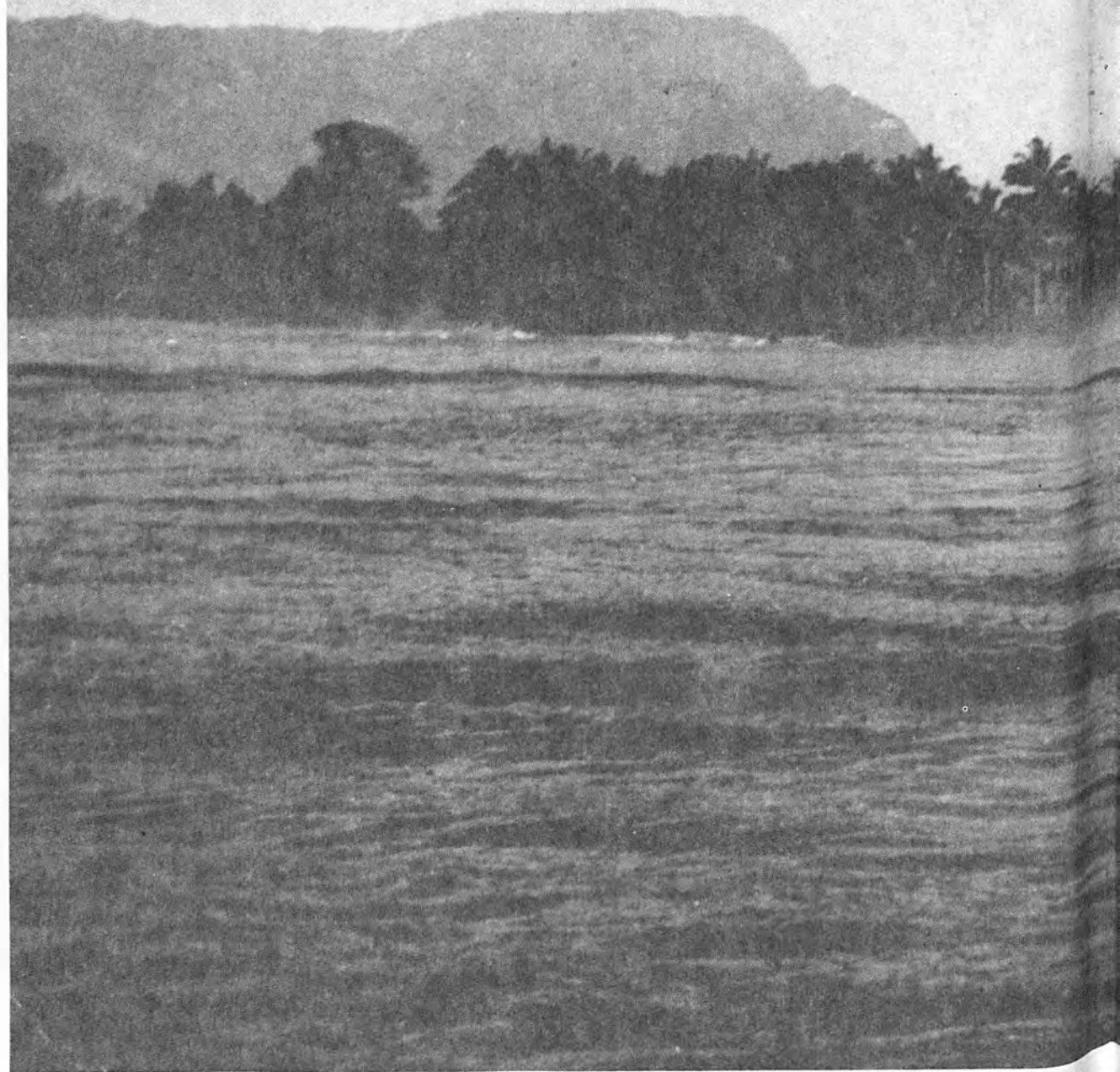
<sup>16</sup> Promoted to Captain 27 December 1943, effective 30 November 1943.

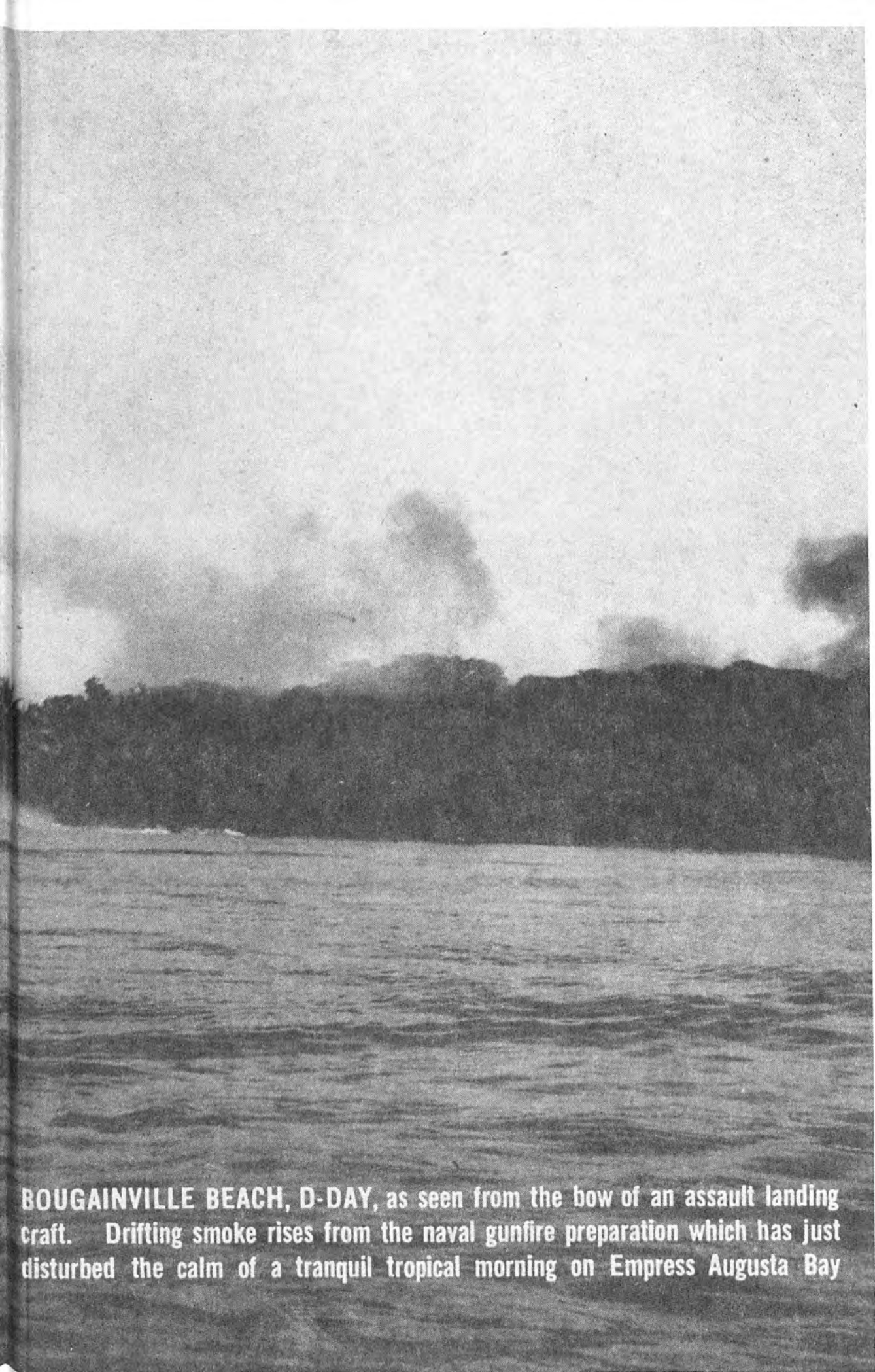


**TABLE OF DISTANCES FROM EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY**  
In Nautical Miles

Auckland	2126
Birds	60
Chitose	93
Emirao	416
Green Islands	123
Guadalcanal	355
Guam	1343
Hawaii	55
Manila	2386
Morota	180
New Caledonia	1137
Pearl Harbor	3227
Rabaul	210
Russell Islands	300
Sydney	1664
Tarawa	1185
Wakaru	220
Yokohama	2657

MARINE CORPS HISTORICAL LIBRARY





**BOUGAINVILLE BEACH, D-DAY, as seen from the bow of an assault landing craft. Drifting smoke rises from the naval gunfire preparation which has just disturbed the calm of a tranquil tropical morning on Empress Augusta Bay**



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
WASHINGTON

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the  
THIRD MARINES, THIRD MARINE DIVISION

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces during the invasion, seizure, occupation and defense of Empress Augusta Bay Beachhead, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, from November 1 to December 22, 1943. In action against the enemy for the first time, the THIRD Marines landed on an extremely wide front in the face of perilous surf and beach conditions and through flanking fire of hostile machine guns, anti-boat guns, mortars, small arms and artillery from heavily entrenched positions on Cape Torokina and Puruata Island. Pressing forward through almost impenetrable jungle and swampy terrain, this Regiment completely reduced the intricate system of mutually supporting Japanese pillboxes, bunkers, fire trenches and foxholes which constituted the Cape Torokina defense, and secured its portion of the objective by evening of D-Day. Shifted to the left flank of the beachhead, the THIRD Marines smashed a Japanese counter-landing and drove steadily forward despite difficulties of terrain, supply and communication and, developing the main enemy position in a meeting engagement on the Numa Numa Trail, completely wiped out the Japanese 23rd Infantry. In continuous action as a front line regiment for a total of fifty-two consecutive days, the gallant men and officers of the THIRD Marines, by their skill in jungle warfare and their aggressive fighting spirit, contributed greatly to the success of the campaign and enhanced the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the THIRD Marines at Bougainville from November 1 to December 22, 1943, are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

*James Forrestal*  
Secretary of the Navy.