A Magnificent Fight:

Marines in the Battle For Wake Island

Marines in World War II Commemorative Series

By Robert J. Cressman

U.S.

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It is Monday, 8 December 1941. On Wake Island, a tiny sprung paper-clip in the Pacific between Hawaii and Guam, Marines of the 1st Defense Battalion are starting another day of the backbreaking war preparations that have gone on for weeks. Out in the triangular lagoon formed by the islets of Peale, Wake, and Wilkes, the huge silver Pan American Airways *Philippine Clipper* flying boat roars off the water bound for Guam. The trans-Pacific flight will not be completed.

Word of war comes around 0700. Captain Henry S. Wilson, Army Signal Corps, on the island to support the flight ferry of B-17 Flying Fortresses from Hawaii to the Philippines, half runs, half walks toward the tent of Major James P. S. Devereux, commander of the battalion's Wake Detachment. Captain Wilson reports that Hickam Field in Hawaii has been raided.

Devereux immediately orders a "Call to Arms." He quickly assembles his officers, tells them that war has come, that the Japanese have attacked Oahu, and that Wake "could expect the same thing in a very short time."

Meanwhile, the senior officer on the atoll, Commander Winfred S. Cunningham, Officer in Charge, Naval Activities, Wake, learned of the Japanese surprise attack as he was leaving the mess hall at the contractors' cantonment (Camp 2) on the northern leg of Wake. He ordered the defense battalion to battle stations, but allowed the civilians to go on with their work, figuring that their duties at sites around the atoll provided good dispersion. He then contacted John B. Cooke, PanAm's airport manager and requested that he recall the *Philippine Clipper.* Cooke sent the prearranged code telling John H. Hamilton, the captain of the Martin 130 flying boat, of the outbreak of war.

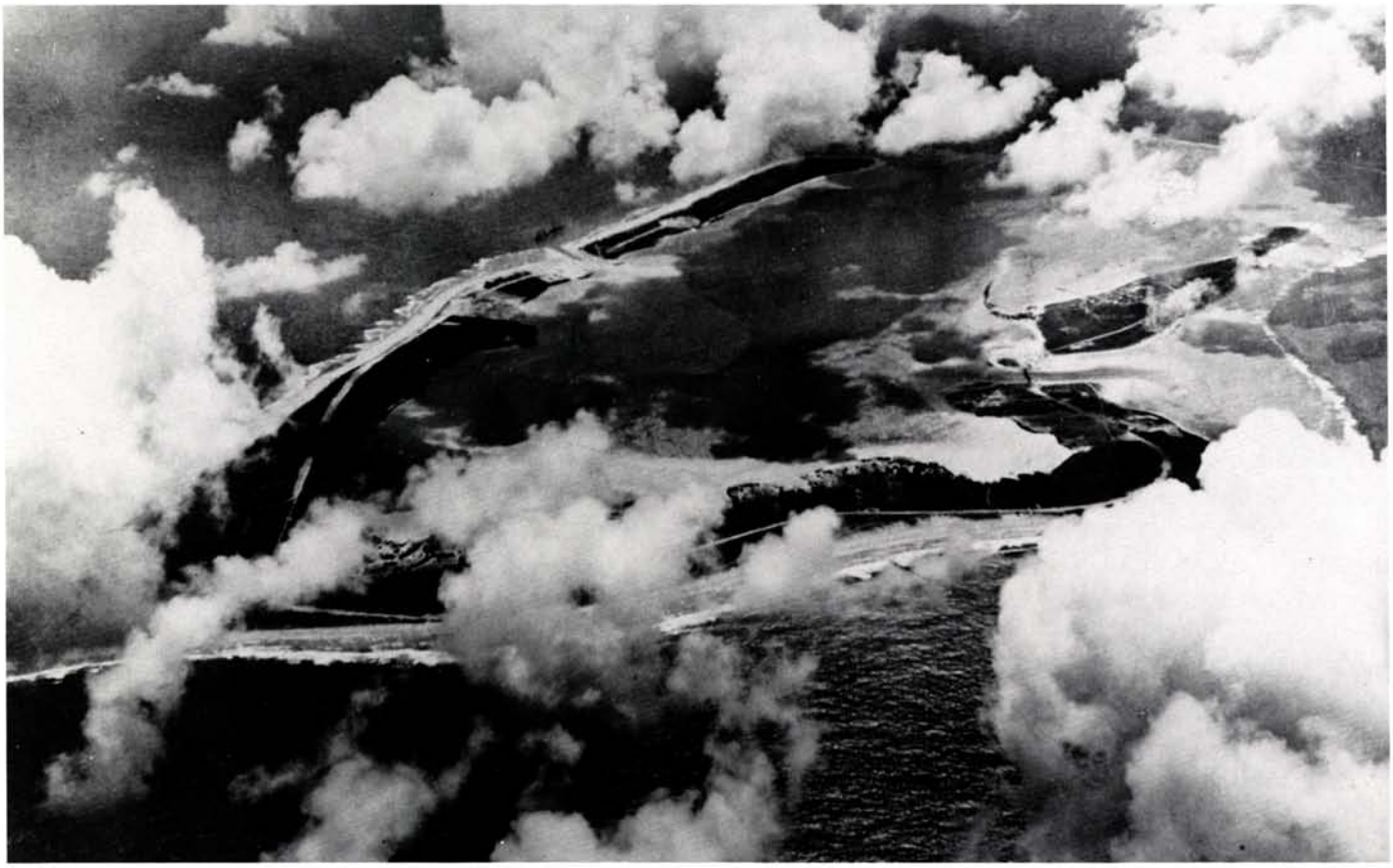
Marines from Camp 1, on the southern leg of Wake, were soon embarked in trucks and moving to their stations on Wake, Wilkes, and Peale islets. Marine Gunner Harold C. Borth and Sergeant James W. Hall climbed to the top of the camp's water tower and manned the observation post there. In those early days radar was new and not even set up on Wake, so early warning was dependent on keen eyesight. Hearing might have contributed elsewhere, but on the atoll the thunder of nearby surf masked the sound of aircraft engines until they were nearly overhead. Marine Gunner John Hamas, the Wake Detachment's munitions officer, unpacked Browning automatic rifles, Springfield '03 rifles, and ammunition for issue to the civilians who had volunteered for combat duty. That task completed, Hamas and a working party picked up 75 cases of hand grenades for delivery around the islets. Soon thereafter, other civilians attached themselves to Marine Fighting Squadron (VMF) 211, which had been on Wake since 4 December.

Offshore, neither *Triton* (SS 201) nor *Tambor* (SS 198), submarines that had been patrolling offshore since 25 November, knew of develop-

On the cover: *In 1945, RAdm Shigematsu Sakaibara, back to camera at right, surrenders his garrison to returning Americans. (Department of Defense [USMC] Photo 133686)*

At left: *Col Walter L. J. Bayler, reputedly "the last Marine off Wake" in December 1941, is the first to set foot on the island in 1945. (Department of Defense [USMC] Photo 133688)*

Major James P. S. Devereux, Commanding Officer of the Wake Detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion (seen here as a POW at Shanghai, *circa* January 1942), was born in Cuba and educated in the United States and in Switzerland. Devereux enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1923. He saw service at home (Norfolk, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Quantico, among other places) and abroad (Cuba, Nicaragua, and China). He was awarded the Navy Cross for his leadership of the Marines at Wake. After his retirement, he served in the U.S. House of Representatives.



National Archives Photo 80-G-451195

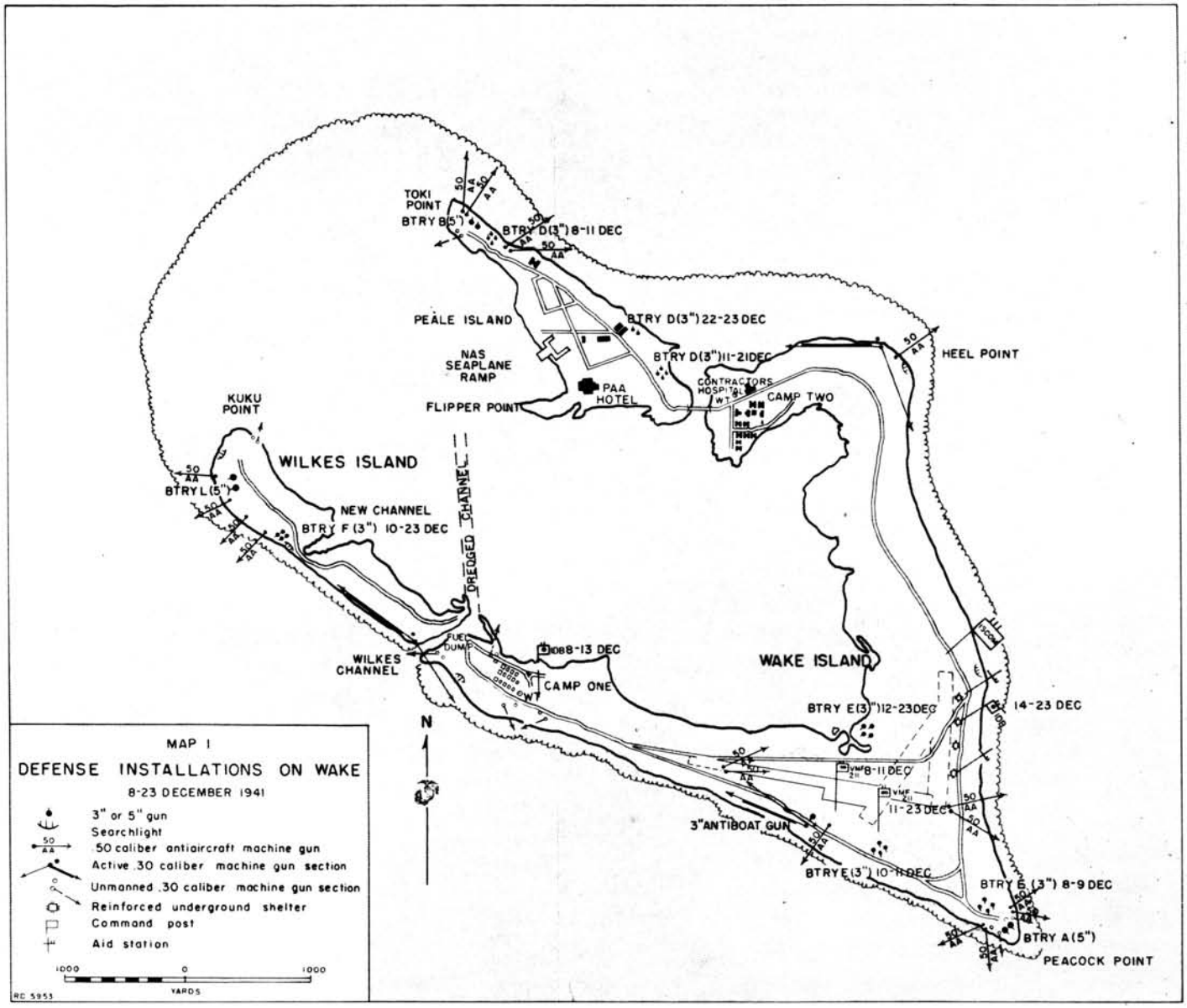
A May 1941 photo taken from the northeast, from a Navy Catalina flying boat, reveals the Wake Island coral atoll in the mid-Pacific beneath broken clouds. Wishbone-shaped Wake proper lies at left, as yet unmarked by construction of the airfield there. The upper portion of the photo shows Wilkes; at right is Peale, joined to Wake by a causeway.

ments on Wake or Oahu. They both had been submerged when word was passed and thus out of radio communication with Pearl Harbor. The transport *William Ward Burrows* (AP 6), which had left Oahu bound for Wake on 27 November, learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl while she was still 425 miles from her destination. She was rerouted to Johnston Island.

Major Paul A. Putnam, VMF-211's commanding officer, and Second Lieutenant Henry G. Webb had conducted the dawn aerial patrol and landed by the time the squadron's radiomen, over at Wake's airfield, had picked up word of an attack on Pearl Harbor. Putnam immediately sent a runner to tell his executive officer, Captain Henry T. Elrod, to disperse planes and men and keep all aircraft ready for flight.

Meanwhile, work began on dugout plane shelters. Putnam placed VMF-211 on a war footing immediately; two two-plane sections then took off on patrol. Captain Elrod and Second Lieutenant Carl R. Davidson flew north, Second Lieutenant John F. Kinney and Technical Sergeant William J. Hamilton flew to the south-southwest at 13,000 feet. Both

An unshaven Commander Winfield S. Cunningham, Officer in Charge, Naval Activities, Wake Island, and commander of the defense of Wake, was photographed as a POW on board the Japanese transport *Nitta Maru*, at Yokohama, Japan, about 18 January 1942. A member of the Naval Academy Class of 1921 and an excellent pilot, he had flown fighters and flying boats, and had been schooled in strategy and tactics. Contemporaries in the Navy regarded him as an intelligent, quick-witted officer who possessed moral courage. His long and varied experience in aviation duty had fitted him well for his independent duty at Wake. He would earn the Navy Cross for his leadership of the defense of Wake.



sections were to remain in the immediate vicinity of the island.

The *Philippine Clipper*, meanwhile, had wheeled about upon receipt of word of war and returned to the lagoon it had departed 20 minutes earlier. Cunningham immediately requested Captain Hamilton to carry out a scouting flight. The *Clipper* was unloaded and refueled with sufficient gasoline in addition to the standard reserve for both the patrol flight and a flight to Midway. Cunningham, an experienced aviator, laid out a plan, giving the flying boat a two-plane escort. Hamilton then telephoned Putnam and concluded the arrangements for the search.

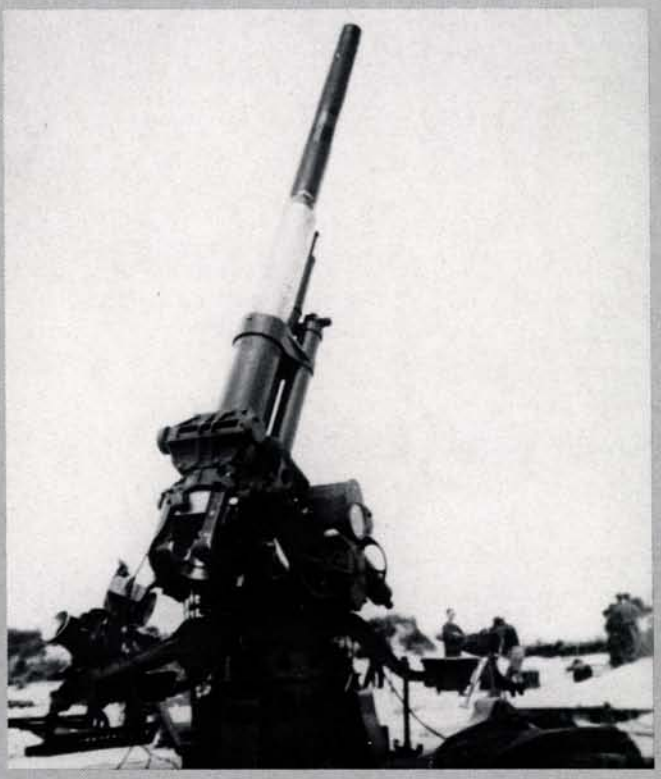
Major Paul A. Putnam, a "model of strong nerves and the will to fight," is pictured at right in the autumn of 1941. One of his men, Second Lieutenant David Kliewer, praised Putnam's "cool judgment, his courage, and his consideration for everyone [that] forged an aviation unit that fought behind him to the end." Putnam had become commanding officer of VMF-211 on 17 November 1941 at Ewa, after having served as executive officer. Designated a naval aviator in 1929, he had flown almost every type of Marine plane from a Ford Trimotor to a Grumman F4F-3. He had distinguished himself in Nicaragua in 1931. One officer who had flown with him there considered him "calm, quiet, soft-spoken . . . a determined sort of fellow." He was awarded a Navy Cross for his heroism at Wake.

Defensive Mainstay: The M3 Antiaircraft Gun

At right, in the firing position, is an Army pattern M3 3-inch antiaircraft gun of the type that the 1st Defense Battalion had at Wake. Already obsolescent at the outbreak of World War II, this weapon was the mainstay of the defense battalions in the first months of the war. Twelve of these guns were emplaced at Wake.

As early as 1915, the U.S. Army, recognizing the need for a high-angle firing antiaircraft gun and resolving to build one from existing stocks, chose the M1903 seacoast defense gun and redesignated it the M1917. Soon after America's entry into World War I, however, the requirement for a mobile mount (one with less recoil) compelled the selection of the less powerful M1898 seacoast gun for conversion to the M1918. Development of both guns and mounts continued throughout the interwar years, leading ultimately to the standardization of the gun as the M3 on the M2 wheeled mount.

On the eve of World War II, each of the seven Marine defense battalions then activated had 12 3-inch guns in three four-gun batteries. Each mount weighed a little over six tons. The normal crew of eight could fire 25 12.87-pound high-explosive shells per minute. The guns had an effective ceiling of nearly 30,000 feet and an effective horizontal range of 14,780 yards.



Take-off time was 1300.

Shortly after receiving word of hostilities, Battery B's First Lieutenant Woodrow W. Kessler and his men had loaded a truck with equipment and small arms ammunition and moved out to their 5-inch guns. At 0710, Kessler began distributing gear, and soon thereafter established a sentry post on Toki Point at the northernmost tip of Peale. Thirty 5-inch rounds went into the ready-use boxes near the guns. At 0800, he reported his battery ready for action.

General quarters called Captain Bryghte D. "Dan" Godbold's men of Battery D to their stations down the coast from Battery B at 0700, and they moved out to their position by truck, reporting "manned and ready" within a half hour. The lack of men, however, prevented Godbold from having more than three of his 3-inch guns in operation. Within another hour and a half, each gun had 50 rounds ready for firing. At 1000, Godbold received orders to keep one gun, the director, the heightfinder (the only one at Wake Island for the three batteries), and the power plant manned at all times. After making those arrangements, Godbold put the remainder of his men to work improving the battery position.

While the atoll's defenders prepared for war, Japanese bombers droned toward them. At 0710 on 8 December, 34 Mitsubishi G3M2 Type 96 land attack planes (Nells) of the *Chitose Air Group* had lifted off from the airstrip at Roi in the Marshalls. Shortly before noon, those 34 Nells came in on Wake at 13,000 feet. Clouds cloaked their approach and the pounding surf drowned out the noise of their engines as they dropped down to 1,500 feet and roared in from the sea. Lookouts sounded the alarms as they spotted the twin-engined, twin-tailed bombers a few hundred yards off the atoll's south shore, emerging from a dense bank of clouds. At Battery E, First Lieutenant Lewis telephoned Major Devereux's command post to inform him of the approaching planes.

Although Putnam was rushing work on the six bunkers being built along the seaward side of the runway, he knew none of them would be ready before 1400. He also knew that moving the eight F4F Wildcats from their parking area would risk damage to the planes and obstruction of the runway if the planes were in fact damaged. Since any damage might have meant the loss of a plane—Wake possessed virtually no spare parts—Putnam decided to delay moving the Wildcats and the materiel until suitable places existed to protect them.

No foxholes had been dug near the field, but the rough ground nearby offered natural cover to those who reached it. Putnam hoped that his men would obtain good cover if an attack came. The movement of gasoline, bombs, and ammunition; the installation of electrical lines and

generators; and the relocation of radio facilities kept all hands busily engaged.

The attack found Second Lieutenant Robert "J" Conderman and First Lieutenant George A. Graves in the ready tent, going over last minute instructions concerning their escort of the *Philippine Clipper*. When the alarm sounded, both pilots, already in flight gear, sprinted for their Wildcats. Graves managed to reach one F4F, but a direct hit demolished it in a ball of flame as he was climbing into the cockpit, killing him instantly. Strafers' bullets cut down Conderman as he tried to reach his plane, and as he lay on the ground a bomb hit the waiting Wildcat and blew it up, pinning him beneath the wreckage. He called to Corporal Robert E. L. Page to help him, but stopped when he heard another man crying for help. He directed Page to help the other man first. Strafing attacks killed Second Lieutenant Frank J. Holden as he raced for cover. Bullets and fragments wounded Second Lieutenant Webb.

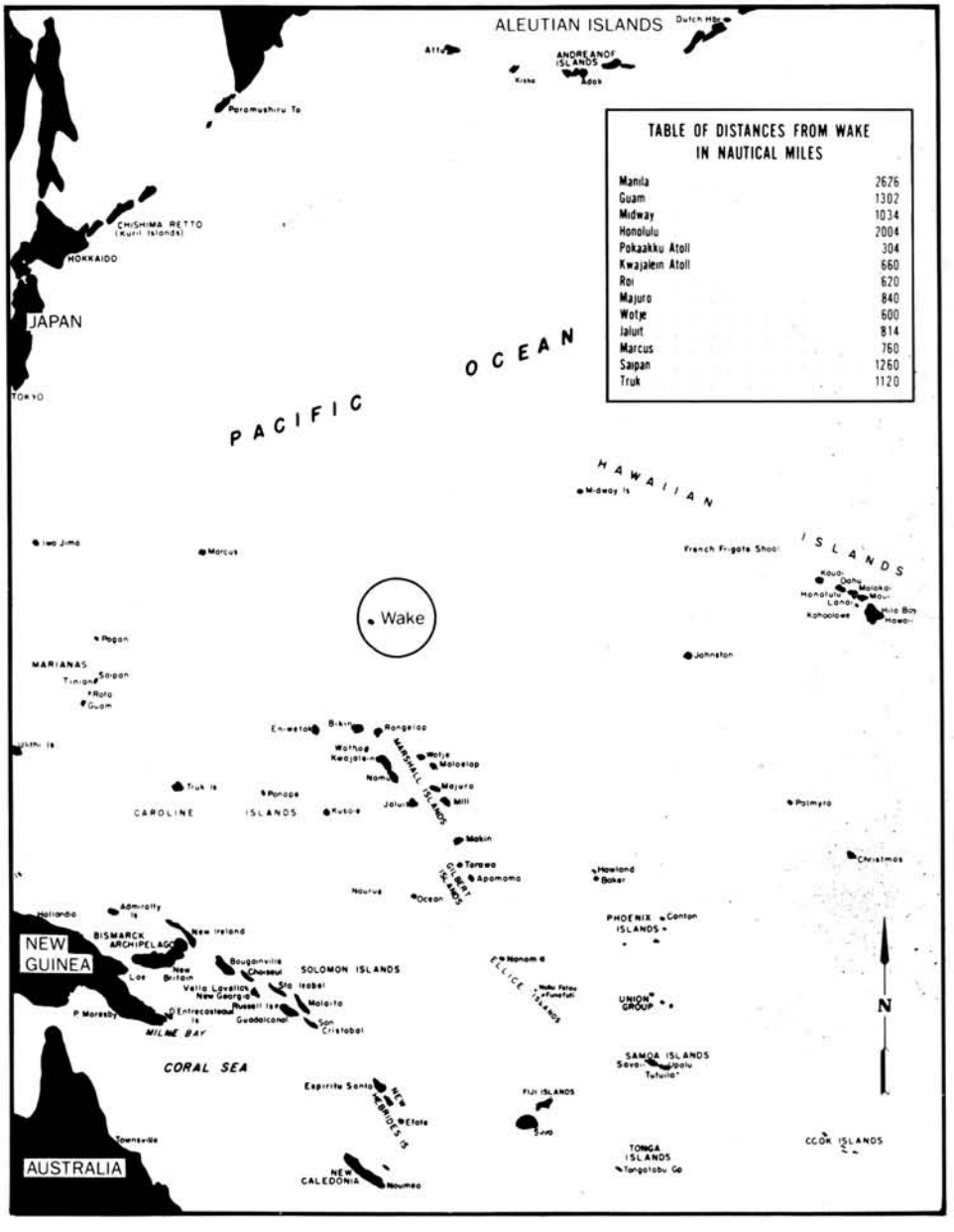
Marine Gunner Hamas, who still had 50 cases of hand grenades in his truck, having just delivered 25 to Kuku Point, saw the red sun insignia on the planes as they roared low overhead. Immediately, he ordered the vehicle stopped and instructed his men to head for cover.

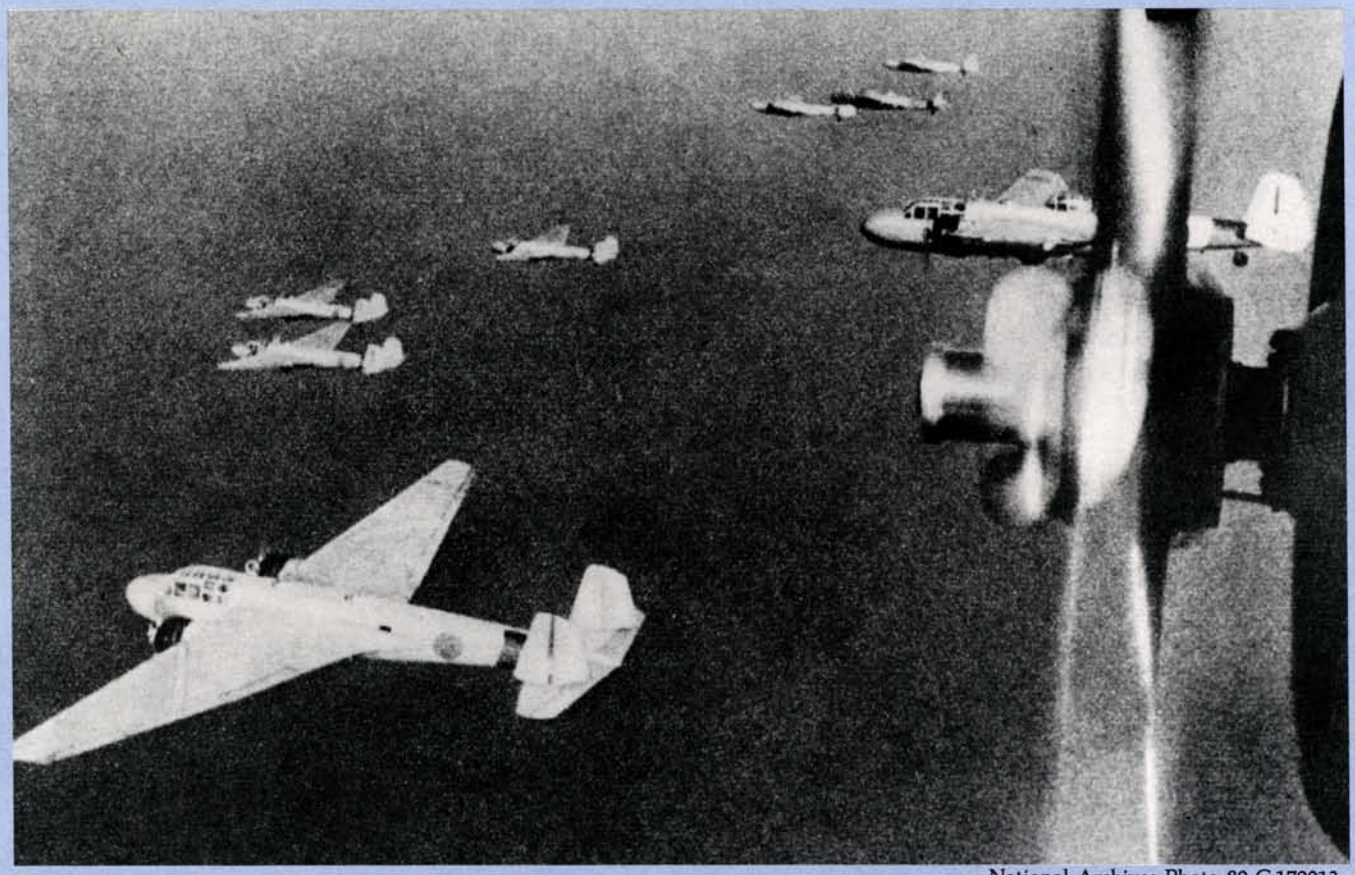
Confident that his airborne planes would be able to provide sufficient warning of an incoming raid, Commander Cunningham was working in his office at Camp 2, when he heard the "crump" of bombs around 1155. The explosions rattled windows elsewhere in the camp, prompting many men to conclude that work crews were blasting coral heads in the lagoon.

Guns 1 and 2 of Battery D opened up on the attackers, collectively firing 40 rounds during the raid. The low visibility and the altitude at which the Mitsubishis flew, however, prevented the 3-inch guns from firing effectively. No bombs fell near the battery, but the guns' own concussions caved in the sandbag emplacements, Marine antiaircraft fire damaged eight Nells and killed a petty officer in one of them. Returning Japanese aircrews claimed to have set fire to all of the aircraft on the ground, and reported sighting only three airborne American planes.

On Peacock Point, First Lieutenant Lewis' Battery E had been standing-to, ready to fire. Like Godbold, Lewis did not have enough men for all four of his guns. Lewis manned two of the 3-inchers, along with the M-4 director, while the rest of his men busily completed sandbag emplacements. After telephoning Devereux's command post when he saw the falling bombs, Lewis quickly estimated the altitude and ordered his gunners to open fire. Again, however, the height at which the attackers came rendered the fire ineffective.

In about seven minutes, Japanese bombs and bullets totally wrecked PanAm's facilities. Bombing and strafing set fire to a hotel – in which five Chamorro employees died – and also to a stock room, fuel tanks, and many other buildings, and demolished a radio transmitter. Nine of PanAm's 66-man staff lay dead.





National Archives Photo 80-G-179013

The Nells, Bettys, and Claudes of Japan

A formation of Mitsubishi G3M1 and G3M2 Type 96 bombers (Nell), above, fly in formation in 1942. The first models flew in 1935, and more than 250 were still serving in the Japanese land-based naval air arm in December 1941. Nells, instrumental in the reduction of Wake's defenses, served alongside the newer, more powerful Mitsubishi G4M1 Type 97 bombers (Betty)—earmarked to replace them in front-line service—in helping to sink the British capital ships HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, off Malaya on 10 December 1941.

Two 1,000-horsepower *Kinsei 45* engines enabled the Nell to reach a speed of 238 miles per hour at 9,840 feet. Normally crewed by seven men, the G3M2 model carried a defensive armament of one 20-mm and two 7.7-mm machine guns, and a payload of either one 1,764-pound torpedo or 2,200 pounds of bombs.

Although Mitsubishi A5M4 Type 96 carrier fighters (Claude), also equipped the *Chitose Air Group*, none accompanied the group's Nells because of the long distances involved. Marine antiaircraft or fighter aircraft gunfire at Wake destroyed at least four Nells during December 1941. Since the number of G3Ms engaged varied from raid to raid—no more than 34 or fewer than 17—so, too, did damage figures. On at least two occasions, though, as many as 12 returned to their base in the Marshalls damaged.

Two of the *Philippine Clipper*'s crew were wounded.

Almost miraculously, though, the 26-ton *Clipper*, empty of both passengers and cargo but full of fuel, rode easily at her moorings at the end of the dock. A bomb had splashed 100 feet ahead of her without damaging her, and she received 23 bullet holes from the strafing attack—none had hit her large fuel tanks. Captain Hamilton courageously proposed evacuating the passengers and Pan Am staff and Commander Cunningham assented. Stripped of all superfluous equipment and having embarked all of the passengers and the Caucasian Pan-Am employees, save one (who had been driving the atoll's only ambulance and thus had not heard the call to report for the plane's departure), the flying boat took off for Midway at 1330.

Although he had received a bullet wound in his left shoulder, Major Putnam immediately took over the terrible task of seeing to the many injured people at the field. His dedication to duty seemed to establish the precedent for many other instances of selflessness which occurred amidst the wreckage of the VMF-211 camp.

Sadly, the attack left five pilots and 10 enlisted men of VMF-211 wounded and 18 more dead, including most of the mechanics assigned to the squadron. On the materiel side, the squadron's tents were shot up and virtually no supplies – tools, spark plugs, tires, and sparse spare parts – escaped destruction. Both of the 25,000-gallon gasoline storage tanks had been demolished. Additionally, 25 civilian workmen had been killed.

As the bombers departed, Gunner Hamas called his men back from the bush, and set out to resume delivery of hand grenades. As he neared the airfield, though, he stopped to help wounded men board a truck that had escaped destruction. Then, he continued his journey and finally returned to Camp 1, where he found more civilian employees arriving to join the military effort.

Earlier, as they had returned to the vicinity of Wake at about noon, Kinney and Hamilton had been descending through the broken clouds about three miles from the atoll when the former spotted two formations of planes at an elevation of about 1,500 feet. He and Hamilton attempted unsuccessfully to catch the formations as they retired to the west through the overcast. Kinney and Hamilton remained aloft until after 1230, when they landed to find the destruction that defied description. Neither Elrod nor Davidson had seen the enemy.

In the wake of the terrible devastation wreaked upon his squadron, Putnam deemed it critical to the squadron's reorganization to keep the remaining planes operational. Since his engineering officer, Graves, had been killed, Putnam appointed Kinney to take his place. "We have four planes left," Putnam told him, "If you can keep them flying I'll see that you get a medal as big as a pie." "Okay, sir," Kinney responded, "if it is delivered in San Francisco."

Putnam established VMF-211's command post near the operations area. His men dug foxholes amidst

Author's Collection

1stLt John F. Kinney (seen here circa *September 1941), became engineering officer for VMF-211 upon 1stLt Graves' death on 8 December, and, along with TSgt William H. Hamilton and AMM1c James F. Hesson, USN, kept Wake's dwindling number of battered Wildcats flying throughout the bitter 15-day siege.*

brush and all of the physically capable officers and men stayed at the field. Putnam ordered that pistols, Thompson submachine guns, gas masks, and steel helmets be issued, and also directed that machine gun posts be established near each end of the runway and the command post. Meanwhile, the ground crews dispersed the serviceable planes into revetments, a task not without its risks. That afternoon, Captain Frank C. Tharin accidentally taxied 211-F-9 into an oil drum and ruined the propeller, reducing the serviceable planes to three. Captains Elrod and Tharin (the latter wounded superficially in the attack) later supervised efforts to construct "protective works" and also the mining of the landing strip with dynamite connected up to electric generators. Contractors bulldozed portions of the land bordering the field, in hopes that the rough ground would wreck any enemy planes that attempted to land there.

That afternoon, over at Battery D, Godbold's men repaired damaged emplacements, improved the director position, and accepted delivery of gas masks, hand grenades, and ammunition. Later that afternoon, 18 civilians reported for military duty. Godbold assigned 16 of them to serve under Sergeant Walter A. Bowsher, Jr., to man the previously idle Gun 3, and assigned the remaining pair to the director crew as lookouts. Under Bowsher's leadership, the men in Gun 3 were soon working their piece "in a manner comparable to the Marine-manned guns."

Gunner Hamas and his men, meanwhile, carted ammunition from the quartermaster shed and dispersed it into caches, each of about 20 to 25 boxes, west of Camp 1, near Wilkes Channel, and camouflaged them with coral sand. Next, they dispersed hundreds of boxes of .50- and .30-caliber ammunition in the bushes that lined the road that led to the airfield. Before nightfall, Hamas delivered .50-caliber ammunition and metal links to Captain Herbert C. Freuler and furnished him the keys to the bomb and ammunition magazines.

About 25 civilians with trucks responded to First Lieutenant Lewis' request for assistance in improving his battery's defensive position. Then, Lewis ordered his men to lay a telephone line from the battery command post (CP) to the battery's heightfinder so that he could obtain altitude readings for the incoming enemy bombers, and relay that information to the guns.

Commander Campbell Keene, Commander, Wake Base Detachment, meanwhile, reassigned his men to more critical combat duties. He sent Ensigns George E. Henshaw and Bernard J. Lauff to Cunningham's staff. Boatswain's Mate First Class James E. Barnes and 12 enlisted men joined the ranks of the defense battalion to drive trucks, serve in galley details, and stand security watches. One of the three enlisted men whom Commander Keene sent to VMF-211 was Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class James F. Hesson. Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton soon found the Pennsylvanian with light brown hair, who had

served in the Air Corps before he had joined the Navy and who had just turned 35 years of age, to be invaluable. VMF-211 also benefitted from the services of civilians Harry Yeager and "Doc" Stevenson, who reported to work as mechanics, and Pete Sorenson, who volunteered to drive a truck.

For the remainder of the day and on into the night, in the contractor's hospital in Camp 2, Naval Reserve Lieutenant Gustave M. Kahn, Medical Corps, and the contractors' physician, Dr. Lawton E. Shank, worked diligently to save as many men as possible. Some, though, were beyond help, and despite their best efforts, four of VMF-211's men – including Second Lieutenant Conderman – died that night.

At Peacock Point, that afternoon, just down the coast from the airfield, "Barney" Barninger's men had completed their foxholes – overhead cover, sandbags, and chunks of coral would come later. Later, at dusk, Barninger evidently sensed that the atoll might be in for a long siege. Thinking that they might not be in camp again for some time, he sent some of his men back to Camp 1 to obtain extra toilet gear and clothing. In the gathering darkness, he set his security watches and rotated beach patrols and observers. Those men not on watch slept fitfully in their foxholes.

That night, Wake's offshore guardians, *Tambor* to the north and *Triton* to the south, surfaced to recharge batteries, breathe fresh air, and listen to radio reports. From those reports the crews of the *Tambor* and *Triton* finally learned of the outbreak of war.

The 9th of December dawned with a clear sky overhead. Over at the airfield, three planes took off on the early morning patrol, while Kinney had a fourth (though without its reserve gas tank) ready by 0900. A test flight proved the fourth F4F to be "o.k.," since she withstood a 350 mph dive "without a quiver." It was just in the nick of time, for at 1145 on the 9th, the *Chitose Air Group* struck again, as 27 Nells came in at 13,000 feet. Second Lieutenant David D. Kliewer and Technical Sergeant Hamilton attacked straggling bombers, and claimed one shot down. Battery D's number 2 and 4 guns, meanwhile, collectively fired 100 3-inch rounds. The Marines damaged 12 planes, but the enemy suffered only very light casualties: one man dead and another slightly wounded.

Author's Collection

Sgt William J. Hamilton, (seen here on 20 January 1938) was one of two enlisted pilots serving in VMF-211 at Wake, and not only flew patrols but helped keep the squadron's planes in the air.

Once more, though, the Japanese wreaked considerable havoc on the defenders. Most of their bombs fell near the edge of the lagoon, north of the airfield, and on Camp 2, demolishing the hospital and heavily damaging a warehouse and a metal shop. One wounded VMF-211 enlisted man perished in the bombing of the hospital while the three-man crew of one of the dispersed gasoline trucks died instantly when a bomb exploded in the foxhole in which they had sought shelter.

Doctors Kahn and Shank and their assistants evacuated the wounded and saved as much equipment as they could. Shank carried injured men from the burning hospital, courageous actions that so impressed Marine Gunner Hamas (who had been trapped by the raid while carrying a load of projectiles and powder to gun positions on Peale) that he later recommended that Shank be awarded a Medal of Honor for his heroism. The hard-pressed medical people soon moved the wounded and what medical equipment they could into magazines 10 and 13, near the unfinished airstrip, and established two 21-bed wards.

Once the bombers had gone, the work of repairs and improving planes and positions resumed. That night, because the initial bombing had destroyed the mechanical loading machines, a crew of civilians helped load .50-caliber ammunition. That same evening, work crews dispersed food, medical supplies, water, and lumber to various points around the atoll, while the communications center and Wake's command post were moved.

Earlier that day from near the tip of Peacock Point, Marine Gunner Clarence B. McKinstry of Battery E had noted one bomber breaking off from the rest. Supposing that the plane had taken aerial photographs, he suggested that the battery be moved. That afternoon, First Lieutenant Lewis received orders to reposition his guns after dark; he was to leave two 3-inchers in place until the other two were emplaced, and then move the last two. Aided by about a hundred civilians with several trucks, Lewis and McKinstry succeeded in shifting the battery – guns, ammunition, and sandbags – to a new location some 1,500 yards to the northwest. Marines and workmen set up dummy guns in the old position.

As the 10th dawned, Marine Gunner McKinstry found himself with new duties, having received orders to proceed to Wilkes and report to Captain Wesley McC. Platt, commander of the Wilkes strongpoint. Battery F comprised four 3-inch guns, but

lacked crewmen, a heightfinder, or a director. Consequently, McKinstry could only fire the guns accurately at short or point-blank range, thus limiting them to beach protection. Assisted by one Marine and a crew of civilians, Gunner McKinstry moved his guns into battery just in time for the arrival of 26 Nells which flew over at 1020 and dropped their bombs on the airfield and those seacoast installations at the tip of Wilkes.

While casualties were light—Battery L had one Marine killed and one wounded (one civilian suffered shell-shock)—the equipment and guns in the positions themselves received considerable damage. Further, 120 tons of dynamite which had been stored by the contractors near the site of the new channel exploded and stripped the 3-inch battery of its fresh camouflage. The gunners moved them closer to the shoreline and camouflaged them with burnt brush because they lacked sandbags with which to construct defensive shelters for the gun crews.

In a new position, which was up the coast from the old one, Battery E's 3-inchers managed to hurl 100 rounds skyward while bombs began hitting near Peacock Point. The old position there was "very heavily bombed," and a direct hit set off a small ammunition dump, vindicating McKinstry's hunch about the photo-reconnaissance plane. Battery D's gunners, meanwhile, claimed hits on two bombers (one of which was seen to explode later). Although Captain Elrod, who single-handedly attacked the formation, claimed two of the raiders, only one Nell failed to return to its base.

That night, the itinerant Battery E shifted to a position on the toe of the horseshoe on the lagoon side of Wake. Their daily defensive preparations complete, Wake's defenders awaited what the next dawn would bring. They had endured three days of bombings. Some of Cunningham's men may have wondered when it would be their turn to wreak destruction upon the enemy.

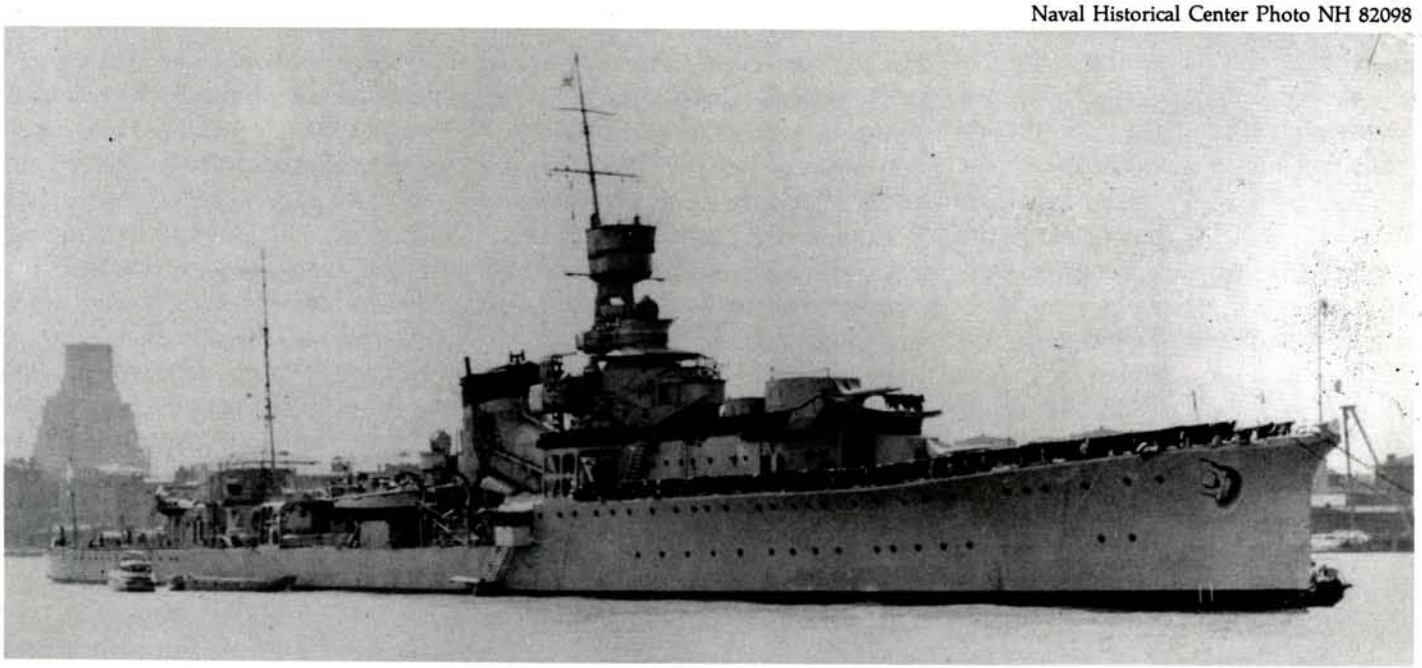
'Humbled by Sizeable Casualties'

During the night of 10 December 1941, Wake's lookouts vigilantly scanned the horizon. Those of her defenders who were not on watch grabbed what sleep they could. Shortly before midnight, the *Triton* was south of the atoll, charging her batteries and patrolling on the surface. At 2315, her bridge lookouts spied "two flashes" and then the silhouette of what seemed to be a destroyer, dimly visible against the backdrop of heavy clouds that lay behind her. The *Triton* submerged quickly and tracked the unidentifiable ship; ultimately, she fired a salvo of four torpedoes from her stern tubes at 0017 on 11 December 1941—the first torpedoes fired from a Pacific Fleet submarine in World War II. Although the submariners heard a dull explosion, indicating what they thought was at least one probable hit, and propeller noises appeared to cease shortly thereafter, the *Triton*'s apparent kill had not been confirmed. She resumed her patrol, submerged.

The ship that *Triton* had encountered off Wake's south coast was, most likely, the destroyer deployed as a picket 10 miles ahead of the invasion convoy steaming up from the south. Under Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, it had set out from Kwajalein, in the Marshalls, on 8 December. It consisted of the light cruiser *Yubari* (flagship), six destroyers—*Mutsuki, Kisaragi, Yay-*

The 3,587-ton light cruiser Yubari, *seen here at Shanghai, China, in April 1937, was completed in July 1923. Armed with 5.5-inch guns, she served as Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka's flagship for the operations against Wake in December 1941.*

Naval Historical Center Photo NH 82098



The Defense Battalion's 5-Inch Guns

In the photo above, a 5-inch/51 seacoast gun of Battery A, 1st Defense Battalion, rests at the Marine Corps Base, San Diego, on 21 October 1940, prior to its being deployed "beyond the seas." Private Edward F. Eaton, standing beside it, serves as a yardstick to give the viewer an idea of the size of the gun that could hurl a 50-pound shell at 3,150 feet per second up to a range of 17,100 yards. These guns gave a good account of themselves at Wake Island, particularly in discouraging Admiral Kajioka's attempted landing in December 1941.

oi, *Mochizuki*, *Oite*, and *Hayate*—along with *Patrol Boat No. 32* and *Patrol Boat No. 33* (two ex-destroyers, each reconfigured in 1941 to launch a landing craft over a stern ramp) and two armed merchantmen, *Kongo Maru* and *Kinryu Maru*. To provide additional gunfire support, the Commander, *Fourth Fleet*, had also assigned the light cruisers *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu* to Kajioka's force.

Admiral Kajioka faced less than favorable weather for the endeavor. Deeming the northeast coastline unsuitable for that purpose, invasion planners had called for the converted destroyers to put 150 men ashore on Wilkes and 300 on Wake. If those numbers proved insufficient, Kajioka's supporting destroyers were to provide men to augment the landing force. If contrary winds threatened the assault, the troops would land on the northeastern and north coasts. Since the weather had moderated enough by the 11th, though, the force was standing toward the atoll's south, or lee, shore in the pre-dawn hours, confident that two days of bombings had rendered the islands' defenses impotent.

Meanwhile, far to the east, at Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet continued to pick up the pieces after the shattering blow that the Japanese had delivered on the 7th. The enemy onslaught had forced Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), to revise his strategy completely. Kimmel wanted to relieve Wake, but deploying what remained of his fleet to protect sea communications, defend outlying bases, and protect far-flung territory, as well as to defend Oahu, would have required a wide dispersal of the very limited naval forces. By 10 December (11 December on Wake), the scattered positions of his aircraft carriers, which were at sea patrolling the Oahu-Johnston-Palmyra triangle, militated against deploying them to support Wake. Cunningham's garrison, however, in a most striking fashion, would soon provide inspiration to the Pacific Fleet and the nation as well.

Wake's lookouts, like *Triton*'s, had seen flickering lights in the distance. Gunner Hamas, on duty in the battalion command post, received the report of ships offshore from Captain Wesley McC. Platt, commander of the strongpoint on Wilkes, and notified Major Devereux, who, along with his executive officer, Major George H. Potter, stepped out into the moonlight and scanned the southern horizon. Hamas also telephoned Cunningham, who ordered the guns to hold fire until the ships closed on the island.

Cunningham then turned to Commander Keene and Lieutenant Commander Elmer B. Greey, resident

officer-in-charge of the construction programs at Wake, with whom he shared a cottage, and told them that lookouts had spotted ships, undoubtedly hostile ones, standing toward the atoll. He then directed the two officers to order an alert and immediately headed for the island's communications center in his pickup truck.

As the Japanese ships neared Wake, the Army radio unit on the atoll sent a message from Cunningham to Pearl Harbor at 0200 on the 11th, telling of the contractors' casualties, and, because of the danger that lay at Wake's doorstep, suggesting early evacuation of the civilians. Army communicators on Oahu who received the message noted that the Japanese had tried to jam the transmission.

At 0400, Major Putnam put VMF-211 on the alert, and soon thereafter he and Captains Elrod, Tharin, and Freuler manned the four operational F4Fs. The Wildcats, a 100-pound bomb under each wing, then taxied into position for take-off. Shortly before 0500, Kajioka's ships began their final run. At 0515, three Wildcats took off, followed after five minutes by the fourth. They rendezvoused at 12,000 feet above Toki Point. At 0522, the Japanese began shelling Wake.

The Marines' guns, however, remained silent as Kajioka's ships "crept in, firing as they came." The first enemy projectiles set the oil tanks on the southwest portion of Wake ablaze while the two converted destroyers prepared to land their *Special Naval Landing Force* troops. The column of warships advanced westward, still unchallenged. Nearing the western tip of Wake 20 minutes later, Kajioka's flagship, the *Yubari*, closed to within 4,500 yards, seemingly "scouring the beach" with her 5.5-inch fire. At 0600, the light cruiser reversed course yet again, and closed the range still further.

The *Yubari*'s maneuvering prompted the careful removal of the brush camouflage, and the Marines began to track the Japanese ships. As the distance decreased, and the reports came into Devereux's command post with that information, the major again told Gunner Hamas to relay the word to Commander Cunningham, who, by that point, had reached his command post. Cunningham upon receiving Hamas' report, responded, "What are we waiting for, open fire. Must be Jap ships all right." Devereux quickly relayed the order to his anxious artillerymen. At 0610, they commenced firing.

Barninger's 5-inchers at Peacock Point, Wake's "high ground" behind them, boomed and sent the first 50-pound projectiles beyond their target. Adjusting the range quickly, the gunners soon scored what seemed to be hits on the *Yubari*. Although Barninger's guns had unavoidably revealed their location, the ships' counterfire proved woefully inaccurate. Kajioka's flagship managed to land only one shell in Battery B's vicinity, a projectile that burst some 150 feet from Barninger's command post. "The fire . . . continued to be over and then short throughout her firing," Barninger later reported. "She straddled continually, but none of the salvoes came into the position." It was fortunate that the Japanese fire proved as poor as it was, for Barninger's guns lay completely unprotected, open save for camouflage. No sandbag protection existed!

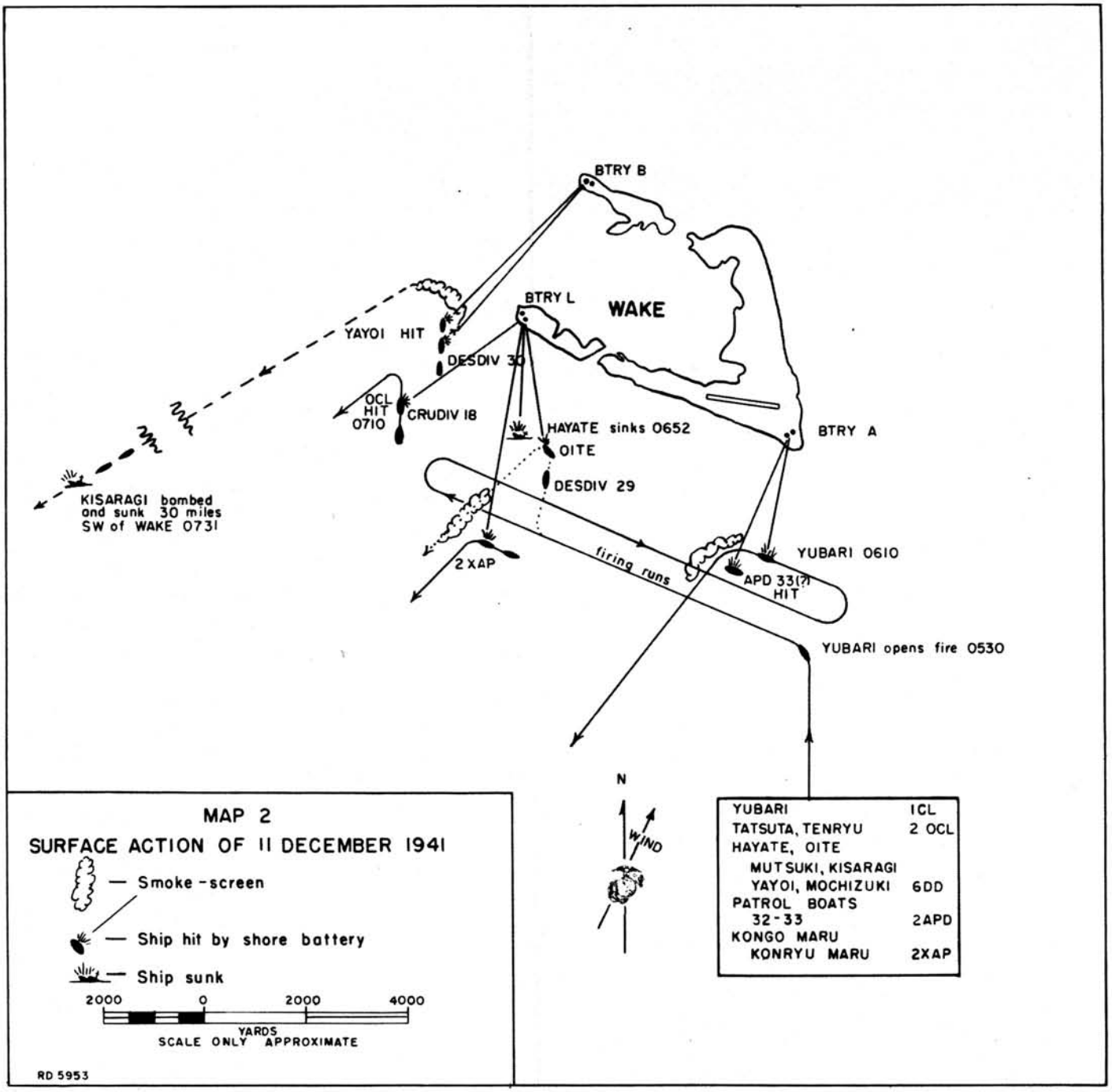
Captain Platt, meanwhile, told Major Potter via phone that, since Battery L's rangefinder had been damaged in the bombing the previous day, First Lieutenant McAlister was having trouble obtaining the range. After Platt passed along Potter's order to McAlister to estimate it, Battery L opened fire and scored hits on one of the transports, prompting the escorting destroyers to stand toward the troublesome guns.

Platt carefully scrutinized the Japanese ship movements offshore, and noted with satisfaction that McAlister's 5-inchers sent three salvoes slamming into the *Hayate*. She exploded immediately, killing all of her 167-man crew. McAlister's gunners cheered and then turned their attention to the *Oite* and the *Mochizuki*, which soon suffered hits from the same guns. The *Oite* sustained 14 wounded; the *Mochizuki* sustained an undetermined number of casualties.

First Lieutenant Kessler's Battery B, at the tip of Peale, meanwhile, dueled with the destroyers *Yayoi*, *Mutsuki*, and *Kisaragi*, as well as the *Tenryu* and the *Tatsuta*, and drew heavy

A portable coincidence range-finder is like those used at Wake Island in conjunction with the 5-inch/51 caliber guns of Batteries A, B, and L. It was believed that they had been removed from decommissioned and deactivated battleships in the 1920s.

Charles A. Holmes Collection, MCHC



counterfire that disabled one gun. The crew of the inoperable mount shifted to that of a serviceable one, serving as ammunition passers, and after 10 rounds, Kessler's remaining gun scored a hit on the *Yayoi*'s stern, killing one man, wounding 17, and starting a fire. His gunners then shifted their attention to the next destroyer in column. The enemy's counterfire severed communications between Kessler's command post and the gun, but Battery B—the muzzle blast temporarily disabling the rangefinder—continued with local fire control. As the Japanese warships stood to the south, Kessler's gun hurled two parting shots toward a transport, which proved to have been out of range.

The *Yubari*'s action record reflects that although Wake had been pounded by land-based planes, the atoll's defenders still possessed enough coastal guns to mount a ferocious defense, which forced Kajioka to retire. As if the seacoast guns and the weather were not enough to frustrate the admiral's venture—the heavy seas had overturned landing boats almost as soon as they were launched—the Japanese soon encountered a new foe. While Cunningham's cannoneers had been trading shells with Kajioka's, Putnam's four Wildcats had climbed to 20,000 feet and maintained that altitude until daylight, when the major had ascertained that no Japanese planes were airborne. As the destroyers that had dueled Battery B opened the range and stood away from Wake, the Wildcats roared in.

Captain Henry T. Elrod (seen at right in the fall of 1941), VMF-211's executive officer, distinguished himself both in the air and in the ground fighting at Wake, with deeds which earned him a posthumous Medal of Honor. Born in Georgia in 1905, Elrod attended the University of Georgia and Yale University. Enlisting in the Corps in 1927, he received his commission in 1931. Elrod is the only Marine hero from Wake who has had a warship – a guided missile frigate – named in his honor.

Major Putnam saw at least one of Elrod's bombs hit the *Kisaragi*. Trailing oil and smoke, the damaged destroyer slowed to a stop but then managed to get underway again, internally afire. While she limped away to the south, Elrod, antiaircraft fire having perforated his plane's oil line, headed home. He managed to reach Wake and land on the rocky beach, but VMF 211's ground crew wrote off his F4F as a total loss. Meanwhile, *Tenryu* came under attack by Putnam, Tharin, and Freuler, who strafed her forward, near the number 1 torpedo tube mount, wounding five men and disabling three torpedoes.

The three serviceable Wildcats then shuttled back and forth to be rearmed and refueled. Putnam and Kinney later saw the *Kisaragi* – which had been carrying an extra supply of depth charges because of the American submarine threat – blow up and sink, killing her entire crew of 167 men. Freuler, Putnam, and Hamilton strafed the *Kongo Maru*, igniting barrels of gasoline stowed in one of her holds, killing three Japanese sailors, and wounding 19. Two more men were listed as missing. Freuler's Wildcat took a bullet in the engine but managed to return to the field. Technical Sergeant Hamilton reached the field despite a perforated tail section.

The *Triton*, which had not made contact with an enemy ship since firing at the unidentified ship during the pre-dawn hours, did not participate in the action that morning. Neither did her sistership, the *Tambor*. The latter attempted to approach the enemy ships she observed firing at the atoll, until they appeared to be standing away from Wake. Then, she reversed course and proceeded north, well away from the retiring Japanese, to avoid penetrating the *Triton*'s patrol area.

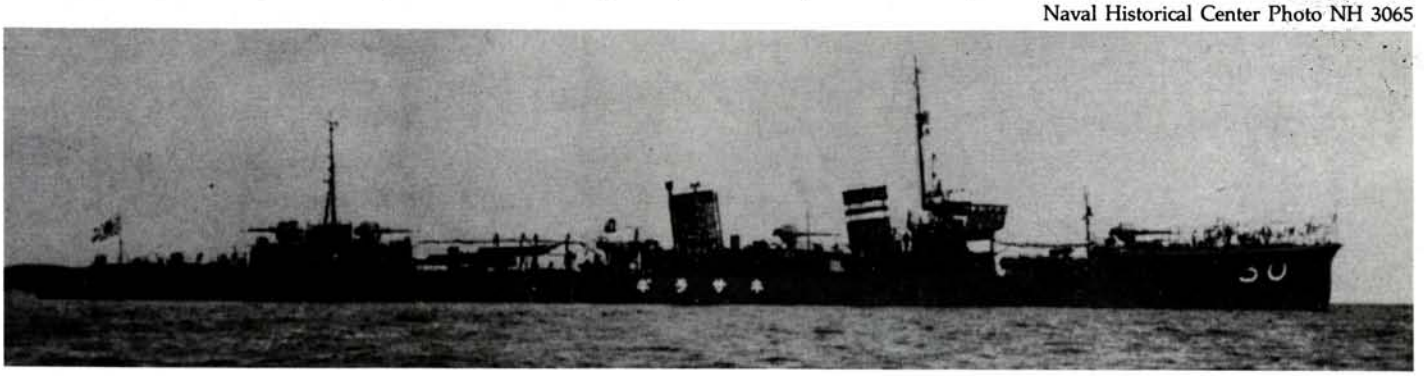
Meanwhile, after Kinney witnessed the *Kisaragi*'s cataclysmic demise, he strafed another destroyer before returning to the field. Having been rearmed and refueled, he took off again at 0915, accompanied by Second Lieutenant Davidson, shortly before 17 Nells appeared to bomb Peale's batteries.

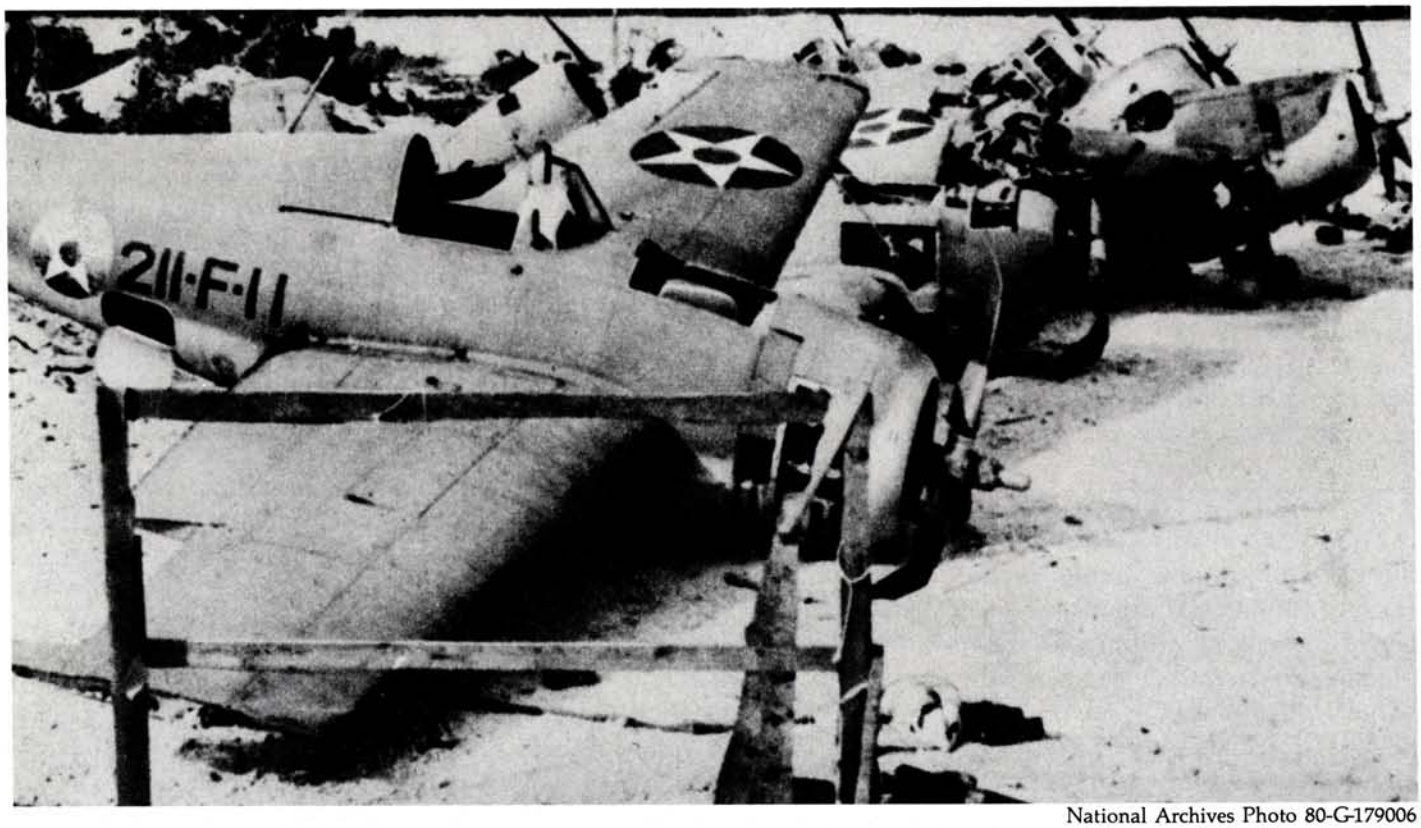
Davidson battled nine of the bombers, which had separated from the others and headed toward the southwest. Kinney tackled the other eight. Battery D, meanwhile, hurled 125 rounds at the bombers. Although some of the enemy's bombs fell near the battery position on Peale, the Japanese again inflicted neither damage nor casualties, and lost two Nells in the process. Eleven other G3M2s had been damaged; casualties included 15 dead and one slightly wounded. Putnam later credited Kinney and Davidson with shooting down one plane apiece.

Ordered to move Battery D's 3-inch guns the length of Peale during the night, Godbold reconnoitered the new position selected by Major Devereux, and at 1745, after securing all battery positions, began the shift. For the next 11 hours, the Marines, assisted by nearly 250 civilians, constructed new emplacements. By 0445 on 12 December, Godbold could again report: "Manned and ready." At Peacock Point, on the night of the 11th, Wally Lewis gave permission for all but two men at each gun, and at the director, to get some sleep – the first the men had had in three days.

A pre-war view of the destroyer Kisaragi, *sunk as the result of damage inflicted by two 100-pound bombs dropped by Capt Henry T. Elrod on the morning of 11 December 1941. Out of the crew of 167 men, not one sailor survived.*

Naval Historical Center Photo NH 3065





National Archives Photo 80-G-179006

Wrecked Grumman F4F-3s from VMF-211 near the airstrip on Wake (photographed after the Japanese took the island). The Wildcat in the foreground, 211-F-11, was flown on 11 December by Capt Elrod in the attack that sank the Japanese destroyer Kisaragi. *Having suffered such damage as to make it unserviceable, 211-F-11 was ultimately cannibalized for spares.*

The Japanese force, meanwhile, ". . . humbled by sizeable casualties," withdrew to the Marshalls, having requested aircraft carrier reinforcement. Hundreds of miles away, at Pearl Harbor, elements of the 4th Defense Battalion received orders to begin preparing for an operation, the destination of which was closely held. The Marines of the battalion fervently desired to assist their comrades on Wake Island and many of them probably concluded, "We're headed for Wake!"

'Still No Help'

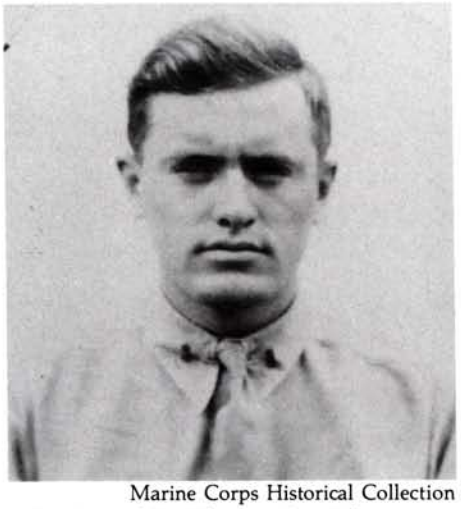
Well before dawn on 12 December, unsynchronized engines heralded the approach of a Japanese flying boat. Captains Freuler and Tharin scrambled their planes to intercept it. The enemy plane—a Kawanishi H6K Type 97 reconnaissance flying boat (Mavis) from the *Yokohama Air Group* dropped its bombs on the edge of the lagoon and then sought cover in the overcast and rain squalls. Tharin, although untrained in night aerial combat techniques, chased and "splashed" it. None of its nine-man crew survived.

Later that same day, 26 *Chitose Air Group* Nells bombed Wake Island. Returning aircrewmen claimed damage to a warehouse and an antiaircraft gun in the "western sector." Antiaircraft fire shot down one plane and damaged four; Japanese casualties included eight men killed. Once the bombers had departed, "Barney" Barninger's men continued working on their foxholes, freshened the camouflage, cleaned the guns, and tried to catch some sleep. The daily bombings, he wrote later, "were becoming an old story, and it was a relief from waiting when the raid was over."

Weathering bombing attacks, taking the enemy's blows, was one thing, but striking at the Japanese was something else—something to boost morale. At about 1600 on the 12th, Second Lieutenant Kliewer, while patrolling, spotted a surfaced submarine 25 miles southwest of Wake. With the sun behind him, he dove from 10,000 feet. Convinced that the submarine was Japanese, Kliewer

Capt Frank C. Tharin (seen here as a first lieutenant, 8 August 1939) would earn a Silver Star Medal, a Distinguished Flying Cross, and two Air Medals for his performance of duty at Wake Island.

Marine Corps Historical Collection



Marine Corps Historical Collection

2dLt David D. Kliewer (seen here circa September 1941), a minister's son, would be awarded a Bronze Star Medal and two Air Medals for his service at Wake.

fired his four .50-calibers broadside into the submarine. Turning to the right, and seeking to increase his chances of scoring maximum damage on the enemy, he dove and dropped his two 100-pounders at such a low altitude that bomb fragments ripped large holes in his wings and tail surfaces. Emptying his guns into the submarine on his next pass, he looked behind him and saw her submerge. Major Putnam flew out to verify that the sub had been sunk and spotted an oil slick at the spot Kliewer indicated.

That night, a stateside radio report praised Wake's Marines. It stated that for security reasons it could not mention the size of the garrison defending the atoll, but noted that "we know the number is very small."

"Nothing like letting the enemy know our status," Kinney noted sardonically in his diary. "Still no help."

Although help was a subject very much on the minds of Admiral Kimmel and his staff back at Pearl Harbor, by 11 December plans to reinforce Wake had not yet "crystallized." Nor could they, until the carriers around which any task forces could be formed could be marshalled for the task. As Captain Charles H. "Soc" McMorris, Kimmel's war plans officer, had estimated, all of the nearly 1,500 people on Wake could be accommodated very rapidly on board the seaplane tender *Tangier* (AV-8) if they either destroyed or abandoned their personal belongings. *Tangier* would be crowded, but he believed it could be done. Protecting the tender, though, was key. "She should not go," McMorris wrote, "until air protection is available." If the evacuation of Wake was decided upon—and he recommended against it—the "prompt-test measure" would be to have *Tangier* assigned to a task force formed around the aircraft carrier *Lexington* (CV-2). Then, accompanied by destroyers, she could evacuate Wake's garrison while *Lexington*'s planes provided cover. Even as the people at Pearl Harbor considered plans for her employment, however, "Lady Lex" and her consorts were encountering difficulty refueling in the heavy seas northwest of Oahu. Ultimately, Task Force 12 had to put into Pearl to complete the refueling.

The following day, 13 December, found VMF-211 conducting its patrols as usual with three available aircraft. Meanwhile, ground crews dragged Captain Elrod's old plane over from the beach and propped it up across the runway to serve as a decoy. The contractors promised Kinney that a light-proof hangar would be finished that night.

Listening to the radio that evening provided little inspiration. As Kinney noted in his diary, Kay Kyser, the reknowned bandleader, had dedicated a song to the "Wake Marines," while commentators noted that Wake's defenders, when asked what they required, had said "Send us more Japs."

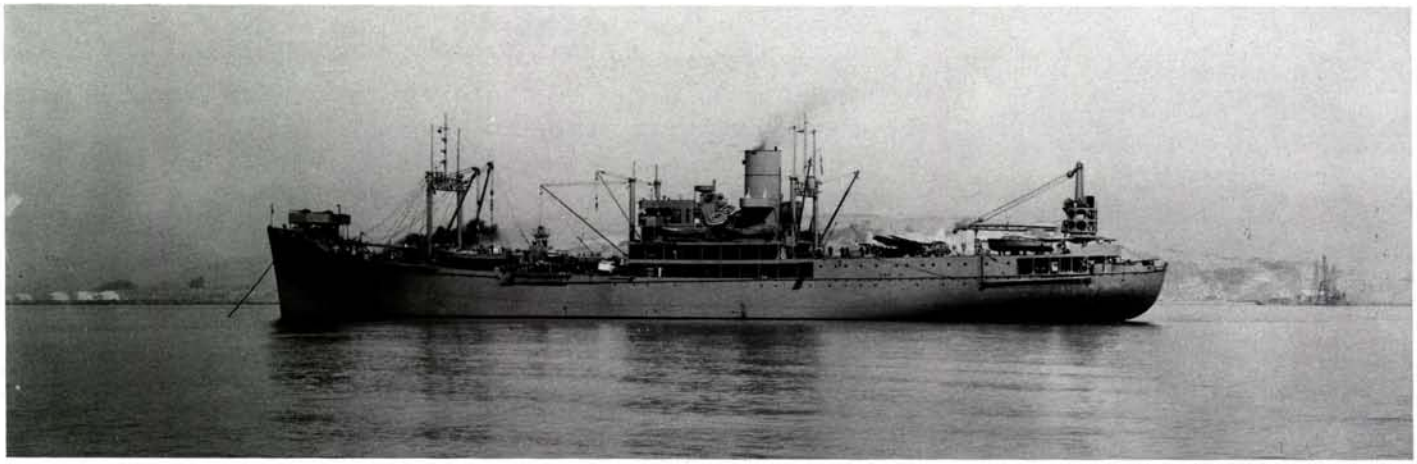
"We began to figure out," Kinney wrote, "that the U.S. was not going to reinforce us."

At Pearl Harbor, however, efforts proceeded apace to disprove those who despaired of relief: the *Tangier* began discharging aviation gasoline to a barge alongside, as she prepared for her impending mission. Early the following morning, she began unloading warheads and torpedoes and commenced loading aviation stores earmarked for Wake. Later, she shifted to the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, where she continued discharging gasoline and unloading torpedoes. "Wake Island," Rear Admiral Claude Bloch, the Commandant of the 14th Naval District, wrote on 12 December (13 December on Wake) "is putting up a magnificent fight. Kimmel is doing his best to devise means for reinforcing it and getting out the civilians . . . ." The *Lexington* and her consorts entered Pearl to fuel on 13 December, while *Saratoga* (CV-3) and her escorts (three old destroyers) steamed toward Oahu—also delayed by heavy weather.

The enemy, meanwhile, maintained aerial pressure on the atoll. Three flying boats bombed the island at 0437 on Sunday, 14 December, but did not damage anything. The Marines, sailors, and contractors went about their daily business of improving their defensive positions. The artillerymen replaced the natural camouflage with fresh foliage.

Wake had little need for "more Japs," despite media claims. It did, however, need tools with which it could defend itself. Cunningham radioed to the Commandant of the 14th Naval District a lengthy list of supplies—including fire control radars—required by his 5- and 3-inch batteries, as well as by the machine gun and searchlight batteries.

At the airfield, the 14th dawned with just two planes in service. Kinney determined, though, that one of those, an F4F "bought" from VF-6 (embarked on the USS *Enterprise*), required an engine replacement. They would scavenge the parts required from two irreparably damaged planes. As a work crew tackled that task, 30 Nells from the *Chitose Air Group* began sowing destruction across Wake. One bomb hit one of the aircraft shelters and set afire an F4F.



National Archives Photo 19-N-25360

The seaplane tender Tangier *(AV-8) (seen here off Mare Island, California, in August 1941), a converted freighter, had elements of the 4th Defense Battalion embarked as well as vitally needed ammunition and equipment, including radar.*

Scrambling over to that Wildcat after the raid had ended, Kinney saw that the enemy ordnance had hit close to the tail but had damaged only the oil tank and intercoolers. Since that was the squadron's best engine, Kinney knew that it must be removed, mount and all. Kinney used an improvised hoist to lift the plane by its nose.

With only the single makeshift hoist, Kinney and his crew removed one engine and attached the other mount by nightfall, fortified only by a gallon of ice cream which Pete Sorenson, one of the contractors, had thoughtfully brought them. Since the hangar was not complete, they had to work quickly to avoid the blackout.

Kinney instructed the civilian foreman to call him as soon as the hangar was ready to receive the plane. He sent Hamilton to bed at 0800, and retired, himself, to be awakened an hour and a half later. With Hamilton in tow, he awoke the three civilians who had been helping them, and all went to the hangar. With a bit more effort, they were ready for the aircraft at 1130. Kinney and his civilian helpers completed installing the engine by 0330 on the 15th.

The failure to have the hangars completed, meanwhile, proved to be a sore point for Major Putnam. Commander Cunningham differed with his Marine subordinate over just how much pressure to apply to the civilians, eschewing the use of armed force in favor of addressing the workers in small groups and appealing to them to lend a hand.

Annoyed that Cunningham seemed to be using only "moral suasion" on the contractors, Putnam, on 14 December, personally persuaded the contractors to work on the underground shelters—no work having been done for the previous 24 hours—and the civilians turned out in force ("about 300 when only 50 could work," Kinney noted).

The enthusiastic turnout, however, had an unexpected effect. Curiosity moved many workmen to line the airstrip to watch the take-off of the evening patrol. The surging crowd caused Captain Freuler to ease his plane to the left to avoid hitting any men, and in so doing found that he had aimed the plane toward a crane which sat on the north side of the airfield. Continuing to the left, Freuler tried to miss the piece of heavy equipment but instead "groundlooped" his F4F into the "boondocks," wrecking it. Hauled back to the runway, the damaged Wildcat served, thereafter, as a decoy.

At Pearl Harbor, at 1231 on 14 December (0901 15 December, on Wake), Task Force 11 (formerly Task Force 12) stood out to sea. Its commander, Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, had been ordered to raid Jaluit to divert attention away from Task Force 14, which was to sortie the following day and proceed to Wake. Brown's force was to conduct the raid on Jaluit—reckoned to be the center of Japanese operations in the Marshalls—and then to retire toward Pearl Harbor the day before Task Force 14, under Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, was to reach Wake.

Fletcher's task, meanwhile, was to see that the *Tangier* reached her objective. The *Saratoga*, with VMF-221 embarked, was to launch the Marine fighters to fly into Wake while the seaplane tender was to moor offshore to begin the process of putting ashore reinforcements, ammunition, provisions, and equipment—including an important radar set. The *Tangier* was then to embark approximately 650 civilians and all of the wounded men and return to Pearl Harbor. Kimmel and his staff had estimated that the process of unloading and debarkation would take at least two days; embarking all the people at Wake could be accomplished in less than one. Unfavorable weather, however, could lengthen the time considerably. At 1331 (at Pearl Harbor), on 15 December Kimmel informed the Chief of Naval Operations (Admiral Harold R. Stark) of the relief expedition he had just launched. He received Admiral Stark's concurrence early the following morning.

Meanwhile, during the day on the 15th, Dan Godbold's men observed

the usual routine, starting the day at full alert and replacing the natural camouflage before reducing the alert status at 0700. His men completed the shelters near the guns during the day and began work on a shelter at the heightfinder position. They stopped work at 1700 to return to full alert. A half hour later, however, battery lookouts reported a plane lurking amongst the low clouds to the east, and Godbold reported the presence of the intruder to the island command post. At 1800, four flying boats came in at 1,000 feet and dropped bombs on what their crews thought was the "barracks area (Camp 1) on the northern part of the island." They also strafed the area near Batteries D and B. The Japanese reported their bombing as having been "effective," but it inflicted no material damage. One civilian workman was killed. From his vantage point, Marine Gunner McKinstry, in Battery E, thought all of the bombs landed in the ocean.

The next day, the 16th, 33 Nells raided Wake Island at 1340. The Marines, however, greeted the Japanese fliers with novel fire control methods. Kinney and Kliewer, aloft on patrol, spotted the incoming formations closing on the atoll at 18,000 feet, almost 10 minutes before they reached Wake's airspace. The U.S. pilots radioed the enemy's altitude to the gun batteries. The early warning permitted Lewis to enter the data into the M-4 director and pass the solution to Godbold. Battery D hurled 95 rounds skyward. Battery E's first shots seemed to explode ahead of the formation, but Gunner McKinstry reported that the lead plane in one of the formations dropped, smoking, to the rear of the formation. He estimated that at least four other planes cleared the island trailing smoke. Godbold estimated that four planes had been damaged and one had crashed some distance from the island. Japanese accounts, however, provide no support for Godbold's estimate, acknowledging neither losses nor damage to Japanese aircraft during the attack that day. Kliewer and Kinney each attacked the formations of planes, but with little effect, partly because only one of Kinney's four machine guns functioned.

That day, as half of Wake's submarine support—the *Tambor*—retired toward Oahu because of an irreparable leak in her forward torpedo room, Kinney returned to the task of keeping the planes ready to fight with field expedient repairs and borrowed gear. Kinney and his helpers fashioned gun cleaning rods from welding rods. The pervasive, intrusive coral sand threatened to cause severe mechanical damage to the planes. Kinney borrowed a compressor from PanAm (two previous compressors had been "strafed out of commission") to try to keep the planes clean by blasting a mixture of air and kerosene to blow out the accumulations of grit.

To help Kinney and Hamilton and

Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, the commander of Task Force 14, is the subject of much historical "Monday morning quarterbacking." All these commentators have the benefit of something neither Pye, the overall commander, nor Fletcher, on the scene, had—hindsight. As "Soc" McMorris (Admiral Kimmel's war plans officer) put it, "We had no more idea'n a billygoat," about what Japanese forces lay off Wake. The welter of message traffic linking CruDivs, CarDivs, and BatDivs with land-based air painted a formidable picture of what might be encountered by a *single* U.S. Navy carrier task force. While the Navy pilots may have been well trained, *Saratoga*'s embarked fighter squadron was understrength, having only 13 operational Wildcats.

Nor could the Marines of VMF-221 (bound for Wake) have been counted on as an effective adjunct to *Saratoga*'s squadron, since they had not operated from a carrier. An even more compelling argument for how VMF-221 would have performed in the emergency is that Major General Ross Rowell, commanding the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, knowing of 221's manpower and operational deficiencies, lamented having to send "[Major Verne] McCaul's half-baked outfit into that mess." Rowell knew that maintaining the temperamental Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo fighters at a stateside air base with all the conveniences had been a chore—let alone having to operate the F2A-3 at an advance base (especially one that had been so badly cut-up as Wake had been) or at sea on a carrier (where the F2A's performance—especially with landing gear failures—was nearly infamous).

And, too, the three carriers committed to the relief expedition were all there were in the Pacific. There were no reserves. Even though the Japanese harbored no ideas of conquest of Hawaii at that time—they were through with Oahu for the time being—Pye and his advisors had no way of knowing that. What intelligence existed pointed toward a potential disaster for an island where the issue was, as Cunningham correctly perceived; very much in doubt!

When asked in 1970 if the relief expedition's arrival would have made any difference in the outcome at Wake, retired Brigadier General Devereux answered: "I rather doubt that that particular task force, with its size and composition, could have been very effective . . . . I think it was wise . . . to pull back."

National Archives Photo 80-G-266632

Marines from the 4th Defense Battalion embark in Tangier *(AV-8) at Pearl Harbor, 15 December 1941, bound for Wake. Barely visible beyond the first Marine at the head of the gangway is a sobering reminder of the events of eight days before: the mainmast of the sunken* Arizona *(BB-39). Tank farm spared by the Japanese on that day lies at right background.*

their small but dedicated band of civilians, Aviation Machinist's Mate Hesson, who had been wounded on the 14th, violated doctor's orders and returned to duty. He resumed work on the planes, carrying on as effectively as ever in spite of his injures. Putnam later recalled Hesson's service as being "the very foundation of the entire aerial defense of Wake Island."

At Pearl Harbor, in the lengthening shadows of 15 December (16 December on Wake), the relief expedition made ready to sail. The *Tangier*, the oiler *Neches* (AO-5) and four destroyers sailed at 1730 on the 15th (On Wake, 1400 on 16 December.). The *Saratoga* and the remainder of the escort—delayed by the time it took to fuel the carrier—were to sail the following day. "The twilight sortie," First Lieutenant Robert D. Heinl, Jr., as commander of Battery F, 3-Inch Antiaircraft Group, wrote of the *Tangier*'s sailing, "dramatized the adventure." The ships steamed past somber reminders of 7 December—the beached battleship *Nevada* and a Douglas SBD Dauntless from the *Enterprise* that had been shot down by "friendly fire" off Fort Kamehameha. "The waters beyond sight of Oahu," First Lieutenant Heinl noted, "seemed very lonely waters indeed . . . Columbus' men, sailing westward in hourly apprehension of toppling off the edge of a square earth, could not have felt the seas to be more inscrutable and less friendly."

Wake's dogged defense caused Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue, Commander, *South Seas Force* (*Fourth Fleet*), to seek help. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the Commander in Chief of the *Combined Fleet*, responded by assigning a force under the command of Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe, Commander, *8th Cruiser Division*, consisting of carriers *Hiryu* and *Soryu* and escorting ships, to reinforce Inoue. At 1630 on 16 December, the two carriers (with 118 aircraft), screened by the heavy cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma* and the destroyers *Tanikaze* and *Urakaze*, detached from their *Pearl Harbor Striking Force*, and headed toward Wake.

As Abe's ships steamed toward Wake, U.S. Navy radio intelligence operators intercepted Japanese radio transmissions. The messages, when decoded, caused the intelligence analysts to suspect that connections existed among the Japanese *Fourth Fleet* operations "CruDiv 8" (the *Tone* and the *Chikuma*), "Cardiv 2" (the *Soryu* and the *Hiryu*), and "Airon 24 (*24th Flotilla*). Aerial reconnaissance flights from the Marshalls followed.

The following afternoon Rear Admiral Bloch sent a message that must have seemed a trifle unrealistic to Cunningham, who was primarily concerned with defending the atoll and keeping his men alive. The message stated that it was "highly desirable" that the dredging of the channel

across Wilkes continue and inquired about the feasibility "under present conditions" of finishing the work with equipment at hand. It requested an estimated date of completion.

On 17 December, something occurred at Pearl Harbor which harbored ill portents for the Wake Island relief operation. Admiral Kimmel was relieved of command. In a perfunctory ceremony at the Submarine Base, Kimmel relinquished command to Vice Admiral William S. Pye, who would serve as the acting commander until Admiral Chester W. Nimitz arrived to assume command. Pye inherited an operation about which he would soon harbor many reservations. The next day (18 December), CinCPac's radio intelligence men noted again that . . . "Cardiv and Crudiv 8 continued to be associated with the Fourth Fleet in communications."

While the acting CinCPac digested that latest disquieting intelligence and sent it along to Fletcher and Brown, Wake's defenders endured another air raid. On the 19th, 27 Nells came in from the northwest at 1135, and dropped bombs on the remainder of the PanAm facility on Peale and on Camp 1 on Wake. Battery D fired 70 rounds at the attacking planes, and both Godbold and Marine Gunner McKinstry reported seeing one plane leaving the sky over the atoll, trailing a plume of smoke behind it. An aviator, they said, drifted down in his parachute some distance from land. Wake's gunners had actually done far better than they had thought. Of 27 planes engaged, 12 had been hit by antiaircraft fire.

Cunningham responded to Bloch's message of the previous day that up to that point he had been concerned only with defending the island and preserving lives. He addressed the completion of the channel by listing the difficulties associated with the task. He pointed out that blackout conditions militated working at night, and that Japanese air raids, which came without warning, reduced the amount of work which could be accomplished during the day. But working during the day was hazardous, he said, because noisy equipment prevented workmen from being alerted to the incoming planes in time for them to take cover. Furthermore, the amount of contractor's equipment was being continually reduced by the bombings. Additionally, continuing the projects would require the immediate replenishment of diesel oil and dynamite. With morale of the civilian workmen generally low, Cunningham could not predict, under the prevailing conditions, when the construction projects would be completed. He further declared that "relief from raids would improve [the] outlook." After recording, in a second message the damage inflicted by the Japanese on the base on Peale, the atoll commander noted that, since the outbreak of war, the efforts involved in assisting in the defense and salvage operations had fully occupied all of the contractors' men. Cunningham continued by noting the additional numbers of dead or missing civilians since his earlier dispatch on the subject, and described the civilians' morale as "extremely low." He reiterated his request to consider evacuating the civilians, since the large number of them who were not contributing to the defensive efforts required sustenance, which drew on the stores required by those actively engaged in the defensive operations.

In the meantime, Vice Admiral Pye had passed on to Brown information pointing toward Japan's establishment of an air base in the Gilberts and the existence of a submarine force at Jaluit. Most disturbing of all was the news that CinCPac's intelligence people knew of "no definite location of [the] force which attacked Oahu." For all anyone knew, the Japanese carriers whose planes had bombed Pearl Harbor could be lurking almost anywhere!

Considering the newly established enemy air bases that he would have to pass en route to Jaluit, Brown could see that Japanese air searches from those places might spot Task Force 11 before it reached its objective. He began fueling his ships on the 18th—the same day that Rear Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr.'s Task Force 8 sailed from Pearl to support Task Forces 11 and 14—and informed the task force of its objective. Brown completed the fueling operations on the 19th. That done, he detached his oiler, the *Neosho* (AO-23), to stand out of danger, and contemplated what lay ahead.

Fletcher's Task Force 14, meanwhile, pressed westward. At noon on the 19th, the *Saratoga* and her consorts were 1,020 miles east of Wake. D-Day had been set for the 24th.

'All Hands Have Behaved Splendidly'

Shortly before 1600 on 20 December, scrutinized by Wake Island's only serviceable F4F, a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat bearing mail landed in the lagoon. It arrived in the midst of a rain squall, but the defenders welcomed the precipitation because it worsened the flying weather and inhibited the Japanese bombing efforts. Commander Keene's sailors moored the Catalina and fueled it for the next morning's flight.

As "Barney" Barninger observed, the flying boat's arrival "set the island on end with scuttlebutt." Most men surmised that the civilians would be evacuated. The scuttlebutt was partially correct. From the secret orders carried on board the PBY, Cunningham learned that he was to prepare all but 350 civilians (those to be selected "by specific trades to continue the more important of the projects," one of which was the completion of the ship channel between Wake and Wilkes) for evacuation. He was also notified that fire control, radar, and other equipment was being

sent, along with reinforcements of both men and machinery.

That day, Commander Cunningham recounted the events which had occurred to date in a report to Rear Admiral Bloch. Although many air raids had occurred, he reported, that most had resulted in few casualties and little damage to installations. He attributed Wake's escape from more serious damage to the effectiveness of the Marines' antiaircraft fire – fire delivered despite the lack of fire control equipment. A former fighter pilot, he also lavished unstinting praise on VMF-211's aviators, who had "never failed to push home attacks against heavy fire." That none of the planes had been shot down, he marvelled, "is a miracle."

The representative of the Bureau of the Budget, Herman P. Hevenor, who had arrived on Wake via the *Clipper* on 7 December to check the progress of construction on the atoll and review the expenditures, wrote to the Bureau telling them of the siege to that point and praising those who led the defense. "The Commanding Officer [Cunningham] and his staff, including the Marine Officers, have done a big job and an efficient one. Their stand against the Japs has been marvelous and they deserve everything our Government can give them . . . ."

Major Putnam dashed off a report of VMF-211's operations to Lieutenant Colonel Claude A. Larkin, commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 21. After recounting the losses of both planes and men suffered by his squadron, and the damage he felt his men had inflicted upon the enemy, Putnam wrote that a large share of the squadron's records had been destroyed on the first day, and since then, "parts and assemblies have been traded back and forth so that no airplane can be identified. Engines have been traded from plane to plane, have been junked, stripped, rebuilt, and all but created." Practically all of 211's gear had been destroyed. Quartermaster property lay scattered about, wholly unaccounted for.

Nevertheless, he praised his men. "All hands have behaved splendidly and held up in a manner of which the Marine Corps may well tell." He singled out the "indefatigable labor, the ingenuity, skill, and technical knowledge of Lieutenant Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton," since "it is solely due to their efforts that the squadron is still operating."*

The next morning the PBY crew and their only passenger, Major Walter L. J. Bayler, who had completed his temporary duty at Wake, clambered on board the Catalina. The PBY taxied into the lagoon and took off for Midway.

As the PBY departed, a Japanese task force steamed toward Wake Island, intent upon attacking on the 22d. The arrival and departure of that PBY, however, influenced the Japanese plans. On 20 December, Rear Admiral Abe received a report (based upon the radio messages the PBY sent as it approached Wake) that planes from Patrol Squadron 23 had advanced to Wake from Midway the previous day. Consequently, the commander of the *South Seas Force*, hoping to catch and destroy those planes, pressed Abe to advance the attack one day. The *Wake Island Reinforcement Force* increased its speed to 30 knots.

In the meantime, on the morning of 21 December, Rear Admiral Kajioka set out from the Marshalls for a second attempt at Wake. The attacking naval forces included the same ships that had participated in the first attack, the destroyers *Asanagi* and *Yunagi* (which replaced the *Hayate* and the *Kisaragi*, which had been sunk during the initial attack), and some reinforcements, four heavy cruisers (*Kako, Aoba, Furutaka* and *Kinugasa*) that had recently taken part in the occupation of Guam, and the seaplane carrier *Kiyokawa Maru*. Instead of 225 troops in each converted destroyer, 250 (some of whom had taken part in the seizure of Guam) had been embarked. Landing exercises had been conducted at Kwajalein.

At 0700 on the 21st, beneath cloudy skies, *Hiryu* and *Soryu* turned into the northeasterly wind and began launching planes. The aircraft arrived over Wake at about 0900 to find a 200-meter ceiling and, seeing no U.S. patrol planes, circled at 50 to 200 meters and began attacking shore installations. Antiaircraft fire hardly seemed to hinder them as they "worked things over a bit" and gave embattled defenders their first taste of dive-bombing. *Soryu*'s and *Hiryu*'s aviators, having experienced the flak over Pearl Harbor, reported "very slight" resistance from antiaircraft fire. "The enemy," Rear Admiral Abe reflected, "seemed to lose their fighting spirits."

The blow had fallen without warning. It caught Second Lieutenant Kliewer eating breakfast with the crews of the two .50-caliber machine guns at the west end of the field. He admired them for the way in which they stuck to their guns amidst the bombing and strafing, continuing to fire "when other guns on the island [had been] silenced."

The raid had caught Major Putnam returning from Camp 2 in a truck. He attempted to reach the only flyable F4F, but strafing Zeroes twice forced him away. Only after the Mitsubishis and Aichis left the vicinity, at about 1020, was he able to take off and attempt to follow them to their ships. Although he was not successful in that endeavor, his attempt typified the "highest order of courage and resolution" that he displayed throughout the siege. As Putnam searched for the Japanese fleet, Cunningham radioed word of the morn-

*In a marginal note to this report by Putnam upon his return from a POW camp in Japan, in October 1945, he added AMM1c Hesson's name to those of Kinney and Hamilton.

ing's raid to CinCPac and the Commandant of the 14th Naval District.

Later that day, 33 Nells paid Wake a visit. The antiaircraft fire, however, apparently forced them to bomb from a higher altitude than before (18,000 feet *vice* 13,000). Although Dan Godbold claimed to have seen one plane dropping from the skies over Wake, trailing smoke, all G3M2s returned safely to Roi. Their bombs, however, had fallen thickly about the battery, scoring a bullseye on the director emplacement, killing Platoon Sergeant Johnalson E. Wright, wounding three other men, and knocking unconscious the range officer, Second Lieutenant Robert W. Greeley. The M-4 director, although destroyed by the bomb, deflected the full force of the explosion from Greeley and saved his life.

Wright, the firing battery officer, had been known for his cheerfulness and boundless vitality. Although during previous raids he had been told to take cover, he had remained at his post, calmly giving orders and disregarding the bombs. His seemingly tireless efforts to improve the efficiency of the battery earned him a Bronze Star posthumously.

At Peacock Point, a bomb had fallen near the shelter belonging to Barninger's no. 2 gun crew, causing the entrance to be blocked and blowing the sides in. Fortunately, no one was hurt. "The bomb hitting the shelter," Barninger wrote later, "was the only one close to the guns." He and his men spent the rest of the day repairing the damaged shelter. Most of the Marines, though, began feeling that foxholes were better. "Although we didn't lose a man," Barninger commented, "it was a close thing and with the heavy caliber bombs the shelter is too light. For that reason we are all back in the foxholes."

On the previous day, Major Devereux had ordered Marine Gunner McKinstry to keep the two guns of Battery F firing to divert the enemy's attention from the only complete battery on the island, Battery E. On the 22d, McKinstry's gunners put on a fine performance, despite having neither director nor heightfinder to help them. Firing by the expedient of "lead 'em a mile," the two guns of Battery F kept the enemy guessing as to which group of guns was the greater threat.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

2dLt Carl R. Davidson (seen circa *September 1941), VMF-211's assistant gunnery officer, was awarded a Navy Cross posthumously for courageously and unhesitatingly attacking an overwhelming number of Kates on 21 December.*

Nevertheless, all of the planes from *Hiryu* and *Soryu* returned undamaged to their decks. Then, Abe's force steamed south to be in a position 200 miles from Wake the next day to provide an antisubmarine screen for Kajioka's ships.

At Pearl Harbor, Vice Admiral Pye read with concern Cunningham's dispatch reporting the raid by carrier planes. The Japanese had inserted a dangerous new factor into the equation. Pye deemed it essential "to insure [the] defense of the [Hawaiian] islands." With the Army's Hawaiian defense in shambles, and the battleship strength significantly reduced by the Japanese attack on 7 December, he believed that the Pacific Fleet's three carriers constituted the best protection for Oahu. After he considered the evidence of increased Japanese air activity in the Marshalls, with one, or perhaps two, carrier groups in that vicinity, as well as "evidence of extensive offshore lookout and patrol," he decided that a surprise raid on Jaluit could not be conducted successfully. Thus, Pye reluctantly abandoned the proposed carrier raid on the Marshalls.

While he allowed the efforts to relieve Wake to continue, Pye warned Fletcher not to get within 200 miles of the atoll, and directed Brown to move north with Task Force 11 to support Task Force 14. That decided, on the afternoon of 20 December, he radioed his decision to the Navy Department.

With efforts to relieve Wake progressing, CinCPac radioed Cunningham on the morning of the 22d (21st at Pearl Harbor) and asked him to report the condition of the aircraft runways. He also requested to be informed immediately of any significant developments.

At 0800 on 22 December, 39 planes from the *Soryu* and the *Hiryu* ascended and headed into the gray skies above the beleaguered atoll. Their pilots expected to meet American fighters.

Second Lieutenant Davidson took off from Wake at 1000, cranked up his landing gear, and set out on the regular midday patrol. Engine trouble prevented Captain Freuler from getting aloft until 1030.

Shortly before noon, Davidson, patrolling to the north of Wake, radioed Freuler, then flying to the south of the atoll, informing him of approaching enemy aircraft. In spite of the odds, both men gave battle.

Freuler engaged six carrier attack planes and dropped one, trailing smoke, out of formation on his first pass. As the group of Nakajimas broke up, he made an opposite approach and fired, flaming one Kate, which exploded in an expanding ball of fire about 50 feet beneath him. As his controls responded sluggishly, and his badly scorched F4F's manifold pressure dropped, he

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Capt Herbert C. Freuler (seen circa *September 1941), was VMF-211's gunnery and ordnance officer. Freuler was commissioned a second lieutenant in July 1931. He was awarded a Navy Cross and a Bronze Star for heroism at Wake.*

glanced back toward Wake and saw Davidson engaging several enemy planes. An instant later, a *Hiryu* Zero got on Freuler's tail and opened fire. Bullets penetrated Freuler's fuselage, both sides of his vacuum tank, the bulkhead, seat, and parachute. After his plane was hit, Freuler threw his F4F into a steep dive—the Japanese pilot did not follow him—nursed it home, and landed with the canopy stuck in the closed position. Ground crews extricated him and took him to the hospital.

Carl Davidson, unfortunately, did not return. The pilot who had knocked Freuler out of the fight went to the rescue of his shipmates and shot down Davidson. Rear Admiral Abe later paid homage to the two Marine pilots who had challenged his carrier planes, lauding them as having resisted fiercely and bravely.

The *Soryu* lost two planes and their three-man crews. Damage suffered in the aerial action compelled a third to ditch, but one of the screening ships recovered its crew.

That afternoon, at 1320, Cunningham radioed Pye that a "combined land- and carrier-based plane attack" had occurred and that his fighters had engaged the attackers. He reported Davidson's loss and the wounding of Freuler, but noted that they had shot down "several" planes. The atoll had suffered "no further damage." As "Barney" Barninger later recounted: "Dive bombers again—the carriers must still be in the vicinity . . . . Things are getting tense. Rumor continues to fly about relief, but the dive bombers [are] also present. Things go on in the same manner as before. All that can be done is being done, but there is so little to do [it] with."

Heavy seas bedevilled Frank Jack Fletcher's Task Force 14 as it pressed westward. Having been ordered to fuel to capacity before fighting, Fletcher began fueling his ships from *Neches* in the turbulent seas. Rolling swells and gusty winds slowed that process considerably and permitted the fueling of only four of his destroyers. If Fletcher was expected to fight, his ships would require more fuel to be able to maneuver at high speed, if necessary. He resolved to top off the rest the following day (23 December).

Meanwhile, at around 1900 on 21 December (1530, 22 December Wake), the PBY that had borne Major Bayler (the "last man off Wake Island") from Wake to Midway ar-

Wreckage of what is probably Capt Freuler's plane, on the beach where he crash-landed it on 22 December, after he had destroyed a Kate in aerial combat. Bullets penetrated his fuselage, vacuum tank, bulkhead, seat, and parachute.

National Archives Photo 80-G-413519

Marine Corps Historical Collection

The sound of the heavy surf surging ashore continuously in the defenders' ears as it pounded the reef that ringed the atoll, militated against their hearing approaching enemy planes—a decided disadvantage in view of Wake's lack of radar.

rived at Pearl Harbor. The plane's commander dictated a report, which was transcribed by a CinCPac stenographer shortly after the pilot's arrival, regarding Wake's desperate plight. Pye, upon reading the report, was deeply moved. Members of Pye's staff, many of whom had also faithfully served on Admiral Kimmel's staff, pleaded with Pye's Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Milo F. Draemel, on behalf of the Wake relief efforts. Referring to the PBY commander's report, Pye declared later, "the situation at Wake seemed to warrant taking a greater chance to effect its reinforcement even at the sacrifice of the *Tangier* and possible damage to some major ships of Task Force 14." The admiral therefore removed the restrictions on Task Force 14's operations. The *Tangier* was to be detached with two destroyers to run in to Wake to begin the evacuation of the civilians and to disembark the Marines.

Pye also rescinded the restrictions on the operating areas of Task Forces 8 and 11, allowing them to support Cunningham's command more effectively. Those on the staff who had pleaded for the relief force to continue toward Wake felt vindicated by Pye's decision that night.

Meanwhile, at Wake, with Commander Cunningham's prior approval, Paul Putnam, with no flyable planes left, reported his men to Major Devereux for service as infantrymen. Devereux ordered Putnam to keep his squadron where it was and await further orders.

'This Is As Far As We Go'

Shortly after midnight, First Lieutenant Barninger noted flashing lights "way off the windy side of the island." Alerted to the odd display on the horizon in the darkness, Barninger telephoned Major Devereux, who replied that he also had seen it. Devereux directed Barninger to keep a watch out and cautioned the Peacock Point strongpoint commander to be mindful that the lee shore posed the most possibilities for danger. Lookouts continued to note irregular flashes of light in the black, gusty, rainy predawn of 23 December 1941. It may have been the *Tenryu*, the *Tatsuta*, and the *Yubari* firing blindly at what their spotters thought was Wake Island but which was, instead, only empty ocean.

At 0145, however, a report came into the detachment commander's command post, telling of an enemy landing in progress at Toki Point, at the tip of Peale. Devereux alerted the battalion. Kessler, in the meantime, dispatched a patrol up the lagoon beach toward the PanAm facility, which met a patrol from Battery D. Neither had anything to report. On Wilkes, Captain Platt directed Battery L to move the men of two 5-inch gun sections (equivalent to two rifle squads) to the shore of the lagoon, west of the area of the new channel being dredged across the island. The rest of the men of the battery—fire controlmen and headquarters men under McAlister, who had established his command post near the searchlight section of the battery—moved into positions they had readied along the south shore of Wilkes, between McKinstry's Battery F and the new channel.

Kessler, whom Devereux had requested to confirm or deny the accuracy of the information regarding the landing, reported that there was no landing in progress, but that he had seen the lights offshore. Cunningham, at 0145, radioed the Commandant, 14th Naval District, reporting "gunfire between ships to northeast of island."

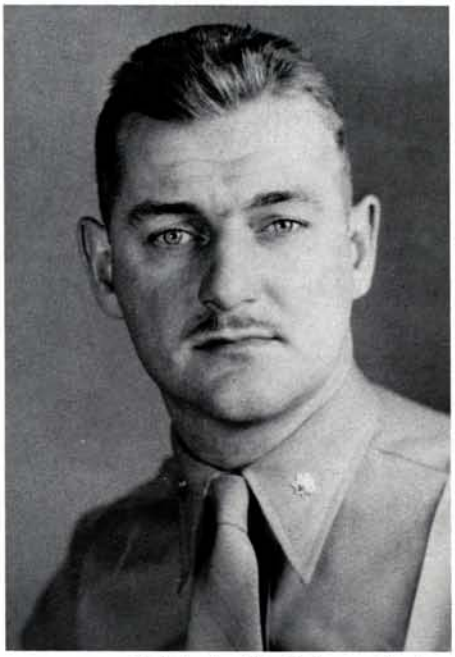
Wake thus alerted, Second Lieutenant Arthur A. Poindexter, at Camp 1 with the mobile reserve (predominantly supply and administration Marines and 15 sailors under Boatswain's Mate First Class James E.

Barnes), believed Peale to be threatened. He exercised initiative and entrucked eight Marines and with four .30-caliber machine guns. Reporting his intention to the detachment commander, Poindexter and that portion of his mobile reserve sped past the airfield toward Peale. It was nearing Devereux's command post when he ordered it intercepted. The major retained Poindexter's little force where it was, pending clarification of the situation.

The bad weather that prevented the Marines from seeing their foes likewise hindered the Japanese. Shortly before 0200, *Special Naval Landing Force* troops clambered down into the medium landing craft designated to land on Wilkes and Wake. Four landing craft were launched some 3,000 to 4,000 meters offshore, but in the squalls and long swells they experienced difficulty keeping up with *Patrol Boat No. 32* and *Patrol Boat No. 33* as they churned on a northeasterly course, headed for the beach. The landing craft designated to follow *No. 32* lost sight of her in the murky, gusty darkness.

At about 0230, Marines on Peacock Point detected the two patrol boats, which appeared to them only as dark shapes as they made for the reef by the airstrip. Then, the two ships ground gently ashore on the coral. The Japanese naval infantrymen slipped over the side into the surf, struggled ashore, and sprinted across the coral for cover.

On Wilkes, Gunner McKinstry called to Captain Platt and informed him that he thought he heard the sound of engines over the boom of the surf, and at 0235 one of his .50-caliber guns (gun no. 10) opened fire in the darkness. Ten minutes later, McKinstry, having sought permission to use illumination, caused a searchlight to be turned on. Although the light was shut off as suddenly as it had been turned on, its momentary beam revealed a landing boat aground on Wilkes' rocky shore and, beyond that, two destroyers, beached on Wake.



Poindexter File, Reference Section

1stLt Arthur A. Poindexter (seen here in a post-war photograph), commander of the mobile reserve on Wake, provided such evidence of "exemplary conduct and ability to lead troops . . . with utter disregard for his own safety" that he was ultimately awarded the Bronze Star.

McAlister ordered Platoon Sergeant Henry A. Bedell to detail two men to hurl grenades into the enemy craft. The veteran non-commissioned officer, accompanied only by Private First Class William F. Buehler, gamely tackled the task, but Japanese gunfire killed Bedell and wounded Buehler before either had been able to work their way close enough to lob grenades into the boats.

McKinstry's men, meanwhile, manned the 3-inchers of Battery F, but the guns could not be depressed enough to fire onto the beach. The Marines held their position until the men from the *Takano Unit* of the *Special Naval Landing Force* approached closely enough to begin lobbing grenades. Marines and Japanese grappled in the darkness, hand-to-hand, before McKinstry's men, after removing the firing locks from the guns, pulled back to take up infantry positions. Their concentrated fires kept most of the Japanese at bay near the 3-inch gun position.

Other *Special Naval Landing Force* troops, however, probed westward, toward the 5-inch guns that had so humbled Kajioka's force on the 11th. They ran into heavy fire from gun no. 9, a well-camouflaged .50-caliber Browning, handled skillfully by 20-year old Private First Class Sanford K. Ray and situated some 75 yards west of where the *Takano Unit* had first swarmed ashore. Ray's fire prevented the enemy from advancing closer than 40 or 50 yards from his sand-bagged position, and his proximity to the beach allowed him not only to harass the enemy but also to report enemy movements. Although Japanese troops had severed most wire communication lines, Platt remained in touch with developments at the shoreline by reports from Ray.

Reports from observers along the beach soon began to deluge Devereux's command post, where he and his executive officer, Major Potter, attempted to keep abreast of events. Gunner Hamas relayed the information to Cunningham, at his command post. On the basis of those reports, the island commander, at 0250, radioed the Commandant of the 14th Naval District: "Island under gunfire. Enemy apparently landing."

At that point, Devereux directed Poindexter to move the mobile reserve into the area between Camp 1 and the west end of the airfield. Since the eight Marines had remained in the truck with the four machine guns, only 15 minutes elapsed before they set up both gun sections in a position commanding the road that ran along the south shore and also covering a critical section of beach. Within moments, Poindexter's Brownings chattered and spat into the dim shape of the grounded *Patrol Boat No. 32*, most of the bullets striking the after part of the ship. *Special Naval Landing Force* troops who disclosed their positions by igniting flares soon came under fire. At Camp 1, just up the

coast, men from Battery I and the sailors who had been serving as lookouts manned the four .30-caliber machine guns set up there. From Poindexter's vantage point, the enemy troops appeared confused and disoriented, shouting and discharging a number of flares, perhaps for "control and coordination."

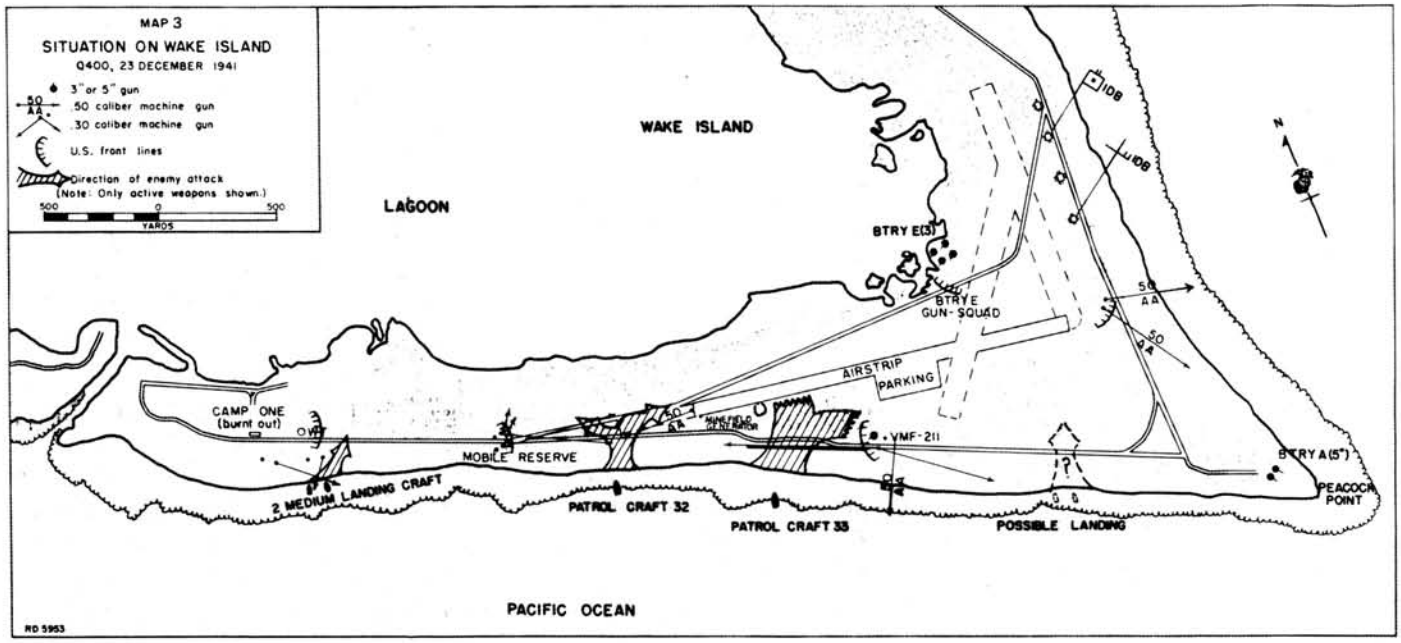
Having received a report of Japanese destroyers standing toward Wake's south shore (and well inside the range of the 5-inch batteries that had so vexed the enemy on 11 December), Second Lieutenant Robert M. Hanna, who commanded the machine guns emplaced at the airstrip, clearly perceived the threat. Accompanied by Corporal Ralph J. Holewinski and three civilians, Paul Gay, Eric Lehtola, and Bob Bryan, Hanna set off at a dead run for the 3-inch gun that had been emplaced on the landward side of the beach road, on a slight rise between the beach road and the oiled tie-down area at the airstrip. Up to that point, Major Putnam's grounded airmen, their ground support unit, and the volunteer civilians, had been awaiting further orders. As Hanna and his scratch 3-inch crew sprinted to the then-unmanned gun, Devereux ordered Putnam to support the lieutenant.

Putnam assigned Second Lieutenant Kliewer to a post on the west end of the airfield, along with Staff Sergeant John F. Blandy, Sergeant Robert E. Bourquin, Jr., and Corporal Carroll E. Trego. They were to set off the mines on the field if the enemy attempted to use it. Two .50-caliber guns situated just north of the airstrip covered Kliewer's position. At the eastern end of the strip lay the guns manned by Corporal Winford J. McAnally, along with six Marines and three civilians and supported by a small group of riflemen. The gunners enjoyed a perfect, unobstructed field of fire—the airstrip itself.

About 0300, just at a time when events began to develop with startling rapidity as the Japanese pushed ashore on Wilkes and Wake, Major Devereux lost touch with Camp 1, Putnam's platoon, Hanna's command post near the airstrip, and Barninger's Battery A. Advancing Japanese troops probably had found the communication lines—the exigencies of war had prevented them from being buried—and cut them. Devereux's last situation reports from those units painted a bleak picture. If Cunningham received less-than-encouraging reports from the defense battalion commander, he received equally grim news from CinCPac when, at 0319 Wake time, Pearl Harbor radioed to Wake that the *Triton* and *Tambor* were returning to Hawaiian waters. "No friendly vessels should be in your vicinity today," the message stated, "Keep me informed."

Hanna and his men, meanwhile, reached the 3-inch gun and set to work. Anxious hands fumbled in the darkness for ammunition while Hanna—since the gun lacked sights—peered down the bore to draw a bead on the beached and sta-

Painting by artist Albin Henning shows Marines firing a .30-caliber Browning machine gun as Japanese landing force sailors splash ashore. While inaccurate in details (barbed wire, for example, is an artist's invention because no such obstruction existed at Wake Island, since the coral reef surrounding the atoll was bare of any holding ground for the stakes or anchors necessary to keep them in place), it does capture the desperate nature of the Marines' final day's fighting.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 307142



tionary *Patrol Boat No. 33* that lay less than 500 yards away. The first round tore into the ship's bridge, seriously wounding both the captain and navigator, killing two seamen, and wounding five. Hanna's gun hurled 14 more rounds on target. Some of his projectiles evidently touched off a magazine, and the beached warship began to burn. The illumination provided by the burning ship revealed her sistership, which Hanna and his hard-working gunners bombarded, as well. A short time later three *Special Naval Landing Force* sailors attacked Hanna's exposed position. In the ensuing fight, Hanna cooly shot and killed all three enemy sailors with his pistol and resumed the operation of his 3-incher.

Reinforcing Hanna's cannoneers became the next order of business. Devereux felt compelled to keep Peale's Battery B intact to deal with surface threats, and Battery E (which, by that point, had a full complement of guns and crews along with the only heightfinder and director) to deal with enemy planes. That left Godbold's Battery D, which by that point possessed only two operational guns and no fire-control gear. Devereux directed Godbold to send one section (nine men) to the battalion command post to reinforce Hanna's crew. Under Corporal Leon A. Graves, the squad clambered on board a contractor's truck and reached the command post about 0315. They were to proceed along the road that paralleled the shoreline to a junction some 600 yards south of the airfield, where they were to leave the truck and proceed through the brush to Hanna's position. Quickly, they set out into the night.

The flames from the wrecked *Patrol Boat No. 33* disclosed Japanese troops advancing past the west end of the airstrip into the thick undergrowth in front of the mobile reserve's positions. Poindexter, after ordering one machine gun section to keep up a fire into the brush to interdict that movement and protect his own flank, heard machine gun fire from Camp 1, behind him. Wanting to see for himself if more Japanese landing craft were coming ashore to his rear, the lieutenant, accompanied by his runner, left the front in charge of Sergeant "QT" Wade, and hurried back to the camp.

There, unable to see at what his neophyte sailor-gunners were expending their ammunition, Poindexter asked each to point out his target. Two could not – they'd opened fire only because the other two had done so – but a third pointed to the dim outline of what appeared to be a "large landing barge on the order of a self-propelled artillery lighter." When another craft of the same type seemed to materialize out of the murk, Poindexter ordered firing resumed at what proved to be two large landing craft that were attempting to ground themselves 1,200 yards east of the entrance to Wilkes Channel.

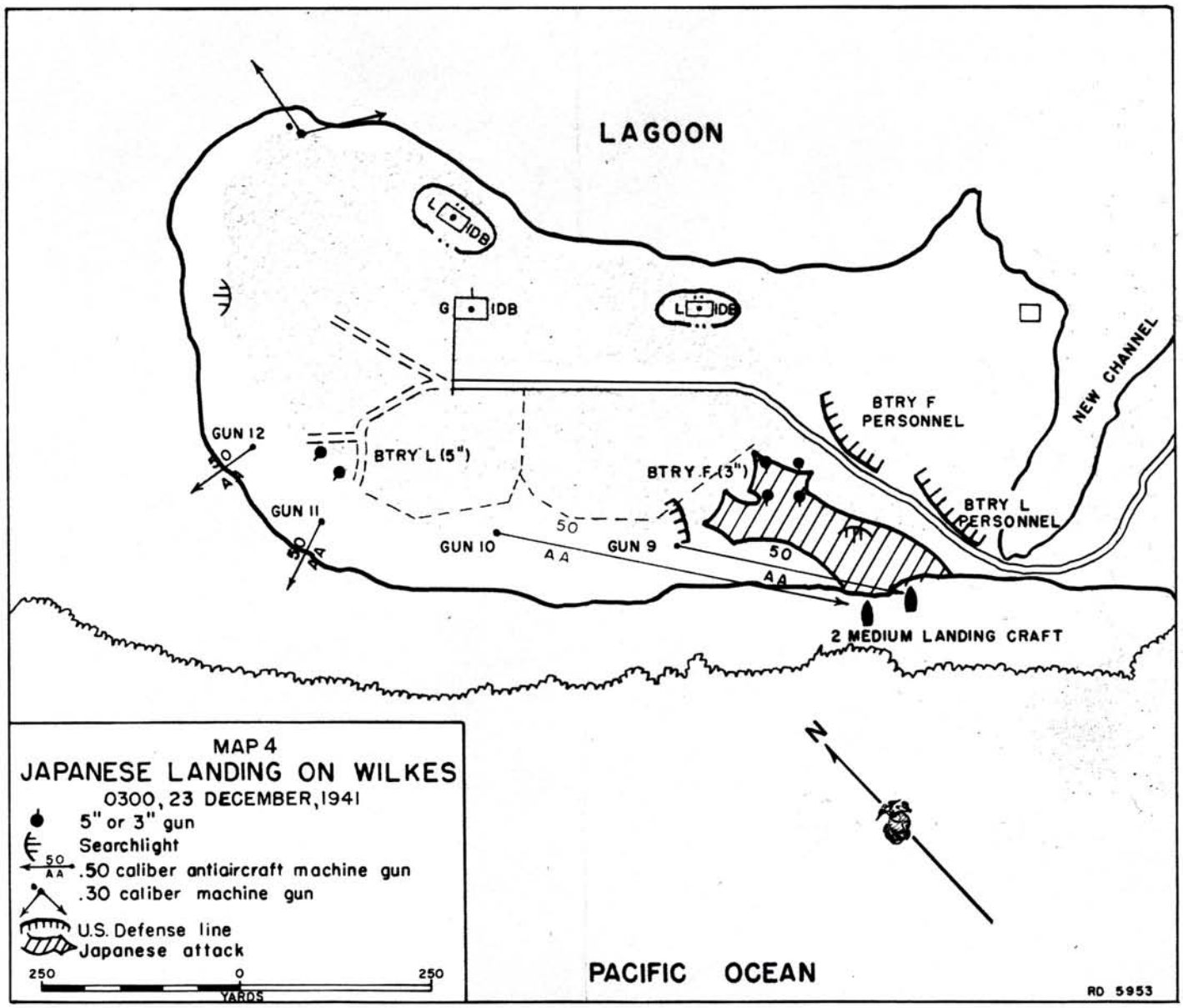
The enemy coxswains, however, appeared to be having difficulty coaxing the unwieldy landing craft onto the beach, backing off and trying again and again to land the *Special Naval Landing Force* men crouched behind the gunwales, which seemed to be deflecting the .30-caliber bullets peppering them. Seizing the moment, Poindexter called for volunteers to pick their way down the rocky beach to the water's edge, there to lob grenades into the boats. Poindexter organized two teams – Mess Sergeant Gerald Carr and a civilian, Raymond R. "Cap" Rutledge (who had served in the Army in France in World War I), in one, Poindexter and Boatswain's Mate First Class Barnes in the other. The grenadiers dashed to the water's edge while the machine guns momentarily held their fire. Barnes, taking cover behind coral heads, remained hidden until the barges ground ashore again. Then, exposing himself to enemy fire, he hurled several grenades toward the Japanese

craft, and managed to land at least one inside, killing or wounding many of the troops on board.

The valiant efforts of Poindexter and his men, however, stopped the Japanese just momentarily, for soon they began swarming ashore and moving inland. Shortly before the wire communications to Devereux's command post failed, Poindexter reported the result of his foray.

Having seen flares streaking skyward in the murk, Captain Godbold on Peale, meanwhile, sent out two patrols, one to move westward toward the naval air base, and the other to go eastward along the lagoon's shore. Neither patrol encountered any enemy troops. A half-hour later, Godbold established an outpost at the bridge connecting Peale and Wake.

Meanwhile, after word of the enemy landing reached Pearl Harbor, Vice Admiral Pye convened a meeting of his staff. By 0700 (22 December, Hawaiian time), having received further word of developments at Wake, Pye estimated that a relief of the island looked impossible, given the prevailing situation, and directed that the *Tangier* should be diverted toward the east. With the relief mission abandoned, should his forces attack the enemy forces in the vicinity of Wake? Or should American forces be withdrawn to the east? He feared that the timing of the Japanese carrier strikes and the landing then in progress indicated that the enemy had "estimated closely the time at which our relief expedition might arrive and may, if the general location of our carrier groups is estimated, be waiting in force." American forces could inflict extensive damage upon Japanese, Pye believed, if the enemy did not know of the presence of the U.S. carrier task forces. They had not yet seen action, though, and no one could overestimate the danger of having ships damaged 2,000 miles from the nearest repair facilities—"a damaged ship is a lost ship," Brown had commented in Task Force 11's war diary. Damage to the carriers could leave the Hawaiian Islands



open to a major enemy thrust. "We cannot," Pye declared, "afford such losses at present."

Two courses of action existed – to direct Task Force 14 to attack Japanese forces in the vicinity of Wake, with Task Forces 8 and 11 covering Task Force 14's retirement, or to retire all forces without any attempt to attack the enemy. These choices weighed heavily on Pye's mind. If American forces hit the Japanese ships at Wake and suffered the loss of a carrier air group in the process, Pye deemed the "offensive spirit" shown by the Navy as perhaps worth the sacrifice.

However, in the midst of his deliberations, shortly after 0736, Pye received a message from the CNO which noted that recent developments had emphasized that Wake was a "liability" and authorized Pye to "evacuate Wake with appropriate demolition." With Japanese forces on the island, though, Pye felt that capitulation was only a matter of time. "The real question at issue," Pye thought, "is, shall we take the chance of the loss of a carrier group to attempt to attack the enemy forces in the vicinity of Wake?" Radio intelligence from the previous day linked "CruDiv 8 . . . CarDiv 2" and, erroneously, "BatDiv 3" (consisting of two battleships) with the forces off of Wake. A pair of *Kongo*-class fast battleships, supported by carriers and heavy cruisers would easily have overmatched Fletcher's Task Force 14.

In the meantime, Japanese cruisers – probably the *Yubari*, *Tenryu*, and *Tatsuta* – had begun shelling Wake, further discomfitting the defenders. Despite Lewis' Battery E firing "prearranged 3-inch air burst concentrations" over the Japanese beachhead, the enemy continued to press steadily toward VMF-211's position around Hanna's 3-inch gun. Major Putnam, already wounded in the jaw, with blood from his wound staining the backs of the snapshots of his little daughters, which he carried in his

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Raymond R. "Cap" Rutledge, one of the contractors on Wake, (seen here as a POW at Shanghai in January 1942), had served in the U.S. Army during World War I and threw hand grenades into Japanese landing barges off Wake in the pre-dawn fighting of 23 December.

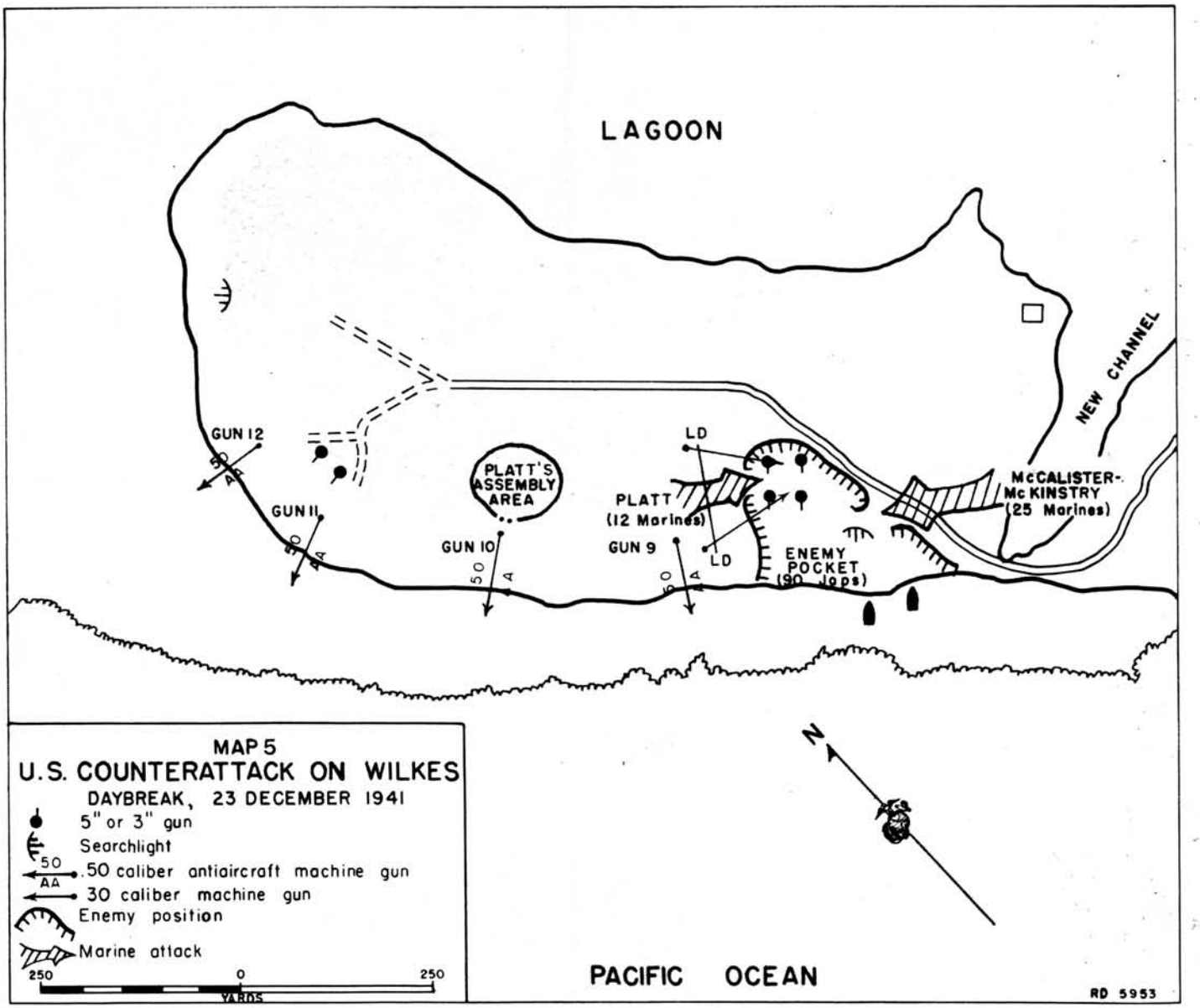
pocket, formed his final line. "This," he said, "is as far as we go."

Putnam had placed Captain Elrod in command of one flank of VMF-211's defensive line, which was situated in dense undergrowth. In the impenetrable darkness, the squadron executive officer and his men – most of whom were unarmed civilians who acted as weapons and ammunition carriers (until weapons became available) – conducted a spirited defense which repeated attacks by *Special Naval Landing Force* troops could not dislodge. Each time he heard Japanese troops mounting a probe of 211's position, Elrod interposed himself between the enemy and his own men and provided covering fire to enable his detachment to keep supplied with guns and ammunition. Shortly before dawn, a Japanese sailor who had hidden himself among the heaps of casualties surrounding Hanna's gun shot and killed the gallant Captain Elrod.

Captain Tharin, in charge of a group of Marines on the left flank of VMF-211's line, delivered covering fire for the unarmed ammunition carriers attached to his unit, which repulsed several assaults on his position. At one point, Japanese sailors penetrated the defenses in Tharin's sector, but in the counterattack, which drove the enemy from the position, Tharin captured an enemy automatic weapon and used it "successfully and effectively against its former owners." The indomitable Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class Hesson armed himself with a Thompson sub-machine gun and some grenades and although wounded by rifle fire and grenade fragments, singlehandedly drove back two concerted attacks – killing several Japanese and preventing them from overrunning 211's flank.

Despite the heroic efforts of Putnam's "platoon," the Japanese managed to move into the roughly triangular area which was bounded by Peacock Point, on one side, the beach and the south side of the airstrip on the others. Corporal Graves' squad from Battery D, meanwhile, detrucked somewhat north of their intended destination (200 yards south of the airstrip rather than 600), began walking toward VMF-211's position, and quickly encountered a Japanese patrol. In the ensuing firefight, enemy machine gun and rifle fire killed one Marine and pinned down the remainder for a time, until Graves and his men managed to extricate themselves and retire northward toward the battalion command post. Graves' encounter indicated that the Japanese had penetrated the U.S. defenses. Despite their extraordinary efforts, neither Kliewer and the .50-caliber guns at the airfield, nor the Hanna-VMF-211 group at the 3-inch gun near the shore, had been able to stop them.

At the same time, Batteries A and E began to receive mortar, small arms, and machine gun fire, prompting Barninger to deploy his range section, armed with two .30-caliber Brownings, and deployed as infan-



trymen, facing northwest "across the high ground" to the rear of the 5-inchers at Peacock Point. Lewis, whose 3-inch fire had silenced an automatic weapons position in the thick undergrowth southwest of Battery E, dispatched a patrol to try to relieve the pressure on his position. That group, under Sergeant Raymond Gragg, progressed only 50 yards beyond the perimeter before it came under heavy fire. The Japanese, however, moved no further because of the resistance put up by Gragg's squad.

Amidst the chaos, Devereux groped for information about the progress of the battle. At some point, he received word from one of the few positions which had retained wire contact with his command post, Corporal McAnally's machine gun section, which was located at the eastern end of the airstrip. McAnally reported that the Japanese were advancing up the shore road, apparently intent upon launching a thrust up the other prong of Wake. With one unit besetting Putnam's at the airstrip, another Japanese unit skirted Putnam and Hanna and was headed into the triangular end of Peacock Point.

McAnally, establishing contact with the .50-caliber machine guns on the east shore of Wake, some 400 yards south, carried on a "resolute, well-coordinated defense" which stymied the enemy in the area. Perhaps more important, McAnally served as Devereux's eyes and ears on that portion of the battlefield.

On Wilkes, Private First Class Ray's defense of his position equalled that of McAnally's. Captain Platt, having lost communication with his own posts and also with the defense battalion command post, set out on a personal reconnaissance mission at about 0430. He crawled through the thick underbrush and picked his way across the rocky beach, until, at about 0500, he came to a place east of gun no. 10 where he could see *Special Naval Landing Force* men massed in and about Battery F's guns. Soon thereafter, while clambering back to the gun, Platt met Sergeant Raymond L. Coulson and ordered him to gather two .30-caliber machinegun crews and their guns at Kuku Point

(where they had been sent during the false alarm earlier that morning), along with the searchlight crew and everyone else he could find, and to return to gun no. 10.

Devereux, still isolated from his units and literally in the dark about the actions on Wilkes and those in the vicinity of Camp 1, attempted as best he could to keep the island commander informed. Cunningham, consequently, also had scant comprehension of the way the fighting was progressing in those areas. At 0500, about the time Captain Platt was reconnoitering the Japanese position on Wilkes, Cunningham radioed Commandant 14th Naval District, "Enemy on island. Issue in doubt."

Poindexter, meanwhile, satisfied that Camp 1 was being defended as well as possible, proceeded to the mobile reserve gun positions on the west side of the airfield. Japanese machine gun and mortar fire, accompanied by "much shouting" and "numerous pyrotechnic flares," began to fall around those positions, partially disabling one U.S. gun section. As the sky over Wake began to lighten with the dawn, Poindexter became concerned about the enemy fire that had begun to land near his men, and also that the enemy troops infiltrating the woods might outflank the mobile reserve. He ordered a retirement toward Camp 1. The sections alternated in covering each other throughout the movement, maintaining a steady volume of fire. Reaching Camp 1 after daylight, Poindexter established a north-south line astride the shore road, east of a prominent water tank.

While Poindexter deliberated the situation facing his force, Japanese movement along the east shore road increasingly pressed Corporal McAnally's group. McAnally communicated his difficult situation to Devereux's command post. Japanese hand grenades and small arms fire made life difficult for McAnally's band, which nevertheless held its ground and broke up several assaults.

Around 0530, Devereux told Major Potter to form a final defensive line astride the north-south road, which was being threatened from the south by the advancing Japanese. Calling Godbold's Battery D into the action soon thereafter, Devereux committed his last reserve troops into the action on the east side of Wake. Aware of Corporal McAnally's predicament, Devereux ordered the corporal's combat group to withdraw northward, toward the command post, to join Major Potter's detachment.

On Wilkes at about that time, Sergeant Coulson rejoined Captain Platt with the two machine-gun crews and guns, and eight riflemen. The surf that had masked the sound made by the invaders now worked to the advantage of the hard-pressed defenders. Along with the sputter and crackle of gunfire along the south shore of Wake and on Wilkes, it prevented the Japanese from discovering Platt's briefing of his Marines for the assault on the abandoned Battery F position. In the waning darkness, Platt and his men crept toward the enemy, reaching a point less than 50 yards away from the abandoned 3-inchers. On Platt's signal, the two machine guns chattered and spat toward the enemy position. His skirmishers charged forward and soon began engaging the Japanese — who, with no security on the west, were taken completely by surprise, and whose only light machine guns had been emplaced facing eastward, toward the old channel.

Almost simultaneously with Platt's assault, but not at all coordinated with it, McAlister (who lost contact with the Wilkes strongpoint commander soon after the enemy landing) and his men encountered and engaged a small enemy patrol on the beach ahead of them, killing one man before the rest took cover behind some coral boulders. While flanking fire pinned down the enemy, Gunner McKinstry started forward to clean out that pocket of resistance. McAlister stopped him, but as he was telling the Gunner to detail one of the men to do it instead, Corporal William C. Halstead climbed atop the rocks and slew the remainder of the enemy.

Platt's and McAlister's assaults cleaned out the Japanese in the 3-inch gun position. Platt and McAlister reorganized their units and searched for any enemy troops who might have escaped. They encountered no further resistance and took two prisoners, who had been wounded and had feigned death. The Marines counted at least 94 dead Japanese. American losses included nine Marines and two civilians killed; four Marines and one civilian wounded.

Meanwhile (shortly before dawn) on Wake, Japanese troops surrounded Kliewer's position. The four Marines, however, armed with only two Thompsons, three .45-caliber pistols, and two boxes of hand grenades, repelled multiple bayonet charges in the darkness. Dawn revealed a full-scale enemy attempt to carry the post, but Kliewer and his three shipmates, backed up by the two .50-caliber machine guns 150 yards behind them, killed many of the attacking Japanese and continued to hold their ground.

On Peale, with the departure of Captain Godbold and the Marines of Battery D for the island's command post on Wake, First Lieutenant Kessler became strongpoint commander. At dawn, he scanned the other islets. On Wilkes, he discerned Japanese flags whipping in the breeze — one particularly large one flying where Battery F had been (flags which Platt's men would remove shortly thereafter). Kessler reported his observations to Devereux, who had not heard a word from Platt since around 0300. The report prompted Devereux to fear that Wilkes had fallen.

As he scanned Wake at about 0600, however, Kessler observed the

masts of what proved to be *Patrol Boat No. 32*, which was aground on the south shore of Wake. Kessler requested permission to fire at the ship. His request was approved, but he was admonished to avoid firing into friendly troops. Kessler ordered his 5-inchers to open fire. The first salvo clipped off the mainmast. Then Battery B's gunners lowered their sights to hit the ship itself. They could see only the funnel tops over the intervening island. Twenty-five minutes later, at 0625, the command post ordered Battery B to cease fire, their target having been "demolished."

Twenty minutes later, Kessler observed four "battleships, or super heavy cruisers" (probably the heavy cruisers *Aoba*, *Kinugasa*, *Furutaka*, and *Kako*) off Heel Point, moving westward but remaining well out of range. Those ships lay 10 kilometers off shore and shelled the atoll, but achieved little success.

Additional Japanese forces were headed for Wake. At 0612, off to the northwest, *Soryu* turned into the wind and launched 12 planes. The day's air operations had begun. In less than an hour, the planes were over the island.

Throughout the battle, Major Devereux had, as well as he could, kept the island commander informed of the progress of the assault. While the Marines, assisted by the sailors and civilians, had been attempting to stem the tide, most of the news which trickled into Cunningham's command post boded ill. At 0652, he sent out a message reflecting the situation as he knew it: "Enemy on island. Several ships plus transport moving in. Two DD aground." That was at 1032, 22 December 1941, on Pearl Harbor. It was to be the last message from the Wake Island defenders.

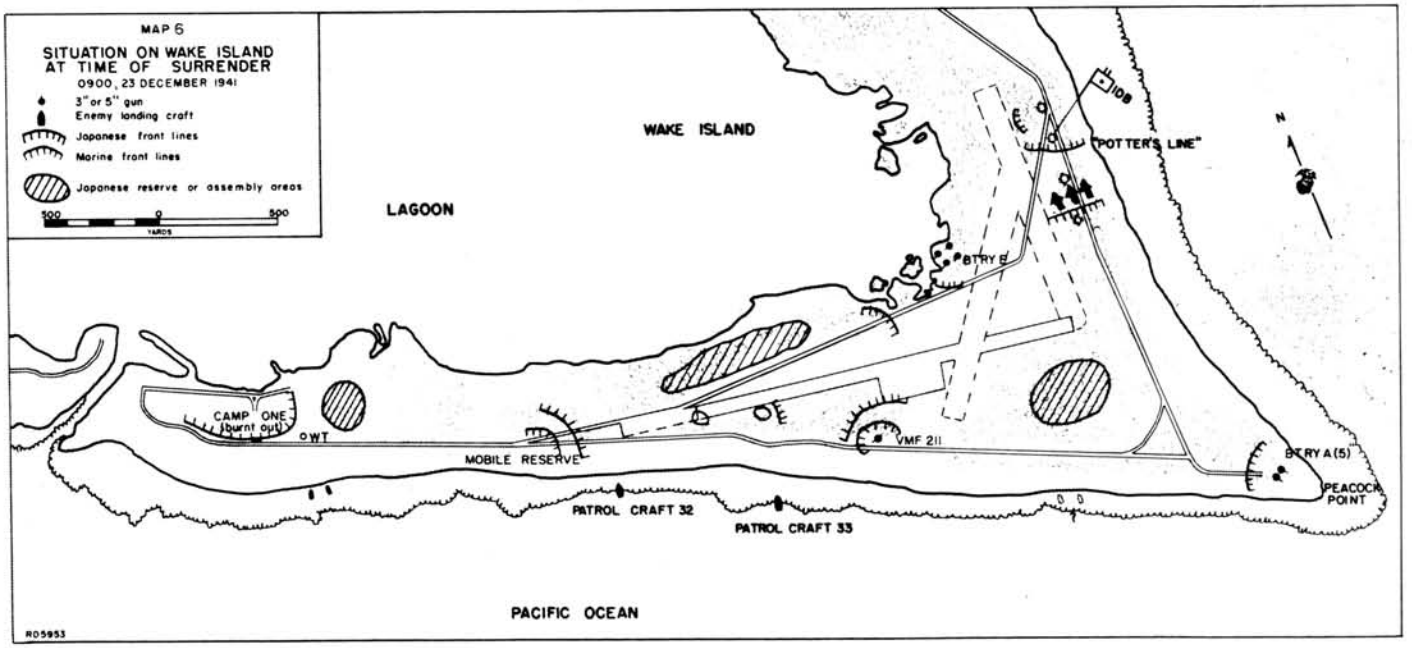
At Pearl Harbor, at about the time that Cunningham was sending that last message, Vice Admiral Pye had reached making a decision. He concluded that if Task Force 14 encountered anything but a weaker Japanese force, the battle would be fought on Japanese terms while within range of shore-based planes and with American forces having only enough fuel for two days of high speed steaming. Like Brown, Pye believed that a damaged ship was a lost ship, especially 2,000 miles from Pearl Harbor. The risk, he believed, was too great. He ordered the recall of Task Forces 14 and 11, and directed Task Force 8 to cover the retirement.

Frank Jack Fletcher's Task Force 14, meanwhile, was right on schedule, and was in fact further west than Pye knew. His ships fully fueled and ready for battle, Fletcher planned to detach the *Tangier* and two destroyers for the final run-in to Wake, while the pilots on board the *Saratoga* prepared themselves for the fight ahead. Fletcher, not one to shirk a fight, received the news of the recall angrily. He ripped his hat from his head and disgustedly hurled it to the deck. Rear Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, Fletcher's air commander, similarly felt the fist-tightening frustration of the recall. He retired from the *Saratoga*'s flag bridge as the talk there reached "mutinous" proportions.

As word of the recall circulated throughout Task Force 14, reactions were pretty much the same. Pye's recall order left no latitude for discussion or disobedience; those who argued later that Fletcher should have used the Nelsonian "blind eye" obviously failed to recognize that, in the sea off Copenhagen, the British admiral could see his opponents. Fletcher and Fitch, then 430 miles east of Wake, could not see theirs. They had no idea what enemy forces they might encounter. The Japanese had beaten them to Wake.

'A Difficult Thing To Do'

Even as deliberations proceeded to determine the fate of the relief efforts, the men on Wake, ignorant of what



was transpiring at Pearl Harbor and on the bridges of Task Force 14's ships, fought on. Shortly before 0700 on Wake (1040, 22 December, at Pearl Harbor), the two trucks bearing Battery D's former antiaircraft gunners, under Second Lieutenant Greeley and Captain Godbold, respectively, reached Devereux's command post. Major Potter deployed the new arrivals in an attempt to form a thin defensive line running across the island. The attempt was doomed because of the terrain they were being forced to defend, an area which had been partially cleared of brush as part of the airfield construction. It presented the Marines with 450 yards of ground without cover or concealment. Marine Gunner Borth established a defensive line near the battalion command post with two .30-caliber guns crewed by command post Marines and a few Marines from Battery D.

At about the time Greeley and Godbold reached Devereux's command post with Battery D's Marines, Second Lieutenant Kessler, at Battery B, shifted his attention to a column of three destroyers off Kuku Point. Four U.S. salvos appeared to inflict heavy damage on the lead ship, so he shifted his attention to the second ship in column. After about 15 minutes, dive bombers directed bombs and strafing toward the position, the battery's firing having called attention to its existence. Fortunately, their accuracy was poor, and Kessler's men escaped without casualty.

By that time, the situation seemed to be grim. Enemy planes were attacking every visible target. Major Potter's final defense line was receiving increasingly heavy enemy rifle and machine gun fire. Japanese troops near the airstrip continued probing and besetting VMF-211's encircled remnant. Wilkes had apparently fallen to the enemy. Major Devereux saw little left to be done. Still having no communication with the stubborn defenders of Wilkes and of Camp 1, Devereux had no way of knowing which of his units were still fighting.

About an hour after daylight (0630), Commander Keene picked up the telephone in the contractors' headquarters and found Commander Cunningham and Major Devereux engaged in conversation on the line. The latter reported being hard-pressed at his command post. He did not believe, he said, that the battalion could hold out much longer. Cunningham told Devereux that if he did not feel he was able to continue fighting, he should surrender. A discussion between the two men then ensued. "You know, Wilkes has fallen," Devereux stated. Cunningham answered that he did. Devereux then stated that he did not feel he should make the decision to surrender, that Cunningham, the commander of the island, should decide. Pausing for a moment, Cunningham then told Devereux that he authorized surrender, and to take the necessary steps to carry it out. Uncertain of his ability to contact the Japanese commander, Devereux asked Cunningham to attempt to make contact with the enemy, as well. Cunningham responded: "I'll see what I can do."

Surrendering, however, would take time, and the "word" did not reach everyone right away. On Wilkes, having reorganized his men, Platt attempted at about 0800 to phone the battalion command post on Wake. He managed to reach someone at the Camp 1 motor pool, but got no farther, because the motor pool was not in communication with the command post.

At about 0800, Devereux notified the units he could still reach of the surrender decision. On Peale, Kessler received orders to cease firing the 5-inch guns. At Battery E, Lewis' men removed and smashed the firing locks. When stuffing blankets into the muzzles and firing a round did not do sufficient damage to the guns, the men rolled grenades down the barrels. Other Marines smashed equipment and chopped up electrical cables. Lewis himself destroyed the optics and electromechanical parts of the heightfinder and director by firing 20 rounds into them from his .45. Satisfied with that work of destruction, he marched his men as a unit to Devereux's command post. At Peacock Point, First Lieutenant Barninger ordered that the 5-inch firing locks be broken and buried, the telescopes smashed, and the rangekeeper destroyed. Then, running up a white flag, he ordered all hands, including the civilians who had stood faithfully with the battery, to eat as much as they could. No one knew how much the enemy would allow their captives to eat.

As surrender preparations proceeded apace on one side of Wake and in the positions that Devereux had been able to reach by telephone, Poindexter's men, meanwhile, established themselves along a line at the edge of the clearing east of Camp 1. They emplaced 10 .30-caliber machine guns to cover their entire front with interlocking fields of fire. Occasional low-flying planes strafed their positions. Japanese gunfire from their front, though, proved ineffective. Poindexter sent back word to Camp 1 for all "special duty personnel" to join the reserve as riflemen.

When, by 0900, the enemy at the front having shown no inclination to attack his position, Poindexter ordered a counterattack toward the airstrip. Dividing his men into three 10-man squads with a non-commissioned officer in charge of each, the commander of the mobile reserve decided to launch his attack along a front which extended from the beach into the brush on the north side of the road. Poindexter's counterattack regained the terrain between Camp 1 and the road junction west of the airstrip.

Meanwhile Devereux, accompanied by Sergeant Donald Malleck,

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 315174

Civilian contractors are marched off to captivity after the Japanese captured Wake. Some, deemed important by the Japanese to finish construction projects, were retained there. Fearing a fifth column rising, the Japanese executed 98 contractors in October 1943, an atrocity for which atoll commander, RAdm Shigematsu Sakaibara, was hanged after the war.

who held aloft a white rag attached to a swab handle, set out down the north-south road along the eastern shore of Wake to contact the Japanese. As he passed Marines still in action he ordered them to cease firing.

A *Special Naval Landing Force* sailor soon emerged from the brush along the road and halted Devereux's progress, covering the major and Sergeant Malleck as they took off their helmets and laid down their weapons. Unable to speak any English, the Japanese motioned them toward the hospital bunker, where Devereux found an enemy officer who spoke some English. The enemy had already captured the hospital, killing one patient and wounding another when they fired into the entrance. Soon thereafter, Commander Cunningham, who had changed into his blue uniform for the occasion, arrived to arrange the details of the surrender. Devereux and Malleck, accompanied by a Japanese officer, then began the sad journey toward those Marines who still stubbornly held out ahead of them.

Meanwhile, the resistance put up by Hanna and the remnant of VMF-211 had prompted the Japanese to call for more close air support. One plane overflew the embattled 3-inch gun and carried out low-level attacks that allowed the observer to fire on the position with his flexible-mount 7.7mm gun. The strafing killed two civilians, Paul Gay and Eric Bryan, and wounded Major Putnam, Second Lieutenant Hanna, and Corporal Holewinski.

Having finally reached the airfield at around 0930, Devereux found that the Japanese had taken cover behind the revetments and had pinned down Hanna's men and what remained of VMF-211's force. The major ordered Captain Tharin, the only officer who had not been seriously wounded, to cease fire. Of the 10 men in that position, all—including the gallant Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class Hesson—had been wounded in the last-ditch fighting.

Even as elements on Wake still held out, Vice Admiral Pye was informing the CNO that Wake could not be evacuated. Japanese forces had landed, supported by cruisers and destroyers and, probably, by a covering force nearby. The "gallant defense of Wake," Pye stated, "has been of utmost value, but hereafter Wake is a liability." In view of the "extensive operations" then underway, the situation had forced Pye to conclude that risking one carrier task force to attack enemy forces in the vicinity of Wake was "not justifiable." Pye had ordered the two westernmost task forces (14 and 11) to retire toward Pearl Harbor. The third (Task Force 8) he sent on an unrelated mission.

On Wake, Second Lieutenant Kliewer, seeing the Japanese flags all along the beach, decided to set off the mines, blowing up the airfield, and then to fall back in the confusion generated by the explosions. Unfortunately, the rain had drowned the generator motor, which disabled the electric detonator.

At 1015 Kliewer saw men carrying a white flag coming down the beach. Major Devereux was among them, with a group of what appeared to be Japanese officers. They stopped about 50 feet from Kliewer's trench and ordered him to surrender. Kliewer's men counseled against giving up: "Don't surrender, lieutenant. The Marines never surrender. It's a hoax."

"It was a difficult thing to do," Kliewer wrote later, "but we tore down our guns and turned ourselves over."

About one hour later, Devereux's melancholy procession arrived at the lines facing the mobile reserve, which still fought stoutly. A rifleman shouted back to Poindexter that a "large group of Japs are coming down the road toward us with a white flag." As they trudged closer, Poindexter could see no Americans in the group, and after ordering his men to hold their fire, he stepped out into the road, Springfield at the ready. Cautioning his men not to fire unless the enemy fired at him, he walked toward the group. Soon, he discerned Major Devereux amidst them, shouting to him, telling him that Wake had been surrendered.

Dropping his rifle and grenades in the road, Poindexter joined Devereux, who then told him to return to his unit and order his men to drop their weapons and stand up. At that, Japanese troops, bayonets fixed, began to rush the positions they had been engaging, but were stopped by a Japanese officer who interposed himself between the two sides. As Poindexter and his men trudged toward the airstrip, he saw large numbers of enemy troops emerging from the brush and falling in along the road, confirming his suspicions that the enemy had established itself in force in the region.

Devereux then progressed to Camp

In a photo copied from a Japanese pictorial history, Special Naval Landing Force *troops pay homage to the memory of Lt Kinichi Uchida, whose unit lost two other officers and 29 enlisted men killed and 34 wounded at Wake Island.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 315175

1, which was still held by the machine-gun sections of Poindexter's group. There, a Japanese sailor climbed to the top of the water tower observation post and cut down the stars and stripes that had been flying throughout the battle. Elsewhere at Camp 1, in what could be regarded as one of the last measures of defiance to the now-victorious foe, Gunnery Sergeant John Cemeris, the Wake detachment's machine gun maintenance sergeant, unaware of the surrender, fired briefly at a low-flying floatplane.

Cemeris was not alone in his defiance. Marines on Wilkes, ignorant that their shipmates on Wake and Peale had laid down their arms, still sought to carry on the fight as best they could. Platt, sighting ships to the southwest of Wilkes, ordered Battery L to engage them. McAlister and his men hurried back to the 5-inchers, only to find the ships out of range. Enduring bombing and strafing attacks from Japanese planes, around noon the Marines at Battery L spotted small boats standing toward the channel between Wilkes and Wake, and observed several transports and warships lying about 4,000 yards out. Manning the 5-inchers, the Marines discovered one would not move and that one of the dive-bombing attacks had damaged the recoil cylinders of the other. Platt then ordered McAlister's Marines to take up a position along the old channel and fire on the small boats. An exploding bomb killed 20-year-old Private First Class Robert L. Stevens while the men were en route to their new positions. He was the last combat casualty suffered by the Marines on Wake Island.

At about 1300, Devereux reached Wilkes. Soon thereafter, a Japanese destroyer closed with the island and opened fire, apparently intent on bombarding them, but an exchange of signals quickly caused the ship to cease firing. Almost a half hour later, at a point about between the old and

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 529733

One of the many cartoons that mirrored Wake's gallant battle, "Sun Spots," shows holes marked "Wake Island Saga" and "Philippine Fortitude" in a Japanese flag.

new channels, Devereux spotted "a few grubby, dirty men [Platt's] who came out of the brush with their rifles ready." They laid down their arms and surrendered, too. The men of Wake had fought well, impressing the victors with their tenacious bravery, which later proved to be inspiring, not only to the Marine Corps, but also to the nation as a whole.

Of the 449 Marines (1st Defense Battalion and VMF-211 detachments) who manned Wake's defenses, 49 were killed, 32 were wounded, and the remainder became prisoners of war. Of the 68 Navy officers and men, three were killed, five wounded, and the rest taken prisoner. The small, five-man Army communications detachment suffered no fatalities; they were all taken prisoner. Of the 1,146 civilians involved in construction programs on Wake Island, 70 were killed and 12 were wounded. Five of Wake's defenders were executed by the Japanese on board *Nitta Maru*. With the exception of nearly 100 contractors who remained on Wake Island, all of the rest of the civilians joined Wake's Marines, sailors, and soldiers in prisoner of war (POW) camps. The Japanese transported the wounded military men and civilians from the island as their wounds healed and they were deemed well enough to travel. They,

too, were placed in POW camps until their liberation in 1945.

The Japanese lost two ships and seven planes; a score more were damaged. The casualty statistics, though irrevocably incomplete, show that at least 381 Japanese died and many more were wounded.

Wake was not recaptured by American forces during the war. Air raids on Wake occurred throughout the war, the first occurring in February 1942. Raids in October 1943, however, had grave repercussions for the contractors who had been left behind. Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, the atoll commander, who feared that the raids portended a major landing, had them all executed. He was unwilling to have his garrison threatened by such a large "fifth column." For that offense, he was hanged as a war criminal. The U.S. recovered Wake Island after the Japanese surrender in 1945.

Wake's defense in 1941 had been one of the few bright spots during the first months of war in the Pacific. It provided Americans a stirring example of heroism.

In a 1942 Ralph Lee cartoon a battered but still defiant Marine shakes his fist angrily at Japanese planes overhead.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 307267

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