

# **PEARL HARBOR TO GUADALCANAL**

## **History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II**



### **VOLUME I**

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

# Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal

HISTORY OF U. S. MARINE CORPS  
OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II

VOLUME I

*by*

LIEUTENANT COLONEL FRANK O. HOUGH, USMCR

MAJOR VERLE E. LUDWIG, USMC

HENRY I. SHAW, JR.

*Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps*

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 58-60002

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office  
Washington 25, D. C.

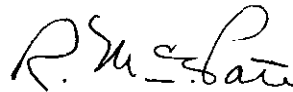
## Foreword

With the recent completion of our historical monograph project, the Marine Corps historical program entered a new phase. This book is the first of a projected five-volume series covering completely, and we hope definitively, the history of Marine operations in World War II.

The fifteen historical monographs published over a period of eight years have served to spotlight the high points in this broad field. The basic research which underlay their preparation will be utilized again in this project. But a monograph by its very nature aims at a limited objective, and in its concentration on a single battle or campaign necessarily ignores many related subjects. All too often it has been difficult to avoid conveying the impression that the specific operation under discussion was taking place in a vacuum. Thus, while much valuable history has been written, the story as a whole remains untold.

This lack the present project aims to rectify. The story of individual battles or campaigns, now isolated between the covers of separate publications, will be largely rewritten and woven together in an attempt to show events in proper relation to each other and in correct perspective to the war as a whole. In addition, new material, especially from Japanese sources, which has become available since the writing of the monographs, will be integrated into the story. Only when the broad picture is available can the significance of the Marine Corps' contribution to the final victory in the Pacific be fairly evaluated.

Now a word about Volume I which sketches briefly the development of the Marine Corps' amphibious mission from its inception and then carries the story of World War II through Guadalcanal. As logistical officer of the 1st Marine Division, I was privileged to take part in this, our first effort to strike back at the Japanese. Looking rearward from the vantage point of later years when our materiel superiority was overwhelming, it is difficult to visualize those lean first months in the Pacific when there was never enough of anything, and Allied strategy of giving top priority to Europe meant that there would not be for some time to come. Thus our initial offensive quickly and richly earned the nickname "Operation Shoestring." But the shoestring held during those early critical days when its holding appeared highly questionable; and when it did, the ultimate outcome of the war in the Pacific ceased to remain in doubt.



R. McC. PATE

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

## Preface

This book covers Marine Corps participation through the first precarious year of World War II, when disaster piled on disaster and there seemed no way to check Japanese aggression. Advanced bases and garrisons were isolated and destroyed: Guam, Wake, and the Philippines. The sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, "the day that will live in infamy," seriously crippled the U. S. Pacific Fleet; yet that cripple rose to turn the tide of the entire war at Midway. Shortly thereafter the U. S. Marines launched on Guadalcanal an offensive which was destined to end only on the home islands of the Empire.

The country in general, and the Marine Corps in particular, entered World War II in a better state of preparedness than had been the case in any other previous conflict. But that is a comparative term and does not merit mention in the same sentence with the degree of Japanese preparedness. What the Marine Corps did bring into the war, however, was the priceless ingredient developed during the years of peace: the amphibious doctrines and techniques that made possible the trans-Pacific advance—and, for that matter, the invasion of North Africa and the European continent.

By publishing this operational history in a durable form, it is hoped to make the Marine Corps record permanently available for the study of military personnel, the edification of the general public, and the contemplation of serious scholars of military history.

This initial volume was planned and outlined by Lieutenant Colonel Harry W. Edwards, former Head of the Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps. Much of the original writing was done by Lieutenant Colonel Frank O. Hough, formerly Head of the Writing Section, Historical Branch. Three historical monographs, Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr.'s *The Defense of Wake* and *Marines at Midway*, and Major John L. Zimmerman's *The Guadalcanal Campaign*, were adapted to the needs of this book by Major Verle E. Ludwig, who also contributed considerable original writing of his own. Mr. Kenneth W. Condit wrote the chapter on landing craft development and shared, with Colonel Charles W. Harrison and Major Hubard D. Kuokka, the authorship of the chapter treating the evolution of amphibious doctrine. The buildup of Pacific outpost garrisons, the opening moves of the war, and the record of Marines in the defense of the Philippines were written by Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr. The final editing was done by Colonel Harrison, present Head of the Historical Branch.

A number of the leading participants in the actions described have commented on preliminary drafts of pertinent portions of this manuscript. Their

valuable assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Special thanks are due to those people who read and commented on the entire volume: Lieutenant General Edward A. Craig, U. S. Marine Corps, Retired; Dr. John Miller, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army; Captain Frederick K. Loomis, U. S. Navy, Naval History Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Department of the Navy; and Colonel Heintz, who initiated the original program of monographs dealing with Marine actions in World War II.

Mrs. Edna Clem Kelley and her successor in the Administrative and Production Section of the Historical Branch, Miss Kay P. Sue, ably handled the exacting duties involved in processing the volume from first drafts through final printed form. The many preliminary typescripts and the painstaking task of typing the final manuscript for the printer were done by Mrs. Miriam R. Smallwood and Mrs. Billie J. Tucker.

Most of the maps were prepared by the Reproduction Section, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia. However, we are indebted to the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, for permission to use Maps Nos. 3, 14, 15, 20, 21, and 23-27, which were originally drafted by its Cartographic Branch. Official Defense Department photographs have been used throughout the text.



E. W. SNEDEKER

MAJOR GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS  
ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF, G-3

# Contents

## PART I INTRODUCTION TO THE MARINE CORPS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. Origins of a Mission . . . . .	3
2. Evolution of Modern Amphibious Warfare, 1920-1941 . . . . .	8
3. Development of Landing Craft. . . . .	23
4. Marine Occupation of Iceland . . . . .	35
5. The Marine Corps on the Eve of War. . . . .	47

## PART II WAR COMES

1. Prewar Situation in the Pacific. . . . .	59
2. Japan Strikes . . . . .	70
3. The Southern Lifeline. . . . .	84

## PART III THE DEFENSE OF WAKE

1. Wake in the Shadow of War . . . . .	95
2. The Enemy Strikes. . . . .	106
3. Wake Under Siege . . . . .	121
4. The Fall of Wake . . . . .	132
5. Conclusions . . . . .	150

## PART IV MARINES IN THE PHILIPPINES

1. China and Luzon . . . . .	155
2. Bataan Prelude . . . . .	172
3. The Siege and Capture of Corregidor . . . . .	184

## PART V DECISION AT MIDWAY

1. Setting the Stage: Early Naval Operations . . . . .	205
2. Japanese Plans: Toward Midway and the North Pacific . . . . .	214
3. Midway Girds for Battle . . . . .	216
4. Midway Versus the Japanese, 4-5 June 1942 . . . . .	221
5. Battle of the Carrier Planes, 4 June 1942 . . . . .	226

## PART VI THE TURNING POINT: GUADALCANAL

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. Background and Preparations . . . . .	235
2. Guadalcanal, 7-9 August 1942 . . . . .	254
3. Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo . . . . .	263
4. The Battle of the Tenaru . . . . .	274
5. The Battle of the Ridge . . . . .	294
6. Action Along the Matanikau . . . . .	310
7. Japanese Counteroffensive . . . . .	322
8. Critical November . . . . .	341
9. Final Period, 9 December 1942-9 February 1943 . . . . .	359

## APPENDICES

A. Bibliographical Notes . . . . .	375
B. Chronology . . . . .	382
C. Marine Task Organization and Command Lists . . . . .	387
D. Marine Casualties . . . . .	395
E. First Marine Division Operation Order—Guadalcanal . . . . .	396
F. Military Map Symbols . . . . .	399
G. Guide to Abbreviations . . . . .	400
H. Unit Commendations . . . . .	404
Index . . . . .	413

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Continental Marines . . . . .	6
Marines of Huntington's Battalion . . . . .	6
Marines in France in World War I . . . . .	12
Bandit-Hunting Patrol in Nicaragua . . . . .	12
Experimental Amphibian Tractor . . . . .	25
Early Version of Landing Craft . . . . .	25
Air Evacuation of Wounded in Nicaragua . . . . .	49
Army Light Tank Landing at New River, N. C. . . . .	49
Pearl Harbor Attack . . . . .	72
Japanese Landing on Guam . . . . .	72
Japanese Patrol Craft Lost at Wake . . . . .	135
Japanese Naval Troops Who Took Wake . . . . .	135
Japanese on Bataan . . . . .	174
Aerial View of Corregidor Island . . . . .	186
Effect of Japanese Bombardment of Corregidor . . . . .	186
An Army B-25, One of Doolittle's Raiders . . . . .	208
Japanese Carrier <i>Shoho</i> . . . . .	208



## ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued

	PAGE
Camouflaged Lookout Tower at Sand Island . . . . .	222
Japanese Cruiser <i>Mikuma</i> . . . . .	222
Crude Sketch Map of Guadalcanal . . . . .	246
Equipment for the 1st Marine Division . . . . .	251
Marine Raiders and the Crew of the Submarine <i>Argonaut</i> . . . . .	251
The Original Henderson Field . . . . .	255
Unloading Supplies at Guadalcanal . . . . .	255
Tulagi Island . . . . .	272
Tanambogo and Gavutu Islands . . . . .	272
Marine Commanders on Guadalcanal . . . . .	278
LVT Bridge Built by Marine Engineers . . . . .	282
Solomons Natives Guide a Patrol . . . . .	282
90mm Antiaircraft Guns of the 3d Defense Battalion . . . . .	296
105mm Howitzer of the 11th Marines . . . . .	296
Raiders' Ridge . . . . .	309
Marines of the 2d Raider Battalion . . . . .	309
The Pagoda at Henderson Field . . . . .	312
Cactus Air Force Planes . . . . .	312
Five Blasted Japanese Tanks . . . . .	331
Marine Light Tanks . . . . .	331
Japanese Torpedo Plane . . . . .	338
Naval Gunfire Support . . . . .	338
37mm Guns of the Americal Division . . . . .	361
1st Division Marines Leave Guadalcanal . . . . .	361

## MAPS

1. Scene of Battle . . . . .	Map Section
2. Japanese Capture of Guam, 10 December 1941 . . . . .	77
3. South Pacific . . . . .	91
4. Defense Installations on Wake, 8-23 December 1941 . . . . .	97
5. Landing on Wake Island, 23 December 1941 . . . . .	Map Section
6. Situation on Wilkes Island, 0300-Dawn, 23 December 1941 . . . . .	145
7. Japanese Landing on Bataan . . . . .	Map Section
8. Corregidor with Inset Showing Manila Bay . . . . .	Map Section
9. Marshalls, Gilberts, and Eastern Carolines . . . . .	206
10. Midway Islands, June 1942 . . . . .	Map Section
11. Solomon Islands with Inset Showing Santa Cruz Islands . . . . .	244
12. Makin Raid, 17-18 August 1942 . . . . .	284
13. Guadalcanal and Florida Islands . . . . .	Map Section
14. Initial Dispositions, 7 August 1942 . . . . .	Map Section
15. Landings in Tulagi Area, 7 August 1942 . . . . .	Map Section
16. The Perimeter, 12 August 1942 . . . . .	287

## MAPS—Continued

	PAGE
17. Battle of the Tenu, 21 August 1942 . . . . .	289
18. The Perimeter, 12-14 September 1942 . . . . .	300
19. Edson's Ridge—First Phase, 12-13 September 1942 . . . . .	304
20. Edson's Ridge—Final Phase, 13 September 1942 . . . . .	307
21. Matanikau Action, 24-27 September 1942 . . . . .	314
22. Matanikau Offensive, 7-9 October 1942 . . . . .	318
23. October Attacks on the Perimeter . . . . .	Map Section
24. Push Toward Kokumbona, 1-4 November 1942 . . . . .	344
25. Koli Point, 4-9 November 1942 . . . . .	Map Section
26. Battle Area, December 1942-January 1943 . . . . .	Map Section
27. XIV Corps Plan—First January Offensive . . . . .	Map Section
28. Capture of Kokumbona and Advance to the Poha River, 23-25 January 1943 . . . . .	Map Section
29. Final Phase, 26 January-9 February 1943 . . . . .	370

PART ONE

*Introduction to the Marine Corps*

PART ONE

*Introduction to the Marine Corps*

# Origins of a Mission

In a sense, Marines may be said to have existed in ancient times when the Phoenicians, and subsequently the Greeks and Romans, placed men aboard their ships for the specific purpose of fighting, in contrast to the crews who navigated them and the rowers who propelled them. However, Marines in the modern sense date to Seventeenth Century England where, in 1664, a regiment of ground troops was raised specifically for duty with the fleet as well as ashore. This unit bore the somewhat ponderous title: "Duke of York and Albany's Maritime Regiment of Foot." Over a period of many decades of expansion and evolution, during much of which nobody knew for certain whether it belonged to the Army or the Navy, this basic unit developed into the corps known today as the Royal Marines.

By the time of the American Revolution, the status of the British Marines had jelled firmly. Thus, when the American Colonies revolted and began setting up their own armed services, they modeled these much along the lines of the similar components of the mother country, these being the forms with which they were most familiar and which suited them best temperamentally. This was true of the Continental Marines and to an even greater degree of the Marine Corps, reactivated under the Constitution in 1798.

In the days of wooden, sail-propelled ships the functions of the Marines became well defined. At sea they kept order and were responsible for internal security. In

combat they became the ship's small-arms fighters: sniping from the fighting tops, and on deck spearheading boarding parties in close action or repelling enemy boarders. Ashore they guarded naval installations, both at home and abroad, and upon occasion fought on land beside Army components. Amphibious-wise, they were available as trained landing parties, either to seize positions on hostile shores, or to protect the lives and property of nationals in foreign countries. Both the British and U. S. Marines have seen much such service.

At the time of this writing the Marine Corps is 181 years old, according to its own reckoning, though its service has not been continuous. Marines celebrate their Corps' birthday on 10 November, this being the date in the year 1775 when the Continental Congress authorized the raising of two battalions of Marines for the Continental service. The scanty records extant show nothing to indicate that those battalions were actually raised, but many Marines were recruited for service on board the ships of the infant Navy where they performed creditably in all the major sea actions of the Revolutionary War, staged two important amphibious landings in the Bahamas, and ashore participated in the Trenton-Princeton campaign under General Washington.

The Continental Marines, like the Navy and all but a minuscule detachment of the Army, passed out of existence following the close of the Revolutionary War. How-

ever, foreign pressures brought the Navy back into existence in 1798 under the recently adopted Constitution, and on 11 July of that year the Marine Corps was reactivated as a separate service within the naval establishment.

Since that date Marines have fought in every official war the United States has had—and scores of obscure affairs that lacked official blessing but in which, to quote the eminent Marine writer, John W. Thomason, Jr., “. . . a man can be killed as dead as ever a chap was in the Argonne.”<sup>1</sup> They have served as strictly naval troops, both ashore and afloat, and participated in extended land operations under Army command, notably in the Creek-Seminole Indian Wars of the 1830's, the Mexican War, both World Wars, and in Korea.

All over the world, Britain's Royal Marines were seeing much the same type of service. For a century or more the courses of the two corps ran parallel, and they were as functionally alike as it is possible for any two military organizations to be. Individual members of these services had so many interests in common that, as one British writer put it, they had a tendency to “chum up”<sup>2</sup> when ships of the two nations put in to the same ports. Even the present U. S. Marine emblem (adopted in 1868) derives from that of the Royal Marines; though at a glance they appear entirely different, the basic motifs of both are the fouled anchor and globe: the Eastern Hemisphere for the British, the Western for the U. S. Much in common existed

at top level, as well, and over the years the two organizations developed a very close and most cordial relationship that exists to this day, despite the strange evolutionary divergence that set in between them.<sup>3</sup>

The transition of navies from sail to steam began evolutionary developments which profoundly altered the nature of all shipboard duties, and temporarily threatened both corps with extinction. From this the Royal Marines emerged burdened with a miscellany of often incongruous duties never envisioned in the old days, and considerably emasculated by lack of a single mission of overriding importance. That the effect on the U. S. Marines was precisely the reverse resulted from the fundamental difference in the problems facing the two nations which required U. S. Marines to carve out a special mission for themselves, though they traveled a long, uneven road in bringing this to full fruition.

The basic problem that confronted the early steam navies was that of obtaining fuel. Sail-propelled men-of-war, on which all naval experience and tradition up to that time was based, could operate at sea almost indefinitely, putting in only to replenish provisions and water, readily available at nearly any port of call anywhere in the world. But sufficient coal to support large-scale steamship operations could be obtained only from well stocked bases, and a fleet's operating radius thus became limited by the location of such bases. If an enemy lay beyond that radius, the fleet might as well be chained to a post so far as getting at

<sup>1</sup> Capt J. W. Thomason, Jr., *Fix Bayonets!* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955 ed.), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> LtCol M. Rose, RMA, *A Short History of the Royal Marines* (Deal, England: Depot Royal Marines, 1911), 22.

<sup>3</sup> LtCol R. D. Heintz, Jr., “What Happened to the Royal Marines?,” *USNI Proceedings*, February 1949, 169.

him was concerned, unless the source of supply could be projected farther in his direction.

To the British Empire, on which "the sun never sets," this posed no serious problem; it had, or could build, all the bases it needed without leaving its own territory. But the United States, with few outlying possessions, had genuine cause for concern. In order to give the fleet significant operating range in the Pacific, the Navy in 1878 set up a coaling station in Samoa, and in 1887 the government concluded a treaty with Hawaii permitting the establishment of another at Pearl Harbor.

But the United States had no deep-seated interest in the Far East during this era, and no serious apprehension of an attack from that direction. The Navy's principal concern lay in the possibility of being obliged to enforce the Monroe Doctrine in the Caribbean or South Atlantic. As early as 1880, far-sighted naval officers began turning their thoughts toward this mission. The cost of maintaining permanent bases in those areas would have been prohibitive, so the problem boiled down to devising a plan for seizing advanced bases when and where strategy dictated their need and developing these as quickly as possible to withstand attack. The scattered, under-strength U. S. Army of that era could not supply sufficient trained ground troops on the short notice necessary to make such operations effective, so the Navy faced the problem of developing ground troops of its own for service with the fleet.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>E. B. Potter (ed), *The United States and World Sea Power* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1955), 577-578, hereinafter cited as *U. S. & Sea Power*.

It would seem, particularly with benefit of today's hindsight, that the Marine Corps would be the logical choice for the development of this mission. However, this was not so apparent at the time. Marines had never participated in this type of operation on anything resembling the scale envisioned, and they comprised a very small unit as compared to the blue-jackets. One school of thought contended that the advanced base function should be performed entirely by Navy personnel under command of naval officers, in the interests of unity and other considerations.<sup>5</sup> The controversy, strictly on the theoretical level, waxed warm and sometimes acrimonious, giving rise at length to one of those perennial efforts to eliminate the Marines altogether.<sup>6</sup>

However, the advent of the Spanish-American War found the Navy wholly unprepared to cope with the advanced base problem. It was the Marine Corps that promptly organized an expeditionary battalion, including its own artillery component, for the seizure of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in order to enable the U. S. Fleet to operate indefinitely in the Caribbean waters. At Key West this unit underwent training in minor tactics, basic weapons, and musketry, and then landed in the target area on 10 June 1898, ten days before the first Army troops arrived off the coast of Cuba. There the Marines quickly secured a beachhead and successfully defended it against a numerically superior enemy.

<sup>5</sup>For detailed discussion of this controversy, see W. H. Russell, "The Genesis of FMF Doctrine: 1879-1899," *MC Gazette*, April-July 1951.

<sup>6</sup>LtCol R. D. Heintz, Jr., "The Cat with More than Nine Lives," *USNI Proceedings*, June 1954.



CONTINENTAL MARINES present a stirring sight as they charge in this symbolic painting of Revolutionary fighting by H. Charles McBarron, Jr. (USMC 304045)



MARINES OF HUNTINGTON'S BATTALION, first troops ashore in Cuba in 1898, captured Guantanamo Bay, used thereafter as an American naval base. (USMC 4982)



So expeditiously and efficiently was this operation conducted that its contribution to the speedy and decisive culmination of the war would be difficult to evaluate. This also greatly strengthened the Marine Corps' claim to the Navy's amphibious mission, a claim that gained still further strength by Admiral Dewey's subsequent statement that if a similar Marine component had served with his fleet at Manila Bay, the whole painful and protracted Philippine Insurrection might have been avoided.

The Spanish-American War signaled emergence of the United States as a world power. Possession of the Philippines caused the Navy to reappraise the whole Far East situation. The USS *Charleston*, convoying Army troops to Manila, paused en route to seize the Spanish island of Guam to serve as an advanced coaling station,<sup>7</sup> and annexation of Ha-

---

<sup>7</sup> Seizure of Guam required no landing force. The Spanish governor had not learned about the declaration of war and mistook the token naval

waii followed shortly.<sup>8</sup> Additional advanced bases were established in the Philippines themselves as soon as the situation permitted.

This increasing consciousness of the Navy's widespread commitments and responsibilities brought about the evolutionary developments which culminated in the early 1940's in the amphibious assault doctrines and techniques "which finally made possible what Major General J. F. C. Fuller has called 'the most far-reaching tactical innovation of [World War II].'"<sup>9</sup>

---

bombardment for a courtesy salute and hurried out to the *Charleston* to apologize for his inability to return it for lack of ammunition. He promptly surrendered the island upon being apprised of the facts.

<sup>8</sup> Prior to the Spanish War, the question of the annexation of Hawaii had been under negotiation off and on for many years between that government and the United States. In a treaty signed in 1875, Hawaii had been declared "an American sphere of influence."

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *U. S. & Sea Power*, 587.

# Evolution of Modern Amphibious Warfare, 1920–1941

## EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

The success of the Guantanamo Bay operation and the very real possibility that the United States' new position in world affairs might lead to repetitions of essentially the same situation led high-level naval strategists to become interested in establishing a similar force on a permanent basis: a force capable of seizing and defending advanced bases which the fleet could utilize in the prosecution of naval war in distant waters—waters conceivably much more distant than the Caribbean. This in turn led to the setting up of a class in the fundamentals of advanced base work at Newport, Rhode Island in 1901. During the winter of 1902–1903 a Marine battalion engaged in advanced base defense exercises on the island of Culebra in the Caribbean in conjunction with the annual maneuvers of the fleet. Expeditionary services in Cuba and Panama prevented an immediate follow-up to this early base defense instruction, but in 1910 a permanent advanced base school was organized at New London, Connecticut. A year later it was moved to Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup>

By 1913 sufficient progress had been made in advanced base instruction to per-

mit the formation of a permanent advanced base force. Made up of two regiments, one of coast artillery, mines, searchlights, engineers, communicators, and other specialists for fixed defense, and the other of infantry and field artillery for mobile defense, the advanced base force totalled about 1,750 officers and men. In January of 1914 it was reinforced by a small Marine Corps aviation detachment and joined the fleet for maneuvers at Culebra.<sup>2</sup> But the analogy between advanced base training and the amphibious assault techniques that emerged in World War II is easily overdrawn. Prior to World War I the primary interest was in defense of a base against enemy attack. There was no serious contemplation of large-scale landings against heavily defended areas.

This all but exclusive concern for the defense of bases was clearly borne out by the writing of Major Earl H. Ellis. Ellis, one of the most brilliant young Marine staff officers, was among the farsighted military thinkers who saw the prospect of war between the United States and Japan prior to World War I. Around 1913, he directed attention to the

<sup>1</sup>J. A. Isely and P. A. Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 21–22, hereinafter cited as *Marines and Amphibious War*.

<sup>2</sup>*Annual Report of the Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps, 1914* (Washington: GPO, 1914). Hereinafter all annual reports from the Office of the Commandant will be cited as *CMC AnRept* (year).

problems of a future Pacific conflict. To bring military force to bear against Japan, Ellis pointed out, the United States would have to project its fleet across the Pacific. To support these operations so far from home would require a system of outlying bases. Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines, which were the most important of these, we already possessed. Their defense would be of utmost importance and would constitute the primary mission of the Marine advanced base force. Ellis discussed in considerable detail the troops which would be required and the tactics they should employ.

In addition to the bases already in the possession of the United States, Ellis foresaw the need of acquiring others held by Japan. To the Marine Corps would fall the job of assaulting the enemy-held territory. Although he did not discuss the problems involved nor take up the tactics to be employed, Ellis foreshadowed the amphibious assault which was to be the primary mission of the Marine Corps in World War II.<sup>3</sup>

The infant Advance Base Force was diverted to other missions almost as soon as it was created. Hardly were the Culebra maneuvers of 1914 completed when the Marines were sent to Mexico for the seizure of Vera Cruz. The next year they went ashore in Haiti, and in 1916 unsettled conditions in Santo Domingo required the

landing of Marines in that country. Expeditionary service in these two Caribbean republics was to constitute a heavy and continuing drain on Marine Corps resources which might otherwise have been devoted to advanced base activities.

The expansion of the Marine Corps to about 73,000 officers and men during World War I served as a temporary stimulant to the Advance Base Force. In spite of the demands for manpower resulting from the sending of an expeditionary force to France, the Advance Base Force was maintained at full strength throughout the war. By the Armistice it numbered 6,297 officers and men.<sup>4</sup>

#### *UPS AND DOWNS OF THE NINETEEN TWENTIES*

Marines returning from overseas late in 1919 picked up where they left off three years before. At Quantico the Advance Base Force, redesignated the Expeditionary Force in 1921, stood ready to occupy and defend an advanced base or to restore law and order in a Caribbean republic. In that year it included infantry, field artillery, signal, engineer, and chemical troops, and aircraft. A similar expeditionary force was planned for San Diego, but perennial personnel shortages prevented the stationing of more than one infantry regiment and one aircraft squadron there during the 1920's.<sup>5</sup>

Nothing seemed changed, but delegates of the Great Powers, meeting at Versailles to write the peace treaty ending World War I, had already taken an action which was to have far-reaching consequences for

<sup>3</sup> Earl H. Ellis, "Naval Bases" (MS. n. d.). The date and origin of this MS and to whom it was addressed are obscure, but it appears that the work is either a lecture or a series of lectures with the following divisions: "1. Naval Bases; Their Location, Resources and Security; 2. The Denial of Bases; 3. The Security of Advanced Bases and Advanced Base Operations; 4. The Advanced Base Force."

<sup>4</sup> LtCol C. H. Metcalf, *A History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Putnam's, 1939), 456-460, 472.

<sup>5</sup> *CMC AnRepts*, 1921-29.

a future generation of Marines. In the general distribution of spoils, the former German island possessions in the central Pacific had been mandated to the Japanese. At one stroke the strategic balance in the Pacific was shifted radically in favor of Japan. That country now possessed a deep zone of island outposts. Fortified and supported by the Japanese fleet, they would constitute a serious obstacle to the advance of the United States Fleet across the Pacific.

Earl Ellis was one of the first to recognize the significance of this strategic shift. In 1921 he modified his earlier ideas and submitted them in the form of Operations Plan 712, "Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia." In this plan Ellis stressed the necessity for seizing by assault the bases needed to project the Fleet across the Pacific. He envisioned the seizure of specific islands in the Marshall, Caroline, and Palau groups, some of which were actually taken by Marines in World War II. He went so far as to designate the size and type of units that would be necessary, the kind of landing craft they should use, the best time of day to effect the landing, and other details needed to insure the success of the plan. Twenty years later Marine Corps action was to bear the imprint of this thinking:

To effect [an amphibious landing] in the face of enemy resistance requires careful training and preparation, to say the least; and this along Marine lines. It is not enough that the troops be skilled infantry men or artillery men of high morale; they must be skilled water men and jungle men who know it can be done—Marines with Marine training.<sup>6</sup>

The Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, and other high ranking

<sup>6</sup> OPlan 712, AdvBOPs in Micronesia, 1921.

Marines shared Ellis' views. "The seizure and occupation or destruction of enemy bases is another important function of the expeditionary force," he stated in a lecture before the Naval War College in 1923. "On both flanks of a fleet crossing the Pacific are numerous islands suitable for submarine and air bases. All should be mopped up as progress is made. . . . The maintenance, equipping and training of its expeditionary force so that it will be in instant readiness to support the Fleet in the event of war," he concluded, "I deem to be the most important Marine Corps duty in time of peace."<sup>7</sup>

The 1920s, however, were not the most favorable years for training in amphibious operations. Appropriations for the armed services were slim, and the Navy, whose cooperation and support was necessary to carry out landing exercises, was more intent on preparing for fleet surface actions of the traditional type. Still, a limited amount of amphibious training was carried out in the first half of the decade.

During the winter of 1922, a reinforced regiment of Marines participated in fleet maneuvers with the Atlantic Fleet. Their problems included the attack and defense of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the island of Culebra. In March of the following year, a detachment of Marines took part in a landing exercise at Panama, and a battalion of Marines and sailors practiced a landing on Cape Cod that summer.

Panama and Culebra both witnessed landing exercises early in 1924, with a Marine regiment participating. This set of exercises was the high point of train-

<sup>7</sup> MajGen J. A. Lejeune, "The United States Marine Corps," *MC Gazette*, December 1923, 252-253.

ing reached in the twenties. It marked the advent of serious experimentation with adequate landing craft for troops and equipment. However, it was most notable for the great number of mistakes made in the course of the exercises, such as inadequate attacking forces, insufficient and unsuitable boats, lack of order among the landing party, superficial naval bombardment, and poor judgment in the stowage of supplies and equipment aboard the single transport used.<sup>8</sup>

The last landing exercise of the era was a joint Army-Navy affair held during the spring of 1925 in Hawaiian waters. It was actually an amphibious command post exercise, undertaken at the insistence of General Lejeune to prove to skeptical Army officers that the Marine Corps could plan and execute an amphibious operation of greater than brigade size. A force of 42,000 Marines was simulated, although only 1,500 actually participated. It ran more smoothly than had the previous exercise, but still was handicapped by a lack of adequate landing craft.<sup>9</sup>

Even this meager amphibious training came to an end after 1925. New commitments in Nicaragua, in China, and in the United States guarding the mails served to disperse the expeditionary forces. By 1928 the Commandant announced in his annual report that barely enough personnel were on hand at Quantico and San Diego to keep those bases in operation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Marines and Amphibious War*, 30-32.

<sup>9</sup> BriGen Dion Williams, "Blue Marine Corps Expeditionary Force," *MC Gazette*, September 1925, 76-88; LtGen M. B. Twining ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, 25Jan57; BPlan JA&Nav Exercise, 1925, Problem No 3, Blue MarCor ExpedFor, 8Jan25.

<sup>10</sup> *CMC AnRept*, 1928.

Whatever the shortcomings of the work in amphibious doctrine and technique during the 1920's, the Marine Corps scored a major triumph when its special interest in the field became part of the official military policy of the United States. *Joint Action of the Army and Navy*, a directive issued by the Joint Board of the Army and Navy in 1927, stated that the Marine Corps would provide and maintain forces "for land operations in support of the fleet for the initial seizure and defense of advanced bases and for such limited auxiliary land operations as are essential to the prosecution of the naval campaign."

Further, in outlining the tasks to be performed by the Army and Navy in "Landing Attacks Against Shore Objectives," this document firmly established the landing force role of the Marine Corps: "Marines organized as landing forces perform the same functions as above stated for the Army, and because of the constant association with naval units will be given special training in the conduct of landing operations."<sup>11</sup>

#### ACTIVATION OF THE FLEET MARINE FORCE

The recognition of a mission did not create the doctrine nor the trained forces to carry it out, and, in 1927, neither was at hand. In January 1933 the last Marine had departed from Nicaragua, and withdrawal from Haiti was contemplated. Troops were now becoming available for training in landing operations, but before any real progress could be made, one preliminary step was essential. A substantial permanent force of Marines with its

<sup>11</sup> The Joint Board, *Joint Action of the Army and Navy* (Washington: GPO, 1927), 3, 12.



MARINES IN FRANCE IN WORLD WAR I, part of the 4th Marine Brigade of the 2d Infantry Division, prepare to move up to the front line trenches. (USMC 4967)



BANDIT-HUNTING PATROL in Nicaragua in 1929 typifies Marine activities between the World Wars when the Corps served as a Caribbean riot squad. (USMC 515283)

own commander and staff would have to be organized for the purpose, otherwise training would be constantly interrupted by the dispersal of the troops to other commitments.

No one recognized this more clearly than the Assistant Commandant, Brigadier General John H. Russell. He assembled a staff at Quantico to plan the organization of a force which could be rapidly assembled for service with the Fleet. In August of 1933 he proposed to the Commandant that the old "Expeditionary Force" be replaced by a new body, to be called either "Fleet Marine Force," or "Fleet Base Defense Force." The new force, while an integral part of the United States Fleet, would be under the operational control of the Fleet Commander when embarked on vessels of the Fleet or engaged in fleet exercises afloat or ashore. When not so embarked or engaged it would remain under the Major General Commandant.

Russell's recommendations were promptly approved by the Commandant and by the Chief of Naval Operations. The designation "Fleet Marine Force" (FMF) was preferred by the senior naval staffs, and the Commandant was requested to submit proposed instructions for establishing "appropriate command and administrative relations between the commander in Chief and the Commander of the Fleet Marine Force."<sup>12</sup> The decision became official with the issuance of Navy Department General Order 241, dated 8 December 1933.

This directive could well be called the Magna Carta of the Fleet Marine Force. It stated:

1. The force of marines maintained by the major general commandant in a state of readiness for operations with the fleet is hereby designated as fleet marine force (F. M. F.), and as such shall constitute a part of the organization of the United States Fleet and be included in the operating force plan for each fiscal year.

2. The fleet marine force shall consist of such units as may be designated by the major general commandant and shall be maintained at such strength as is warranted by the general personnel situation of the Marine Corps.

3. The fleet marine force shall be available to the commander in chief for operations with the fleet or for exercises either afloat or ashore in connection with fleet problems. The commander in chief shall make timely recommendations to the Chief of Naval Operations regarding such service in order that the necessary arrangements may be made.

4. The commander in chief shall exercise command of the fleet marine force when embarked on board vessels of the fleet or when engaged in fleet exercises, either afloat or ashore. When otherwise engaged, command shall be directed by the major general commandant.

5. The major general commandant shall detail the commanding general of the fleet marine force and maintain an appropriate staff for him.

6. The commanding general, fleet marine force, shall report by letter to the commander in chief, United States Fleet, for duty in connection with the employment of the fleet marine force. At least once each year, and at such times as may be considered desirable by the commander in chief, the commanding general, fleet marine force, with appropriate members of his staff, shall be ordered to report to the commander in chief for conference.<sup>13</sup>

However significant the creation of the FMF may have been in terms of the future, its initial form was modest enough. The Commandant was obliged to report in August 1934 that the responsibility for maintaining ship's detachments and garrisons abroad, and performing essential

<sup>12</sup> CNO ltr to CMC, 12Sep33; *Marines and Amphibious War*, 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Navy Dept GO 241, 8Dec33.

guard duty at naval shore stations, prevented the Marine Corps from assigning the component units necessary to fulfill the mission of the FMF. At this time the total number of officers and men in the FMF was about 3,000.<sup>14</sup>

#### "THE BOOK" COMES OUT

With the creation of the FMF the Marine Corps had finally acquired the tactical structure necessary to carry out the primary war mission assigned to it by the Joint Board in 1927. The next order of business was to train the FMF for the execution of its mission.

But the training could not be very effective without a textbook embodying the theory and practice of landing operations. No such manual existed in 1933. There was a general doctrine by the Joint Board issued in 1933, and, though it offered many sound definitions and suggested general solutions to problems, it lacked necessary detail.

In November 1933, all classes at the Marine Corps Schools were suspended, and, under the guidance of Colonel Ellis B. Miller, Assistant Commandant of the Schools, both the faculty and students set to work to write a manual setting forth in detail the doctrines and techniques to be followed in both training and actual operations. Under the title, *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*, it was issued in January 1934.

On 1 August 1934, the title was changed to *Manual for Naval Overseas Operations* and some changes were effected in the text. A few months later this publication, now retitled *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*, was approved by the

<sup>14</sup> CMC AnRept, 1934.

Chief of Naval Operations for "temporary use . . . as a guide for forces of the Navy and the Marine Corps conducting a landing against opposition."<sup>15</sup> In mimeographed form it was given relatively limited distribution within the Navy, but wide distribution within the Marine Corps. Comments were invited.

The doctrine laid down in this remarkable document was destined to become the foundation of all amphibious thinking in the United States armed forces. The Navy accepted it as official doctrine in 1938 under the title of *Fleet Training Publication 167*, and in 1941 the War Department put the Navy text between Army covers and issued it as *Field Manual 31-5*.

Remarkable as it was, the Marine amphibious doctrine was largely theory when it was first promulgated at Quantico in 1934. To put the theory into practice, major landing exercises were resumed. They were held each winter from 1935 through 1941 on the islands of Culebra and Vieques in conjunction with fleet exercises in the Caribbean, or on San Clemente off the California coast. A final exercise of the prewar period on a much larger scale than any previously attempted was held at the newly acquired Marine Corps base at New River, North Carolina, in the summer of 1941. These fleet landing exercises provided the practical experience by which details of landing operations were hammered out.

In light of its importance, here might be as good a place as any to consider briefly the more basic aspects of this doctrine as conceived in the original manual and mod-

<sup>15</sup> NavDept, *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*, 1935, hereinafter cited as *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*.



ified by experience in fleet exercises up to the outbreak of the war. Amphibious operations and ordinary ground warfare share many of the same tactical principles. The basic difference between them lies in the fact that the amphibious assault is launched from the sea, and is supported by naval elements. While water-borne the landing force is completely powerless and is dependent upon the naval elements for all its support: gunfire, aviation, transportation, and communication. In this initial stage only the naval elements have the capability of reacting to enemy action. As the landing force, however, is projected onto the beach, its effectiveness, starting from zero at the water's edge, increases rapidly until its strength is fully established ashore.

#### COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

This basic difference between land and amphibious operations created a problem in command relationships which has plagued amphibious operations from earliest times. During the initial stage when only naval elements have the capability of reacting to enemy action it has been generally and logically agreed that the over-all command must be vested in the commander of the naval attack force. It has, however, not been so generally agreed in the past that once the landing force is established ashore and capable of exerting its combat power with primary reliance on its own weapons and tactics that the landing force commander should be freed to conduct the operations ashore as he sees fit.

The authors of the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*, writing in 1934, evidently did not foresee that this particular aspect of command relations presented

a problem that required resolution.<sup>16</sup> They simply defined the "attack force" as all the forces necessary to conduct a landing operation and added that the attack force commander was to be the senior naval officer of the fleet units making up the attack force. His command was to consist of the landing force and several naval components, organized as task groups for the support of the landing. These included, among others, the fire support, transport, air, screening, antisubmarine, and reconnaissance groups. The commanders of the landing force and of the several naval task groups operated on the same level under the over-all command of the attack force commander throughout the operation.

This initial command concept was destined to undergo a number of modifications and interpretations which will be discussed in this history as they occur. The first important change did not come about until toward the close of the Guadalcanal campaign.<sup>17</sup>

#### NAVAL GUNFIRE SUPPORT

There is nothing new in the concept of using the fire of ships' guns to cover an amphibious landing of troops during its most vulnerable phase: before, during, and after the ship-to-shore movement. Our

<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in the remainder of this chapter is derived from *Tentative Landing Operations Manual; FTP-167, Landing Operations Doctrine, U. S. Navy* (Washington: Office of the CNO, 1938) and changes 1 & 2 thereto; 1st MarBrig ltr to CMC, 5Jun39 and encl (a) thereto; 1st MarBrig Flex 6 Rept, "Notes from Critique for Makee Learn Problem at Culebra, 14-15Feb40;" 2d MarBrig Minor Landing Exercises Rept, San Clemente Island, Calif, 17Apr-6May39.

<sup>17</sup> See Part VI of this history.

own history contains many examples of this technique, notably: two landings of U. S. troops in Canada during the War of 1812 (York and Niagara Peninsula, summer 1813); General Scott's landing at Vera Cruz in 1847 during the Mexican War; several amphibious operations during the Civil War, *e. g.*, Fort Fisher in 1865; and Guantanamo Bay during the Spanish-American War in 1898.

However, the evolution of modern weapons posed difficult problems of a technical nature, and the much belabored Gallipoli operation seemed to indicate that these were insoluble. High-powered naval guns, with their flat trajectory and specialized armor-piercing ammunition, proved no true substitute for land-based field artillery, and much study and practice would be required to develop techniques which would make them even an acceptable substitute.

Nevertheless, a rudimentary doctrine concerning naval gunfire support evolved during the years between 1935 and 1941. But it evolved slowly and none too clearly. Experimentation indicated that bombardment ammunition, with its surface burst, was better suited to fire missions against most land targets, while armor-piercing shells could be employed to good effect against concrete emplacements and masonry walls. The types of ships and guns best adapted to perform specific fire missions—close support, deep support, counterbattery, interdiction, etc.—were determined. And some progress was made in fire observation technique.

Three types of observers were provided for: aerial, shipboard and, once the first waves had landed, shore fire control parties. For the greater part of this period the latter were made up of personnel of

the firing ships, inexperienced in such work, untrained, and wholly unfamiliar with the tactical maneuvers of the troops they were supporting. Not until 1941 were trained Marine artillery officers with Marine radio crews substituted, the naval officers then serving in a liaison capacity.

Other considerations of a naval nature served as further limiting factors on the NGF support concept. The necessity for the support ships to have a large proportion of armor-piercing projectiles readily available with which to fight a surface action on short notice restricted the accessibility of and limited the amount of bombardment shells carried. In turn, the probability of enemy air and submarine action once the target area became known caused much apprehension in naval minds and dictated the earliest possible departure of the firing ships from the objective. An example of this apprehension at work came to the fore early in the Guadalcanal campaign.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, tradition dies hard in any service. The traditional belief that warships exist for the sole purpose of fighting other warships dates far back in history, with one of its leading exponents the great Lord Nelson with his oft-quoted dictum: "A ship's a fool to fight a fort." This supposed vulnerability of surface vessels to shore-based artillery remained very much alive in the minds of naval planners. So they dictated that support ships should deliver their fires at maximum range while traveling at high speed and maneuvering radically—not exactly conducive to pin-point marksmanship.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, these considerations, the starting concept of naval gunfire support with which we

<sup>18</sup> See Part VI, Chap 2, of this history.

<sup>19</sup> *Marines and Amphibious War*, 38.

entered World War II, added up to this: a bombardment of very short duration, delivered by ships firing relatively limited ammunition allowances of types often not well suited to the purpose, from long ranges while maneuvering at high speeds. Obviously, the best that could be expected would be area neutralization of enemy defenses during troop debarkation and the ship-to-shore movement, followed by a limited amount of support on a call basis, with this, too, to be withdrawn as soon as field artillery could be landed.<sup>20</sup>

Area neutralization—that was the basic concept, with deliberate destruction fire ruled out. A blood bath would be required to expunge this from “The Book.”

### AIR SUPPORT

As the Marine Corps developed the various techniques contributing to a smooth landing operation, it had to give more and more consideration to the fast growth of military aviation as a powerful arm.

Even the original *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* considered the vulnerable concentrations of troops in transports, landing boats, and on the beach and called for a three-to-one numerical superiority over the enemy in the air. Later, in *FTP-167*, the ratio was increased to four-to-one, primarily to wipe the enemy air threat out of the skies and secondarily to shatter the enemy's beach-head defense and to cut off his reinforcements.

Considerable emphasis was placed, however, on direct assistance to the troops themselves. This included such supporting services as guiding the landing boats to the beach, laying smoke screens, and providing reconnaissance and spotting for

naval gunfire and artillery. Most importantly, it included rendering direct fire support to the landing force until the artillery was ashore and ready to fire.

For this air war, employment of Marine squadrons on carriers was considered ideal but, due to a limited number of carriers, was not always a practical possibility. Planners even considered moving Marine planes ashore in crates and assembling them, after the ground troops had seized an airfield.

Hence, the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* called for the Navy to carry most of the initial air battle. Marine pilots, however, might be employed with Navy air units. Actually, in order to exercise Marine air, most of the early training landings had to be scheduled within round trip flying distance of friendly airfields. Although by 1940 Marine carrier training operations were becoming routine, the heavy reliance upon Navy carrier air over Marine landings lasted throughout the war.

As noted before, close coordination of air with ground received great emphasis in the Marine Corps. Even in Santo Domingo and Haiti and later in Nicaragua, Marine pilots reconnoitered, strafed, and bombed insurgent positions, dropped supplies to patrols, and evacuated wounded. The *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* incorporated this teamwork into its new amphibious doctrine, and the landing exercises of the late 30's developed aviation fire power as an important close ground support weapon. By 1939, Colonel Roy S. Geiger advocated and other Marine Corps leaders conceded that one of the greatest potentials of Marine aviation lay in this “close air support.”

The challenge became that of applying the fire power of Marine air, when needed,

<sup>20</sup> SM-67, *Naval Gunfire in Amphibious Operations* (Quantico: MCEC, MCS, 1955), 2.

to destroy a specific enemy front line position without endangering nearby friendly troops.

Refinement of this skilled technique as we know it today was slow because of many factors. There was so much for pilots to learn about rapidly developing military aviation that close air support had to take its place in the busy training syllabus after such basic drill as aerial tactics, air to air gunnery, strafing, bombing, navigation, carrier landings, and communications, and constant study of the latest in engineering, aerodynamics, and flight safety.

Also, whenever newer, faster, and higher flying airplanes trickled into the Marine Corps in the lean thirties, they were found to be less adaptable for close coordination with ground troops than the slower, open cockpit planes which supported the patrol actions of Nicaragua.

In Nicaragua the aviator in his open cockpit could idle his throttle so as to locate an enemy machine gun by its sound, but in the maneuvers of 1940 pilots flashing by in their enclosed cockpits found it difficult to see what was going on below or even to differentiate between friendly and "enemy" hills.<sup>21</sup> In Nicaragua, the Marine flier was most often an ex-infantryman, but 10 years later many of the new Navy-trained Marine aviators were fresh from college and knew little about ground tactics. The lack of a real enemy to look for, identify, and to shoot at hindered attempts at precision, especially since air-ground radio was not yet as re-

liable as the old slow but sure system where pilots read code messages from cloth panels laid on the ground or swooped down with weighted lines to snatch messages suspended between two poles.

The main key to development of close air support lay in reliable communications to permit quick liaison and complete understanding between the pilot and the front line commander. Part of the solution lay in more exercises in air-ground coordination with emphasis on standardized and simplified air-ground communications and maps. By 1939 an aviator as an air liaison officer was assigned to the 1st Marine Brigade Staff. While both artillery and naval gunfire, however, employed forward observers at front line positions, air support control was still being channeled slowly through regimental and brigade command posts.<sup>22</sup> In the same year one squadron sent up an air liaison officer in the rear seat of a scouting or bombing plane to keep abreast of the ground situation and to direct fighter or dive bomber pilots onto targets by means of radio.<sup>23</sup> This was better but not best.

Meanwhile, war flamed up in Europe. Navy and Marine planners took note as the Germans drove around the Maginot line with their special air-ground "armored packets" in which aviation teamed up with the fast, mobile ground elements to break up resistance.<sup>24</sup> By this time the Marines were working on the idea of plac-

<sup>21</sup> From Culebra came the report, "1st MAG as a whole performed in a creditable manner, although at one stage they were impartial in their attacks." 1st MarBrig Flex 6 Rept, "Notes from Critique for Makee Learn Problem at Culebra, 14-15Feb40."

<sup>22</sup> LtGen Julian C. Smith interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 25Jul56.

<sup>23</sup> Col R. D. Moser interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 31Aug56.

<sup>24</sup> WD G-2 Memo for C/S, 23Sep41, I. B. 130, Air-GrdOps, Tab C; CinCLant Flex 6 Rept, 13Jun40, 14-15.

ing radio-equipped "observers" on the front lines to control air support for the troops. But the Leathernecks were already in the war before the first standardized Navy-Marine Corps instructions on their employment appeared.<sup>25</sup> Also at that time, on Guadalcanal certain infantry officers were given additional duty as regimental "air forward observers." They were coached on the spot by aviators of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.<sup>26</sup>

### THE SHIP-TO-SHORE MOVEMENT

The ship-to-shore movement was visualized by the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* in a manner which resembled closely a conventional attack in land warfare: artillery preparation, approach march, deployment, and assault by the infantry. It stressed that this movement was no simple ferrying operation but a vital and integral part of the attack itself and demanded a high order of tactical knowledge and skill.

The two major problems in the ship-to-shore movement are the speedy debarkation of the assaulting troops and their equipment into the landing boats and the control and guiding of these craft to their assigned beaches. To facilitate the first, the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* directed that each transport on which combat units were embarked should carry as a minimum sufficient boats to land a reinforced infantry battalion.<sup>27</sup> Thus

<sup>25</sup> USN, CSP-1536, 5Sep42.

<sup>26</sup> 1st MarDiv, Final Report on Guadalcanal Operation, 1Jul43, Phase V, Annex D, OPlan 2-42, 5. The directive on appointing air forward observers was dated 2Oct42.

<sup>27</sup> This general concept that troops and their landing craft should be transported together to the objective area remained valid through-

each transport and its accompanying troops would be tactically self-sufficient for the assault landing, and the loss of one ship would not be a crippling blow. To expedite their debarkation the Marines generally went over the side via cargo nets rigged at several stations on the ship.

To solve the second major problem in the ship-to-shore movement, that of controlling and guiding the landing craft to their proper beaches, the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* provided for: (1) marking the line of departure with buoys or picket boats; (2) a designated control vessel to lead each boat group from the rendezvous area to the line of departure, towing the boats in fog, smoke, or darkness, if necessary; (3) wave and alternate wave guide boats; (4) each boat to carry a signboard with its assigned letter and number indicating its proper position in the formation; and (5) for a guide plane to lead the boat waves in.

The system for the control of the ship-to-shore movement was still substantially the same as prescribed in the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* when the Marines made their first amphibious landing of World War II at Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942.

### COMBAT UNIT LOADING

"Combat unit loading" of transports is the key to amphibious logistics as developed by the Marine Corps. This is a practical process designed to make supplies and equipment immediately available to the assault troops in the order needed, disregarding to a large extent the waste of cargo space which results. In contrast is commercial loading which is equally

out the war, although at times it was necessary to deviate from it.

practical in utilizing every cubic foot of cargo space available but prevents access to much of the cargo until the ship is unloaded.

Highest priority items for combat unit loading vary somewhat with the nature and problems of a particular operation. Relative priorities must be worked out with minute care. The responsibility for handling this was given to a Marine officer designated transport quartermaster (TQM) aboard each amphibious assault ship. He had to know not only the weight and dimensions of each item of Marine gear carried but had to familiarize himself with the characteristics of the particular ship to which he was assigned: exact location and dimensions of all holds and storage spaces in terms of both cubic feet and deck space. This familiarity required at times accurate remeasurement of holds and loading spaces as modifications, not shown in the ship's plans, had often been made in the ship's internal structure. Initially, the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* directed that the TQM should be an officer of the unit embarked, but such were the variations in ships that it subsequently proved more feasible to assign a Marine officer, thoroughly familiar with Marine gear, permanently to a particular ship with which he would become equally familiar through experience.

Practical experience with combat loading between 1935 and 1941 generally confirmed the soundness of the doctrines set forth in the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*. Application of these doctrines in the fleet landing exercises was limited, however, by several factors, chiefly the lack of suitable transports. In addition, an uncertainty at times as to ports of embarkation and dates of avail-

ability of ships sometimes entangled planning procedures. As a result, there was no ideal approximation of wartime combat loading.

### SHORE PARTY

One of the most serious problems encountered in early landing exercises was congestion on the beaches as men and supplies piled ashore. To keep such a situation reasonably in hand requires a high degree of control; control difficult to achieve under such circumstances, even when the enemy remains only simulated. Assault troops must push inland with all speed not only to expand the beachhead, but also to make room for following units and equipment to land and to provide space in which personnel assigned strictly beach functions can operate.

To solve this problem the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* provided for a beach party, commanded by a naval officer called a beachmaster, and a shore party, a special task organization, commanded by an officer of the landing force. The beach party was assigned primarily naval functions, *e. g.*, reconnaissance and marking of beaches, marking of hazards to navigation, control of boats, evacuation of casualties, and, in addition, the unloading of material of the landing force from the boats. The shore party was assigned such functions as control of stragglers and prisoners, selecting and marking of routes inland, movement of supplies and equipment off the beaches, and assignment of storage and bivouac areas in the vicinity of the beach. The composition and strength of the shore party were not set forth except for a statement that it would contain detachments from some or all of the following landing force units: medical, supply, working details, engineers,

military police, communications, and chemical. The beach party and the shore party were independent of each other, but the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* enjoined that the fullest cooperation be observed between the beachmaster and the shore party commander, and the personnel of their respective parties.

It was not indicated from what source "working details" for the shore party would come, but in practice, since there was no other source, the policy of assigning units in reserve the responsibility for furnishing the labor details quickly developed. This in effect, however, temporarily deprived the commander of his reserve.

No realistic test of the shore and beach party doctrine took place during the early fleet landing exercises. Although some material was landed on the beach, it generally consisted of rations and small quantities of ammunition and gasoline. Not until 1941 were adequate supplies available and the maneuvers on a large enough scale to provide a test of logistic procedures. The results were not encouraging. "In January of 1941 . . . the shore party for a brigade size landing . . . consisted of one elderly major and two small piles of ammunition boxes," wrote a Marine officer who "suffered" through those years. "The ship-to-shore movement of fuel was a nightmare. We had no force level transportation, [no] engineers and no supporting maintenance capability worthy of the name. In short, the combination of the parsimonious years and our own apathy had left us next to helpless where logistics were concerned."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> BriGen V. H. Krulak ltr to ACoF8, G-3, HQMC, 5Mar57.

Major General H. M. Smith, the landing force commander at the New River exercise in the summer of 1941, reported that "considerable delay in the debarkation of troops and supplies was caused by lack of personnel in the Shore and Beach Parties . . . . Roughly, the supplies except for subsistence it was possible to land . . . were insufficient to sustain the forces engaged for more than three days."<sup>30</sup>

General Smith, who had a deep respect for logistics, was determined to correct these deficiencies. "It is evident," he reported to Rear Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, "that special service troops (labor) must be provided for these duties in order to prevent reduction of the fighting strength of battalion combat teams . . . . The present doctrine results in divided authority between shore party commanders." He recommended that "the beach and shore party commanders be consolidated into one unit, a Shore Party, under control of the landing force."<sup>31</sup>

Solution to the problem of divided authority came from a joint board of Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard officers appointed by Admiral King. Its recommendations closely followed those of General Smith and were accepted *in toto* and published on 1 August 1942 as *Change 2 to FTP 167*. The principal changes were: (1) joining together of the beach and shore parties under the title Shore Party, as a component of the landing force; (2) designating the beach party commander as the assistant to the shore party commander and his advisor on

<sup>30</sup> CG LantPhibFor PrelimRept to CinCLant on New River Exercise 4-12Aug41, 27Aug41.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

naval matters; and (3) transferring the responsibility for unloading boats at the beach from the naval element to the landing force element of the shore party.<sup>32</sup>

Marine Corps Headquarters solved the labor force problem by adding a pioneer (shore party) battalion of 34 officers and 669 enlisted men to the marine division.<sup>33</sup> This change occurred on 10 January 1942, too late for the personnel concerned to gain practical experience in large-scale exercises in the techniques of handling vast quantities of supplies or to test the adequacy of the strength and organization provided. At Guadalcanal this lack came close to having serious consequences.<sup>34</sup>

General Smith was not content merely to submit his shore party recommendations to Admiral King. At his direction, the logistics staff of the Amphibious

Force Atlantic Fleet prepared a detailed Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) covering all phases of logistics. Issued as Force General Order No. 7-42, SOP for Supply and Evacuation, it served as the basic guide to combat loading and shore party operations during the Guadalcanal operation.<sup>35</sup>

By 7 December 1941 the Marine Corps had made long strides towards amphibious preparedness. It had a doctrine which had been tested in maneuvers and found to be basically sound. Many of the errors in implementation had been recognized and corrected; still others were awaiting remedial action when war broke out. But the simulated conditions of the maneuver ground were now to be abandoned. The Marines and their doctrine were now to submit to the ultimate test of war.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Marine Corps T/O D-94, 10Jan42.

<sup>34</sup> See Part VI of this history.

---

<sup>35</sup> Krulak, *op. cit.*; Twining, *op. cit.*



# Development of Landing Craft

## INTRODUCTION

The amphibious warfare doctrine laboriously developed by Marines between the two World Wars could never have been successfully executed without special equipment to transport the assaulting troops and their supplies from ship to shore and to land them on an enemy-defended beach.

No one was more aware of the need for such equipment than the Marines. Shortly after the end of World War I they induced the Navy to undertake design studies on two landing craft, one for personnel and one for materiel. Troop Barge A, as the first of these types was called, was tried out at Culebra in the winter of 1923-24. A shallow draft, twin-engined, 50-foot craft with a rated speed of about 12 knots and a carrying capacity of 110 fully equipped Marines, it had good beaching qualities and could retract from the beach with aid of a stern anchor. Three years later the second type, a 45-foot artillery lighter, was built and tested. Equipped with two parallel hinged ramps in the stern, it could be beached successfully stern-to and 155mm guns and other pieces of heavy Marine equipment unloaded. It lacked a power plant, however, and had to be towed by another craft.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LtGen K. E. Rockey ltr to ACoS, G-3, 21Jun57; 2dLt W. B. Trundle rept on experiments with Beetle Boat to CG, MarCorExpedFor, 3Mar24; Senior Member, BoatCom ltr to Pres,

Another item of equipment tried out in 1924 was the Christie "amphibian tank." Afloat, this unusual machine was driven by twin-screw propellers at a rated speed of seven knots. On short, as a tractor, it could make 15 mph; or, where good roads were available, the demountable tracks could be removed, and on wheels it could do 35 mph. It functioned well enough on land and in the sheltered waters of rivers. But in the open sea, under conditions that must be realistically anticipated for an assault landing, it proved so unseaworthy that the Marine Corps directed its attention to other types.

The construction of these types of amphibious equipment constituted a beginning, however humble, towards the solution of the problem of transporting troops and equipment from ship to shore. But a shortage of funds made it impossible to follow up these developments until 1935, when appropriations became more plentiful as a result of the naval expansion program begun in the first Roosevelt administration.

## LANDING BOATS

With the publication of the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* in 1934 and the resumption of landing exercises the following year, work on the landing craft

MCEB, 21Jul36, both in War Plans Sec HQMC files, folder "Landing Boats and Barges, 1924-1939," hereinafter cited as *War Plans Files, 1924-39*.

was resumed. Three types of boats for landing operations were contemplated by Marine planners of the mid-thirties. These included fast, small, surf boats to lift the leading waves; standard Navy boats and life boats of merchant vessels for the bulk of troops; and barges and lighters for heavy material.<sup>2</sup>

Steps to solve the first problem, provision of special troop landing boats, were initiated in 1935. The Marine and Navy officers who tackled the problem that year had to start pretty much from scratch, for Troop Barge A, a promising early development, fell victim to the size and weight restrictions imposed by naval ships in those days. Navy thinking and planning for the development of amphibious equipment was restricted by the types of ships then serving the fleet. Troop transports were practically nonexistent, so it was planned as an emergency measure to lift Marine landing forces in battleships and cruisers. A length of 30 feet, the size of davits on these ships, and a weight of five tons which was the maximum capacity of the davits, were therefore imposed as basic requirements for all new landing craft.

In an effort to explore the suitability of existing commercial craft for landing operations, the Navy, at the request of the Marine Corps, agreed to test as wide a variety of small craft from the yards of private builders as the limited funds available would permit. Bids were advertised, and nine replies were received, four of which met with the approval of the Marine Corps Equipment Board and were accepted.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> CMC to Chief BuC&R, 24Nov36, 2d endorsement to CominCh ltr to CNO, 14Oct36. *War Plans Files, 1924-39.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Tests of these approved types were conducted at Cape May, New Jersey, in the summer of 1936. But the experiments fell short of the original intention, "to test as wide a variety of forms as was practicable," because Andrew Higgins, a New Orleans boat builder with a promising design, declined to submit a bid. In 1926 Higgins had designed a special shallow draft craft called the *Eureka* for the use of trappers and oil drillers along the lower Mississippi and Gulf coast. It had a tunnel stern to protect the propeller and a special type of bow, called by Higgins a "spoonbill," which enabled it to run well up on low banks and beaches and retract easily. In 1934 the inventor had visited Quantico to interest Marines in his boat, and the Navy was now particularly anxious to test it with other comparable types of small craft.<sup>4</sup>

The four boats which showed up at Cape May for the test were of two general types. The sea skiff, a boat employed by Atlantic coast fishermen, was represented by the Bay Head, Red Bank, and Freeport boats. This type appeared in theory to offer a solution to the landing craft problem, as it was normally launched and landed through the heavy surf of the Atlantic beaches in fishery work. The other boat, a sea sled built by the Greenport Basin and Construction Company, was a high speed craft not normally employed in surf nor landed on beaches. The test board, comprising representatives of the Navy general line, Bureau of Construction and Repair, Bureau of Engineering, the Coast Guard, and the Marine Corps, reported that none of the boats were wholly satisfactory. They eliminated the sea sled en-

<sup>4</sup> Asst Chief BuC&R ltr to Higgins Industries, 21Oct36, S82-3 (15) BuShips files.



EXPERIMENTAL AMPHIBIAN TRACTOR developed for the Marine Corps in 1924 began the long line of test vehicles that culminated in the LVT. (USMC 13562)



AN EARLY VERSION OF THE LANDING CRAFT used in World War II which resulted from joint Navy-Marine Corps experiments in the 1920's and 30's. (USMC 515227)

tirely and recommended that the three remaining craft be modified and sent to the Fleet for further tests.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> CMC to Chief BuC&R, 24Nov36, 2d endorsement to Cominch ltr to CNO, 14Oct36, *War Plans Files, 1924-39*.

These tests took place at Culebra during Flex 4 in the winter of 1938. Though superior in speed and beaching ability to standard Navy boats, the modified fishing craft still had serious drawbacks. Owing to their exposed rudders and propellers

they tended to dig in when retracting. They were so high forward that Marines debarking had to drop 10 feet from the bow to the beach. They were, moreover, all unsuitable for lowering and hoisting.<sup>6</sup>

In the light of the drawbacks revealed by tests, the Bureau of Construction and Repair undertook the construction of a boat embodying all the best features of the fishing craft.<sup>7</sup> This was the beginning of a long and unsuccessful effort by the Bureau to develop a satisfactory landing craft. The "Bureau Boat" in various forms showed up regularly at Fleet Landing Exercises from 1939 through 1941, but efforts to get the "bugs" out of its design were abandoned in 1940.

Experiments with standard Navy ships' boats proceeded simultaneously with the development of special types. From the first they proved unsatisfactory. After five of them foundered in a four-foot surf at San Clemente during Flex 3, efforts to adapt standard Navy boats for beach landings were abandoned. The fact was that, having been designed for other purposes, none of them were suitable for beaching operations. As the Commanding Officer of the 5th Marines concluded: "Navy standard boats are totally unsuited for landing troops of the leading waves, even under moderate surf conditions. They are in no sense tactical vehicles, lacking in speed and maneuverability and are extremely difficult to handle in surf.

<sup>6</sup> CG 1st MarBrig Flex 4 Rept, 12Mar38; BriGen V. H. Krulak ltr to Head HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1Feb57, w/attached comments.

<sup>7</sup> CMC to Chief BuC&R, 24Nov36, 2d endorsement to Cominch ltr to CNO, 14Oct36, *War Plans Files, 1924-39*.

They do not permit the rapid debarkation of troops at the water's edge."<sup>8</sup>

By 1938 a beginning had been made towards the solution of the landing craft problem. As a result of the early experiments the Marines had proved to their own satisfaction what they had suspected all along—that none of the standard Navy boats could be adapted satisfactorily for the landing through surf of troops or heavy equipment. Nor were the experimental models based on commercial craft, though superior to Navy boats, a satisfactory means for landing of assault waves on a defended beach. These results, though negative in character, at least cleared the way for concentrating development on specially designed landing craft.

The fruitful line of development came into view with the re-entrance of Andrew Higgins into the picture. In October 1936, about a year after declining to bid on the experimental landing boat contract, Higgins had written the Navy offering his *Eureka* as a troop landing craft. As funds for the purchase of experimental boats had been exhausted, the Navy was unable to purchase the Higgins craft at that time.<sup>9</sup>

A year later Commander Ralph S. McDowell, who was responsible for landing craft development in the Bureau of Construction and Repair, learned of the *Eureka* boat. He wrote Higgins inviting him to visit the Navy Department and discuss this boat if he ever came to Washington. Higgins and his naval architect

<sup>8</sup> CO 5th Mar Flex 3 Rept, 26Feb37.

<sup>9</sup> Asst Chief BuC&R ltr to Higgins Industries, 21Oct36, S82-3 (15) BuShips files.

caught the first train for Washington. They spent about a week in McDowell's office working out a conversion of the standard *Eureka* into a landing craft. As funds for the purchase of experimental boats had been exhausted, the Navy Department at first refused to purchase the Higgins craft. But after the inventor offered to build a boat for less than cost, the Department relented, found the necessary funds, and gave Higgins a contract for one boat. Higgins delivered it to Norfolk in 30 days.<sup>10</sup>

The *Eureka* was tested in surf at Hampton Roads in the spring of 1938<sup>11</sup> and made its first maneuver appearance at Flex 5 in 1939 where it competed against several Bureau boats and the by now venerable fishing craft. Marines were enthusiastic about its performance. "The Higgins boat gave the best performance under all conditions. It has more speed, more maneuverability, handles easier, and lands troops higher on the beach," reported the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. "It also has greater power in backing off the beach; not once was the boat observed having difficulty in retracting."<sup>12</sup>

Lieutenant Commander R. B. Daggett, the representative of the Bureau of Construction and Repair at Flex 5, did not

share the Marines' enthusiasm for the Higgin's *Eureka*. "The Higgins . . . boat is too heavy. . . . The speed is too slow. . . . All the Higgins boats have 250 horsepower with accompanying excessive gasoline consumption for the speed obtained,"<sup>13</sup> he reported to his bureau.

Daggett's preference was for a modified Bureau boat built by the Welin Company. The other Bureau types and the fishing boats he found unsatisfactory, and as the Marine Corps and the Bureau were in agreement, on this point at least, these craft were discarded.

Neither the Marine Corps nor the Bureau of Construction and Repair was to have the last word at Flex 5. The Commander Atlantic Squadron, as represented by his Landing Boat Development Board, recommended further tests for the Bureau and *Eureka* craft. Accordingly at Flex 6 the following year the drama was re-enacted. Again the Marines declared the *Eureka* to be "the best so far designed." The Atlantic Squadron, shifting slightly from dead center, decided that the Higgins "was the best all-around boat for the purpose intended . . . [but] the Bureau was almost as good."<sup>14</sup>

By 1940 money for naval purposes was beginning to be more plentiful, and the Navy was now willing to purchase landing

<sup>10</sup> Capt Ralph S. McDowell, USN, interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 19Jun57; Asst Chief BuC&R ltr to Higgins Industries, 21Oct36, S82-3 (15) BuShips files.

<sup>11</sup> LCdr G. H. Bahm ltr to CNO, 7Jun38, S82-3 (15) BuShips files.

<sup>12</sup> CO 1/5 Flex 5 Rept No 14 to CG 1st MarBrig, 15Mar39.

<sup>13</sup> LCdr R. B. Daggett memo to Chief BuC&R, 13Feb39, encl to Chief BuC&R ltr to CNO, 16Feb39, *War Plans Files, 1924-39*.

<sup>14</sup> Comments & Recommendations of Umpires and Observers, Flex 6, January-March 1940; Experimental Landing Boat Group Officer ltr to ComLantRon, 10Mar40, *War Plans Files, 1940-41*.

craft in quantity. But in view of the fact that the Fleet was unable to make a clear-cut recommendation for either the Bureau or Higgins types, the Navy let contracts for the first 64 landing craft on a fifty-fifty basis.<sup>15</sup>

The question was finally settled in September 1940. The Navy was now converting large merchant ships for use as troop transports. These ships were equipped with davits capable of handling 36-foot boats, and as the *Eureka* of 36-foot length had twice the capacity of the 30-footer then in service and could make the same speed without an increase in horsepower, the Navy decided to adopt the larger as standard.<sup>16</sup>

After five years of work the Marines finally had the landing craft they wanted. The one feature that kept the Higgins boat from fulfilling the ideal that they had built up in their minds was the difficulty of emptying it on the beach: all troops, equipment, and supplies had to be unloaded over the fairly high sides. During a visit to Quantico in April 1941, Higgins was shown a picture of a Japanese landing craft with a ramp in the bow by Major Ernest E. Linsert. Higgins became enthusiastic about the idea and returned to New Orleans determined to examine the possibility of installing a ramp in the bow of his 36-foot *Eureka*. Linsert, who was serving as Secretary, Marine Corps Equipment Board, recommended to the President of the Board, Brigadier General Emile P. Moses, that

<sup>15</sup> DeptContBd for Dev of Landing Boats Rept to CNO, 18May40, and BuShips ltr to Cdt 5th Naval Dist, 8Jul40, both C-882-3(15) BuShips files.

<sup>16</sup> CNO ltr to Chief BuShips, 23Sep40, 2455-130-60 HQMC files.

the Marine Corps procure a ramp-bow 36-foot *Eureka*. Upon receiving the approval of Marine Corps Headquarters, Moses and Linsert went to New Orleans to assist Higgins, who had agreed to make a prototype, converting a standard 36-foot *Eureka* into a ramp-bow boat at his own expense.

On 21 May, informal tests were conducted on Lake Pontchartrain. The new craft proved to be seaworthy. She beached and retracted with ease, and while on the beach the ramp was lowered and personnel and a light truck were debarked and reembarked. On the recommendation of the Navy Department Continuing Board for the Development of Landing Boats,<sup>17</sup> a special board of Marine Corps and Bureau of Ships officers was appointed to conduct official acceptance tests. With General Moses as senior member the board carried out the tests during the first week in June. The ramp-bow craft passed with flying colors.<sup>18</sup>

Thus was born the precursor of the LCVP (landing craft vehicle, personnel), the craft which, in the opinion of General H. M. Smith, ". . . did more to win the war in the Pacific than any other single piece of equipment."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This board had been created by SecNav on 12Jan37 to coordinate landing craft development. It was composed of representatives of the CNO, BuC&R, BuEng, and MarCorps.

<sup>18</sup> LtCol E. E. Linsert interview by HistBr, HQMC, 3Jun57, hereinafter cited as *Linsert interview*; BriGen E. P. Moses msg to CMC, w/endorsements, 21May41, 2455-130-60 HQMC files; MajGen E. P. Moses ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, 11Apr57; CNO ltr to CMC *et al*, 2Jun41, 2455-130-60 HQMC files.

<sup>19</sup> Gen H. M. Smith, *Coral and Brass* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 72.

*LIGHTERS AND BARGES*

The design of a successful tank lighter proved a longer and more difficult process than did the development of the personnel landing craft. The old 45-foot artillery lighter, developed in 1927, was considered to have a limited usefulness for landing heavy equipment in the later stages of an operation, but the Marine Corps hoped to obtain a lighter, self-propelled craft particularly suited to landing tanks during the early stages.<sup>20</sup>

As a stop-gap measure, Marines at Quantico came up with a device to adapt the standard Navy 50-foot motor launch for landing light vehicles and artillery. "Boat Rig A," this contraption was called. It consisted of a platform fitted within the hull of the boat, together with a portable ramp by means of which the vehicle could go ashore over the bow when the craft beached. The ramp was carried into the beach broken down, where it was assembled and hitched up for debarkation. This completed, it would be disengaged and left on the beach to accommodate the next boat coming in. The ramp could be assembled and made ready for use by eight men in about 10 minutes. On subsequent trips, it took about four minutes to connect the ramp to the boat. Under ideal conditions vehicles up to five tons in weight could be landed from a 50-foot motor launch using Boat Rig A. In calm water Boat Rig A worked fairly well, but when it was tried out at Culebra in 1935, it proved so top heavy that it nearly capsized in a moderate swell. The experiment was accordingly written off.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> CMC to Chief BuC&R, 24Nov36, 2d endorsement to Cominch ltr to CNO, 14Oct36, *War Plans Files, 1924-39*.

<sup>21</sup> *Marines and Amphibious War*, 47; *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*, 78-80.

With the failure of Boat Rig A, the Marine Corps turned its attention to developing a self-propelled lighter designed specifically for landing tanks and heavy equipment through the surf. In December 1935 the Commandant requested the Bureau of Construction and Repair to design such a craft. It was to be capable of landing the 9,500-pound Marmon-Herrington tank which the Marine Corps was then considering. Negotiations dragged on for more than a year, until in April both the Marine Corps and the Bureau had agreed upon a design. A 38-foot craft, it made its first appearance at a fleet landing exercise in 1938.<sup>22</sup> The Marines reported it to be "a distinct improvement over previous experimental designs. It is self-propelled, has sufficient speed, and is sound and practicable in construction. It is equally adaptable for landing artillery and is an efficient cargo carrier."<sup>23</sup>

A 40-footer, built at the Norfolk Navy Yard in the autumn of 1938, showed up at Culebra the following winter for Flex 5. It was used successfully in transporting ashore tanks and trucks of the types then standard in the Marine Corps. Under the conditions encountered at Culebra in 1939, both the 38- and 40-foot lighters were judged to be ". . . good sea boats, handle well, have sufficient power and speed, and are capable of retracting themselves from the beach by use of their stern anchors. . . . Both types . . . proved suitable for landing tanks and motor vehicles. The new

<sup>22</sup> CMC ltr to Chief BuC&R, 19Dec35, S82-3(16) BuShips files; Senior Member, BoatCom ltr to Pres, MCEB, 21Jul36; CNO ltr to Chief BuC&R, 8Jul36; CMC ltr to Chief BuC&R, 17Apr37; Chief BuC&R ltr to Cdr R. H. English, 7Apr37, all in *War Plans Files, 1934-39*.

<sup>23</sup> CG 1st MarBrig Flex 4 Rept, 12Mar38.

lighter proved superior to the old in respect to ease and safety of loading in a seaway as well as cargo-carrying capacity."<sup>24</sup>

All tank lighter experiments conducted up to the end of Flex 5 had been built around the Marmon-Herrington tank. This vehicle, adopted by the Marine Corps in 1935, had been designed to fit within the weight limitations imposed by the Navy for amphibious equipment. Lightness was just about the only virtue possessed by this tank. By 1939 the Marine Corps had given up on it and was testing the Army light tank for its suitability in amphibious operations. As the Army tank weighed about 15 tons, it could not be carried in any of the tank lighters then in existence. The Navy accordingly produced a new model 45-feet in length, capable of carrying one Army and two Marmon-Herrington tanks.<sup>25</sup>

One of the new 45-footers was completed in time for a trial at Culebra during the winter of 1940 in Flex 6. The tests lacked somewhat in realism, however, because none of the Army-type tanks were available. The new lighter performed adequately as a carrier of the Marmon-Herrington tank, for other vehicles, and miscellaneous heavy equipment. At the end of Flex 6, General Smith recommended to the Commandant that ". . . 20 of the 45-foot lighters be constructed, at the earliest practicable date, for use by the Atlantic Squadron in landing operations."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> CO 1/5 Flex 5 Rept No 14 to CG 1st MarBrig, 15Mar39.

<sup>25</sup> BuC&R ltr to Cdt Norfolk Navy Yard, 6Jul39, *War Plans Files, 1940-41*.

<sup>26</sup> CG 1st MarBrig ltr to CMC, 29Apr40, *War Plans Files 1940-41*.

In the fall of 1940 the Navy contracted for the construction of 96 45-foot tank lighters. After the contract had been awarded, doubt arose as to the seaworthiness of the basic design. During a landing exercise in the Caribbean, one of the 45-footers capsized and sank when the Army-type tank it was carrying shifted to one side in a moderate sea.<sup>27</sup>

In the spring of 1941 the Marine Corps found itself in urgent need of all the lighters it could lay its hands on for use in a proposed amphibious landing in the Azores.<sup>28</sup> None of the 96 lighters ordered by the Navy had been delivered, and not more than eight or ten were expected in time for the operation. Therefore, on 27 May 1941 the Navy Department Continuing Board for the Development of Landing Boats recommended that Higgins be given an opportunity to convert one of his 45-foot *Eureka* boats into a tank lighter by installing a ramp in the bow. If this craft met service tests he would be awarded a contract for 50 tank lighters. The Secretary of the Navy gave his approval on 29 May, and Higgins received this order by telephone the next day.<sup>29</sup>

Higgins rushed through the conversion, completing it in time for testing and acceptance during the first week in June by the same board of Marine Corps and Bu-

<sup>27</sup> ComLantRon ltr to CNO, 13Dec40, 2455-130-60 HQMC files; Senate Report No. 10, Part 16, Additional Report of the Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, 78th Congress, 2d Session, hereinafter cited as *Senate 10*.

<sup>28</sup> See Part I, Chap 5 of this history.

<sup>29</sup> CNO ltr to CMC *et al*, 2Jun41, 2455-130-60 HQMC files; *Senate 10*, 139; Capt R. B. Daggett, USN, interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 20May57, hereinafter cited as *Daggett Interview*.



reau of Ships officers who had come to New Orleans to test the 36-foot ramp-bow *Eureka*. At the New River exercises that summer the Higgins tank lighters proved to be of excellent basic design. "They were found to be fast, subject to ready control and retraction, relatively light, and equipped with a reliable power plant," reported General Smith.<sup>30</sup> They also proved to be too hastily constructed. The ramps were so weak that several collapsed, and the sill was too high for efficient handling of vehicles. Higgins, who was present, was confident that he could correct the deficiencies.<sup>31</sup>

Before the reports of the New River exercises had been received by the Navy Department, a contract had been let for 131 additional tank lighters. These were of a 47-foot Bureau design, a prototype of which had never been built. As a result of the good showing of the Higgins tank lighter at New River, this contract was later reduced to ten. Higgins was the low bidder, and built one craft to Bureau specifications, although he was convinced that the design was unseaworthy. His fears proved to be well founded when the tests were carried out. By this time, however, the tank lighter program had again changed direction.<sup>32</sup>

On 4 October 1941, the Auxiliary Vessels Board of the Navy had reported that there was no lighter capable of landing the newly developed Army 30-ton medium tank. The Secretary of the Navy directed

<sup>30</sup> CG PhibLant ltr to CinCLant, 9Sep41, FMFLant files.

<sup>31</sup> CNO ltr to CMC *et al*, 2Jun41, 2455-130-60 HQMC files; *Daggett Interview*; *Linsert Interview*; CinCLant ltr to CNO, 7Oct41, FMFLant files.

<sup>32</sup> *Senate 10*, 139-140.

the Bureau of Ships to remedy this deficiency. Accordingly, in December existing tank lighter contracts were changed to provide 50-footers in lieu of the 45-foot Higgins and 47-foot Bureau types still to be built. Both Higgins and the Bureau produced designs of 50-foot craft. Before any deliveries could be made, President Roosevelt, at a White House Conference on 4 April 1942, directed the procurement of 600 additional 50-foot tank lighters by 1 September for the North African operation. The Bureau of Ships, to meet this commitment, ordered 1,100 of its own design.<sup>33</sup>

Since this order was earmarked for service in a projected Army operation, the Army showed keen interest in a test of the two types held near Norfolk on 25 April 1942. Each carried a 30-ton tank, elaborately lashed down in the Bureau lighter, merely blocked in place in the Higgins. Wind velocity ran 18 to 23 miles per hour, with wave heights estimated between 1½ and 2 feet. Both lighters showed a speed of 10 miles an hour over a measured 1½-mile course. What happened after that is described by the Army observer who made the trip in the Higgins type:

As we neared the [antisubmarine] net it became apparent that the Navy Bureau-type tank lighter was in trouble. She appeared to have a tendency to dive when headed into the seas and was taking considerable water aboard. She stopped several times and members of the crew could be seen manning hand pumps and attempting to better secure the tank in the lighter. Once when under way and making a wide turn, it appeared that the lighter was going to overturn. Some of the crew was seen straddling the higher bulwark and the coxswain had left the pilot house and was steering the vessel from the rail.

While this was going on, our [Higgins] lighter was standing by, as was a picket boat and two

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

Higgins 36-foot boats. None of these vessels was experiencing any difficulty. The Higgins tank lighter was maneuvering around in sharp turns into the sea, through the wave troughs.

We then [after Bureau lighter turned back] opened the engines up to 1,900 r. p. m. and proceeded past Little Creek to Fort Storey. The lighter took no water except a little spray. Performance was excellent in all respects. The lighter was beached in the surf and the tank ran off onto the beach despite poor handling by the coxswain who finally allowed the lighter to broach to. In spite of this the vessel had such power and retraction qualities [as] to get back into deep water.

As far as comparison of characteristics of the types of tank lighters are concerned, it may be stated that in the May 25 tests there was no comparison. . . .<sup>34</sup>

As a result of these tests, the Bureau hastily notified all yards to shift to the Higgins type. Thus the Higgins 50-footer became the standard tank lighter of the Navy, the prototype of the LCM (landing craft, mechanized) as the Marines knew it in World War II, and as they know it today in enlarged form.

### AMPHIBIOUS VEHICLES

Another vehicle which was to play a vital role in the amphibious operations of World War II was the amphibian tractor (amtrack, LVT). It was built in 1935 by Donald Roebing, a wealthy young inventor living in Clearwater, Florida. The "Alligator," as Roebing called his creation, was a track-laying vehicle which derived its propulsion afloat from flanges fixed to the tracks, essentially the principle of early paddle-wheel steamships. Originally intended as a vehicle of mercy, for rescue work in the Everglades, the "Alligator" was destined for fame as an instrument of war.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

The Marine Corps first took notice of the "Alligator" in 1937, when Rear Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus, Commander, Battleships, Battle Force, U. S. Fleet, showed Major General Louis McCarthy Little, then commanding the Fleet Marine Force, a picture of the strange vehicle appearing in *Life* magazine. General Little was quick to grasp its potentialities and sent the picture and accompanying article to the Commandant. He, in turn, passed it along to the Equipment Board at Quantico.<sup>35</sup>

The Marine Corps had not forgotten the old Christie amphibian, of such bright promise and disappointing performance. Here appeared to be a possible answer. The Board dispatched its secretary, then Major John Kaluf, to Florida to see the vehicle perform and to consult with Mr. Roebing. Kaluf was favorably impressed, and on this basis the Equipment Board reported to the Commandant that ". . . subject boat has possibilities for use in landing troops and supplies at points not accessible to other types of small boats." In May 1938 the Commandant cited this opinion in recommending to the Navy that ". . . steps be taken to procure a pilot model of this type of amphibious boat for further tests under service conditions and during Fleet Landing Exercise No. 5."<sup>36</sup>

Both the Navy Board and the Bureau of Construction and Repair endorsed the recommendation unfavorably on the grounds of economy. The boat develop-

<sup>35</sup> *Linsert Interview*; LtCol V. J. Croizat, "The Marines' Amphibian," *MC Gazette*, June 1953, 42-43 (Croizat takes his information from Linsert).

<sup>36</sup> CMC ltr to Senior Member, NavDept ContBd for Dev of Landing Boats, 18May38, *War Plans Files, 1924-39*.

ment program was at last well under way, and it seemed unwise to divert any of the limited appropriations to a purely experimental project. CNO concurred in the recommendation of the Board.<sup>37</sup>

Marine interest in the amphibian tractor persisted, however, and in October 1939, General Moses visited Roebling at his shop in Clearwater, Florida. He inspected the latest model tractor, and persuaded Roebling to design a model including desired military characteristics.<sup>38</sup>

In January 1940, Roebling had completed the new design. An appropriation was secured from the Bureau of Ships, and work started on the first military model of an amphibian tractor. In November the completed machine was delivered at Quantico where it was demonstrated for the Commandant and a large party of high ranking officers of the Army and Navy.<sup>39</sup> It measured up in every respect save one. Its aluminum construction was not considered rugged enough for hard military use. Still the tractor was so impressive in every other respect that the Navy contracted with Roebling for 200 of the machines constructed of steel. As Roebling did not have the facilities for mass manufacture, he subcontracted the actual construction to the Food Machinery Corporation which had a plant in nearby Dunedin. The first vehicle, now designated LVT(1) (Landing Vehicle Tracked), came off the assembly line in July 1941.<sup>40</sup>

Quantity procurement of LVT(1) did not halt further development of amphibian tractors. By October 1941, the prototype of LVT(2) had put in an appearance, but volume production of the new model was delayed by the entry of the United States into the war. To achieve maximum output, the design of LVT(1) was "frozen" shortly after Pearl Harbor and the vehicle put into mass production.<sup>41</sup>

This early LVT(1) was unarmed, though capable of mounting machine guns. The Marines, now that they had made a start, wanted something more: an armored, turreted model capable of mounting at least a 37mm gun and serving as the equivalent of a seagoing tank in landing operations. At Clearwater in January 1940, Roebling sketched a turreted version of the LVT, the plans for which Major Linsert, Secretary of the Equipment Board, later completed.<sup>42</sup>

Nothing more was done about the armored LVT until June 1941, when the Commandant recommended that such a vehicle be developed, using the existing LVT as a basis. The new vehicle should be ". . . capable of sustained point-blank combat against shore-based weapons . . . It should be able to approach a defended beach from the sea, land, over-run enemy weapons, destroy them, and continue operations ashore to support our ground troops."<sup>43</sup> Armor protection against .50 caliber machine-gun fire and an armament

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, and endorsements thereto.

<sup>38</sup> Pres MCEB ltr to CMC, 29Aug40, 2455-130-20 HQMC files; *Linsert Interview*; Croizat, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *Linsert Interview*; Croizat, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> Chief BuShips ltr to Cdt 5th Naval Dist., 6Dec40, 2455-130-60 HQMC files; SecNav ContBd for the Dev of Landing Vehicle,

Tracked, "History of Landing Vehicle Tracked," 1Dec45, hereinafter cited as *LVT Hist.*; *Daggett Interview*.

<sup>41</sup> *LVT Hist.*

<sup>42</sup> Croizat, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> CMC ltr to CNO, 27Jun41, and CNO 1st endorsement thereto to Chief BuShips, 15Jul41, 2455-130-20 HQMC files.

including a 37mm antitank gun and three .30 caliber machine guns would be required to accomplish this mission. The Chief of Naval Operations approved the project and directed the Bureau of Ships to perfect a design.

Bureau engineers began development in cooperation with Roebling and the engineers of the Food Machinery Corporation. But theirs was not to be the first armored LVT completed. Working independently and at its own expense, the Borg-Warner Corporation produced model "A," the first turreted amphibian tractor. Design work on the Roebling-Food Machinery model, LVT(A)(1) was not completed until December 1941, and the prototype did not emerge from the Food Machinery plant until June 1942. It was an LVT(2) hull mounting a 37mm gun in a standard light tank turret. It was quickly put in pro-

duction, and the first vehicle rolled off the assembly line in August 1943.<sup>44</sup>

The craft described here were, of course, only a few of the wide variety of boats and beaching ships that performed yeoman service in all theaters during World War II. These ranged in size from the big lumbering LST (Landing Ship, Tanks, or "Large, Slow Target"), originated by the British, to the Army-developed DUKW, an amphibious truck propeller-driven afloat. But Marines played no notable part in the development of any of these, and none had appeared during the period covered by this volume. They will be described in subsequent volumes as they came to play their part in the tactical picture of Marine operations.

---

<sup>44</sup> *LVT Hist*; Croizat, *op. cit.*

## Marine Occupation of Iceland<sup>1</sup>

"It has been said," wrote Winston Churchill, "Whoever possesses Iceland holds a pistol firmly pointed at England, America, and Canada."<sup>2</sup> At the time of which he wrote, the "pointed pistol" threatened most immediately the British lifeline: the northern convoy route between Great Britain and the Western Hemisphere, upon which the island kingdom was dependent for most of the materials to sustain its war effort as well as much that was needed for its very sub-

sistence. Iceland perched on the flank of these shipping lanes, which were under heavy attack by German submarines. Hostile air and naval bases on the island would almost certainly render the northern route unusable, and put pressure, perhaps intolerable pressure, on the longer and more vulnerable southern route.

At the outbreak of the war Iceland enjoyed the status of autonomous parliamentary monarchy, sharing the same king with Denmark. When the Nazis overran the latter nation in April 1940, the Icelandic Parliament voted to take over the executive power of the Danish King and to assume control of foreign affairs. The strategic island became, for all practical purposes, a completely independent republic<sup>3</sup>—and a wholly defenseless one without even the pretense of an army or navy. This state of affairs gave rise to considerable concern in London and Washington, more genuine concern than it caused initially among the insular-minded Icelanders.

To the British the threat appeared very desperate indeed. Early in May they determined to occupy Iceland, and the need for speed and secrecy fused decision and action.<sup>4</sup> There was no time to stand on

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from the 1st MarBrig (Prov) Rept of Activities 16Jun41–25Mar42, 26Mar42; 6th Mar (Reinf) Repts of Activities 25May–30Nov41, 13Dec41; 5th DefBn Repts of Activities 7Jun41–28Feb42, 27Feb42; Correspondence files dealing with Marine occupation of Iceland; J. L. Zimmerman, Notes and MSS on Marine occupation of Iceland (located at NRMC, Job 14051, Box 9, Folders 129–130), hereinafter cited as *Zimmerman MSS*; Gen O. P. Smith, Diary and Narrative covering the occupation of Iceland, hereinafter cited as *Smith Narrative*; S. Conn and B. Fairchild, "The Framework of Hemisphere Defense," MS of a forthcoming volume in the series *United States Army in World War II* (located at OCMH), hereinafter cited as *Hemisphere Defense*; B. Fairchild, MS chapters titled "Planning the Iceland Operation: The Army's First Task Force," "Establishing the Iceland Base Command," and "Bermuda and the North Atlantic Bases," part of a forthcoming volume of the same series; W. L. Langer and S. E. Gleason, *The Undeclared War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), hereinafter cited as *Undeclared War*.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 138.

<sup>3</sup> On 16May42 the Parliament announced that Iceland would not renew its union with Denmark and in 1944 the island became in name as well as fact a republic.

<sup>4</sup> J. R. M. Butler, *Grand Strategy: Volume II—History of the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1957), 262.

ceremony; despite Churchill's bland assertion that the British occupation of Iceland was effected "with the concurrence of its people,"<sup>5</sup> they had, in fact, not been consulted beforehand. "As the attitude likely to be adopted by the Icelandic Government toward such an 'invasion' was in some doubt they were not informed of the proposed expedition."<sup>6</sup> Indeed the first inkling the natives had that anything out of the ordinary was afoot came when early-rising fishermen discovered a British destroyer nosing up to a jetty in the harbor of the island capital, Reykjavik. At 0620 on 10 May, a reinforced battalion of Royal Marines landed and occupied the town, moving so swiftly that it was able to seize the German Consulate before the hapless Consul could destroy his papers.

According to plan, the Royal Marines were to take the situation in hand in order to pave the way for larger occupation forces. They were relieved in ten days by a Canadian Army brigade which was first reinforced and later replaced by British units. By the time Iceland began to loom large in U. S. defense plans, the big, bleak, sparsely-populated island was occupied by nearly 25,000 British troops. Hvalfjordur, a deep inlet of the sea 30 miles north of Reykjavik, became the site of a vital naval fueling and repair base, while the principal airfields, also near the capital, were home bases for squadrons of patrol bombers that hunted the German submarines.<sup>7</sup>

As reverse followed reverse, however, the British increasingly felt the need for the return of their troops from Iceland

to the home islands, seriously threatened with invasion and under heavy air attack. The prospect of British withdrawal caused some alarm among the Icelanders and led to diplomatic soundings of the American position.

On 18 December 1940 the Icelandic Minister of Foreign Affairs, V. Stefansson, arranged a private meeting with the U. S. Consul General, Bertel E. Kuniholm. After firm assurances that his proposal was strictly unofficial, the Minister suggested to Kuniholm that the United States might consider the possibility of declaring Iceland part of the area covered by the Monroe Doctrine, in effect joining the island to the Western Hemisphere.<sup>8</sup> Kuniholm duly reported the tentative proposition to Washington and nearly a month later he received a cautious reply from the Secretary of State which advised him that no action was likely to be forthcoming in the near future but that he should neither encourage nor discourage further approaches along this line.<sup>9</sup>

In unheralded American-British staff conversations which took place in Washington in the first months of 1941, plans were laid for Allied action in case the U. S. should be drawn into the war beside Britain. Under these plans the defense of Iceland was to become the re-

<sup>8</sup> Although the location of the eastern boundary of the Western Hemisphere is a subject of debate among geographers, most maps of this period show Iceland as clearly within the Eastern Hemisphere. Secretary Hull, however, remembered associates bringing him maps (at the time Hitler seized Denmark) which showed Greenland wholly and Iceland partly within the Western Hemisphere. *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 2 vols (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), I, 73.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 754.

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Maj D. B. Drysdale, RM, ltr to LtCol J. L. Zimmerman, 7Sep54, in *Zimmerman MSS*, Folder 130.

<sup>7</sup> Butler, *op. cit.*, 262, 287, 402, 469.

sponsibility of the United States; Army troops were to relieve the British as soon as practicable after the outbreak of war, but certainly no sooner than 1 September 1941, as the Army did not feel it would be ready to take on such a commitment until then.<sup>10</sup> But as the spring of 1941 wore on, American measures in aid of Britain, such as Lend-Lease and the progressive extension of the Neutrality Patrol into the mid-Atlantic, brought the U. S. closer and closer to conflict with Germany. Open and increasing support of the British seemed to suit the public mood; a survey of public opinion taken by the Gallup Poll in early May showed that an overwhelming majority (75%) of the American people favored helping Britain even if such a course was sure to lead the nation into war with Germany.<sup>11</sup> The stage was thus set for what one exhaustive study of this period has called an "overt act of participation in the European conflict."<sup>12</sup>

By late spring Britain felt her back against the wall. Churchill asked President Roosevelt to send American troops to Iceland to replace the British garrison. The President agreed provided an invitation to the American occupation force was forthcoming from the Icelandic Government. Churchill undertook to produce this invitation, but the process proved more one of extraction than of production. Icelandic reluctance to "invite" a

foreign force to occupy the island very nearly upset a timetable already in operation.

On 4 June, the President ordered the Army to prepare a plan for the immediate relief of British troops in Iceland. The question of where the troops were going to come from arose immediately. Although the Army had reached a strength of nearly a million and a half men, the great bulk of its soldiers were raw recruits gathered in by Selective Service and recently called up National Guardsmen. Under existing legislation these men could not be sent beyond the Western Hemisphere unless they volunteered for such service. Equipment in nearly every category was in short supply, even for training purposes. The Army needed its comparatively small force of regulars to form cadres for new units. To withdraw these cadres for an expeditionary force would throw the whole immense training program out of gear.

A review of the Army's immediate capabilities convinced the President that the Marine Corps would have to furnish the initial occupation force for Iceland. Since all Marines, both regular and reserve, were volunteers, there were no geographical restrictions on their use. On 5 June, Roosevelt directed the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Harold R. Stark, to have a Marine brigade ready to sail in 15 days' time. The organization of this brigade was facilitated by the fact that a reinforced infantry regiment slated for expeditionary duty was at that moment en route from the west coast to the east.

At this time the Marine Corps was heavily committed to a program of organizing, equipping, and training two divisions, one on each coast. Since the infan-

<sup>10</sup> M. E. Matloff and E. M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare—United States Army in World War II* (Washington: OCMH, 1953), 46, hereinafter cited as *Strategic Planning*.

<sup>11</sup> E. Roosevelt and J. P. Lash (eds.), *F. D. R.: His Personal Letters 1928-1945*, 2 vols (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), II, 1158.

<sup>12</sup> Langer and Gleason, *op. cit.*, 575.

try regiments of both divisions were still forming, they were considerably under-strength, and it had been necessary to reinforce the east coast's 1st Marine Division when it was tabbed for a major role in a proposed landing operation. On 24 May, the Commandant drew on the 2d Marine Division at Camp Elliott, California, for the necessary regiment, and Colonel Leo D. Hermle's 6th Marines (Reinforced) was selected "for temporary shore duty beyond the seas."<sup>13</sup> The regiment was brought up to full strength by substantial drafts from the 2d and 8th Marines,<sup>14</sup> and on 28 May it joined its assigned reinforcing artillery, tank, and service elements. Six days after he received his orders, Colonel Hermle had his command combat loaded; the ships, three large transports and four destroyer transports, sailed from San Diego on 31 May.

When it had embarked, this regiment had orders to report to the Commanding General, I Corps (Provisional), FMF, Atlantic Fleet. At that time, its most probable mission appeared to be either the seizure of Martinique or the occupation of the Azores, both discussed in the following chapter. Momentous events, however, were developing in Europe, and these served to change the whole pattern of the war, as well as the mission of the regiment. Both British and American intelligence indicated that Hitler was getting ready to attack Russia, and soon. Such an event would automatically cancel any immediate threat to Gibraltar and render the Azores venture pointless. President

<sup>13</sup> 6th Mar (Reinf) Repts, *op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> "The rule was that [these] men must have been in the service for one year and must have clear records. The other regiments 'played ball' in this respect and we received good men." *Smith Narrative*, 17.

Roosevelt, in fact, ordered a suspension of planning for the Azores operation on 7 June, while preparations for the movement to Iceland proceeded apace.

While the 6th Marines' convoy was still in the Pacific heading for the Panama Canal, the wheels were set in motion to complete the organization of the projected brigade. One other major unit, the 5th Defense Battalion at Parris Island, was designated for duty in Iceland; its commanding officer, Colonel Lloyd L. Leech, flew to Washington on 7 June for a two-day round of briefing and reports. The battalion's antiaircraft guns and gunners were what was wanted, so when the order assigning the 5th Defense to I Corps (Provisional) was published on 10 June the 5-inch Artillery Group was shown as being detached. In addition to the 6th Marines (Reinforced) and the 5th Defense Battalion (less 5-inch Artillery Group), the budding brigade received a company of engineers, a chemical platoon, and a platoon of scout cars from the 1st Marine Division at New River. The port for the hurried assembly of ships, materiel, and men was Charleston, S. C.

The men of the 5th Defense Battalion had some inkling of their probable area of employment; Colonel Leech's warning order phoned from Washington on the 8th had directed that special attention be paid to provision of warm clothing. On board the 6th Marines' transports, however, speculation was rife that the regiment was heading for the Caribbean, perhaps for Guantanamo Bay, but more popular was the rumored destination of Martinique. When the convoy turned north after clearing the canal, passed the western end of Cuba, and headed for Charleston most of the "scuttlebutt" still held out for a tropical objective. Need-



less to say, the issue of winter clothing after the regiment arrived at Charleston on 15 June came as a real "shocker." The severely limited time to assemble and load out the Iceland force made this cold weather gear "the darndest collection of winter clothing ever assembled;"<sup>15</sup> there were bits and pieces of everything.

On the day following the arrival of the 6th Marines in Charleston the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) was formally organized; its commander was Brigadier General John Marston. The troop list included:

Brigade Headquarters Platoon  
 Brigade Band  
 6th Marines  
 5th Defense Battalion (less 5-inch Artillery Group)  
 2d Battalion, 10th Marines  
 Company A, 2d Tank Battalion (less 3d Platoon)  
 Company A, 2d Medical Battalion  
 Company C, 1st Engineer Battalion  
 1st Platoon, Company A, 2d Service Battalion  
 3d Platoon, 1st Scout Company  
 Chemical Platoon

On 18 June, General Marston arrived in Charleston from Quantico, bringing with him a small headquarters detachment and his instructions from the CNO for the operation of his brigade in Iceland. These orders, dated 16 June, gave him a simple and direct mission:

In Cooperation with the British Garrison, Defend Iceland Against Hostile Attack.<sup>16</sup>

The question of over-all command in Iceland had, of course, risen early in the top-level negotiations. The British wished the brigade to be placed directly under their control since they had the major

force on the island, but Admiral Stark thought that it would be going too far for U. S. troops, ostensibly neutral, to be placed under the command of an officer of a belligerent power. Marston's orders, therefore, read that he would coordinate his actions "with the defense operations of the British by the method of mutual cooperation,"<sup>17</sup> while reporting directly to the CNO.

The brigade spent a week in Charleston, most of it devoted to loading supplies that arrived from camps and depots all over the eastern half of the U. S. The Army might not be sending any troops in this first contingent, but a good portion of the weapons and equipment that went out with the Marines was taken from Army units.<sup>18</sup> On 22 June, the last cargo that could be handled within the time limits set was loaded and at 0800 the four transports and two cargo vessels carrying 4,095 officers and men set sail for Argentia, Newfoundland.

At sea a formidable escort force including battleships, a couple of cruisers, and ten destroyers joined up.<sup>19</sup> Five days out of Charleston, the convoy arrived at Argentia and hove to awaiting further orders. These orders were not forthcoming until 1 July, when the Icelandic reluctance to actually "invite" American occupation was finally compromised in a much-qualified statement by the island's Prime Minister to President Roosevelt that the presence of U. S. troops was "in accordance with the interest of Iceland."<sup>20</sup> This left-handed invitation was the go-ahead

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

<sup>18</sup> G-4 draft memo for TAG, "Transfers of Equipment to the U. S. Marine Corps," 5Jun41.

<sup>19</sup> U. S. Atlantic Flt OPlan F-41, 20Jun41, 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Msg sent by Prime Minister Herman Jonasson of Iceland to President Roosevelt, 1Jul41.

<sup>15</sup> MajGen H. R. Paige ltr to ACoS, G-3, HQMC, February 1957.

<sup>16</sup> CNO Serial 069312 to CG, 1st MarBrig (Prov), 16Jun41.

signal and the brigade was headed east by dawn on 2 July. The Marines were going with the blessing of Churchill who had written the President earlier that:

I am much encouraged by . . . your marines taking over that cold place and I hope that once the first installment has arrived you will give full publicity to it. It would give us hope to face the long haul that lies ahead.<sup>21</sup>

The President made the desired announcement on 7 July as the convoy anchored in Reykjavik harbor, pointing out that the Americans were there "to supplement, and eventually to replace, the British forces," and that an adequate defense of the strategic island was necessary to ward off a potential threat to the Western Hemisphere.<sup>22</sup> A third, but unannounced, purpose of this American occupation was the acquisition of a naval and air base in Iceland to facilitate the prosecution of our antisubmarine war in the North Atlantic.<sup>23</sup>

While the threat of German attack was always present, the likelihood of it happening steadily lessened as the year wore on.<sup>24</sup> On the day that the 1st Brigade left

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Hull Memoirs, *op. cit.*, II, 947.

<sup>22</sup> S. I. Rosenman (ed), *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 13 vols (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), X, 255-256.

<sup>23</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic—September 1939—May 1943—History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), 78, hereinafter cited as *Battle of the Atlantic*.

<sup>24</sup> An estimate of the situation prepared by a special board convened by the brigade shortly after its arrival in Iceland attributed to the Germans the following capabilities: To land in force from air or sea; to conduct bombing attacks; and to conduct raids by surface vessel and submarines. The board concluded, however, that as long as the British Home Fleet operated in superior numbers in the water surrounding Northern Scotland, the Orkney, Shetland,

Charleston, Germany attacked Russia. Hitler repeatedly in the months that followed indicated that he wanted to avoid provoking the U. S. into war while he concentrated on the offensive in Russia. His submarine commanders were given orders to spare American shipping as much as possible, even though it had been publicly announced that U. S. Navy vessels were affording protection to British and Canadian ships that joined American convoys headed for Iceland. Still Hitler decreed that there would be no accounting for the submarine commander who sank an American vessel by mistake. Up until the actual U. S. entry into the war this partial immunity of American vessels from attack held good.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that Hitler had decided to go easy on U. S. ships in the North Atlantic was naturally not known to American naval commanders. There was considerable pressure to get the brigade and its equipment unloaded in the shortest possible time and the convoy headed back for the States. This unloading proved an onerous task. There was little local labor. Marines had to furnish all working parties and the men toiled around the clock, helped not a little by the fact that at this time of year it was light 24 hours a day.

Only two ships could be docked at Reykjavik at a time and the places beside

and Faroe Islands it would be impossible for the Germans to support a force of any size in Iceland. 1stMarBrig(Prov) Estimate of the Situation (Defense of Iceland), 5Aug41.

<sup>25</sup> "Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945," *Brassey's Naval Annual 1948* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 220ff. See the transcripts for the conferences of 21Jun41, 9Jul41, 25Jul41, 17Sep41, and 13Nov41 for the continuity of German policy regarding American shipping.

the wharves were reserved for the cargo vessels which carried heavy equipment of the 5th Defense Battalion. The rest of the convoy rode at anchor in the harbor, while men and supplies were lightered ashore to a gently sloping pebble beach near the city. Early on 12 July the job was finished, the convoy sailed, and the Marines had their first real chance to look around them.

They drew small reassurance from what they saw. The Icelandic landscape was something less than prepossessing, at least to men raised where soil produces vegetation and a tree is a tree. No trees above dwarf height grow on Iceland's rugged, mountainous terrain, and vegetation is limited to a little sheep pasturage on the comparatively flat stretches. It has been described as the most volcanic region in the world. Craters, many of them occasionally active, pock its surface, and lava flows lace across it.

The most unpleasant thing about Iceland's weather is its very uncertainty; the mountains usually insure that the same kind of weather rarely exists simultaneously all over the island. Although the temperature range is moderate, the humidity is consistently high, and precipitation frequent but erratic. About the only constant is the assurance of steady winds, which may change abruptly to gale force.<sup>26</sup>

The island is slightly smaller in area than Kentucky, but barely supported a population of about 120,000 at the time of the occupation. Along its 2,300 miles

---

<sup>26</sup> In a hurricane on 15Jan42, wind velocities of over 125 mph were recorded. It did an enormous amount of damage. Ships were driven on the rocks and huts and other buildings which were not firmly anchored were blown away. Paige, *op. cit.*

of jagged coastline were a number of small fishing villages; and except for the area around Reykjavik where there was a roadnet, all communication was by sea. The prim little capital boasted about 38,000 inhabitants, two movie houses, and one first class hotel; as a liberty town for nearly 30,000 British and American troops it boasted nothing. The only living things the island had in abundance were sheep and ponies,<sup>27</sup> and the Marines never developed a taste for mutton and were forbidden to ride the runt-sized steeds. Altogether, it was probably good for morale that the Marines did not know at this time that they were destined to see Iceland—and nothing but Iceland—for eight dreary months to come.

Even before the first brigade unit set foot on shore, the Marines learned what the term "mutual cooperation" meant to the British. They could not have been more cordial, generous, and helpful. As the brigade was woefully short of motor transport, the British put more than 50 trucks at its disposal, together with drivers familiar with the region and the traffic problems peculiar to Iceland—and left them in the hands of the Marines for several weeks. They also furnished rations and turned over several of their permanent camps to the new arrivals, moving into tent camps to make room.<sup>28</sup>

The enthusiastic reception by the British included a highly prized offer by their

---

<sup>27</sup> Most of the information on Iceland's climate and terrain was taken from Col L. P. Hunt, "Report of two-day reconnaissance of Iceland, June 12-13, 1941," 18Jun41.

<sup>28</sup> "Our reception by the British has been splendid. They have placed at our disposal all of their equipment and have rationed us for ten (10) days to cover the period of disembarkation." BriGen J. Marston ltr to MGC, 11Jul41.

commander, Major General H. O. Curtis, to provide the Marines with the distinctive polar bear shoulder insignia of the British force. General Marston accepted for the brigade and noted later that:

The mutual cooperation directive worked, to the entire satisfaction of the British Commander and the Brigade. The British complied with our requests and we complied with theirs. It was as simple as that. A British commander less sympathetic than General Curtis might have upset the applecart but under that talented officer no incident of conflict occurred.<sup>29</sup>

In their new camps the Marines made their first acquaintance with the Nissen hut, an introduction that was to ripen into familiarity that rarely reached the friendship stage. In the months to come the men of the brigade were to build and maintain roads and construct defenses; they were to become very practiced at the art of the stevedore; but most of all they were to become efficient builders of the ubiquitous Nissen hut. The hut itself "was an elongated igloo covered with corrugated iron roofing and lined with beaver board"<sup>30</sup> designed to accommodate about 14 men. It was possible to erect several huts in combination to accommodate larger numbers of men or for use as offices, mess halls, recreation rooms, and classrooms.

For the first week ashore the Marines were fully occupied getting their camps established and then they were fitted into the British scheme of defense. Initially, the brigade's primary mission was to serve as a mobile reserve although its lack of transportation meant that most of its mobility would be dependent on foot

power.<sup>31</sup> The various units, which were spread out over a good part of the countryside around Reykjavik, were also responsible for local defense of their bivouac areas, a responsibility that grew to include long segments of coastline when the British units defending these possible landing points were later relieved.

The machine guns and 3-inch guns of the 5th Defense Battalion were integrated into the British antiaircraft defenses around the airfield and harbor and remained a part of this system for the rest of the Marines' stay. As a result, the 5th Defense spent most of its time performing the duties for which it was constituted; its state of training was good and it improved as a result of a steady round of gun watches and drills and frequent though unproductive enemy aircraft alerts. In contrast, the men of the 6th Marines and its reinforcing units had reason to think that they were on one gigantic and never-ending working party, and the regiment labelled itself a "labor regiment" in its August report to General Marston.

A welcome break from the steady grind of labor details occurred on 16 August when Prime Minister Churchill visited Iceland en route to England following his famous Atlantic conference with President Roosevelt. He was accompanied by an imposing array of high British rank: Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord; General John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff; and Air Chief Marshal Sir Wilfred Freeman, Vice Chief of Air Staff. After paying their respects to local officials, they at-

<sup>29</sup> MajGen J. Marston ltr to ACoFS, G-3, HQMC, 31Jan57.

<sup>30</sup> *Smith Narrative*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Iceland Force memo IF/168/1/G to CG, 1st MarBrig, 16Jul41; 1st MarBrig OpOrd No 3-41, 16Jul41.

tended a large joint British-American military review held in their honor. Of this event Churchill wrote later: "There was a long march past in threes, during which the tune 'United States Marines' bit so deeply into my memory that I could not get it out of my head."<sup>32</sup>

The reason for the continuous round of camp construction was two-fold. First, somebody had to build the camps to accommodate the expected influx of Army troops; neither the British nor the Icelanders were in a position to do so. The process of simple elimination gave the Marines the job. Second, it soon became apparent that the Marines themselves were going to stay for a while and a good part of their time had to be spent preparing their own facilities for the onset of winter.

A common, indeed, official, belief that the Marines were going to be relieved in September by Army troops held strongly for about a month after the brigade arrived in Iceland. There were numerous evidences that this was the intention of the top planners when the concept of the Marine Corps furnishing the initial occupation troops was first broached. By mid-August, however, it became evident that the Army would not be able to provide enough men to relieve the brigade and that the lack of readily available troops would make the role of those who did arrive one of reinforcement rather than relief. The British, who were supposed to return to their home islands, had to stay on to bolster the defenses. The crux of the Army's dilemma was the fact that not all of its men were available for assignment; "the passage of legislation in August 1941 permitting the retention

in service of the selectees, Reserve officers, and the National Guardsmen still left the problem of restriction on territorial service—a problem which was to remain with the Army until Pearl Harbor brought a declaration of war."<sup>33</sup>

There was really not too much trouble taking care of the first Army contingent to arrive, a small force of about 1,000 men built around a pursuit squadron and an engineer battalion. Their convoy made port on 6 August and the units, which came under Marston's command, moved into a camp set up for them by the Marines. However, preparations for the arrival of a second Army echelon of brigade strength due in mid-September meant that every Marine available had to turn to on camp construction. It was the difficulties attendant upon the raising of this second force that led to the decision to hold the Marines in Iceland.<sup>34</sup>

The commander of the Army troops of the September echelon was senior to General Marston; according to the original occupation plan, the principle of unity of command was to hold in Iceland, and under it the senior officer present, regardless of service of origin, would have assumed operational control over all American troops. According to this concept, Army Major General Charles H. Bonesteel would simply have superseded General Marston and all hands would have carried on as before. But in the interim between June and September, the Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Mar-

<sup>33</sup> *Strategic Planning*, 51.

<sup>34</sup> AG memo to ACoFS, War Plans Div, 6Sep41. In order to field the force that finally reached Iceland in September, the Army had to draw on posts and stations all over the U. S. AG WrnO to Army commanders concerned, 14Aug41 (located at TAGO).

<sup>32</sup> Churchill, *op. cit.*, 449.

shall, had decided that unity of command did not go far enough, at least as far as Iceland was concerned. He determined that if General Bonesteel was to have full responsibility for the American occupation, then he should also have full administrative as well as operational control over all the troops in Iceland.

Such a transfer of the Marines from Navy control could be effected by executive order, as had been done by President Wilson in the case of the Marines serving in France in World War I. Unfortunately, from the Marines' point of view, this transfer involved a great deal more than a simple change of command. It brought them under the Army's administrative and disciplinary system which differed considerably from that of the Navy and with which they were unfamiliar.

The Commandant, who had seen the system at work in World War I, protested vigorously. On 4 September he wrote Admiral Stark:

The proposed change will not only necessitate a complete revision of this plan [unity of command] but would introduce many administrative difficulties, with no corresponding advantages in so far as command relations are concerned. A complete change of the administrative system would again be required when the First Marine Brigade is detached from the Army.<sup>35</sup>

And again on 5 September:

In view of the existing situation in Iceland and the probable nature of other operations to be conducted by the Navy elsewhere, the proposed plan has many undesirable ramifications. If carried to its logical conclusion, it will mean, at best, frequently shifting Marine units from the Navy to the Army and back again, with much administrative grief. It will probably change our concept of command relations in joint operations.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> MGC memo for Adm Stark, 4Sept41.

<sup>36</sup> MGC memo for Adm Stark, 5Sep41.

But it was a losing fight. Marshall stated that he had no intention of establishing a precedent and remained adamant. The Commandant did not learn of the proposed change until it was practically an accomplished fact, and the support he received from the CNO was lukewarm. The actual transfer of command took place on 24 September and General Holcomb was directed to report to the Secretary of War on all matters pertaining to the brigade.<sup>37</sup>

The resultant administrative difficulties did not prove to be as bad as Holcomb and many others had feared. The change-over was more of an annoyance than it was a definite hindrance; after all, as one battalion commander commented later, "while administration difficulties may be bothersome they can be handled."<sup>38</sup> In the course of trying to master Army procedures, General Marston wrote the Assistant Commandant:

They have a tremendous amount of paper work which the Marine Corps seems able to avoid. The barrage of force orders coming out of staff sections is appalling. Of course we are getting along all right but it will be months before we are oriented in the new direction . . . If the future develops another situation similar to that of this Brigade in Iceland, I hope that you will be able to have the transfer deferred with at least two months notice so that the officers concerned can get themselves oriented in preparation for the jump.<sup>39</sup>

One of General Bonesteel's first acts as the Commanding General of the new Iceland Base Command was to send a letter of appreciation to the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) which extended his "sin-

<sup>37</sup> Presidential directive to SecWar and SecNav, 22Sep41.

<sup>38</sup> MajGen W. A. Worton ltr to CMC, 1Feb57.

<sup>39</sup> BriGen J. Marston ltr to BriGen A. A. Vandegrift, 10Oct41.

cere thanks for the splendid assistance [given] in the preparation of the various campsites and in numerous other ways prior to and during our arrival in Iceland. The amount of hard and extended labor involved is fully recognized and deeply appreciated.”<sup>40</sup>

The onrush of winter made it necessary for all troops to devote a good part of their time to camp maintenance and weatherizing. And as supplies continued to come in for the depots being built up near Reykjavik, working parties had to be provided to empty ships as well as to construct the storehouses needed to protect the equipment. Days rapidly shortened until there were only four hours of a sort of hazy daylight to accomplish necessary functions.

With the continued requirements for camp construction and preparations for an arctic winter, the brigade was not able to conduct a satisfactory training program.

Every possible opportunity was seized by unit commanders, however, to improve the state of readiness of their men. Many of the specialists, of course, like the communicators, engineers, and service personnel received considerable on-the-job training. While large-scale exercises were not possible, small units operated together as the press of construction allowed. In particular, a considerable amount of range firing of crew-served weapons was accomplished. When the 3d Battalion of the 6th Marines was moved to a camp too far away from Reykjavik to make it feasible to use its men for working parties, the commanders of 1/6 and 2/6 agreed to alternate in furnishing working

parties “in order to get in a minimum amount of training.”<sup>41</sup> The 3d Battalion, encamped in a pass that lay right in the path of winter winds howling out of the mountains near Hvalfjordur, was forced to “button-up” for the winter almost as soon as it shifted in September.

The lack of adequate unit training has been emphasized by some critics of the Marines’ employment in Iceland. Training did not stop; it was hampered and curtailed by the weather and the requirements of working details, but it did go on despite all the very real obstacles. The men, trained and indoctrinated as amphibious assault troops, however, were perturbed when they heard the news of Pearl Harbor while huddled around the stoves in their Nissen huts. Were they to be left forgotten in the wrong ocean?

Once the war broke out in earnest the Navy, too, did not view with favor the employment of a Marine Brigade on a defensive mission in Iceland. The Marines were needed in the Pacific and pressure was put on the Army to get them relieved. Plans were laid to send a convoy with 8,000 men from New York on 15 January to provide the brigade’s relief and return transportation. But, like so many previous false starts, this was not to be. Several of the ships in this convoy were diverted elsewhere and the resulting troop lift was only enough to relieve one battalion. General Marston picked 3/6, which cheerfully turned over its wind-blown billets to the Army troops and embarked on 28 January. The battalion left Iceland on the 31st and reached New York on 11 February.

A start had been made and the brigade began negotiations to turn over its camps,

---

<sup>40</sup> CG, IBC ltr to CG, 1st MarBrig(Prov), 27Sep41, quoted in *Zimmerman MSS*, Folder 129.

---

<sup>41</sup> Gen O. P. Smith ltr to ACoF, G-3, 7Feb57.

defense mission, and heavy equipment to the Army. The convoy carrying the final relief put into Reykjavik on 3 March, and the Marines began loading out the following day. At 1010 on 8 March, General Marston closed his CP on shore and opened it on board the USS *McCawley*; at noon that date the brigade returned to the jurisdiction of the Navy. It is interesting to note that this is the only instance in World War II where a Marine unit was "detached for service with the Army by order of the President." In the many joint operations that followed, all services adhered to the principle of unity of command. General Bonesteel recognized the Marines' dislike for the "detached service" concept but in a final letter to General Marston commended the brigade whose "every officer and enlisted man gave his whole hearted support and cooperation to our efforts to a much greater extent than mere compliance with instructions implied."<sup>42</sup>

The brigade landed at New York on 25 March and was immediately disbanded. The 5th Defense Battalion was ordered to Parris Island, the 6th Marines to the Second Division at Camp Elliott, and the supporting units to their parent organizations wherever those might be.

Thus passed into history an uncomfortable and at times frustrating mission, the military value of which was not clearly apparent at the time. The Marine Corps' expansion program in late 1941 and early 1942 was admittedly hampered by the absence of such a sizeable body of well-

trained regulars and reserves. The brigade had relieved no appreciable number of British troops, which had been the original purpose of the American occupation. There is no concrete evidence that the Germans ever seriously considered attacking Iceland, although it is conceivable, even if somewhat unlikely, that the knowledge of the presence of the brigade might have deterred such an attack. The military value of the Iceland occupation stemmed from rigorous service in the field. In the many scattered and detached posts, heavy responsibilities fell on the shoulders of the young company grade officers and NCOs. Adversity developed and strengthened leadership. Once the brigade reached Iceland there was a minimum rotation of officers and men. This stability of personnel gave the commanders an opportunity, seldom afforded in peacetime, to develop teamwork and unit *esprit de corps*. Upon return to the United States, almost all ranks received a promotion and all units of the brigade were drawn on heavily to provide leaders for newly activated units. The 6th Marines furnished large drafts to the raider and parachute battalions, as well as to units of the 2d Division.

The military know-how, discipline, and qualities of leadership developed in Iceland were invaluable in providing cadres of experienced Marines around which to form these new units. As a result, the 6th Regiment, which sailed from San Diego for New Zealand in late October 1942, contained only a very small percentage of "Iceland Marines." The military wealth had been shared.

<sup>42</sup> CG, IBC ltr to CG, 1st MarBrig(Prov), 1Mar42, quoted in *Zimmerman MSS*, Folder 130.



# The Marine Corps on the Eve of War<sup>1</sup>

## *THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT: DEFENSIVE EXPANSION*

While war came to Europe in September 1939, the United States did not formally enter the struggle against the Axis Powers for another 27 months. The formal declarations of war did not, however, project the nation directly from a state of isolation and indifference into active belligerency. Although the United States declared its neutrality—our aim being to avoid conflict while guarding against totalitarian penetration of the Western Hemisphere—we were gradually drawn deeper and deeper into short-of-war operations in support of Great Britain and her allies.

Initially, the Administration moved with caution. In the years following the “war to end all wars,” disappointment in the League of Nation’s failure and the world-wide depression of the 1930’s had served to increase our isolationist tendencies. Aware of the national sentiment,<sup>2</sup> President Roosevelt initiated a program for gradually increasing the armed services, strengthening our bases, and develop-

ing a foundation for the expansion of our national resources and industry. On 8 September 1939, seven days after Hitler’s armies crossed into Poland, the President officially declared a limited national emergency. As the rising tide of Nazi aggression swept over Europe in 1940 and 1941, Americans awakened more and more to the peril and supported increasingly the national policy of strengthening our armed forces.

As of 30 June 1939, two months before Hitler’s armies launched their *Blitzkrieg*, Marine Corps strength stood at 19,432 officers and enlisted,<sup>3</sup> of whom 4,840 (including aviation components) were assigned to the Fleet Marine Force. FMF ground forces were organized in two units optimistically designated “brigades,” each in actuality an understrength infantry regiment<sup>4</sup> reinforced by skeletonized supporting elements: 1st Brigade based on the east coast (Quantico), 2d Brigade on the west coast (San Diego). Each brigade had the support of a Marine aircraft group of corresponding numerical designation, and FMF aviation further boasted a scouting squadron (VMS-3) based in the Virgin Islands.

However, conversion of international tension into armed conflict in Europe resulted in a marked quickening of United

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from *CMC AnRepts*, 1939–1941.

<sup>2</sup> The Roper Poll in September 1939 showed that extreme interventionist sentiment was limited to 2.5% of the total population; 37% preferred to have nothing to do with the warring nations. R. E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins, An Intimate History* (New York: Harper and Brother, 1948), 128.

<sup>3</sup> Table DGB-2200-DJF prepared by PersAcct Sect, RecordsBr, PersDept, HQMC, 26Nov54.

<sup>4</sup> 5th and 6th MarRegts of WWI fame, based on the east and west coasts respectively.

States defense efforts. And from that point on the Commandant's Annual Reports reflect a steady succession of upward revisions in personnel planning until by 30 November 1941 total strength stood at 65,881, the number, give or take a few, with which the Marine Corps would enter the war against the Axis Powers a week later at Pearl Harbor.

But of greater significance than the increase in over-all strength was the growing proportion of that strength represented by the Fleet Marine Force. Fiscal 1940 saw the numbers of the Corps' striking arm more than doubled: from 4,525 to 9,749; and this figure in turn had more than tripled by 30 November 1941, reaching 29,532. One factor largely responsible for this impressive increase was mobilization in November 1940 of the entire Organized Marine Corps Reserve, both ground and air, thus making available a large number<sup>5</sup> of officers and men, at least partially trained, for incorporation into the FMF with a minimum of delay.

This increased strength made possible organization of a unit larger than the Marine Corps had ever operated before: the triangular division, consisting of three infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, supported by engineer, reconnaissance, and signal units plus medical and other service troops. Thus on 1 February 1941 the brigades stationed on the east coast and west coast were officially activated as the 1st Marine Division and 2d Marine Division respectively. To effect the necessary expansion, cadres were drawn from existing units around which to build and train new units of the same type. This proved a slow and laborious process, and

<sup>5</sup> Total of 5,241 officers and enlisted.

months passed before either division could be built up to authorized strength.

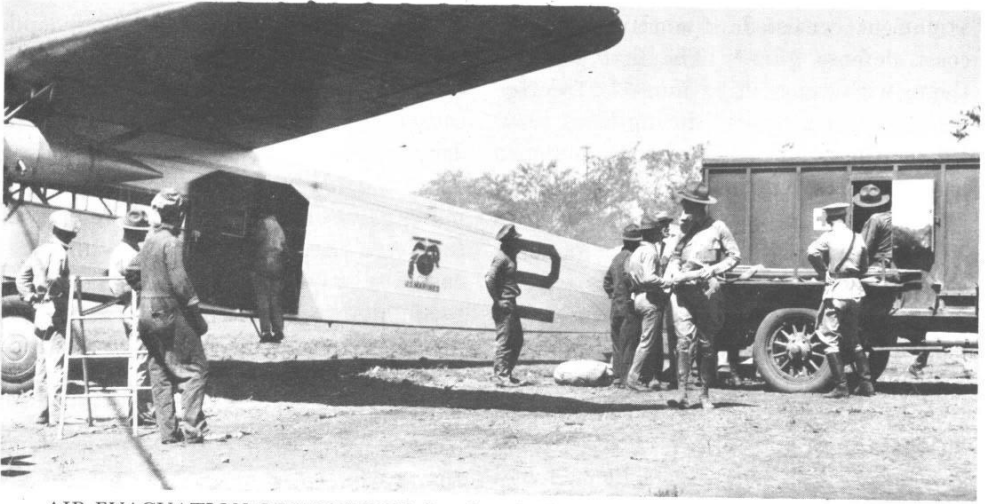
Growth of Marine Aviation kept pace with that of the ground forces, and again that pace looked faster on paper than it was in actuality. Simultaneously with the conversion of the two brigades into divisions, the east coast and west coast FMF aircraft groups, based at Quantico and San Diego respectively, were activated as the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings (MAW). But, as with the divisions, bringing them up to authorized strength proved no overnight process.

Initially, each could boast only a single aircraft group of mixed composition, designated MAG-11 and MAG-21 respectively. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, FMF air personnel numbered 2,716 officers and enlisted out of a total aviation strength of 5,911.<sup>6</sup> These were divided among the two wings and the detached squadron in the Virgin Islands. The 1st MAW had remained based at Quantico. But the coming of war found the 2d MAW scattered far and wide, with a squadron at Wake Island, a detachment at Midway Island, and the balance of the wing at Ewa, on Oahu, T. H.<sup>7</sup>

Though the two divisions and two wings comprised the Marine Corps' principal striking arm, considerations of im-

<sup>6</sup> The two groups were identical in composition but slightly unequal in strength. Each contained 2 fighter, 2 scout-bomber, 1 observation, and 1 utility squadrons. MAG-11 had 100 operational aircraft to 90 for MAG-21. The Virgin Islands detachment operated 8 utility-scouting planes, bringing the total of FMF aircraft of all types to 198. Altogether, Marine Aviation included 13 squadrons and 204 operational planes of all types.

<sup>7</sup> "Administrative History of U. S. Marine Corps in World War II" (MS in HistBr Archives), 158, hereinafter cited as *AdminHist*.



AIR EVACUATION OF WOUNDED from Ocotol, Nicaragua was pioneered by Marine aviators who presaged the mass evacuation techniques of World War II. (USMC 5173)



ARMY LIGHT TANK is unloaded from its landing craft during joint Army-Marine amphibious exercises at New River, N. C. in August 1941. (SC 125129)

mediate urgency diverted many FMF personnel into other activities. The United States had no intention of defending America on its own soil as long as the situation permitted any other choice. The Navy already possessed several outlying

bases and hoped to obtain more, for security of which it relied on the Marines. Hence there evolved a type of organization specially adapted to this duty: the Marine defense battalion, which was primarily an artillery outfit whose main

armament consisted of anti-aircraft and coast defense guns.<sup>8</sup> The first four of these, with consecutive numerical designations, were activated during fiscal 1940. By the time of Pearl Harbor the number had reached seven with two more in process of formation.<sup>9</sup>

Concurrent with increased numbers came increased responsibilities. The Navy, too, was expanding at an unprecedented rate, diverting more Marines from the FMF to perform the Corps' traditional functions: security of naval installations ashore and service afloat. By 30 November 1941, ships' detachments had grown to 68, manned by a total of 3,793 Marines.<sup>10</sup>

Ashore the Navy's stepped-up training programs, particularly in naval aviation, created more and more bases, security of which imposed a serious additional drain on Marine man power. In fiscal 1940 the Corps was called upon to provide guard detachments at four new naval air stations in the Continental United States and three in U. S. overseas territories.<sup>11</sup> The following fiscal year added another four

air stations, a naval ammunition depot, a naval supply depot,<sup>12</sup> and 18 other new installations ranging in character and location from David Taylor Basin, Carderock, Maryland, to Naval Magazine, Indian Island, Washington. Furthermore, garrison detachments were detailed to twelve stations overseas, as will be discussed subsequently.

Simultaneously with filling the Navy's demands, the Marine Corps assumed additional security problems of its own as existing bases expanded and new ones were established. (See below.) Thus, the period under discussion saw the activation of seven new guard companies of a non-FMF character: at Quantico, San Diego, Dunedin (Florida), and Bremerton (Washington).

#### *GROWTH OF MARINE TRAINING AND OPERATIONAL BASES*

Inevitably the problems of housing, training, and equipping rapidly expanding manpower imposed increasing pressure on the Corps' existing facilities, pegged as these were to peacetime needs and the economy of depression years.

Following World War I, activities strictly Marine Corps in nature had been concentrated generally at the recruit training depots at Parris Island and San Diego,<sup>13</sup> and at the operational bases at Quantico and San Diego, where the East

---

<sup>8</sup> The genesis of the defense battalion was attributable to two factors: (a) the acceptance of the advanced base concept and its logical tactical requirements; and (b) during the pre-World War II period, while the nation was apathetic towards rearmament and/or military expansion, an increase in Marine strength, under the guise of a defense force, was politically more acceptable.

<sup>9</sup> CNO ltr to CMC, 9Dec41, Encl (a).

<sup>10</sup> Compilation from muster rolls closed 30Nov41 (located at Unit Diary Sect, HQMC).

<sup>11</sup> NAS Key West and Jacksonville, Fla.; Tongue Point, Oreg.; Alameda, Calif.; Sitka and Kodiak, Alaska; and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

---

<sup>12</sup> NAS Cape May, N. J.; Miami, Fla.; Corpus Christi, Tex.; and Quonset Point, R. I.; NAD Burns City, Ind.; NSD, Oakland, Calif.

<sup>13</sup> Generally, all recruits from east of the Mississippi were trained at Parris Island, all from west at San Diego.

Coast and West Coast components of the Fleet Marine Force were stationed. FMF aviation was based nearby at MCAS, Quantico, and NAS, San Diego.

Marines first laid eyes on Parris Island early in the Civil War when they participated in the naval expedition which seized adjoining Port Royal. This served as an important naval base throughout the war, but the Navy did not begin construction of installations on the island proper until 1883. The first record of a separate Marine detachment setting up there permanently occurs in June 1893. The post did not begin functioning, however, in its present capacity until November 1915 when the East Coast Marine recruit depots were transferred there from Norfolk and Philadelphia.

Retained as a permanent base after World War I, Parris Island continued its role as the point of initial contact with military life for all newly enlisted Marines from the East. Partly for this reason, its facilities were maintained at a fairly high level during the lean years of the 1920's and 1930's. Nevertheless, the flood of recruits soon overflowed existing facilities and forced a rapid expansion. Thus in 1940-41, even as the full training program continued and was intensified, new barracks, a new post exchange, and a new rifle range were added to those already operating at full capacity.

The Recruit Depot, San Diego, which had operated as such since August 1923, experienced similar problems and arrived at similar solutions. As events proved, both of these bases managed to keep abreast of the expansion program

throughout the war and thus accomplish their basic missions.

Much of San Diego's success in its primary mission was owed to the activation of nearby Camp Elliott in mid-1940 to furnish advanced training and serve as a base for West Coast elements of the FMF. Until then San Diego had housed both of those activities, and with the speeding-up expansion program they were beginning to get in each other's way. The first FMF units began the transfer early in 1941 and greatly eased the pressure; though, as will be seen, Camp Elliott itself was eventually pressured out of existence.

Quantico, acquired by the Marine Corps immediately following U. S. entry into World War I, found its difficulties less readily resolved. During the interim between wars, this post assumed a position of paramount importance in the development of Marine amphibious doctrine and techniques, and in the training of Marine officers and technicians. The passage of years saw additional educational units move in until the Virginia base became the center of higher learning for the Marine Corps.

Advent of the national emergency soon made it apparent that no practicable physical expansion would enable Quantico to continue these activities, all rapidly growing and intensifying in scope, and at the same time serve as home base for east coast FMF units, especially when operational forces were to reach division size. Parris Island, hard pressed to keep abreast of its own problems, could do

little to relieve the pressure. Clearly the situation called for construction of an entirely new and extensive base for FMF operations on the eastern seaboard. This required Congressional approval, which was obtained on 15 February 1941.

The site selected lay in the New River-Neuse River area of the North Carolina coast. The surveying and purchasing of land began immediately. By the end of April this preliminary work had been completed, and construction of Tent Camp #1, Marine Barracks, New River commenced. The isolated location of the area made development an enormous task. Transportation to the site was almost nonexistent, electric power lines were either lacking or greatly overloaded and able to provide but a fraction of the current needed. And the necessary labor could be obtained only by offering special inducements to workers. Both the Marine Corps and civilian contractors approached these problems to such good effect that by the summer of 1941 the far-from-completed camp had reached a stage of development that made it available for use.

The fledgling 1st Marine Division, still understrength,<sup>14</sup> moved in shortly after its return from maneuvers in the Caribbean. There it participated in a series of amphibious exercises, one with the Army's 1st Infantry Division, the first of four Army divisions to receive such training jointly with Marine units or under the direction of Marine officers.

Men of the Marine division pitched in to improve camp conditions while continuing their intensive training for combat.

<sup>14</sup> While the table of organization listed three, the 1st MarDiv had only two infantry regiments at this time.

Civilian contractors pushed construction of permanent buildings so effectively that soon various specialized training and schooling facilities and other units began transferring to the new base from both Quantico and Parris Island. The 1st Marine Division, however, had long since departed beyond the seas by the time Marine Barracks, New River, reached the stage of development where the powers that be saw fit to dignify it, late in 1942, with the name Camp Lejeune.

Like the division, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing began outgrowing its Quantico facilities long before it achieved full strength. Even while development progressed at New River, the Marine Corps obtained authorization for a new air base nearby. Cunningham Field, Cherry Point, North Carolina, was designated a Marine Corps Air Station for development purposes on 1 December 1941, and work began on what would become by commissioning day, 20 May 1942, a vast new base capable of handling the greater part of a completely built-up Marine aircraft wing.<sup>15</sup>

On the west coast, Camp Elliott, less hampered than Quantico by a multiplicity of activities, proved capable initially of handling the vastly increased load of advanced training, though the camp was expanded and developed to many times its original size in the process. Its 29,000 acres housed the 2d Marine Division from its activation until its departure for the Pacific. It also became the home of the Marine Corps' first tank training center and the infantry training center for numerous replacement drafts.

<sup>15</sup> *AdminHist*, 159.

*OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS:  
ATLANTIC*<sup>16</sup>

During the years between wars, the pervasive spirit of pacifism which led to repeated attempts by this country to cooperate in reduction of naval armaments and in international treaties militated against adequate defense preparations, as did budgetary restrictions. Such peace as these measures achieved proved uneasy at best, but the fact that the U. S. lived up to its agreements, whereas some other nations did not, contributed toward making our defense program a shadow of what it might have been. This was particularly serious in the Pacific, as will be seen. But in 1939-41, with war flaming through Europe, the more immediate danger lay in the Atlantic where Hitler's submarines appeared nearly invincible.

In the fall of 1939 the United States armed forces were barely adequate for the defense of the Western Hemisphere. As long as the national sentiment did not sanction total rearmament and military expansion, the administration was forced to rely on existent means and a partial mobilization of both manpower and material. Unfortunately, the lull in military operations in Europe during the winter of 1939-1940 seemed to justify public apathy and made the problem of rearmament more difficult for the President and his military planners.

Britain's historical dominance of the Atlantic sea lanes had given us a false sense of security there, and permitted the United States to commit a major part of

the Navy to guard against Japanese aggression in the Pacific. However, the German offensive in the spring of 1940 served to jolt Americans from their complacency. German troops overran Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries, and France. President Roosevelt recognized the danger in this and caused a shift in our military policy to provide greater security in the Atlantic.

During the summer and fall of 1940, Congress stepped up the procurement of aircraft, mobilized the reserves, passed selective service legislation, and launched the two-ocean navy building program. But completion of these measures would take time, and we had no assurance that the Axis partners would sit idly by and enjoy the fruits of their initial aggression. To implement the rearmament program, President Roosevelt adopted the policy of aiding Britain and Russia (after June 1941) while continuing diplomatic relations with Germany and Japan. With industry expanding and the armed forces increasing in size and equipment, the Administration did everything short of war to bolster Britain's tottering position.

In the fall of 1940 Britain and the United States completed negotiations which culminated in one of the most extraordinary military deals in history. Britain, holding numerous Caribbean possessions, desperately needed additional convoy vessels to protect her vital Atlantic supply line against submarine depredations; the U. S., possessor of numerous overage destroyers, wished to strengthen defense of eastern approaches to the mainland and the Panama Canal. As a result of this situation, on 2 September 1940 the U. S. agreed to swap 50 of these destroy-

<sup>16</sup>Unless otherwise noted the material in this and the following sections is derived from *Hemisphere Defense; Undeclared War; Strategic Planning; Battle of the Atlantic*.

ers<sup>17</sup> in return for 99-year leases on certain base sites in various strategically placed British possessions: the Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, Saint Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana.

Since plans called for development of these sites into naval activities of varying nature, the first Americans to move in were Marines of the several security guard detachments. The same held true in the case of two additional bases not included in the destroyer deal: at Argentia (Newfoundland) and in Bermuda. Thus, while in the throes of expanding the FMF, the Marine Corps found itself saddled with still more garrison duty beyond the continental limits of the United States.

#### *DEFENSE OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE: MARTINIQUE*

The fall of France and the Netherlands alarmed the United States to the danger that New World possessions of these countries<sup>18</sup> might fall into Germany's hands should Hitler force the conquered nations to cede them, or to provide servicing there for German U-Boats operating in the Atlantic.

Martinique, the administrative and economic center of France's colonies in the Caribbean, became the focal point of

<sup>17</sup> These were 1,200-ton, flush-deck four-stackers, vintage of World War I, many of which had been laid up since that struggle and had to be recommissioned. By the time the trade was completed (10Apr41), the U. S. had become more deeply involved and threw in an additional 10 escort vessels of the "Lake" class Coast Guard cutter.

<sup>18</sup> Dutch Guiana, Aruba, and Curacao; French Guiana on the South American continent; Saint Pierre and Miquelon off Newfoundland; Martinique, Guadeloupe, and several smaller islands in the West Indies.

American interest and concern. For should the three French warships there, including the aircraft carrier *Bearn* (loaded with 106 American-manufactured fighter planes destined for pre-Vichy France), be taken over by the enemy, the security of British and American shipping in the Atlantic would be seriously threatened. Furthermore, the French High Commissioner for the Antilles, Rear Admiral Georges Robert had declared his allegiance to the Vichy government and was emphatic in his refusal to accept American and British offers of "protection."

One solution, and one which was immediately discarded, called for an American break with Vichy and the occupation of the islands by American forces. It was not expected, however, that Admiral Robert would yield without a fight—and we were not ready to scrap our neutral policy and draw accusations of Yankee imperialism from friendly Western Hemisphere nations. Dire necessity, however, required some plan of operation. On 8 July 1940, the Joint Planning Committee completed a plan for an expeditionary force, to be readied for embarkation from New York on or about 15 July. The 1st Marine Brigade<sup>19</sup> was earmarked for the initial landing force, to be followed by a task force based on the Army's 1st Infantry Division.

While the expeditionary force was readied, officials of the Departments of State and Navy worked out a compromise to relieve the tense situation. The Ameri-

<sup>19</sup> The 1st MarBrig then based at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was composed of 5th Mar, 1st Bn, 10th Mar (artillery), 1st EngBn, 1st MedBn, three provisional (casual) companies, BrigHqCo, and one company each of service troops, chemical troops, tanks, and motor transport.



can representative in negotiations that followed, Rear Admiral John W. Greenslade, arrived at an agreement with Admiral Robert to maintain the *status quo*; and the "hot" Martinique problem was temporarily resolved without the United States being forced into military action.

However, heightened tensions during the late summer of 1940 again indicated the possibility of French connivance with Germany. Accordingly, late in October 1940 the President ". . . asked the Navy to draft a plan for an emergency operation. . . ." <sup>20</sup> This plan called for an assault on Martinique, by a naval force including a landing party of some 2,800 Marines of the 1st Marine Brigade, to be supported by two reinforced Army regiments. Later plans increased the size of the force; revised estimates were based on the possibility of more than token resistance from the seven to eight thousand French soldiers and sailors on the island.

Fortunately, the operation against Martinique died stillborn. Admiral Greenslade reached a new "gentlemen's agreement" with Admiral Robert, although there were frequent instances later when President Roosevelt still thought it might be necessary to occupy the island. The Marine Corps remained prepared for possible action until Admiral Robert surrendered his command to American Vice Admiral John S. Hoover in June 1943.

### THE AZORES

As early as spring 1940, President Roosevelt was deeply concerned over the possibility of a German invasion of the Portuguese Azores. These islands lie athwart the vital shipping lanes between

the United States and the Mediterranean, and Europe and South America. While the Army considered them of little value in Western Hemisphere defense considerations, their danger was measurable by their value to Germany. From air bases and naval facilities in the islands, German aircraft and submarines could sortie after the bulk of British shipping.

Our deep concern for the safety and integrity of the islands led to a series of discussions with both the British, Portugal's ally, and the Lisbon government. By October 1940, United States Army and Navy planning officers had drafted a plan for a surprise seizure of the Azores. However, the plan to land one reinforced division was built on sand: the Army did not have the necessary troops to commit, nor did the Navy have adequate ships to transport and support the landing force. And, politically, it was contrary to American policy at this time to become a *de facto* participant in the European war.

By May 1941 intelligence estimates from Europe again indicated the possibility of a German movement into the Iberian peninsula and German occupation of the Azores and adjacent islands. On the 22d of that month, President Roosevelt directed the Army and Navy to draft a new plan for an expedition to occupy the Azores. This plan (GRAY), approved by the Joint Board on 29 May, provided for a landing force of 28,000 combat troops, half Marine and half Army; the Navy was responsible for transporting and supporting the force. Major General H. M. Smith, USMC, would command the landing force, under Rear Admiral Ernest J. King, the expeditionary commander.

However, while these preparations were being made, other factors developed and

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Hemisphere Defense*, Chap IV, 6.

altered the original mission of the mixed force. Portugal was opposed to an American occupation of the Azores, and United States planners became preoccupied with the threat of German efforts to occupy South America, particularly Brazil. The succeeding weeks witnessed a change in both the urgency for the Azores operation and in the mission of the Marine complement of the Azores force.

During the early part of June, intelligence sources in Europe produced creditable evidence that Germany did not plan to invade Spain and Portugal but intended rather to attack in the opposite direction. Russia would be Hitler's next objective. The forecast of the German plans put an end to American fears for the safety of the Azores, and permitted the United States to divert the Marines to Iceland.

#### DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY

How thin the Marine Corps had to spread its manpower in order to fulfill its many commitments is indicated by the table that follows showing the distribution effective 30 November 1941, on the eve of Pearl Harbor. The fact that the figures quoted do not add up to total Corps strength is accounted for by omission of minor categories involving individuals or small groups of men.

#### PEARL HARBOR TO GUADALCANAL

##### *Continental U. S. (non-FMF)*

Major Marine Corps Bases <sup>21</sup> .....	14, 707
Posts & Stations (43).....	10, 089
Headquarters & Staff.....	780
Recruiting (4 districts).....	847
Total.....	26, 423

##### *Overseas (non-FMF)*

Posts & Stations (24).....	3, 367
Tactical Units <sup>22</sup> .....	5, 498
Shipboard Detachments (68).....	3, 793
Total.....	12, 658

##### *Fleet Marine Force, Continental U. S.*

1st MarDiv.....	8, 918
2d MarDiv (less dets).....	7, 540
2d DefBn.....	865
1st MAW.....	1, 301
2d MAW (less dets).....	682
Miscellaneous.....	633
Total.....	19, 939

##### *Fleet Marine Force, Overseas*

5 DefBns (Pacific).....	4, 399
2d MAW (elements) (Pacific).....	733
2d MarDiv (elements) (Pacific).....	489
Total.....	5, 621
Total above categories.....	64, 641
Total strength Marine Corps.....	65, 881

<sup>21</sup> Quantico, Parris Island, San Diego, Camp Elliott, New River.

<sup>22</sup> 4th Mar (Philippines), 801; 1st SepBn (Philippines), 725; 1st MarBrig(Prov) (Iceland), 3,972.

PART TWO

*War Comes*

## Prewar Situation in the Pacific

### *SUMMARY OF NEGOTIATIONS*<sup>1</sup>

In the late years of the 19th Century and the early decades of the 20th, Japan set out to gain more territory. Consistently following a policy of encroachment in Asia and the Pacific, and retreating only when confronted with the threat of superior force, the Japanese Empire steadily grew in size and strength. Warning signals of an impending clash between Japan and the Western nations with extensive interests in the Orient became increasingly evident. In the 1930's when these nations were gripped by economic depression and their military expenditures were cut to the bone, Japan struck brazenly.

In 1931 Japanese troops invaded Manchuria and no concerted international military effort was made to halt the seizure. An ineffectual censure by the League of Nations, far from discouraging Japan, emboldened her to further action. Angrily, the Japanese delegates stalked out at Geneva and gave formal notice of intention to withdraw from the League. The country thickened its curtain of secrecy which shrouded the League-man-

dated islands awarded Japan as its share of the spoil of German possessions lost in World War I. In 1934 the Japanese served notice that they would no longer abide by the limitations of the Washington Naval Disarmament Treaty of 1922. Finally, in 1937, Japan attacked China and horrified the world with the excesses committed by her soldiers in the infamous Rape of Nanking. But still there was no effective military action to curb this rampant aggression.

In this period Japan was not without supporters. Germany and Italy, bent on similar programs of territorial aggrandizement in Europe and Africa, made common cause with the Japanese. These "Axis" powers signed a mutual assistance pact in 1937, ostensibly aimed at the Communist Cominform, but in essence as a show of strength to forestall interference with their plans of conquest. In August 1940, after the outbreak of war in Europe and the fall of France, Germany forced the Vichy Government to consent to Japanese occupation of northern Indo-China. The three predatory nations combined again in less than a month, this time in the Tripartite Treaty of 27 September which promised concerted action by the Axis in case of war with the United States.

The United States, traditionally a friend of China and a supporter of an "Open Door" policy in Asia, strongly opposed Japanese moves to establish hegemony over the strife-torn Chinese Republic.

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from Senate Doc No. 244, 79th Congress, 2d Session, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack* (Washington: GPO, 1946), hereinafter cited as *Pearl Harbor Rept* and the Committee's record of 39 volumes of hearings and exhibits, hereinafter cited as *Hearings Record*; G. N. Steiger, *A History of the Far East* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1944).

While the political sentiment of the majority of Americans in the late 1930's would condone no direct military intervention, the government and the nation were openly sympathetic to the Chinese cause. Both moral and legal embargoes against munitions shipments to Japan were put into effect and increasing amounts of material aid given to China. American pilots, including members of the armed forces, were permitted to volunteer to fly for the Chinese Air Force against the Japanese.<sup>2</sup>

By early 1941 Japan was hurt in pride, purse, and potency as a result of American political and economic measures taken to halt its expansion. In March a new Ambassador, Admiral Nomura, was sent to Washington to negotiate a settlement of Japanese-American differences. He was confronted with a statement of four principles which represented the basic American position in negotiations. These were:

- (1) Respect for the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of each and all nations;
- (2) Support of the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries;
- (3) Support of the principle of equality, including equality of commercial opportunity;
- (4) Nondisturbance of the *status quo* in the Pacific except as the *status quo* may be altered by peaceful means.<sup>3</sup>

In retrospect, it seems obvious that there was little likelihood of Japan accepting any of these principles as a basis for negotiations. At the time, however, considerable and protracted effort was made to resolve differences. Postwar evidence indicates that the Japanese Premier, Prince Konoye, as well as Ambassador Nomura were sincere in their efforts to

achieve a peaceful solution of the threatening situation in the Pacific. It was not Konoye, however, who called the turn in Imperial policy, but the Japanese Army. And the Army adamantly refused to consider any concession that might cause it to lose face.

After Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, the longtime threat of Soviet intervention in Japan's plans for expansion was virtually eliminated. The Japanese Army moved swiftly to grab more territory and to add to its strength. Southern Indo-China was occupied and conscripts and reservists were called up. In the face of this fresh evidence of Japanese intransigence, President Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in the United States, effectively severing the last commercial contact between the two nations.

In October the Army forced the Konoye Cabinet to resign and replaced it with a government entirely sympathetic to its position.<sup>4</sup> The new premier, General Tojo, sent a special representative, Saburu Kurusu, to Washington to assist Nomura and revitalize negotiations. The Japanese diplomats were in an untenable position. They were instructed, in effect, to get the United States to accept Japanese territorial seizures on Japanese terms. Their mission was hopeless, but behind its facade of seeming interest in true negotiations, Tojo's government speeded up its preparations for war. As far as the Japanese leaders were concerned, war with the United States was a now or never proposition, since American-inspired economic sanctions would soon rob them of the necessary raw materials, particularly

<sup>2</sup> *United States Relations with China* (Washington: Dept of State, 1949), 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Hearings Record*, Part 2, 1103-1104.

<sup>4</sup> M. Kato, *The Lost War* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1946), 48.

oil, which they had to have to supply their military machine.

The only event that might have halted Japanese war preparations would have been a complete abnegation by the United States of its principles of negotiation. On 22 November Ambassador Kurusu received the third and last of a series of communiques from Japan setting deadlines for successful negotiations. He was informed that after 29 November things were "automatically going to happen."<sup>5</sup>

As far as the Japanese were concerned negotiations were at an end and the time for direct action had come. The two Japanese envoys were carefully instructed, however, not to give the impression that talks had been broken off. The stage had been set for "the day that will live in infamy."

After an extremely thorough investigation of the negotiations during this period prior to the outbreak of the war, a Joint Congressional Committee summed up the duplicity of Japanese negotiations in this succinct statement:

In considering the negotiations in their entirety the conclusion is inescapable that Japan had no concessions to make and that her program of aggression was immutable.<sup>6</sup>

### JAPANESE WAR PLAN<sup>7</sup>

Both the United States and Japan had developed plans for war in the Pacific long before December 1941. Each nation

considered the other to be its most probable enemy. There was, however, a fundamental moral difference between the respective war plans. The Americans planned for defense and retaliation in case of attack; the Japanese intended to strike the first blow. (See Map 1, Map Section)

Japan's prime objective was economic self-sufficiency, and the prize she sought was control of the rich natural resources of Southeast Asia and the islands of the East Indies, her "Southern Resources Area." The Japanese were well aware that invasion in this area would bring them into conflict with a coalition of powers. The lands they aspired to conquer were the possessions or protectorates of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the United States. By means of surprise attacks, launched simultaneously on a half dozen different fronts, the Japanese expected to catch the Allies off-balance and ill-prepared.

The obvious threat of war with Japan had not been ignored by any of these Allied nations, but the tremendous advantage of choice of time and place of attack rested with the aggressor. Japan intended to strike during a period when most of the resources in men and material of the British Commonwealth were being devoted to the defeat of the European Axis partners. The Netherlands, which existed only as a government-in-exile, could contribute quite a few ships but only a small number of men to a common defense force. And the United States, most certainly Japan's strongest enemy, was heavily committed to support the Allies in Europe and the Near East. Moreover, that nation was only partially mobilized for war.

The initial Japanese war concept did not envisage the occupation of any terri-

<sup>5</sup> *Hearings Record*, Part 12, Exhibit No. 1, 165.

<sup>6</sup> *Pearl Harbor Rept.*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from *Pearl Harbor Rept.; Hearings Record*, Part 13, Exhibits 8-8D, Japanese Records; USSBS (Pac). *NavAnalysisDiv, Campaigns of the Pacific War* (Washington: GPO, 1946), hereinafter cited as *Campaigns of the Pacific War*.

tory east of Tarawa in the Gilberts. All operations beyond the limits of the Southern Resources Area were designed to establish and protect a defensive perimeter. The cordon of strategic bases and island outposts was to stretch from the Kuriles through Wake Atoll to the Marshalls and Gilberts and thence west to the Bismarck Archipelago. The islands of Timor, Java, and Sumatra in the East Indies were to be seized and Japanese troops were to occupy the Malayan Peninsula and Burma.

The major force which might prevent or delay the accomplishment of the Japanese plan was the United States Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor. Recognizing the threat posed by the American naval strength, the Commander in Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, directed that a study be made of the feasibility of a surprise aerial attack on Pearl, timed to coincide with the outbreak of war. In February 1941 the first staff considerations of the projected raid were begun, but the actual details of the operation were not worked out until September when it seemed increasingly obvious to the Japanese high command that war was inevitable and that they needed this bold stroke to insure the success of initial attacks.

On 3 November the Chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Osami Nagano, approved the draft plan, and on the 5th commanders of fleets and task forces were given their assignments. Orders were issued to selected task force units to begin moving singly and in small groups to Hitokappu Bay in the Kuriles on or about 15 November. Ten days later a striking force, its core six large fleet carriers transporting the pick of the Japanese Navy's planes and pilots, sortied from the secluded anchorage bound for the Hawaiian

Islands. The approach route lay well north of the search areas patrolled by American planes based at Midway and Wake and out of normal shipping lanes.

The tentative day of attack, X-day, had been set for a Sunday, 7 December (Pearl Harbor time). Japanese intelligence indicated that most of the Pacific Fleet would be in port on a weekend. Tallies of the ships present at the Pearl Harbor Naval Base received from the Japanese consulate at Honolulu were transmitted to the attack force as late as 5 December. Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, the striking force commander, received orders from Yamamoto on 2 December confirming the chosen date. There was still time to turn back; if the approaching ships had been discovered prior to 6 December they had orders to return. No one saw them, however, and the carriers arrived at their launching point right on schedule.

At midnight of 6-7 December, the Japanese Combined Fleet Operation Order No. 1 informed its readers that a state of war existed with the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands.

#### *AMERICAN WAR PLAN*<sup>8</sup>

A nation's war plans are never static. The constantly changing world political scene demands continual reevaluation and amendment. In the 1930's, American war

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from *Pearl Harbor Rept*; Navy Basic War Plan—Rainbow No. 5 (WPL-46), 26May41 and Appendix I, Joint Army-Navy Basic War Plan Rainbow No. 5, quoted in full in *Hearings Record*, Part 33, Exhibit No. 4; MarCorps Plan C-2, Rainbow No. 5, 5Jun41, Plans & Policies Div Files; M. S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations—United States Army in World War II* (Washington: HistDiv, DA, 1950); S. E. Morison,

plans were concerned primarily with courses of action to be taken in the event of a conflict in one theatre and against one nation or a contiguous group of nations. In these so-called "color plans," each probable enemy was assigned a separate color designation; Japan became Orange. With the advent of the Axis coalition, American military men began thinking in terms of a true world war. As these new plans evolved they were given the name Rainbow to signify their concept of a multi-national war.

The United States was deeply involved in the war in Europe soon after its outbreak, if not as an active belligerent, then as the arsenal of the democracies. By the spring of 1941 American naval vessels were convoying shipments of war materiel at least part of the way to Europe and they were actively guarding against German submarines a Neutrality Zone that extended far out into the Atlantic. The intent of these measures and others similar to them was clearly to support Britain in its war against Germany, Italy, and their satellites. There was little question where the sympathies of the majority of Americans lay in this struggle and none at all regarding the position of their government.

On 29 January 1941, ranking British and American staff officers met in Washington to discuss joint measures to be taken if the United States should be forced to a war with the Axis Powers. It was regarded as almost certain that the outbreak of hostilities with any one

of the Axis partners would bring immediate declarations of war from the others. By insuring action on two widely separated fronts, the Axis could expect at the very least a decreased Allied capability to concentrate their forces. The American-British conversations ended on 27 March with an agreement (ABC-1) which was to have a profound effect on the course of World War II. Its basic strategical decision, which never was discarded, stated that:

Since Germany is the predominant member of the Axis Powers, the Atlantic and European area is considered to be the decisive theatre. The principal United States military effort will be exerted in that theatre, and operations of United States forces in other theatres will be conducted in such a manner as to facilitate that effort . . . . If Japan does enter the war, the Military Strategy in the Far East will be defensive.<sup>9</sup>

The defensive implied in the war against Japan was not to be a holding action, however, but rather a strategic defensive that contemplated a series of tactical offensives with the Pacific Fleet as the striking force. A new American war plan, Rainbow 5, was promulgated soon after the end of the American-British talks. Almost the whole of the Pacific was made an American strategic responsibility and the Army's primary mission under the plan was cooperation with and support of the fleet.

A listing of the contemplated offensive actions of Rainbow 5, which included the capture of the Caroline and Marshall Islands, would be interesting but academic. The success of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor forced a drastic revision of strategy which effectively postponed amphib-

---

*The Rising Sun in the Pacific 1931-April 1942—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), hereinafter cited as *Rising Sun in the Pacific*.

---

<sup>9</sup> Para 13 of ABC-1 quoted in *Hearings Record*, Part 33, 958.



ious assaults in the Central Pacific. Certain defensive measures which were mentioned in the plan, however, were implemented prior to the outbreak of war and in most of them Marine forces figured prominently.

Some of the Marine defense battalions, tailored to meet the needs of garrisons for isolated island outposts, were already in the Pacific by the time Rainbow 5 was published. The plan called for the development of bases, primarily air bases, at Midway, Johnston, Palmyra, Samoa, and Wake. All of these islands, which were under control of the Navy, were to have Marine garrisons. Guam, in the center of the Japanese-held Marianas, which had long had a small Marine barracks detachment, was decisively written off in the war plan; its early capture by the Japanese was conceded. The rest of the islands were placed in a category which called for defense forces sufficient to repel major attacks.

The purpose of establishing bases on these islands was twofold. Samoa was to help protect the routes of communication to the Southwest Pacific; Johnston, Palmyra, Wake, and Midway were to serve as outguards for the Pacific Fleet's home port at Pearl. (See Map 1, Map Section)

#### MARINE GARRISONS<sup>10</sup>

The Navy did not start cold with its advance base development scheme for the four island outposts of the Hawaiian

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from CNO Serial 070412, 23Jun41, "Policy regarding employment of Marine Defense Battalions in the Pacific Area" (located at NRMC); CNO Serial 091812, 25Sep41, "Employment of Marine Defense Battalions"; CO, 1st DefBn ltr to OIC, HistDiv,

Group. A blueprint for base expansion in the Pacific had been laid out in the report of the Navy's Hepburn Board, a Congressionally authorized fact-finding group which, in the spring of 1938, made a strategic study of the need for additional United States naval bases. The potential utility of Midway, Wake, Johnston, and Palmyra was recognized,<sup>11</sup> and surveys were conducted and plans made for the construction of base facilities, airfields, and seadromes during 1939 and 1940. The responsibility for developing garrison plans and locating coastal and antiaircraft gun positions was given to Colonel Harry K. Pickett, 14th Naval District Marine Officer and Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. The fact that Colonel Pickett personally surveyed most of the base sites insured active and knowledgeable cooperation at Pearl Harbor with requests from the islands for men and materiel to implement the garrison plans.

Although they were popularly referred to in the singular sense, a custom that will be continued in this narrative, each of the outposts was actually a coral atoll encompassing varying numbers of bleak, low-

HQMC, 29Dec43; CO, 3d DefBn ltr to OIC, HistDiv, HQMC, 4Feb44; MD, 1st DefBn, PalmyraIs, Annual Rept of Activities, 1Jul43; Hist of the 7th DefBn, 21Dec42; 1st SamoanBn, MCR, Annual Rept of Activities, 1Jul42; LtCol R. D. Heintz, *The Defense of Wake* (Washington: HistSec, PubInfoDiv, HQMC, 1947), hereinafter cited as *Defense of Wake*; LtCol R. D. Heintz, *Marines at Midway* (Washington: HistSec, PubInfoDiv, HQMC, 1948), hereinafter cited as *Marines at Midway*.

<sup>11</sup> House Doc No. 65, 76th Congress, 1st Session, "Report on the Need of Additional Naval Bases to Defend the Coast of the United States, its Territories and Possessions" (Hepburn Board Rept), 3Jan39, *passim*.

lying sand islands within a fringing reef. Each atoll had at least one island big enough to contain an airstrip; Midway had two. The lagoons within the reefs were all large enough to permit the dredging and blasting of seaplane landing lanes and anchorages for small cargo ships; Midway's and Wake's were also slated for development as forward bases for the Pacific Fleet's submarines. Civilian contractors were hired to build the naval base installations, but until war actually broke out most of the work on the island defenses was done by the men who were to man them, Marines of the 1st, 3d, and 6th Defense Battalions.

The organization of the defense battalions varied according to time and place of employment, but by late 1941 the standard T/O called for a unit with more than 900 men assigned to a headquarters battery, three 5-inch coast defense gun batteries, three 3-inch antiaircraft batteries, a sound locator and searchlight battery, a battery of .50 caliber antiaircraft machine guns, and a battery of .30 caliber machine guns for beach defense. Midway was the only outpost that actually drew an entire battalion, although Wake originally was slated to be garrisoned by one. On Johnston and Palmyra the habitable area was so limited that it was impossible to accommodate more than a small defense detachment.

Some development work had been done on Wake and Midway, the two northern islands, before the arrival of the naval contractors' construction crews. In 1935 Pan American World Airways had set up way stations for its Clipper service to the Orient on both Midway and Wake and a relay station of the trans-Pacific cable had been in operation on Midway's Sand Is-

land since 1903. Most construction, like the passenger hotel on Wake and the quarters for the airline's and cable company's personnel, was of little military value.

Midway, which had the most ambitious base plan, was also the first outpost scheduled to receive a Marine garrison—the 3d Defense Battalion which arrived at Pearl Harbor on 7 May 1940. The bulk of the battalion remained in Hawaii for the next eight months while reconnaissance details, followed by small advance parties, did the preliminary work on supply and defense installations.<sup>12</sup> On 27 January 1941, in the face of the threat posed by Japan's aggressive actions, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) directed that the rest of the 3d Defense Battalion be moved to Midway, that detachments of the 1st Defense Battalion be established at Johnston and Palmyra, and that the 6th Defense Battalion, then in training at San Diego, move to Pearl Harbor as a replacement and reserve unit for the outposts.<sup>13</sup>

On 15 February, the same day that the 3d Battalion began unloading its heavy equipment at Midway, an advance detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion left San Diego on the *Enterprise*. At Pearl Harbor the detachment left the carrier and transferred to a small cargo ship that steamed on to the southwest for 800 miles

---

<sup>12</sup> BriGen A. R. Pefey notes on draft manuscript, 14Jan57. Since all fresh water had to be distilled, the capacity of the distillers set the limit for the size of the island garrison. In terms of water consumption each contractor's workman took the place of a Marine. Adm C. C. Bloch ltr to ACofS, G-3, HQMC, 7Jan57.

<sup>13</sup> CNO Serial 0618, 17Jan41, "Establishment of Permanent Marine Defense Forces at Johnston, Midway, and Palmyra Islands."

to reach tiny Johnston where on 3 March two 5-inch guns, six Marines, and two naval corpsmen were set ashore. After a few days layover to help the caretaker detail get set up, the rest of the advance party (3 officers and 45 enlisted men) went on to Palmyra, approximately 1,100 miles south of Oahu.

After the remainder of the 1st Defense Battalion arrived at Pearl, small reinforcing detachments were gradually added to the southern outpost garrisons as the islands' supply and quartering facilities were expanded. On Johnston and Palmyra, as at Midway, the civilian contractors' crews and construction equipment were heavily committed to the naval air base program, and only occasionally could the Marines borrow a bulldozer, truck, or grader to help out in their own extensive schedule of defense construction. For the most part, the garrisons relied on pick and shovel to get their guns emplaced and to dig in the ammunition magazines, command posts, and fire direction centers necessary for island defense.

Duty on the small atolls was arduous and dull with little relief from the monotony of a steady round of work and training. When a few hours off was granted, there was no place to go and little to do; the visible world shrank to a few uninviting acres of dunes, scrub brush, and coral surrounded by seemingly endless stretches of ocean. The visits of patrol planes, supply ships, and even inspection parties were welcomed. Under the circumstances, morale at the isolated posts remained surprisingly high, helped perhaps by the prospect of action.

In so far as possible, the 14th Naval District attempted to follow a policy of

rotation for the men at the outlying posts, replacing those that had been longest "in the field" with men from Pearl Harbor. In midsummer a group of 1st Defense Battalion personnel was sent to Midway to start the relief of the 3d Battalion and on 11 September the 6th Defense Battalion arrived to take over as the atoll's garrison. The 3d Battalion returned to Hawaii for a well-deserved break from the gruelling monotony and work of building defenses.

By August 1941 the work on the naval air base at Wake was well along and the need for a garrison there was imperative. An advance detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion arrived at the atoll on 19 August and immediately began the now familiar process of backbreaking work to dig in guns, dumps, aid stations, and command posts. Again the contractor's men and machines were largely devoted to work on the airfield and the lagoon, and the Marines had to get along with the hand tools organic to the unit. In late October reinforcements from the parent battalion made the 2,000-mile trip from Hawaii to bring the garrison up to a strength of nearly 400 men. The unit scheduled to be the permanent garrison on Wake, the 4th Defense Battalion, arrived at Pearl Harbor on 1 December, too late to reinforce or replace the Wake Detachment. A most important addition to the atoll's defenses did arrive, however, before war broke. Twelve Grumman Wildcats of Marine Fighter Squadron 211 flew in to the airstrip off the *Enterprise* on 4 December.

Just before the Japanese attacked, the strength of defense battalion personnel on outpost duty and at Pearl Harbor was:

	Pearl Harbor		Johnston		Palmyra		Midway		Wake	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl	Off	Enl	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
1st DefBn.....	20	241	7	155	7	151			16	406
3d DefBn.....	40	823						1		
4th DefBn.....	38	780								
6th DefBn.....	4	17					33	810		

For armament the outposts relied mainly on the organic weapons of the defense battalions: 5-inch naval guns, 3-inch antiaircraft guns, and .30 and .50 caliber machine guns. Midway had, in addition, three 7-inch naval guns still to be mounted and a fourth gun at Pearl Harbor waiting to be shipped. The breakdown of weapon strength showed:<sup>14</sup>

	Midway	Johnston	Palmyra	Wake
5-inch guns...--	6	2	4	6
3-inch guns...--	12	4	4	12
.50 cal MGs...--	30	8	8	18
.30 cal MGs...--	30	8	8	30

Although the list of weapons was imposing, the garrisons were not strong enough to man them adequately; the standard defense battalion of 1941, moreover, included no infantry.

In contrast to the garrisons of the Pearl Harbor outposts, the 7th Defense Battalion slated for duty at Tutuila, main island of American Samoa, was a composite infantry-artillery unit. The battalion was organized at San Diego on 16 December 1940 with an initial strength of 25 officers and 392 enlisted men. Its T/O called for

<sup>14</sup> ComFourteen Rept of Status of DefBns assigned to the 14th ND, 1Dec41 (located at NRMC). Personnel figures include naval medical personnel assigned to the defense battalions.

a headquarters company, an infantry company, and an artillery battery as well as a small detail which had the mission of organizing and training a battalion of Samoan reservists.

The islands of American Samoa had a native population of almost 10,000 which could be drawn upon as a labor force and for troops to back up a regular garrison. This was not the only significant difference between the outpost atolls and Samoa, however. The terrain of Tutuila, which was by far the largest and most heavily populated of the islands, was mountainous and heavily forested, and its 52 square miles contained a number of areas that could be converted into camps and supply depots. There was room for training areas and small arms ranges. The fine harbor at Pago Pago, site of the U. S. Naval Station and headquarters of the naval governor, could be used by large vessels. This combination of harbor, elbow room, and an indigenous labor force, plus its location along the shipping route to the Southwest Pacific, made Tutuila a vital strategic base. (See Map 3)

During the spring and early summer of 1940, Major Alfred R. Pefley of Colonel Pickett's staff made a thorough survey of Tutuila and prepared a detailed plan for its defense. On 29 November the CNO directed that defense plans based on Pefley's recommendations be implemented

immediately. The naval governor was authorized to begin construction of coast defense and antiaircraft gun positions. Most of the guns to be mounted were already in storage at the naval station and the Bureau of Ordnance was directed to provide the ammunition and additional weapons still needed.<sup>15</sup>

The primary purpose of raising the 7th Defense Battalion was the manning of the four 6-inch naval guns and six 3-inch antiaircraft guns provided for in initial defense plans. The wisdom of including infantry in the battalion and making provision for reinforcement by trained Samoan reserves can hardly be questioned. Tutuila was far too large an island to be adequately protected by a relatively few big guns, most of which were concentrated around Pago Pago harbor. Small beach defense garrisons were needed all around the island shorelines to check enemy raiding parties. It was intended that most of the Samoan reserves would be equipped and trained with rifles taken from naval stores and used in the beach defenses where their knowledge of the terrain would be invaluable.

An advance party of the 7th Defense Battalion, which left the States before the unit was formally activated, arrived at Pago Pago on 21 December 1940. The rest of the battalion made the 4,500-mile voyage from San Diego via Pearl Harbor in March, arriving on the 15th. The next months were busy ones as guns were emplaced and test fired, beach defenses were constructed, miles of communication lines were laid, and trails were cut which would enable quick reinforcement of threatened landing points.

<sup>15</sup> CNO serial 054430, 29Nov40, "Defense of American Samoa."

It was midsummer before the first Samoan Marine was actually enlisted, but many natives voluntarily took weapons training on an unpaid status, continuing a practice begun by the naval governor in November 1940.<sup>16</sup> The first native recruit was enlisted on 16 August 1941 and the 1st Samoan Battalion, Marine Corps Reserve, was a going concern by the time war broke. The authorized strength of the battalion was 500 enlisted men, but this figure could never be reached because of the great number of men needed as laborers on essential base construction.

There was one factor of the defense picture at Tutuila that matched the situation at Midway, Johnston, and Palmyra. None of these islands had, at the onset of war, any land planes. The Marine air squadrons which were scheduled to join the defenders were either still in the States or else based on Oahu, waiting for the signal that the airfields were ready for use. That part of Marine Air which was in the Hawaiian Islands was based at Ewa Field, located approximately four air miles west of Pearl Harbor. Just prior to the Japanese attack, the units stationed at the field were Headquarters and Service Squadron of Marine Aircraft Group 21 (MAG-21); Marine Scout Bomber Squadron 232 (VMSB-232); Marine Utility Squadron 252 (VMJ-252); and the rear echelon of VMF-211, which had moved forward to Wake. Operational control of the Marine planes in the Hawaiian area was exercised by the Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, Pacific Fleet.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Gov of AmerSamoa ltr to CNO, 13Feb41, "Establishment of Native Insular Force."

<sup>17</sup> 2dLt B. Hollingshead, "The Japanese Attack on 7 December 1941 on the Marine Corps Air

Aside from the Marine forces in the Western Pacific assigned to the Asiatic Fleet,<sup>18</sup> the only sizeable Marine units in the Pacific not already accounted for were guard detachments on Oahu and the 2d Engineer Battalion (less Companies C and D) which had been sent to Oahu to establish an advance amphibious training base for the 2d Marine Division. There was a 485-man Marine Barracks at the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard and 102 men assigned to the barracks at the Naval Air

---

Station at Ewa, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii" (MS, HistDiv, HQMC, January 1945), 3-8, hereinafter cited as *Ewa Monograph*. The other squadrons assigned to MAG-21 were either at sea with the Navy's carriers or still in the U. S.

<sup>18</sup> See Part IV, "Marines in the Philippines," for the prewar situation in China and the Philippines.

Station at Ford Island. Marines provided the guard (169 men) at the Naval Ammunition Depot at Luualualei in the hills northwest of Honolulu. The defense battalions which were quartered in or near the navy yard were under the operational control of the Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Colonel Pickett.

There were an additional 877 Marines present in Pearl Harbor on 7 December as members of the guard detachments of the battleships and cruisers of the Pacific Fleet.<sup>19</sup> In all, there were more than 4,500 Marines on Oahu that first day.

---

<sup>19</sup> The strength of most Marine units on Oahu is listed in *Hearings Record*, Part 24, Exhibit No. 40. "Location of regularly assigned commanding officers of ships present during the Japanese attack of 7 December 1941."

# Japan Strikes

## PEARL HARBOR<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps no action in American military history has been so thoroughly documented, examined, and dissected as the Pearl Harbor attack. Investigation has followed investigation; a host of books have been written on the subject, all in an effort to pin down the responsibility in the welter of charge and countercharge. The issue of what individuals or set of circumstances, if any, should bear the blame for the success of the Japanese raid has not been, and may never be, finally decided. On one point, however, there has been unanimous agreement—that the courage of the vast majority of defending troops was of a high order.

The first inkling of the Japanese attack came not from the air, but from the sea. At 0637 on 7 December, more than an hour before any enemy planes were sighted, an American patrol bomber and the destroyer *Ward* attacked and sank an unidentified submarine in the restricted waters close to the entrance to Pearl Harbor.<sup>2</sup> This vessel was one of five Japa-

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from *Pearl Harbor Rept; Hearings Record*, Part 13, Exhibits Nos. 8-8D, Japanese Records, and Parts 23 and 24, Hearings and Exhibits of the Roberts Commission; MarFor, 14th ND Jnl, December 1941; *Eva Monograph*; Col H. K. Pickett ltr to BriGen C. D. Barrett, 22Dec41 (located at NRM, Job 6608, Box 25); *Rising Sun in the Pacific*.

<sup>2</sup> "Unfortunately, the radio report sent to the 14th N. D. was not clear, and in view of many

nese two-man submarines which had the extremely risky mission of penetrating the Pacific Fleet's stronghold. The midgets were transported to the target on board large long-range submarines, part of an undersea scouting and screening force which had fanned out ahead of the enemy carriers. Not one of the midget raiders achieved any success; four were sunk and one ran aground.

The Japanese attack schedule allowed the Americans little time to evaluate the significance of the submarine sighting. The first enemy strike group was airborne and winging its way toward Oahu before the *Ward* fired its initial spread of depth charges. The Japanese carrier force had turned in the night and steamed full ahead for its target, launching the first plane at 0600 when the ships were approximately 200 miles north of Pearl Harbor. A second strike group took off at 0745 when the carriers had reached a position 30 miles closer to the American base. Although a radar set on the island picked up the approaching planes in time to give warning, the report of the sighting was believed an error and disregarded, and the Japanese fighters and bombers appeared unannounced over their objectives.

The enemy plan of attack was simple. Dive bombers and fighter planes would

previous false reports, it was considered necessary to check the report. The air attack started before verification was received." Adm C. C. Block ltr, *op. cit.*

strafe and bomb the major Army and Navy airfields in an attempt to catch defending aircraft on the ground. Simultaneously, the battleships moored to pilings along the shore of Ford Island would be hit by high- and low-level bombing attacks. The shipping strike groups included large numbers of dive and horizontal bombers, since the Japanese anticipated that protective netting might prevent their lethal torpedo bombers from being fully effective. In all, 321 planes took part in the raid, while 39 fighters flew protective cover over the carriers to guard against a retaliatory attack that never materialized.

At 0755 the soft stillness of Sunday morning was broken by the screaming whine of dive bombers and the sharp chatter of machine guns. At half a dozen different bases around the island of Oahu Japanese planes signaled the outbreak of war with a torrent of sudden death. Patrol bombers were caught in the water at Kaneohe Naval Air Station, across the island from Honolulu; closely parked rows of planes, concentrated to protect them from sabotage, were transformed into smoking heaps of useless wreckage at the Army's Wheeler and Hickam Fields, the Marines' air base at Ewa, and the Navy's Ford Island air station. The attack on the airfields had barely started before the first bombs and torpedoes were loosed against the sitting targets of "battle-ship row." Within minutes most of the battleships at the Ford Island moorings had been hit by one or more torpedoes and bombs. If the Japanese had drawn off after the first fifteen minutes of their attacks, the damage done would have been terrific, but the enemy planes kept on strafing and bombing and the toll of ships, planes, and men soared.

The Americans did not take their beating lying down. The first scattered shots from sentries ashore and watch standers who manned antiaircraft guns on board ship flashed back at the enemy even before the bugles and boatswains' pipes sounded "Call to Arms" and "General Quarters." The ships of the Pacific Fleet were on partial alert even in port and most of the officers and men were on board. Crew members poured up the ladders and passages from their berthing compartments to battle stations. While damage control teams tried to put down fires and shore up weakened bulkheads, gun crews let loose everything they had against the oncoming planes. In many cases guns were fired from positions awash as ships settled to the bottom and crewmen were seared with flames from fuel and ammunition fires as they continued to serve their weapons even after receiving orders to abandon ship. On many vessels the first torpedoes and bombs trapped men below deck and snuffed out the lives of others before they were even aware that the attack was on.

The reaction to the Japanese raid was fully as rapid at shore bases as it was on board ship, but the men at the airfields and the navy yard had far less to fight with. There was no ready ammunition at any antiaircraft gun position on the island; muzzles impotently pointed skyward while trucks were hurried to munitions depots. Small arms were broken out of armories at every point under attack; individuals manned the machine guns of damaged aircraft. The rage to strike back at the Japanese was so strong that men even fired pistols at the enemy planes as they swooped low to strafe.

At Ewa every Marine plane was knocked out of action in the first attack.





JAPANESE PHOTOGRAPH of the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor showing the line of American battleships caught at their mooring near Ford Island. (USN 30550)



JAPANESE LANDING ON GUAM depicted by a propaganda artist who shows a portion of the troops and transports of the South Seas Detached Force. (SC 301167)

Two squadrons of Japanese fighters swept in from the northwest at 1,000 feet and dived down to rake the aircraft parked near the runways with machine-gun and cannon fire. Pilots and air crewmen ran to their planes in an attempt to get them

into the air or drag them out of the line of fire, but the Japanese returned again and again to complete the job of destruction. When the enemy fighters drew off at about 0825 they left behind a field littered with burning and shot-up aircraft.

The men of MAG-21 recovered quickly from their initial surprise and shock and fought back with what few rifles and machine guns they had. Salvageable guns were stripped from damaged planes and set up on hastily improvised mounts; one scout-bomber rear machine gun was manned to swell the volume of antiaircraft fire. Although the group commander, Lieutenant Colonel Claude A. Larkin, had been wounded almost as soon as he arrived at the field that morning, he continued to coordinate the efforts to meet further enemy attacks.

Two Japanese dive bombers streaked over the field from the direction of Pearl Harbor at 0835, dropping light fragmentation bombs and strafing the Marine gun positions. A few minutes after the bombers left, the first of a steady procession of enemy fighters attacked Ewa as the Japanese began assembling a cover force at nearby Barber's Point to protect the withdrawal of their strike groups. The Marine machine guns accounted for at least one of the enemy planes and claimed another probable. Two and three plane sections of fighters orbited over the field, and occasionally dived to strafe the gunners, until the last elements of the Japanese attack force headed out to sea around 0945.

Three of the Marine airmen were killed during the attacks, a fourth died of wounds; 13 wounded men were treated in the group's aid station. Flames demolished 33 of the 47 planes at the field; all but two of the remainder suffered major damage. The sole bright note in the picture of destruction was the fact that 18 of VMSB-231's planes were on board the *Lexington*, scheduled for a fly-off to Midway, and thereby saved from the enemy guns.

Within the same half hour that witnessed the loss of Ewa's planes, the possibility of effective aerial resistance was canceled out by similar enemy attacks all over Oahu. Ford Island's seaplane ramps and runways were made a shambles of wrecked and burning aircraft in the opening stage of the Japanese assault. The Marines of the air station's guard detachment manned rifles and machine guns to beat off further enemy thrusts, but the dive bombers had done their job well. There was no need for them to return. The focus of all attacks became the larger ships in the harbor.

The raid drew automatic reactions from the few Marines in the navy yard who saw the first enemy planes diving on the ships. While the guard bugler broke the majority of the men of the barracks detachment and the 1st and 3d Defense Battalions out of their quarters, the early risers were already running for the armories and gun sheds. By 0801 when Colonel Pickett ordered the defense battalion machine-gun groups to man their weapons, eight of the guns had already been set up. More machine guns were hastily put in position and men were detailed to belt the ammunition needed to feed them, while rifle ammunition was issued to the hundreds of men assembled on the barracks' parade ground. Pickett ordered the 3-inch anti-aircraft guns in the defense battalions' reserve supplies to be taken out of storage and emplaced on the parade. He dispatched trucks and working parties of the 2d Engineer Battalion to Lualualei, 27 miles up in the hills, to get the necessary 3-inch shells. The Marine engineers also

sent their heavy earth-moving equipment to Hickam Field to help clear the runways.

Thirteen machine guns were in action by 0820 and the gunners had already accounted for their first enemy dive bomber. During the next hour and a half the fire of twenty-five more .30's and .50's was added to the yard's antiaircraft defenses, and two more planes, one claimed jointly with the ships, were shot down. The 3-inch guns were never able to get into action. The ammunition trucks did not return from the Lualualei depot until 1100, more than an hour after the last Japanese aircraft had headed back for their carriers. By that time the personnel of all Marine organizations in the navy yard area had been pooled to reinforce the guard and antiaircraft defense, to provide an infantry reserve, and to furnish the supporting transport and supply details needed to sustain them.

In the course of their attacks on battleship row and the ships in the navy yard's drydocks, the enemy planes had strafed and bombed the Marine barracks area, and nine men had been wounded. They were cared for in the dressing stations which Pickett had ordered set up at the beginning of the raid to accommodate the flow of wounded from the stricken ships in the harbor. Many of these casualties were members of the Marine ship detachments; 102 sea-going Marines had been killed during the raid, six later died of wounds, and 49 were wounded in action.<sup>3</sup>

The enemy pilots had scored heavily: four battleships, one mine layer, and a tar-

get ship sunk; four battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers, and three auxiliaries damaged. Most of the damaged ships required extensive repairs. American plane losses were equally high: 188 aircraft totally destroyed and 31 more damaged. The Navy and Marine Corps had 2,086 officers and men killed, the Army 194, as a result of the attack; 1,109 men of all the services survived their wounds.

Balanced against the staggering American totals was a fantastically light tally sheet of Japanese losses. The enemy carriers recovered all but 29 of the planes they had sent out; ship losses amounted to five midget submarines; and less than a hundred men were killed.

Despite extensive search missions flown from Oahu and from the *Enterprise*, which was less than 175 miles from port when the sneak attack occurred, the enemy striking force was able to withdraw undetected and unscathed. In one respect the Japanese were disappointed with the results of their raid; they had hoped to catch the Pacific Fleet's carriers berthed at Pearl Harbor. Fortunately, the urgent need for Marine planes to strengthen the outpost defenses had sent the *Lexington* and the *Enterprise* to sea on aircraft ferrying missions. The *Enterprise* was returning to Pearl on 7 December after having flown off VMF-211's fighters to Wake, and the *Lexington*, enroute to Midway with VMSB-231's planes, turned back when news of the attack was received. Had either or both of the carriers been sunk or damaged at Pearl Harbor, the outlook for the first months of the war would have been even more dismal. The Japanese success had the effect of delaying the schedule of retaliatory attacks and amphibious op-

<sup>3</sup> Casualty figures were compiled from records furnished by Statistics Unit, PersAcctSec, PersDept, HQMC.

erations in the Central Pacific that had been outlined in Rainbow 5. A complete reevaluation of Pacific strategy was necessary.

The critical situation facing the outpost islands was clearly appreciated and an attempt was made to get reinforcements to Wake before the Japanese struck; it did not come in time. The tiny atoll was one of the first objectives on the enemy timetable of conquest.<sup>4</sup> Midway was more fortunate; when the *Lexington* returned to Pearl on 10 December with its undelivered load of Marine scout bombers, they were ordered to attempt an over-water flight to the atoll. On 17 December, ten days after the originally scheduled fly-off, 17 planes of VMSB-231, shepherded by a naval patrol bomber, successfully made the 1,137-mile flight from Oahu to Midway. It was the longest single-engine landplane massed flight on record, but more important it marked a vital addition to Midway's defensive potential.

The outpost islands needed men and materiel as well as planes. Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch, Commandant of the 14th Naval District, gave the responsibility for organizing and equipping these reinforcements to Colonel Pickett. On 13 December, all Marine ground troops in the district were placed under Pickett as Commanding Officer, Marine Forces, 14th Naval District. The necessary reinforcements to be sent to Midway, Johnston, and Palmyra were drawn from the 1st, 3d, and 4th Defense Battalions. By the month's end the first substantial increments of men, guns, and equipment had been received at each of the outposts.<sup>5</sup> They were not safe

<sup>4</sup> For the detailed story of the defense of Wake see Part III.

<sup>5</sup> CO, MarFor, 14th ND ltr to MGC, 5Jan42, Development of outpost garrisons.

from attacks by any means, but their positions were markedly stronger.

#### GUAM FALLS<sup>6</sup>

The Washington Naval Disarmament Treaty of 1922 provided for the maintenance of the *status quo* in regard to fortifications and naval bases in certain areas of the Pacific. American adherence to these terms through the 14-year life of the treaty had the practical effect of weakening the defenses of the Philippines and preventing the development of Guam as a naval stronghold. The Hepburn Board of 1938 recommended that Guam be heavily fortified and garrisoned,<sup>7</sup> but Congress failed to authorize the expenditure of the necessary funds. Unhappily, the planners of Rainbow 5 had to concede the capture of the island in the first stages of a war with the Japanese. It was almost as if they could look over enemy shoulders and see the terse direction to the commander of the Japanese Fourth Fleet to "invade Wake and Guam as quickly as possible"<sup>8</sup> at the onset of hostilities. (See Map 2)

Guam was a fueling station for naval vessels making the long run to and from the Orient, a relay point for the trans-Pacific cable, the site of a naval radio station, and a stop for Pan American clippers. Assigned to protect its 20,000 natives and its 228 square miles of rugged, jungled terrain was a token force of 153

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from Maj O. R. Lodge, *The Recapture of Guam* (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1954), 7-9; Capt G. J. McMillin, USN, OfiRept to the CNO of the Surrender of Guam to the Japanese, 11Sep45; T. Wilds, "The Japanese Seizure of Guam," *MC Gazette*, July 1955.

<sup>7</sup> Hepburn Board Rept, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Hearings Record*, Part 13, Exhibit No. 8-C, CombFlt OpOrd No. 1, 5Nov41, 475.

Marines. Backing them up was a Guamanian infantry unit, the 80-man Insular Force Guard, and a volunteer native naval militia with 246 ill-armed and ill-trained members.<sup>9</sup> The island's government departments and naval station activities were manned by 271 regular Navy personnel. A naval officer, Captain George J. McMillin, was both island governor and garrison commander.

The war threat was so real by October 1941 that all women and children of U. S. citizenship were evacuated from Guam. On 6 December the garrison destroyed all its classified papers and like other Pacific outposts awaited the outcome of the U. S.-Japanese negotiations in Washington. The word came at 0545 on 8 December (7 December, Pearl Harbor time). Captain McMillin was informed of the enemy attack by the Commander in Chief of the Asiatic Fleet. In less than three hours Saipan-based Japanese bombers were over the island.

The initial enemy target was the mine sweeper USS *Penguin* in Apra Harbor; this small ship's 3-inch and .50 caliber guns were the only weapons larger than .30 caliber machine guns available to the Guam garrison. Under repeated attacks, the *Penguin* went to the bottom, and her survivors joined the forces ashore. The attack continued throughout the daylight hours with flights of bombers hitting the various naval installations and strafing roads and villages. The island capital, Agana, was cleared of civilians, and the

---

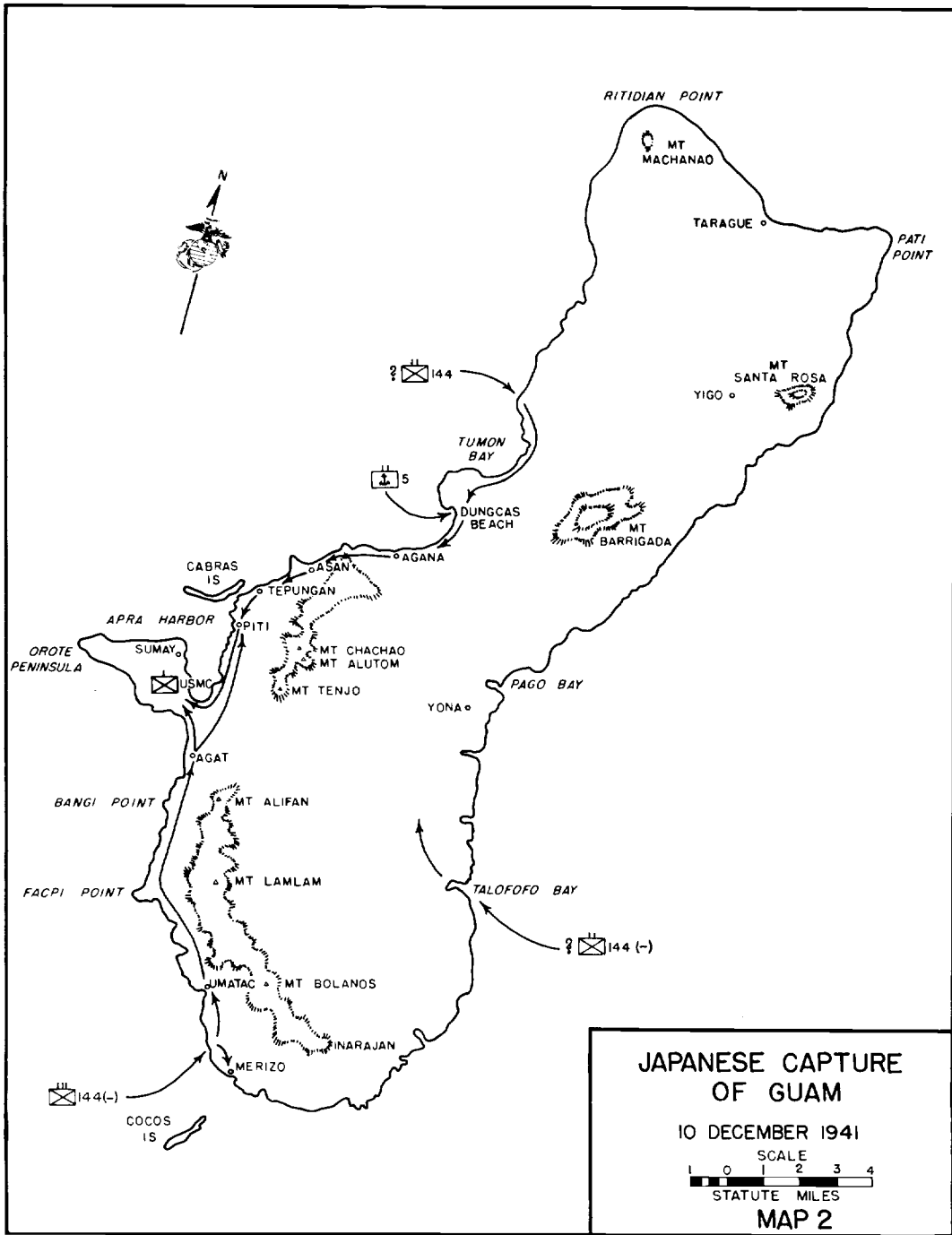
<sup>9</sup> The members of the Insular Force Guard were in the U. S. Government service and received 50 percent of the pay of corresponding ratings in the U. S. Navy. The native militia served without pay and had no arms except obsolete and condemned rifles. RAdm G. J. McMillin ltr to CMC, 3Nov52.

few local Japanese were rounded up and interned.

That night a native dugout landed near Ritidian Point on the northern cape of the island, and the three men in it were captured. They claimed to be Saipan natives sent over to be on hand as interpreters when the Japanese landed. These natives insisted that the Japanese intended to land the next morning (9 December) on beaches near Agana. Captain McMillin suspected a trick. He believed that by this ruse the Japanese sought to draw the Marines out of their prepared positions in the butts of the rifle range at Sumay on Orote Peninsula. He decided not to allow this information to cause a shift of his major defensive force from a position which guarded important Apra Harbor.

By guess or knowledge the Saipan natives had one of the landing sites located accurately, but they were off on their time. The 9th brought no landing, but the bombers came back to give Guam another pounding. The Insular Force Guard was posted to protect government buildings in Agana, but the rest of the island's garrison remained at their assigned posts. Lieutenant Colonel William K. McNulty's 122 Marines of the Sumay barracks continued to improve their rifle range defenses, and the 28 Marines who were assigned to the Insular Patrol, the island's police force, kept their stations in villages throughout Guam.

After the Japanese bombers finished for the day all was quiet until about 0400 on 10 December. At that time flares burst over Duncas Beach north of Agana, and some 400 Japanese sailors of the *5th Defense Force* from Saipan came ashore. While the naval landing party moved into Agana where it clashed with the Insular Force Guard, elements of the Japanese



*South Seas Detached Force* (approximately 5,500 men)<sup>10</sup> made separate landings at Tumon Bay in the north, on the southwest coast near Merizo, and on the eastern shore of the island at Talafofo Bay.

At Agana's plaza the lightly-armed Guamanians, commanded by Marine First Lieutenant Charles S. Todd, stood off the early Japanese attacks, but their rifles and machine guns did not provide enough firepower to hold against a coordinated attack by the Duncas Beach landing force. Captain McMillin, aware of the overwhelming superiority of the enemy, decided not to endanger the lives of the thousands of civilians in his charge by further and fruitless resistance. "The situation was simply hopeless," he later related.<sup>11</sup> He surrendered the island to the Japanese naval commander shortly after 0600, and sent orders to the Marines at Sumay not to resist. The word did not reach all defenders, however, and scattered fighting continued throughout the day as the enemy spread out to complete occupation of the island. But this amounted to only token resistance. There was no chance that the determined Japanese might be driven off by a force so small, even if the defenders could have regrouped. Guam had fallen, and it would be two and a half years before the United States was in a position to win it back.

<sup>10</sup> This reinforced brigade, commanded by MajGen Tomitara Horii, had been organized in November 1941 to take part in the capture of Guam and to move on from there to seize Rabaul in the Bismarcks. It was built around the 144th InfRegt and reinforced by units of the Japanese 55th Division. MIDiv, WD, Order of Battle for Japanese Armed Forces, 1Mar45, 122.

<sup>11</sup> McMillin Surrender Rept, *op. cit.*

During the two days of bombing and in the fighting on 10 December, the total garrison losses were 19 killed and 42 wounded including four Marines killed and 12 wounded.<sup>12</sup> The civilian population suffered comparable but undetermined casualties. The Japanese evacuated American members of the garrison to prison camps in Japan on 10 January 1942, and the enemy naval force that had been present at the surrender settled down to duty as occupation troops.

#### *FIRST ATTACK ON MIDWAY*<sup>13</sup>

Part of the Japanese striking force which raided Pearl Harbor was a task unit of two destroyers and a tanker which proceeded independently from Tokyo Bay to a separate target—Midway. The mission of the destroyers was implied in their designation as the Midway Neutralization Unit; they were to shell the atoll's air base on the night of 7 December while the Japanese carrier force retired from the Hawaiian area. (See Map 10, Map Section)

Dawn of 7 December found five seaplanes of Midway's patrol bomber squadron (VP-21) aloft on routine search missions; two other (Dutch) patrol bombers had just taken off for Wake, next leg of their journey to the Netherlands East Indies. On the Sand Island seaplane ramp two more PBVs (Catalina patrol

<sup>12</sup> Marine casualty figures were compiled from records furnished by the Statistics Unit, PersAcctSec, PersDept, HQMC.

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from *Hearings Records*, Part 24, Exhibit No. 34, "History of Action Occurring at Midway 7-31Dec41 as Compiled from Official Dispatches and Correspondence," Exhibit No. 35, CO, NAS, Midway ltr to CinCPac, Action of 7Dec41, n. d., and Exhibit No. 36, CO, 6th DefBn ltr to ComFourteen, Rept of action on the night of 7Dec41, 12Dec41; *Marines at Midway*.

bombers) were warming up to guide in VMSB-231 which was scheduled to fly off the *Lexington* that day. At 0630 (0900 Pearl Harbor time) a Navy radio operator's signal from Oahu flashed the first news of the Pearl Harbor attack. A few minutes later a dispatch from Admiral Bloch confirmed this report and directed that current war plans be placed in effect.

Commander Cyril T. Simard, the Island Commander, recalled the Dutch PBVs (which were then put to use by VP-21), established additional air search sectors, and ordered Lieutenant Colonel Harold D. Shannon's 6th Defense Battalion to general quarters. The remainder of the day was spent in preparation for blackout, and in issuing ammunition, digging foxholes, and testing communications. All lights and navigational aids were extinguished after it was learned that the *Lexington*, with VMSB-231 still on board, had been diverted to seek the enemy's Pearl Harbor striking force.

Air searches returned late in the day without having sighted any signs of Japanese ships or planes, and the atoll buttoned up for the night with all defensive positions fully manned. At 1842, a Marine lookout saw a flashing light some distance southwest of Sand Island, but it quickly disappeared, and it was about 2130 before the one operational radar on Sand began picking up what seemed to be surface targets in the same general direction. Simultaneously two other observers, equipped with powerful 8x56 night glasses, reported seeing "shapes" to seaward.

Shannon's searchlight battery commander, First Lieutenant Alfred L. Booth, requested permission to illuminate, but his request was turned down. Senior officers

did not want to risk premature disclosure of defensive positions. It was also erroneously believed that friendly ships were in the area, and there were strict orders against illuminating or firing without specific orders.<sup>14</sup>

The apprehension of these observers was justified. The Japanese destroyers *Akebono* and *Ushio* had left their tanker *Shiriyu* at a rendezvous point some 15 miles away and made landfall on the atoll at about 2130. By the time Lieutenant Booth had been cautioned about his searchlights, the two enemy ships had their guns trained on Midway and were ready to make their first firing run. The firing began at 2135.

The first salvos fell short, but as the destroyers closed range on a northeast course the shells began to explode on Sand Island. The initial hits struck near Battery A's 5-inch seacoast guns at the south end of the island, and subsequent rounds bracketed the island's power plant, a reinforced concrete structure used also as the command post of a .50 caliber antiaircraft machine-gun platoon. One round came through an air vent and exploded inside the building. The Japanese ships then suspended fire while they closed on the atoll for a second firing run.

In the island's power plant First Lieutenant George H. Cannon, although severely wounded, directed the re-establishment of wrecked communications and the evacuation of other wounded. He refused evacuation for his own wounds until after Corporal Harold R. Hazelwood had put the switchboard back in operation. Cannon died a few minutes after reaching the

<sup>14</sup> LtCol A. L. Booth ltr to CMC, 27Jan48, hereinafter cited as *Booth*; LtCol L. S. Fraser ltr to CMC, hereinafter cited as *Fraser*.



aid station, but for this action he received posthumous award of the Medal of Honor. He was the first Marine so honored in World War II.

Meanwhile the enemy ships opened fire again, this time at closer range, and Commander Simard ordered Shannon to engage targets of opportunity. Japanese shells set the roof of the seaplane hangar on Sand ablaze, lighting up the target for the enemy gunners, and accurate salvos struck the Pan American radio installation, the island laundry, and adjacent shops. At 2153 the Marine searchlight crews got Shannon's orders to illuminate, but by then only the light on the south end of Sand could bear on the ships. This light silhouetted the *Akebono* about 2,500 yards south of the island, before a near miss from one of the destroyers put it out of commission. Crewmen reacted immediately to get the light back in action and on target, but Battery A's 5-inchers stayed silent because communication damage had prevented passing of Shannon's command to open fire.<sup>15</sup>

But Captain Jean H. Buckner, commanding Battery D's 3-inch antiaircraft guns, could now see the large Japanese battle flag on the *Akebono's* foremast, and he ordered his guns into action. Splashes could not be made out, although illumination was excellent, and Buckner's fire controlmen were positive that the shells were either passing through the ships' superstructures or into their hulls. Battery B (First Lieutenant Rodney M. Handley) on Eastern Island now added its 5-inch fire to the battle and .50 caliber machine guns opened up on the targets which were well within range. This firing from the

Marine batteries kept up for five minutes before the Japanese succeeded in knocking out the searchlight. Although some observers believed that the *Ushio* had also been hulled, results of this Marine fire have never been determined.<sup>16</sup> Both Japanese ships retired soon after the light was shot out and a Pan American clipper captain flying overhead that night en route from Wake reported seeing an intense fire on the surface of the sea and the wakes of two ships on the logical retirement course of the destroyers. Both enemy ships, however, returned to Japan safely, despite any damage that might have been done by the Marine guns.

The enemy fire had cost the 6th Defense Battalion two killed and ten wounded;<sup>17</sup> two men from the naval air station were killed and nine wounded. Material damage on Midway was not too severe and was confined to Sand Island; the airfield on Eastern Island was not touched. The seaplane hangar had burned, although the frame was still intact, and one plane was lost in the flames. Another PBY was badly damaged by shell fragments, and fragments also caused minor damage to a number of buildings. The garrison had stood off its first Japanese attack, but there was little comfort in this. The defenders estimated—correctly—that the enemy would be back sooner or later with a much more serious threat.

With the outbreak of war, completion of the coastal and antiaircraft defenses of Midway took first priority and Marines were treated to the welcome and unusual

<sup>16</sup> The *Ushio*, evidently a very lucky ship, was the only enemy vessel that took part in the Pearl Harbor attack that was still afloat on V-J Day.

<sup>17</sup> Casualty figures were compiled from records

<sup>17</sup> Casualty figures were compiled from records furnished by Statistics Unit, PersAcctSec,

<sup>15</sup> Booth; Fraser; Col L. A. Holm ltr to CMC, 30Jan48.

sight of the civilian contractor's heavy equipment turned to on dugout and battery construction. Authorities at Pearl Harbor were determined to get reinforcements to the atoll and within a week after VMSB-231 made its historic long flight from Oahu, two batteries of the 4th Defense Battalion with additional naval 3-inch and 7-inch guns for coast defense were being unloaded. On Christmas, the Brewster Buffaloes of VMF-221 flew in from the *Saratoga* which had been rushed out to Pearl from San Diego after the Japanese attack. This carrier had taken part in the abortive attempt to relieve Wake. The next day the island received another contingent of 4th Defense Battalion men, the ground echelon of VMF-221, and much needed defense materiel when the seaplane tender *Tangier*, which had also been headed for Wake, unloaded at Midway instead. By the end of December the atoll, which was now Hawaii's most important outpost, had for its garrison a heavily reinforced defense battalion, a Marine scout-bomber and a fighter squadron, and VP-21's patrol bombers. Midway was in good shape to greet the Japanese if they came back, and the passage of every month in the new year made the atoll a tougher nut to crack.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE SOUTHERN OUTPOSTS<sup>19</sup>

Tiny Johnston Island, set off by itself in the open sea southwest of Hawaii, proved to be a favorite target of Japanese

<sup>18</sup> See Part V, "The Battle of Midway" for the story of the events leading up to the decisive naval action which took place at Midway in June 1942.

<sup>19</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from *Hearings Record*, Part 24, Exhibit No. 27, "History of Action Occurring at Palmyra Island 7-31Dec41, As Compiled from

submarines in the first month of the war. It was too close to the Pacific Fleet base at Pearl and too limited in area to make it a prize worth risking an amphibious assault, but its strategic location, like an arrowhead pointing at the Japanese Marshalls, made damage to its air facilities well worth the risk of bombardment attempts. The airfield on the atoll's namesake, Johnston Island, was only partially completed on 7 December, but temporary seaplane handling facilities were in operation at Sand Islet, the only other land area within the fringing reef. There was no permanent patrol plane complement, but Johnston was an important refueling stop and a couple of PBYS were usually anchored in the lagoon.

The news of the outbreak of war created a flurry of activity on Johnston, and the civilian contractor's employees turned to at top speed to erect additional earthworks around the Marine guns and to prepare bomb shelters.<sup>20</sup> No Japanese ship or submarine made its appearance on 7 December, perhaps because the first day of war found the *Indianapolis* and five destroyer minesweepers at Johnston testing the performance of the Higgins landing boat on coral reefs.<sup>21</sup> These ships were

Official Dispatches and Correspondence," Exhibit No. 28, "History of the Action Occurring at Johnston Island 7-31Dec41, As Compiled from Official Dispatches and Correspondence," Exhibit No. 31, CO, NAS, PalmyraIs ltr to ComFourteen, 24Dec41., and Exhibit No. 32, CO, NAS, JohnstonIs ltr to ComFourteen, 19Dec41; CO, NAS, JohnstonIs ltr to ComFourteen, 22Dec41; MarGarFor, Pac File C-1455-40-5, "Defense-Fortification Johnston Island," 12Sep41-13Jun43; MarGarFor, Pac File C-1455-40-15, "Defense-Fortification Palmyra Islands," 26Sep41-30Jun43.

<sup>20</sup> CO, NAS, JohnstonIs, Progress and Readiness Rept, 15Dec41.

<sup>21</sup> *Hearings Record*, Part 23, 758-759.

immediately recalled toward Pearl to form part of the extensive search pattern for the enemy carrier force, and Johnston's defense rested with its own slim garrison. Major Francis B. Loomis, Jr., Executive Officer of the 1st Defense Battalion, caught while returning to Pearl by air from an inspection of the western outposts, assumed command of the Johnston detachment as senior Marine officer present.

Shortly after dark on 12 December a submarine surfaced 8,000 yards off Sand Islet and began firing green star clusters which burst high over the island. The 5-inch battery could not pick up the vessel in its sights, but it fired one star shell in the general direction of the submarine. The submarine ceased firing immediately as she evidently was not seeking a duel.

The next enemy attack came at dusk three days later. The supply ship *Burrows* had delivered a barge load of supplies originally intended for the Wake garrison and picked up 77 civilian construction employees for return to Pearl when a sentry atop Johnston's water tower spotted a flash to seaward and sounded general quarters. The flash had been spotted by the batteries also, and the 5-inch control estimated the range at 9,000 yards. The 3-inch director and height finder made out two ships, one larger than the other. The first two enemy salvos bracketed Johnston and the third struck near the contractor's power house and set off a 1,200-gallon oil tank which immediately fired the building. A strong wind whipped up 50-foot flames from the oil fire, and "as observed from the Naval Air Station at Sand Islet, Johnston Island

seemed doomed."<sup>22</sup> The Japanese continued to fire for ten minutes at this well-lighted target and they hit several other buildings. The 5-inch guns delivered searching fire, and just as the Marines were convinced they were hitting close aboard their targets, the enemy fire ceased abruptly.

The enemy vessels had fired from the obscuring mists of a small squall and spotters ashore never clearly saw their targets, but the defenders believed that they had engaged two surface vessels, probably a light cruiser and a destroyer. Later analysis indicated, however, that one or more submarines had made this attack. Fortunately no one in the garrison was hurt by the enemy fire, although flames and fragments caused considerable damage to the power house and water distilling machinery. The *Burrows*, although clearly outlined by the fire, was not harmed. The fact that its anchorage area was known to be studded with submerged coral heads probably discouraged the Japanese from attempting an underwater attack, and Johnston's 5-inch battery ruled out a surface approach.

During the exchange of fire one of the Marines' 5-inch guns went out of action. Its counter-recoil mechanism failed. After this the long-range defense of the island rested with one gun until 18 December when two patrol bombers from Pearl arrived to join the garrison. This gun was enough, however, to scare off an enemy submarine which fired star shells over Sand Islet after dark on 21 December. Again the simple expedient of firing in the probable direction of the enemy was enough to silence the submarine. The

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 24, Exhibit No. 32, CO, NAS, JohnstonIs ltr to ComFourteen, 19Dec41.

next night, just as the ready duty PBY landed in the lagoon, another submarine, perhaps the same one that had fired illumination over Sand, fired six shells at the islets. Both 5-inchers on Johnston now were back in action and each gun fired ten rounds before the submarine submerged. The patrol plane was just lifting from the water as the last enemy shot was fired. Only one shell hit Sand, but that one knocked down the CAA homing tower and slightly wounded one Marine.

Johnston Island was clearly a discouraging place to attack, and the shelling of 22 December marked the last enemy attempt at surface bombardment. It was just as well that the Japanese decided to avoid Johnston, because reinforcement from Pearl soon had the atoll bursting at its seams with men and guns. An additional 5-inch and a 3-inch battery, 16 more machine guns, and the men to man them arrived on 30 December. In January a provisional infantry company was sent and eventually the garrison included even light tanks. The expected permanent Marine fighter complement never got settled in at Johnston's airfield. The island became instead a ferrying and refueling stop for planes going between Pearl and the South and Southwest Pacific.

Palmyra, 900 miles southeast of Johnston, also figured in the early development of a safe plane route to the southern theater of war. But before the atoll faded from the action reports it too got a taste of the gunfire of a Japanese submarine. At dawn on 24 December an enemy raider

surfaced 3,000 yards south of the main island and began firing on the dredge *Sacramento* which was anchored in the lagoon and clearly visible between two of Palmyra's numerous tiny islets. Only one hit was registered before the fire of the 5-inch battery drove the submarine under. Damage to the dredge was minor and no one was injured.

Colonel Pickett's command at Pearl Harbor had organized strong reinforcements for Palmyra and these arrived before the end of December. Lieutenant Colonel Bert A. Bone, Commanding Officer of the 1st Defense Battalion, arrived with the additional men, guns, and equipment to assume command of the defense force. On 1 March the official designation of the Marine garrison on Palmyra was changed to 1st Defense Battalion and former 1st Battalion men at other bases were absorbed by local commands. The Marine Detachment at Johnston became a separate unit.

After these submarine attacks of December, Palmyra and Johnston drop from the pages of an operational history. The atolls had served their purpose well; they guarded a vulnerable flank of the Hawaiian Islands at a time when such protection was a necessity. While the scene of active fighting shifted westward the garrisons remained alert, and when conditions permitted it many of the men who had served out the first hectic days of the war on these lonely specks in the ocean moved on to the beachheads of the South and Central Pacific.

# The Southern Lifeline

## *STRATEGIC REAPPRAISAL*<sup>1</sup>

In December 1941 reverse followed reverse in the fortunes of the Allies in the Pacific. The Japanese seemed to be everywhere at once and everywhere successful. Setbacks to the enemy schedule of conquest were infrequent and temporary. On the Asian mainland Hong Kong fell and Japanese troops advanced steadily down the Malay Peninsula toward Singapore. In the Philippines Manila was evacuated and American-Filipino forces retreated to Bataan and Corregidor for a last-ditch stand. To the south the first Japanese landing had been made on Borneo, and superior enemy forces prepared to seize the Netherlands East Indies. The capture of Wake and Guam gave the Japanese effective control over the Central Pacific from the China coast to Midway and Johnston. (See Map 1, Map Section)

By the turn of the year only the sea area between the Hawaiian Islands and the United States and the supply route from the States through the South Pa-

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from *The War Reports of General of the Army George C. Marshall—General of the Army H. H. Arnold—Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947), hereinafter cited as *War Reports*; FAdm E. J. King and Cdr W. M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1952) hereinafter cited as *King's Naval Record*; *Strategic Planning*.

cific to New Zealand and Australia were still in Allied hands. The responsibility for holding open the lines of communication to the Anzac area<sup>2</sup> rested primarily with the U. S. Pacific Fleet. On 31 December that fleet came under the command of the man who was to direct its operations until Japan unconditionally surrendered—Admiral Chester W. Nimitz (CinCPac).

As soon as he arrived at Pearl Harbor, Nimitz was given a dispatch from Admiral Ernest J. King, the newly appointed Commander in Chief, United States Fleet (CinCUS, later abbreviated as CominCh). King's message outlined Nimitz's two primary tasks as CinCPac. He was to use his ships, planes, and men in:

(1) Covering and holding the Hawaii-Midway line and maintaining its communications with the west coast.

(2) Maintaining communications between the west coast and Australia, chiefly by covering, securing and holding the Hawaii-Samoa line, which should be extended to include Fiji at the earliest possible date.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Japanese had severely damaged the Pacific Fleet in their Pearl Harbor raid, they had concentrated on

<sup>2</sup> Anzac is actually the abbreviation for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps used in WW I, but the term was so understandable and easy to use in reference to the two Commonwealth nations that it was adopted in the Pacific War and applied frequently to the geographic area in which they lay.

<sup>3</sup> *King's Naval Record*, 353-354.

ships rather than installations, and the repair facilities of the navy yard were virtually untouched. Round-the-clock work promptly restored to operation many vessels which might otherwise have been lost for good or long delayed in their return to fleet service. But Nimitz's strength was not enough to hazard a large scale amphibious offensive, even with the addition of reinforcements sent from the Atlantic Fleet. In the first few months of 1942, Allied strategists had to be content with defensive operations. The few local attacks they mounted were hit-and-run raids which did little more than boost home-front and service morale at a time when most news dealt with defeat and surrender.

From 22 December to 14 January, the political and military leaders of the United States and Great Britain met in Washington (the ARCADIA Conference) to chart the course of Allied operations against the Axis powers. The Americans, despite the enormity of the Japanese attack, reaffirmed their decision of ABC-1 that Germany was the predominant enemy and its defeat would be decisive in the outcome of the war. The Pacific was hardly considered a secondary theater, but the main strength of the Allied war effort was to be applied in the European, African, and Middle Eastern areas. Sufficient men and materiel would be committed to the battle against Japan to allow the gradual assumption of the offensive.

One result of the ARCADIA meetings was the organization of the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), a supreme military council whose members were the chiefs of services in Great Britain and the United States. The CCS was charged

with the strategic direction of the war, subject only to the review of the political heads of state. The necessity of presenting a united American view in CCS discussions led directly to the formation of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) as the controlling agency of American military operations.

On 9 February 1942, the first formal meeting of General George C. Marshall (Chief of Staff, United States Army), Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold (Chief of the Army Air Corps), Admiral Harold R. Stark (CNO), and Admiral King (CominCh) took place. Except for the combination of the offices of CominCh and CNO in the person of Admiral King which took effect on 26 March (Admiral Stark became Commander U. S. Naval Forces Europe) and the addition of Admiral William D. Leahy as Chief of Staff to the President on 20 July, the membership of the JCS remained constant for the duration of the war. As far as the Marine Corps was concerned their representative on the JCS was Admiral King, and he was consistently a champion of the use of Marines at their greatest potential—as specially trained and equipped amphibious assault troops.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>On 13Apr51, before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Gen Holcomb stated that he was called in during the ARCADIA conferences and "sat as a member of that group." Later "... a formal organization occurred in which I was not included. However, because of my intercourse with Admiral Stark I was in on nearly all of the discussions that took place." This intimate relationship changed, however, when Stark was relieved as CNO on 26Mar42. An interesting sequel to this story of the "exclusion" of the Commandant from the JCS was revealed by Gen Holcomb when he further related how after a dinner party

On 10 January 1942, the CCS, acting with the approval of Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt, set up a unified, inter-Allied command in the western Pacific to control defensive operations against the Japanese along a broad sweep of positions from Burma through Luzon to New Guinea. The commander of ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian) forces holding the barrier zone was the British Commander in Chief in India, General Sir Archibald P. Wavell; his ABDA air, naval, and ground commanders were respectively an Englishman, an American, and a Dutchman. But ABDA Command had no chance to stop the Japanese in the East Indies, Malaya, or the Philippines. Wavell's forces were beaten back, cut off, or defeated before he could be reached by reinforcements that could make a significant difference in the fighting. By the end of February Singapore had fallen and the ABDA area was split by an enemy thrust to Sumatra. Wavell returned to India to muster troops to block Japanese encroachment into

---

at the White House in July 1943, the President, associating himself with the Marine Corps, had said to him confidentially: "You know, the first thing you know we are going to be left out of things. We are not represented on the Joint Chiefs of Staff . . . how would you like to be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?" Holcomb replied that he would like it very much but didn't know how the Joint Chiefs would feel about it. That was the last, however, that Holcomb ever heard of this matter directly or officially. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 82d Congress, Hearings on S. 667, "A Bill to Fix the Personnel Strength of the United States Marine Corps and to make the Commandant of the Marine Corps a Permanent Member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" (Washington: GPO, 1951), 34-36.

Burma. On 1 March ABDA Command was formally dissolved.

Although this first attempt at unified Allied command was short-lived and unsuccessful, it set a pattern which governed operational control of the war through its remaining years. This pattern amounted to the selection as over-all commander of a theater of an officer from the nation having the most forces in that particular theater. His principal subordinates were appointed from other nations also having interests and forces there. Realistically, the CCS tried to equate theater responsibility with national interest. On 3 March the Combined Chiefs approved for the western Pacific a new dividing line which cut through the defunct ABDA area. Burma and all Southeast Asia west of a north-south line between Java and Sumatra were added to Wavell's Indian command and the British Chiefs of Staffs were charged with the strategic direction of this theater. The whole Pacific east of the new line was given over to American JCS control.

The Joint Chiefs divided the Pacific into two strategic entities, one in which the Navy would have paramount interests, the Pacific Ocean Area (POA), and the other in which the Army would be the dominant service, the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA). (See Map 1, Map Section for boundary.) Naval planners had successfully insisted in JCS discussions that all positions such as New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and New Zealand which guarded the line of communications from Pearl Harbor to Australia must be controlled by the Navy. In terms of the air age, the JCS division of the Pacific gave the Army operational responsibility for

an area of large land masses lying relatively close together where land power supported by shore-based air could be decisive. To the Navy the JCS assigned the direction of the war in a vast sea area with widely scattered island bases where the carrier plane reigned supreme.

The American commander in the Philippines, General Douglas MacArthur, was the Joint Chiefs' choice to take over direction of SWPA operations; Admiral Nimitz was selected to head POA activities. Formal announcement of the new set-up was not made until MacArthur had escaped from Corregidor and reached safety in Australia. On 18 March, with the consent of the Australian government, MacArthur was announced as Supreme Commander of the SWPA (CinCSWPA). The JCS directive outlining missions for both Pacific areas was issued on 30 March, and the confirmation of Nimitz as Commander in Chief of the POA (CinCPOA) followed on 3 April. By CCS and JCS agreement, both commanders were to have operational control over any force, regardless of service or nation, that was assigned to their respective theaters.

Nimitz still retained his command of the Pacific Fleet in addition to his duties as CinCPOA. The fleet's striking arm, its carriers and their supporting vessels, stayed under Nimitz as CinCPac no matter where they operated. In the final analysis, however, the major decisions on employment of troops, ships, and planes were made in Washington with the advice of the theater commanders. MacArthur was a subordinate of Marshall and reported through him to the JCS; an identical command relationship existed between Nimitz and King.

### SAMOAN BASTION<sup>5</sup>

The concern felt in Washington for the security of the southern route to Australia was acute in the days and weeks immediately following the Pearl Harbor attack. Despite world-wide demands on the troops and equipment of a nation just entering the war, General Marshall and Admiral King gave special attention to the need for holding positions that would protect Australia's lifeline. Garrison forces, most of them provided by the Army, moved into the Pacific in substantial strength to guard what the Allies still held and to block further Japanese advances. Between January and April nearly 80,000 Army troops left the States for Pacific bases.

An infantry division was sent to Australia to take the place of Australian units committed to the fighting in the Middle East. At the other end of the lifeline, a new division was added to the Hawaiian Island garrison. Mixed forces of infantry, coast and antiaircraft artillery, and air corps units were established in early February at Canton and Christmas Islands, southwest and south of Pearl Harbor. At about the same time a New Zealand ground garrison reinforced by American pursuit planes moved into the Fiji Islands, and a small garrison was sent to the French-owned Society Islands to guard the eastern approaches to the supply route. In March a task force of

---

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from HqDeFor Rept of SamoanGru AdvB Facilities, 10Oct42; 2d MarBrig AnRept, 16Jul42; 2d MarBrig Diary, 23Dec41-30Jun42; CG 3d MarBrig ltr to CMC, 10Sep43; 3d MarBrig Brief of Ops, 21Mar42-31Aug43; MAG-13 War Diary, 1Mar42-31May43; Hist of the 7th DefBn, 21Dec42; *Strategic Planning*.



almost division strength arrived in New Caledonia and the Joint Chiefs sent additional Army garrison forces to Tongatabu in the Tonga Islands, south of Samoa, and north to Efate in the New Hebrides. By the end of March 1942 the supply route to Australia ran through a corridor of burgeoning island strong points and the potential threat of major Japanese attacks had been substantially lessened. (See Map 1, Map Section and Map 3)

Actually the initial Japanese war plan contemplated no advances into the South Pacific to cut the line of communications to Australia. The Allied leaders, however, can be forgiven for not being clairvoyant on this point, for the enemy's chance to seize blocking positions along the lifeline was quite apparent. Samoa seemed to be one of the most inviting targets and its tiny garrison of Marines wholly inadequate to stand off anything but a minor raid. The necessity for building up Samoan defenses as a prelude for further moves to Fiji and New Caledonia had been recognized by Admiral King in his instructions to Nimitz to hold the Hawaiian-Samoa line,<sup>6</sup> and reinforcements from the States to back up those instructions were underway from San Diego by 6 January. These men, members of the 2d Marine Brigade, were the forerunners of a host of Marines who passed through the Samoan area and made it the major Marine base in the Pacific in the first year of the war.

Only two weeks' time was necessary to organize, assemble, and load out the 2d Brigade. Acting on orders from the Commandant, the 2d Marine Division activated the brigade on 24 December at Camp Elliott, outside of San Diego. The

principal units assigned to the new command were the 8th Marines, the 2d Battalion, 10th Marines, and the 2d Defense Battalion (dispatched by rail from the east coast). Colonel (later Brigadier General) Henry L. Larsen was named brigade commander. A quick estimate was made of the special engineering equipment which the brigade would need to accomplish one of its most important missions—completion of the airfield at Tutuila. Permission was obtained to expend up to \$200,000 in the commercial market for the purchase of such earth-moving equipment as could not be supplied from quartermaster stocks. When the first cargo ship arrived at San Diego on New Year's day, the brigade went on a round-the-clock loading schedule. Sixty-two hours later all assigned personnel and gear had been loaded and the 4,798 officers and men were on their way to Tutuila.

When the news of Pearl Harbor reached Samoa, Lieutenant Colonel Lester A. Dessez, commanding the 7th Defense Battalion, ordered his troops to man their positions. The Samoan Marine Reserve Battalion was called to active duty and assigned to reinforce the defenses. Despite a spate of rumors and false alarms, no sign of the Japanese was evident until the night of 11 January, when a submarine shelled the naval station for about seven minutes from a position 10,000–15,000 yards off the north shore where the coast defense guns could not bear. The station suffered only light damage from the shells, some of which fell harmlessly into the bay, and two men were wounded slightly by fragments. The Marines remained on alert but received no further visits from the enemy.

<sup>6</sup> *King's Naval Record*, 354.

On 19 January radar picked up signs of numerous ships, and observation stations on the island's headlands soon confirmed the arrival of the 2d Brigade.

While still at sea, General Larsen had received orders from the Navy Department appointing him Military Governor of American Samoa and giving him responsibility for the islands' defense as well as supervisory control over the civil government. As soon as the ships docked antiaircraft machine guns of the 2d Defense Battalion were promptly unloaded and set up in the hills around Pago Pago harbor. The 8th Marines took over beach defense positions occupied by the 7th Defense Battalion and immediately began improving and expanding them. The artillerymen of 2/10 and the 2d Defense set up their guns in temporary positions while they went to work on permanent emplacements. Navy scouting amphibians of a shore-based squadron (VS-1-D14) attached to the brigade soon were aloft on a busy schedule of antisubmarine and reconnaissance missions.

The airfield on Tutuila was only 10 per cent completed when Larsen arrived, but he directed that construction be pushed around the clock, work to go on through the night under lights. He also detailed the brigade's engineer company to assist the civilian contractors in getting the field in shape. For the 2d Brigade's first three months in Samoa, its days were filled with defense construction. There was little time for any combat training not intimately connected with the problems of Samoan defense. The work was arduous, exacting, and even frustrating, since the brigade had arrived during the rainy season and the frequent tropical rainstorms had a habit of destroying in

minutes the results of hours of pick and shovel work.

General Larsen took immediate steps after his arrival in American Samoa to ascertain the status of the defenses in Western (British) Samoa, 40 or so miles northwest of Tutuila. On 26 January the brigade intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel William L. Bales, flew to Apia, the seat of government on the island of Upolu, to confer with the New Zealand authorities and make a reconnaissance of Upolu and Savaii, the two principal islands. The New Zealanders were quite anxious to cooperate with the Marines since they had a defense force of only 157 men to guard two large islands with a combined coastline of over 250 miles. Bales, whose investigation was aimed primarily at discovering the feasibility of developing either or both of the islands into a military base, reported back that Upolu's harbor facilities, road net, and several potential airfield sites made it readily susceptible to base development. He found, on the other hand, that Savaii had no safe major anchorages and that its lava-crust surface did "not offer airfield sites that could be developed quickly by the Japanese or anyone else."<sup>7</sup> On his return to Tutuila, Lieutenant Colonel Bales reported to General Larsen that:

In its present unprotected state, Western Samoa is a hazard of first magnitude for the defense of American Samoa. The conclusion is unescapable that if we don't occupy it the Japanese will and there may not be a great deal of time left.<sup>8</sup>

Naval authorities in Washington and Pearl Harbor recognized the desirability

<sup>7</sup> LtCol W. L. Bales ltr to CG, 2d MarBrig, 8Feb42, Rept on Recon in Western Samoa, 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

of occupying Western Samoa and extended their interest to include Wallis (Uea) Island, a small French possession 320 miles from Tutuila on the western approaches to Samoa. Negotiations were entered into with New Zealand regarding the defense of Western Samoa, and the Free French government in regard to the occupation of Wallis. In March warning orders were sent out to Larsen's brigade and both marine divisions to be prepared to furnish troops for the garrisoning of Western Samoa and Wallis.<sup>9</sup> Negotiations for the use of land and other facilities in Western Samoa were completed on 20 March when Larsen and a New Zealand representative signed an agreement giving the Americans responsibility for defense of all the Samoan islands. This group, together with Wallis, was now considered a tactical entity and a new Marine brigade was to be organized to occupy the western islands.

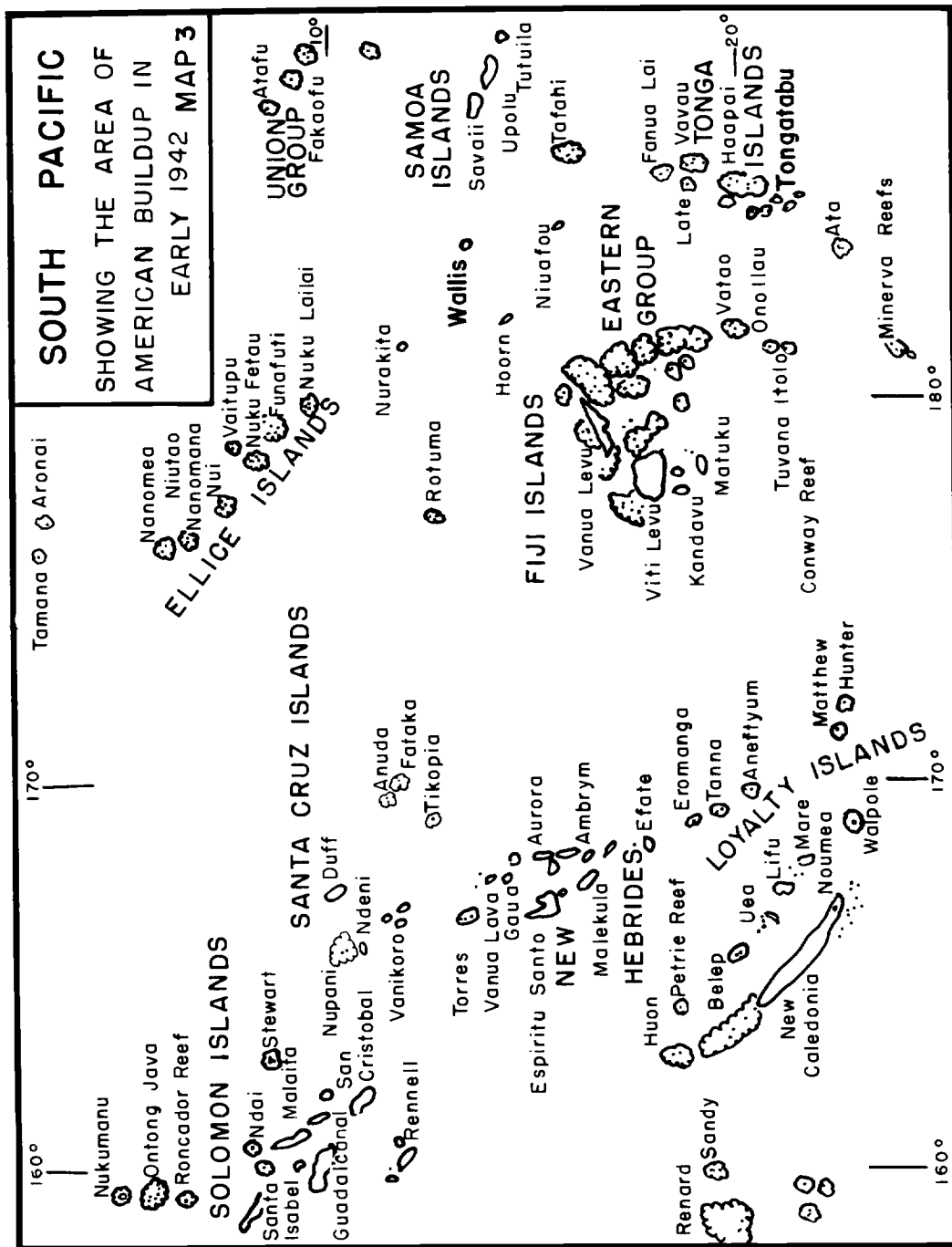
As an advance force of this new garrison, the 7th Defense Battalion was sent to Upolu on 28 March, and a small detachment was established on Savaii. In the States, the 1st Marine Division at New River, North Carolina, organized the 3d Marine Brigade on 21 March with Brigadier General Charles D. Barrett in command. Its principal units were the 7th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines. The 7th's 3d Battalion and Battery C of 1/11 were detached on the 29th to move overland to the west coast for further transfer to Samoa as part of the garrison for Wallis. General Larsen meanwhile had been directed to organize the 8th Defense Battalion on Tutuila, as the major element of the Wallis garrison.

<sup>9</sup> CMC Serial 003A7842, 20Mar42, Defense of Western Samoa and Wallis Island.

To exercise overall authority, Headquarters Samoan Area Defense Force was established on Tutuila. Major General Charles F. B. Price, who was appointed to this command, arrived with his staff at Pago Pago on 28 April from the States. On 8 May the 3d Marine Brigade convoy arrived off Apia and General Barrett assumed military command of Western Samoa. At the end of the month, the 8th Defense Battalion (Reinforced) under Colonel Raphael Griffin moved into Wallis.

More than 10,000 Marine ground troops were stationed in the Samoan area by the beginning of June, and reinforcements arrived in a steady flow. Marine air was also well established. General Larsen's interest and pressure assured that Tutuila's airfield was ready for use on 17 March, two days before the advance echelon of MAG-13 arrived. The new air group, organized on 1 March at San Diego, was earmarked for Price's command. Initially the group commander, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas J. Walker, Jr., had only one tactical squadron, VMF-111, operating from Tutuila's airfield, but VMO-151, a scout-bomber squadron, joined in May with the arrival of the 3d Marine Brigade convoy. The amphibians of the Navy's VS-1-D14 squadron were also put under Walker's command and sent forward to operate from Upolu and Wallis while the airfields projected for those islands were rushed to completion by naval construction battalions.

Like the rest of the garrison forces in the South Pacific which were rushed out to plug a gaping hole in Allied defenses, General Price's defense force was never called upon to conduct the island defense for which it was organized. Samoa might



well have become a target for enemy attacks, but the decisive Battle of Midway forced the Japanese to curb their soaring ambition.<sup>10</sup> Samoa became a vast advanced combat training camp instead of a battleground. Most of the units coming there after the arrival of the 2d Brigade drew heavily on the recruit depots for their personnel,<sup>11</sup> and for these Marines Samoan duty was an opportunity

for learning the fundamentals of teamwork in combat operations. As the need for defense construction was met and the danger of Japanese attacks lessened, Samoa became a staging area through which replacements and reinforcements were funnelled to the amphibious offensives in the Solomons.<sup>12</sup> Units and individuals paused for a while here and then moved on, more jungle-wise and combat ready, to meet the Japanese.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Campaigns of the Pacific War*, 3. See Part V, "Decision at Midway" and especially Chapter 1, "Setting the Stage—Early Naval Operations" for events leading up to the Midway battle.

<sup>11</sup> At least 40% of the 3d MarBrig initial complement was straight out of boot camp. 3d Mar Brig AnRept, 6Sept42, 9.

---

<sup>12</sup> From December 1942 to July 1943 Samoa was the training center for all Marine replacement battalions raised on the east coast of the U. S. K. W. Condit, G. Diamond, and E. T. Turnbladh, *Marine Corps Ground Training in World War II* (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1956), 181-186.

PART III

*The Defense of Wake*

## Wake in the Shadow of War<sup>1</sup>

In the strategic context of 1940 and 1941, the importance of Wake, both to the United States and Japan, was considerable. At this time the United States had not won its ocean-girdling net of Pacific bases, and, with the exceptions of Wake, Midway, and Guam, the islands between the Hawaiians and the Philippines were *terra incognita*. Wake, a prying outpost north of the Marshalls and on the flank of the Marianas, would be a strategic prize for Japan's ocean interests and a corresponding embarrassment while it was in the hands of the United States.

These factors had been noted by the U. S. in the Hepburn Report of 1938 which recommended a \$7,500,000 three-year program to develop the atoll as an advanced air base and an intermediate station on the air route to the Far East. Acting on these recommendations, initial development of Wake began early in 1941.<sup>2</sup> Base construction was given first priority, and by the time the first military contingent arrived on the atoll a civilian contractor's crew of approximately 1,200 men, under supervision of Mr. Daniel Teters, was hard at work.

<sup>1</sup> For a résumé of the previous history of Wake, see *Defense of Wake*, Appendix II, "Pre-war History of Wake, 1586-1941." Col Heintz's monograph has been the principal source used in compiling this account; his version of the action has been followed closely.

<sup>2</sup> Capt R. A. Dierdorff, USN, "Pioneer Party—Wake Island," *USNI Proceedings*, April 1943, 502.

By 18 April 1941, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, became fearful that the defensive efforts had started too late. In a study sent to the Chief of Naval Operations, Kimmel stressed the importance of Wake and asked that work on defense be given a higher priority than base construction. He also requested that a Marine defense battalion be assigned to the atoll.<sup>3</sup>

In 1941 the strength of a typical defense battalion was 43 officers and 939 enlisted men, and its two most characteristic attributes were balanced structure and a high degree of strategic mobility. But mobility disappeared at the battalion's destination. Once its guns were in position, a defense battalion suffered from insufficient transportation and a shortage of men.<sup>4</sup>

The Pacific strategy of 1941 contemplated rendering our bases relatively secure against air raids, hit-and-run surface attacks, or even minor landings. Fleet Marine Force defense battalions, organized for defense against just such operations, could provide antiaircraft protection, could stand off light men-of-war and transports, and in extreme emergency could fight on the beaches with individual weapons in the tradition that every Ma-

<sup>3</sup> CinCPac ltr to CNO, 18Apr41.

<sup>4</sup> USMC T/O's, D-133 through D-155-D inclusive, 27Feb41; MGC ltr, 28Aug41, "Employment of Defense Battalions."

rine, first and last, is an infantryman.<sup>5</sup> Within and about the structure of such lightly held but secure bases, the Pacific Fleet would ply, awaiting the moment when battle could be joined with enemy naval forces—"to get at naval forces with naval forces,"<sup>6</sup> as Admiral Kimmel put it—in decisive action for control of the sea.

As might be expected, the Japanese concept of strategy in the Central Pacific was to seize or neutralize the few advanced United States bases west of the Hawaiian Islands as quickly as possible after the outset of war. For this purpose Japanese forces in the Marshalls and Carolines (the *Fourth Fleet*) were organized along lines resembling an American amphibious force.<sup>7</sup> Commanded by Vice Admiral Nariyoshi Inouye, the *Fourth Fleet* was composed of amphibious shipping, a few old cruisers, destroyers, submarines, shore-based aircraft, and a Japanese version of our own Fleet Marine Force: the special naval landing force.<sup>8</sup> Fleet headquarters were at Truk, where Admiral Inouye's flag flew in the light cruiser *Kashima*.<sup>9</sup>

The war missions of Admiral Inouye and his fleet had been decided generally in 1938 when the basic East Asia war plans

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> CinCpac ltr to CNO, 18Apr41, "Defense and Development of Wake Island."

<sup>7</sup> ATIS (SWPA) Doc No. 17895A, "Full translations of answers to questions concerning attack on Wake Island," hereinafter cited as *Wake Attack*.

<sup>8</sup> The special naval landing force (SNLF, sometimes contracted to SLF) were Japanese Navy personnel organized for service and duties in limited land operations similar to those performed by U. S. Marines. Throughout the war, they gave an outstanding account of themselves.

<sup>9</sup> *Wake Attack*.

had been prepared in Tokyo.<sup>10</sup> But it was not until November 1941 that detailed instructions for commanders within the *Combined Fleet* were formulated and issued. In these instructions, Wake was dismissed in a single phrase:

Forces of the Fourth Fleet:

Defend the South Seas Islands, patrol, maintain surface communications, capture Wake . . . .<sup>11</sup>

Wake would be strictly a local operation. By Admiral Inouye's scheme, 450 special naval landing force troops could, in a pinch, turn the trick.<sup>12</sup>

### *FINAL PREPARATIONS, AUTUMN, 1941*<sup>13</sup>

On 23 June 1941 the Chief of Naval Operations directed that elements of the 1st Defense Battalion, FME, be established at Wake "as soon as practicable." This directive (as eventually modified)

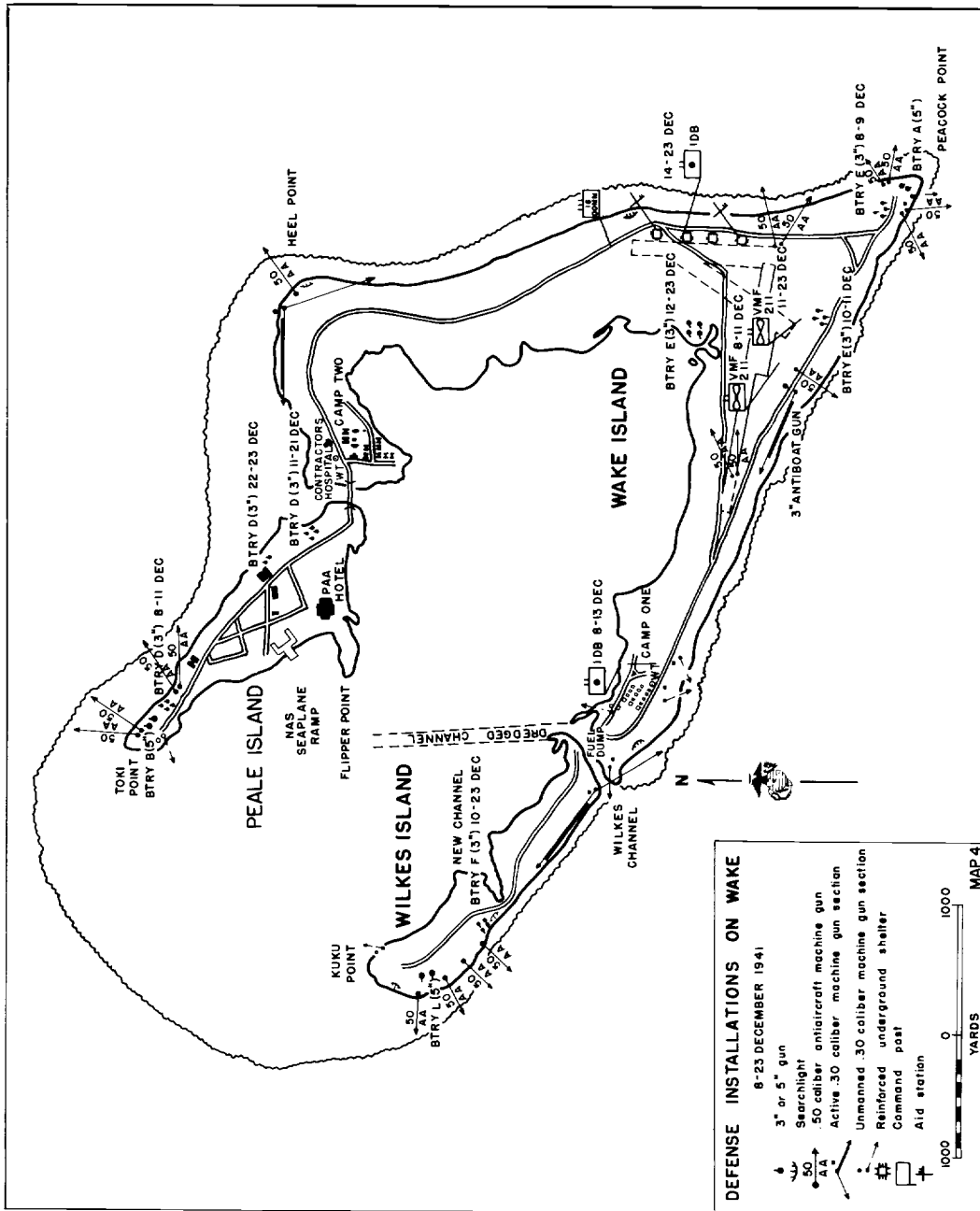
<sup>10</sup> USSBS (Pac), NavAnalysisDiv, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, 2 vols (Washington: GPO, 1946), "Japanese Naval Planning," I, 176, hereinafter cited as *USSBS Interrogations* with subject or interviewee.

<sup>11</sup> *Campaigns of the Pacific War*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> *USSBS Interrogations*, "Japanese Capture of Wake Island," II, 371, hereinafter cited as *Capture of Wake*.

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from CO 1st DefBnDet Wake, Rept to CMC, 18Mar46, hereinafter cited as *Devereux Rept*; Col P. A. Putnam Rept to CMC, 18Oct45, hereinafter cited as *Putnam Rept*; informal reports by key subordinates to Cols Devereux and Putnam on which the official reports are largely based, hereinafter cited as (*officer's name*) Rept; ships' logs of the U. S. naval vessels concerned; Col J. P. S. Devereux, *The Story of Wake Island* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1947), hereinafter cited as *Devereux Story*.





specified that the following units should compose the defensive garrison :

- Four 3-inch antiaircraft batteries
- Three 5-inch seacoast batteries
- Appropriate automatic weapons
- One SCR-268 fire-control radar, and one SCR-270B search radar.<sup>14</sup>

CNO's "as soon as practicable" was translated into immediate action by the Pacific Fleet. About 1 August Major Lewis A. Hohn with five officers and 173 enlisted Marines and sailors from the 1st Defense Battalion commenced loading the USS *Regulus*, a twenty-year-old "Hog Island" transport which would carry the battalion advance detail to Wake. *Regulus* sailed on 8 August, and arrived off Wake on 19 August. Weapons and camp equipment were lightered ashore, and by the time the *Regulus* departed on 22 August, a camp facing the lagoon had been set up on a site near the west end of Wake's west leg. To distinguish this camp from the one west of Heel Point housing the 1,200 Pacific Naval Air Base contract workmen, the Marine camp was designated as Camp One. The civilian establishment became known as Camp Two. (See Map 4)

Wake, as it appeared to the Marines of the 1st Defense Battalion, was a V-shaped atoll composed of three islands: Wake Island proper,<sup>15</sup> the body of the V; and Wilkes and Peale, the two tip-ends. Its land mass consisted of some 2,600 acres of sand and coral. Offshore, heavy surf roared continually against a coral reef which surrounded the whole atoll at dis-

tances varying from 30 to 1,000 yards. The beaches and much of the terrain inland were covered with coral boulders, some large enough to conceal several men. The interior lagoon, although affording sufficient surface and depth for seaplanes, was studded with coral heads and foul ground which had to be dredged before ships could enter the single channel between Wilkes and Wake Island. Despite Wake's limited land area, its coastline exceeded 21 miles. An excellent vignette of Wake in 1941 was given by Colonel Bayler :

Wake is by no means the bare sandy spit one thinks of when atolls are mentioned. Considerable areas of it are covered by woods, and though the trees are small, their thick foliage and the scrubby tangled underbrush provided admirable cover . . . Walking in these jungles was difficult but not impossible . . .<sup>16</sup>

In August 1941, Wake was in rapid transition from its past solitude to the mechanized modernity of an outlying air base. Patrol plane facilities and a concrete ramp, the result of Pan American's pioneering, were already available on Peale.<sup>17</sup> Just inshore of Peacock Point along the west leg of Wake Island a narrow airstrip, 5,000 by 200 feet, had been chopped out of the dense growth. A main roadnet of packed coral was taking shape rapidly as the contractor's work-

<sup>16</sup> LtCol W. L. J. Bayler, *Last Man off Wake Island* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), 62, hereinafter cited as *Last Man off Wake Island*.

<sup>17</sup> In 1935, with Navy cooperation, Pan American Airways began development of a staging and refueling base on Peale to service its big clippers on the run to the Orient. At the time of this narrative major facilities included, in addition to those mentioned above, a powerful radio station, a pier, and a small but excellent hotel for overnight accommodation of passengers. Dierdorff, *op. cit.*, 501.

<sup>14</sup> CNO ltr to CinCPac, 23Jun41, "Establishment of defensive garrison on Wake Island."

<sup>15</sup> To prevent confusion, Wake Island, as distinguished from the entire atoll, will hereinafter be entitled "Wake Island," whereas the single word, "Wake" will designate the atoll.

men blasted, slashed, and dozed the terrain of Wake.

In spite of the need for haste, rigid official separation existed between the construction efforts of Marines and those of the contractors.<sup>18</sup> Operating on a semi-private basis with their heavy equipment, supplies, and facilities the naval air base contract workers were concerned with building roads, shops, utilities, quarters, air base facilities, and the like. They built no defense installations. This construction fell solely to the Marines who had little engineering equipment except picks and shovels or the infrequent luxury of a borrowed civilian bulldozer. The Marines installed their heavy weapons by hand, hewed emplacements and foxholes from the coral, and erected their own living quarters. Understanding this basic difference in available means, the Navy's construction representative, Lieutenant Commander Elmer B. Greey,<sup>19</sup> and the civilian general superintendent, Mr. Daniel Teters, did their best to assist the shorthanded and meagerly equipped Marines. At no time, even after the outbreak of war, did the contractor's establishment or workmen come under full military control.

On 15 October Major Hohn was relieved as Marine detachment commander by Major James P. S. Devereux, who until this time had been executive officer of the 1st Defense Battalion. Major Devereux also

<sup>18</sup> Capt W. S. Cunningham, USN, transcript of recorded interview, "History of Wake Island Defense," 9Jan46, 3, hereinafter cited as *Cunningham Interview*.

<sup>19</sup> "Resident Officer-in-Charge" was LCdr Greey's official designation. With four enlisted Navy radiomen to maintain his communications, he was, until the arrival of Maj Hohn's detachment, sole naval representative on Wake.

became Island Commander, an additional duty which he would hold until relieved late in 1941 by a naval officer, Commander W. S. Cunningham, at this time still navigator of the USS Wright.

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

When I arrived on the island, the contractor's men working on the airfield near the toe of Wake proper had one airstrip in usable condition and were beginning the cross-runway. Five large magazines and three smaller detonator magazines, built of concrete and partly underground, were almost completed in the airfield area. A Marine barracks, quarters for the Navy fliers who would be stationed on the island, warehouses and shops also were going up on Wake. On Peale Island, work was progressing on a naval hospital, the seaplane ramp and parking areas. On Wilkes, there were only fuel storage tanks and the sites of proposed powder magazines, but a new deepwater channel was being cut through the island. In the lagoon, a dredge was removing coral heads from the runways for the seaplanes which were to be based at Wake. Some of these installations were nearly finished ; some were partly completed ; some were only in the blueprint stage.<sup>20</sup>

To bring Wake's defenses to the highest possible state of readiness in the shortest time, Major Devereux found much to be done. In addition, as senior representative of the armed forces on Wake, he was confronted by other demanding problems. To reinforce Army air strength in the Philippines, B-17 "Flying Fortresses" were being staged across the Pacific<sup>21</sup> through Wake, but no aviation ground crews were available there to service the big airplanes. Some 3,000 gallons of gasoline for each of these planes therefore had to be manhandled and hand-pumped

<sup>20</sup> *Devereux Story*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> *War Reports*, 67.

by the Marines.<sup>22</sup> This they did in addition to their normal duties, and the fueling tasks came at all hours of the day or night. It was ironic that many of these aircraft, which cost Wake so many man-hours of vital defensive preparations, would be trapped on the ground by the initial Japanese attacks on Clark and Nichols Fields in the Philippines.

Although this servicing of Army planes represented the heaviest single additional duty imposed upon the Marines, they were also required to act as stevedores in the time-consuming and exhausting process of unloading ships which arrived at the atoll. This work was required until the channel, berthing and turning facilities inside the lagoon could be completed. These additional duties hampered defense work during the autumn of 1941; but fortunately the detachment needed little combat training because it contained a number of "old Marines" of the best type.<sup>23</sup> On 2 November, two weeks after Major Devereux's arrival, the Wake garrison was augmented by a draft from the parent 1st Defense Battalion. This group included 9 officers and 200 enlisted men who arrived from Pearl on board the USS *Castor*. This brought the total Marine strength on Wake to 15 officers and 373 enlisted Marines.

<sup>22</sup> Tankers would pump bulk aviation gas into tank storage ashore; Marine working parties would pump this gasoline into 50-gallon drums and transfer the drums to dispersed fuel dumps; finally, on arrival of planes the same gasoline would again be pumped by the same means into a lone tank-truck for delivery to the aircraft. When time pressed—as it usually did—Marines reinforced the truck by pumping directly from 50-gallon drums into the Fortresses.

<sup>23</sup> *Devereux Story*, 27.

During October and November progress on and about the airstrip, by now a going concern, indicated that there was room on Wake for the aviation component of fighters necessary to balance and round out the defense force. Commander, Aircraft Battle Force, had determined that this was to be Marine Fighter Squadron 211, supported in its independent role by a provisional service detachment drawn from Marine Air Group 21, to which VMF-211 was assigned. To establish the ground facilities required to maintain this squadron, Major Walter L. J. Bayler from the staff of MAG-21, together with a detachment of 49 Marines commanded by Second Lieutenant Robert J. Conderman,<sup>24</sup> were dispatched from Pearl on 19 November in USS *Wright*, an aircraft tender which was also bringing out the prospective Island Commander and commanding officer of the Naval Air Station.

While the *Wright* plowed westward bearing VMF-211's ground components, the air echelon of that squadron, consisting of the squadron commander, nine officers and two enlisted pilots,<sup>25</sup> had on the

<sup>24</sup> This detachment, like a similar one organized for the Marine air component at Midway, had been provisionally made up from key personnel representing each squadron in MAG-21, inasmuch as, at the time of organization, firm decision had not been made as to which squadrons from that group would be assigned to which islands. Wake aviation's ground detachment, therefore, included personnel not only from VMF-211 but from H&S Sq-21 and VMSB-231 and -232. CO MAG-21 Rept to CMC, 23Dec41.

<sup>25</sup> The pilots of VMF-211's Wake detachment were: Maj Paul A. Putnam (commanding), Capts Henry T. Elrod, Herbert C. Frueler, Frank C. Tharin; 1stLt George A. Graves; 2dLts Robert J. Conderman (in command of advance detail and ground maintenance, but also a pilot), Carl R. Davidson, Frank J. Holden, John

afternoon of 27 November received secret verbal warning orders to prepare for embarkation on board a carrier. Such orders had been expected by the squadron commander (though not by the pilots, virtually all of whom carried little more than toilet articles and a change of clothing), and few preparations were required. The squadron had only to fly the 12 new F4F-3 (Grumman Wildcat) fighters from Ewa Mooring Mast (as that air station was then designated) over to Ford Island, the naval air base in the middle of Pearl Harbor, for further transfer by air to the flight deck of the USS *Enterprise*. This was a routine operation for Marine pilots, and except for their unfamiliarity with the new aircraft, and the fact that one plane's starter misbehaved,<sup>26</sup> the morning flight of 28 November onto the *Enterprise* went off without incident.<sup>27</sup>

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

AT SEA,  
December 3, 1941.

DEAR COLONEL LARKIN:

It is expected that we will go ashore tomorrow morning. The extreme secrecy under which we sailed is still in effect and I under-

---

F. Kinney, David D. Kliever, Henry G. Webb; TSgt William J. Hamilton, and SSgt Robert O. Arthur.

<sup>26</sup> A hint as to the importance of the squadron's mission might have been drawn at this time from the fact that, when this starter trouble developed, the pilot of this defective plane was flown by a torpedo plane to the carrier where a brand-new F4F-3 from an *Enterprise* squadron was issued to him.

<sup>27</sup> Maj. P. A. Putnam ltr to CO MAG-21, 3Dec41.

stand is to remain so at least until this Force has returned to Hawaiian operating area. Therefore I am sending this first report via guard mail on this ship, rather than by air mail after landing . . .

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

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

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

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

When the *Enterprise* had reached a point approximately 200 miles northeast of Wake, the squadron, from a materiel standpoint, was "as far as possible ready

for combat service," according to Major Putnam. However, he added, it was:

. . . seriously handicapped by lack of experience in the type of airplane then used. It is believed that the squadron was excellently trained and well qualified for war duty in a general sense, but it was unfortunate that the new type of airplane, so radically different from the type in which training had been conducted, had been received too recently to permit familiarization in tactical flying and gunnery.<sup>28</sup>

On the morning of 4 December this force was met by a Navy PBY sent out from Wake,<sup>29</sup> and the VMF-211 aircraft took off from the *Enterprise* and followed this plane to the atoll. Within less than two hours the last F4F-3 had pancaked on the narrow strip at Peacock Point.

Major Bayler had arrived on 29 November and already was busy setting up airbase communication facilities. Commander Cunningham had succeeded Major Devereux as Island Commander, and Lieutenant Conderman and his 49 headquarters and service personnel were waiting to greet the squadron, but the aircraft operating facilities at Wake were hardly in a finished stage. The landing strip, although sufficient in length, was too narrow to permit safe operation of more than one airplane at a time. Takeoffs or landings by section were thus impossible. Parking was extremely restricted, and all areas about the hardstand mat were in such rough and unfinished condition that

passage of airplanes over them, even when pushed by hand, could cause serious plane damage. Fueling still depended on hand pumps and man power. No shelters or aircraft revetments existed, and the new planes were somewhat puzzling to pilots and mechanics who had no instruction manuals. Major Putnam began immediately to negotiate for the construction of revetments,<sup>30</sup> and he also began a training program to be carried on in conjunction with the daily dawn and dusk patrols which started on the morning after VMF-211 arrived.

These patrols, executed by four aircraft, circled the atoll approximately 50 miles out, and pilots combined this duty with navigation and instrument training. Instrument practice was particularly important because Wake had no electronic homing or navigational aids suitable for fighter operations, and the atoll was a small mark for pilots to locate through a floor of intermittent clouds.<sup>31</sup>

Other changes had taken place since the arrival of the *Wright*. Commander

<sup>28</sup> *Putnam Rpt*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> On the day before, to the surprise of the men on Wake, a 12-plane squadron of PBY's had glided down onto the lagoon, anchored, and commenced a daily series of long-range air searches to the south of Wake. These seaplanes, however, were recalled from Wake on 5 December. The PBY which assisted VMF-211 with its navigation was from this squadron. *Last man off Wake Island*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> "Backed by a written request from the Commander, Aircraft Battle Force, a request was made through the Island Commander to the Civilian Contractor's superintendent on the morning of 5 December, asking for the immediate construction of bunkers for the protection of aircraft, and outlining various other works to follow. Great emphasis was put on the fact that speed, rather than neatly finished work, was required. However, an inspection that afternoon revealed a young civil engineer laboriously setting out stakes with a transit and three rodmen. It required an hour of frantic rushing about and some very strong language to replace the young engineer and his rodmen with a couple of Swedes and bulldozers." *Putnam Rpt*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> HistSec, HQMC interview with 1stLt J. F. Kinney, 23Jul45, 4, hereinafter cited as *Kinney Interview*.

Cunningham had brought with him Commander Campbell Keene, eight Navy officers, and 58 bluejackets who comprised the initial detachment of the Naval Air Station. All these personnel, like the Army Air Force communication detachment<sup>32</sup> of one officer and four soldiers, were without arms or field equipment. In spite of the efforts, men, and equipment consigned to Wake, the situation was still grim on 6 December 1941. The ground defenses, embodying the complete artillery of a defense battalion, had been emplaced during 12-hour working days, and some protective sandbagging and camouflage accomplished. But to man these weapons the 1st Defense Battalion detachment had only 15 officers and 373 enlisted men, although the 1941 T/O called for 43 officers and 939 men. This meant that one 3-inch antiaircraft battery<sup>33</sup> was entirely without personnel, and that each of the other two batteries could man only three of its four guns. Thus only six of the twelve 3-inch guns on the island could be utilized. Only Battery D had its full allowance of fire-control equipment. Battery E had a director but no height finder, and it had to get altitude data by telephone from Battery D. There were not half enough men to employ the ground and antiaircraft machine guns. There was no radar, despite plans for its eventual provision, and the searchlight battery did not have sound locators with which to detect approaching air-

---

<sup>32</sup> Commanded by Capt Henry S. Wilson, USA. This detachment manned an Army Airways Communication Service radio van to assist B-17's en route westward.

<sup>33</sup> This was Btry F. For this battery, however, the necessary fire control equipment had not yet arrived; so, even with full gun crews, its effectiveness would have been slight.

craft. Only the crews of the 5-inch seacoast batteries were at or near authorized strengths, and they also were devilled by unending minor shortages of tools, spare parts, and miscellaneous ordnance items.<sup>34</sup>

Peale Island's base development and defensive organization were the most advanced in the atoll. Although Battery B, the 5-inch seacoast unit at Toki Point, had been fully organized only after the arrival of personnel on 2 November, its position was in good shape. Much the same could be said of Battery D, 3-inch antiaircraft, set up near the southeast end of the island. All emplacements had not been completely sandbagged, but there were adequate personnel shelters plus underground stowage for 1,400 rounds of 3-inch ammunition. Telephone lines, although not buried, linked all positions with the island command post. Work on Wake Island was not far behind. Battery A, the 5-inch seacoast unit at Peacock Point, was completely emplaced and well camouflaged although it lacked individual shelters. Battery E, (3-inch antiaircraft), although working with only 43 Marines, had completely emplaced, sandbagged and camouflaged two guns and the director, and work on the third gun was nearly completed by 6 December. Telephone lines (with important trunks doubled or tripled) connected all units on Wake Island, but the wire was on the surface.

"Wilkes Island was the least developed," reported Captain Wesley McC. Platt, the local commander:

... At the outbreak of war, weapons ... had been set up. All were without camouflage or protection except the .50 caliber machine

---

<sup>34</sup> File, dispatches received from Wake, 7-23 Dec41, hereinafter cited as *Wake File*.

guns, which had been emplaced. All brush east of the new channel had been cleared. The remaining brush west of the new channel was thick and . . . as a result of . . . this [the] . . . .50 caliber machine guns had been placed fairly close to the water line. The beach itself dropped abruptly from 2½ to 4 feet just above the high water mark.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to four .50 caliber AA and four .30 caliber machine guns, Platt had two searchlights and one 5-inch seacoast battery (L) which was set up at Kuku Point. The four 3-inch guns destined for Battery F were parked on Wilkes without personnel or fire control gear. Wire communications were in between the island command post and all units.<sup>36</sup>

Wake, intended primarily as a patrol plane base for PBY's, "the eyes of the Fleet," had no scouting aircraft after the PBY's departed on 5 December, and only the most primitive facilities for any type of aircraft operations. Its defending fighter squadron was learning while working, and these planes had neither armor nor self-sealing fuel tanks. In addition, their naval type bomb racks did not match the local supply of bombs.<sup>37</sup>

Exclusive of the 1,200 civilian contract employees, the military population of Wake (almost twenty per cent of whom were without arms or equipment) totalled 38 officers and 485 enlisted men:<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> LtCol W. McC. Platt reply to HistSec, HQMC questionnaire, 10Mar47.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Capt Frueler, squadron ordnance officer, at this moment was devising homemade modifications of the troublesome bomb lugs. By 8 December two 100-pound bombs could be precariously swung onto each aircraft, though hardly in any manner to inspire pilot confidence in clean release or assurance that return to base could be accomplished without dangling armed bombs.

<sup>38</sup> *Devereux Rept.*

1st Defense Battalion detachment:	15 officers, 373 enlisted
VMF-211 and attachments:	12 officers, 49 enlisted
U. S. Naval Air Station:	10 officers, 58 enlisted (without arms).
Army Air Corps:	1 officer, 4 enlisted (without arms).
USS <i>Triton</i> :	1 enlisted (without arms, landed for medical attention).

Thus there were only 449 Marines on the atoll who were equipped and trained for combat.

Supplies on Wake, although aggravatingly short in many particular items, were generally adequate. The Marines had a 90-day supply of rations, and the civilian workers had a six-month supply. No natural water supply existed, but a sufficient number of evaporators were in service. Ammunition and aviation ordnance supplies initially could support limited operations, but would not withstand a protracted defense. Medical supplies were those normal for a remote, outlying station and could thus be considered adequate.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the naval medical equipment and personnel on Wake, the contractor's organization operated a fully-equipped hospital in Camp Two.<sup>40</sup>

But since November, when dispatches had warned that the international situation demanded alertness, the atoll was as ready for defense as time and material available permitted. When this warning arrived, Major Devereux, then the island commander, asked whether the civilian workers should be turned to tasks dealing more directly with military defense, but he was told not to revise work priorities. Small-arms ammunition was nevertheless

<sup>39</sup> Maj. W. L. J. Bayler *Rept.*, 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> *Cunningham Interview*, 3.



issued to individual Marines, and ready-service ammunition was stowed at every gun position. A common "J"-line (so-called) which augmented normal telephone circuits, joined all batteries, command posts, observation posts, and other installations with which the commander might need contact during battle,<sup>41</sup> and primitive "walky-talkies" formed a radio net established to parallel wire communications between command posts on Wake Island, Wilkes, and Peale. Atop the 50-foot steel water tank at Camp One, the highest point on Wake, Major Devereux had established a visual observation post linked by field telephone to the command post. This OP, with a seaward horizon of about nine miles, was the only substitute for radar.

---

<sup>41</sup> Maj W. L. J. Bayler *Rept*, 3.

On the morning of Saturday, 6 December, Major Devereux found time to hold the first general quarters drill for the entire defense battalion. "Call to Arms" was sounded, and all gun positions were manned (to the extent which personnel shortages permitted), communications tested, and simulated targets were "engaged."<sup>42</sup> The drill ran smoothly, and Major Devereux granted his men an almost unheard-of reward: Saturday afternoon off, and holiday routine for Sunday.

His timing of this "breather" was better than he knew.

---

<sup>42</sup> Prior to the outbreak of war, no opportunity had been found for test firings, calibration, or other gunnery exercises after emplacement of weapons on Wake. The first actual firing was in combat against the Japanese. *Cunningham Interview* 3.

## The Enemy Strikes<sup>1</sup>

The Pan American Airways *Philippine Clipper* which had spent the night of 7-8 December at Wake re-embarked passengers shortly after sunrise on Monday<sup>2</sup> 8 December, taxied into the calm lagoon, and soared toward Guam. Ashore breakfast was nearly over, and some Marines were squaring away their tents prior to falling out for the day's work. Major Devereux was shaving. In the Army Airways Communications Service radio van near the airstrip, an operator was coming up on frequency with Hickam Field on Oahu when at 0650 a frantic uncoded transmission cut through: Oahu was under enemy air attack.

Captain Henry S. Wilson snatched the message and rushed to Devereux's tent. The major tried unsuccessfully to reach Commander Cunningham by telephone, and then called the base communication shack. There, a coded priority<sup>3</sup> transmission from Pearl was being broken down. Devereux put down the telephone and ordered the field music to sound "Call to

Arms."<sup>4</sup> Gunnery sergeants broke out their men and made sure that all had their ammunition. The Marines then piled into trucks which rushed them to the battery areas. By 0735 all positions were manned and ready, the planned watch was established atop the water tank in Camp One, and defense battalion officers had held a brief conference.

The dawn air patrol was up before the news came from Pearl,<sup>5</sup> but aviation personnel took hurried steps to safeguard the new Wildcats still on the ground. The *Philippine Clipper* was recalled ten minutes after its takeoff, and it circled back down to the lagoon. But in spite of these measures, things were not running smoothly at the airstrip. VMF-211 had been on Wake only four days and could hardly call itself well established. Aircraft revetments still being dozed would not be ready until 1400 that day, and suitable access roads to these revetments likewise were unfinished. Existing parking areas restricted plane dispersal to hazardously narrow limits. As Major Putnam stated it:

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

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material in chap 2 is derived from *Devereux Rept*; *Putnam Rept*; (*officer's name*) *Repts*; *Bayler Rept*; *Devereux Story*.

<sup>2</sup> By east longitude date; this was the same as Sunday, 7 December east of the date line.

<sup>3</sup> At this time relative priorities in dispatch traffic were as follows: Urgent (to be used only for initial enemy contact reports), Priority, Routine, Deferred. Thus a priority dispatch presented a considerably more important transmission than it now would.

<sup>4</sup> Cdr Cunningham, who immediately recalled the *Philippine Clipper*, has since stated that it was he who ordered the defense battalion to general quarters, but it appears that this action had already been taken prior to his issuance of any order. *Cunningham Interview*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Kinney Interview*, 3.

progressing simultaneously on six of the protective bunkers for the airplanes, and while none was available for immediate occupancy, all would be ready not later than 1400. Protection and camouflage for facilities were not available but could be made ready within 24 hours. Fox-holes or other prepared positions for personnel did not exist but would be completed not later than 1400. To move the airplanes out of the regular parking area entailed grave risk of damage, and any damage meant the complete loss of an airplane because of the complete absence of spare parts . . . The Squadron Commander decided to avoid certain damage to his airplanes by moving them across the rough ground, to delay movements of material until some place could be prepared to receive it, and to trust his personnel to take natural cover if attacked.<sup>6</sup>

Thus VMF-211's handful of pilots and mechanics spent the morning dispersing aircraft as widely as possible in the usable parking area, relocating the squadron radio installation from its temporary site to a covered one, and arming and servicing all aircraft for combat.

At 0800, only a few hours after the blazing and dying *Arizona* had broken out her colors under enemy fire at Pearl Harbor, Morning Colors sounded on Wake. Defensive preparations hummed. Trucks delivered full allowances of ammunition to each unit, the few spare individual weapons in Marine storerooms were spread as far as they would go to the unarmed Air Corps soldiers and Naval blue-jackets, and gas masks and helmets of World War I vintage were distributed to the battery positions. Watches were set at fire control instruments and guns, while the balance of personnel worked on fox-holes and filled the few remaining sand-bags. The 3-inch antiaircraft batteries were specifically directed to keep one gun, plus all fire control instruments, fully

<sup>6</sup> Putnam Rept, 8.

manned. Marine units and the Island Commander hastily set up command posts. Commander Cunningham located his CP in Camp Two, and VMF-211's remained in the squadron office tent. Aviation personnel had to stick with their jobs of belting extra ammunition and transferring bulk fuel into more dispersable drums.

At 0900 the four-plane combat air patrol returned to base. The planes were refueled while the four pilots<sup>7</sup> took a smoking break, and then clambered back into F4F's 9 through 12 and took off again to scout the most likely sectors for enemy approach. Shortly after this the pilot of the *Philippine Clipper*, Captain J. H. Hamilton, reported for duty to Major Putnam at VMF-211's headquarters. He had orders from the Island Commander to make a long-range southward search with fighter escort. These orders, however, were later cancelled.<sup>8</sup>

While VMF-211's combat air patrol made a swing north of Wake at 12,000 feet, 36 twin-engined Japanese bombers were flying northward toward the atoll. This was *Air Attack Force No. 1* of the *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla*, based at Roi, 720 miles to the south.<sup>9</sup> As the enemy group leader signalled for a gliding let-

<sup>7</sup> There were: Capt Elrod, who had relieved Maj Putnam on station, and 2dLt Davidson in one section, and 1stLt Kinney and TSgt Hamilton in the other.

<sup>8</sup> Orders were changed and the clipper took off for Midway at 1250 that afternoon to evacuate certain PAA personnel plus all passengers. Mr. H. P. Hevenor, a government official who missed the plane, was marooned on Wake and eventually ended up in Japanese hands. "It struck me as a rather drastic lesson in the wisdom of punctuality," commented Col Devereux. *Devereux Story*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Notes on Enemy Interviews, n. d., hereinafter cited as *Enemy Notes*.

down in his 10,000-foot approach, he noted that the south coast of the atoll was masked by a drifting rain squall at about 2,000 feet. The three Japanese divisions, in 12-plane Vs, dropped rapidly down into the squall and emerged a few seconds later almost on top of the Wake airstrip. First Lieutenant William W. Lewis, commanding Battery E at Peacock Point, saw these planes at 1150, and he grabbed a "J"-line telephone to warn Devereux. Just as the major answered, a spray of bright sparks began to sail through the air ahead of the enemy formation. One civilian thought "the wheels dropped off the airplanes." But the planes had not come to lose their wheels. Japanese bombs were falling on Wake.

Lewis, an experienced antiaircraft artilleryman, had not only complied with the commanding officer's directive to keep one gun manned, but had added another for good measure. Within a matter of seconds he had two of Battery E's 3-inch guns firing at the Japanese,<sup>10</sup> and .50 caliber guns along the south shore of Wake quickly took up the fire. A tight pattern of 100-pound fragmentation bombs and 20mm incendiary bullets struck the entire VMF-211 area where eight Grummans were dispersed at approximately hundred-yard intervals. While two 12-plane enemy divisions continued to release bombs and to strafe Camp Two, one division broke off, and swung back over Camp One and the airstrip.

<sup>10</sup> Battery E, it will be recalled, had no height finder but was supposed to rely for this data on telephonic information from Battery D on Peale. Without waiting for word from Peale, Lt Lewis made a quick estimate of target altitude, cranked it onto his director, and had the battery in action within a matter of seconds.

For a second time within less than ten minutes the airstrip was bombed and strafed. By 1210 the strike was over. The enemy planes turned away and commenced their climb to cruising altitude. "The pilots in every one of the planes were grinning widely. Everyone waggled his wings to signify 'Banzai'."<sup>11</sup>

The enemy attack burned or blasted seven of the eight F4F-3's from propeller to rudder, and the remaining Wildcat sustained serious but not irreparable damage to its reserve fuel tank. A direct bomb hit destroyed Major Bayler's air-ground radio installation, and the whole aviation area flamed in the blaze from the 25,000-gallon avgas tank which had been hit in the first strike. Fifty-gallon fuel drums burst into flame. VMF-211's tentage, containing the squadron's scanty stock of tools and spares, had been riddled and partially burned. Worst of all, 23 of the 55 aviation personnel then on the ground were killed outright or wounded so severely that they died before the following morning, eleven more were wounded but survived. At one stroke, VMF-211 had sustained nearly 60 per cent casualties. Nearly 50 per cent of the ground crewmen were dead. Three pilots (Lieutenants George A. Graves, Robert J. Conderman, and Frank J. Holden) were killed, and another, Lieutenant Henry G. Webb, was seriously wounded. Three more pilots, Major Putnam, Captain Frank C. Tharin, and Staff Sergeant Robert O. Arthur, had received minor wounds but remained on duty. In Camp

<sup>11</sup>Account by Norio Tsuji, a Japanese observer during the raid. ATIS (SWPA), Enemy Publications No. 6, "Hawaii-Malaya Naval Operations," 27Mar43, 27-38, hereinafter cited as *Hawaii-Malaya NavOps*.

Two and the adjacent Pan American area, the hotel and other seaplane facilities were afire, the *Philippine Clipper* had received a few stray machine-gun bullets, and some ten civilian employees of PAA had been killed.<sup>12</sup> The enemy did not lose a single bomber although "several" were damaged by anti-aircraft fire.<sup>13</sup> The Marine combat air patrol, well above the raid and momentarily scouting to the north, had not made contact. These pilots returned for landing shortly after the attack, and by a final stroke of ill fortune Captain Henry T. Elrod damaged his propeller seriously on a mass of bomb debris.

Wake's defenders were most concerned that this first raid had struck almost before they knew that enemy planes were overhead. The rain squall had helped the Japanese, but the atoll's lack of early-warning equipment was almost as beneficial to the enemy. The garrison needed radar, but none was available. Throughout the siege the Japanese planes continued to elude the most vigilant visual observation, and with the sound of their engines drowned by the booming surf they would often have their bombs away before they were spotted.

Damage control began at the airstrip as soon as the enemy departed. Casualties went to the one-story contractor's hospital which had been taken over as the island aid station,<sup>14</sup> the dead were placed

in a reefer box at Camp Two, and able-bodied aviation personnel turned their attention to the airplanes and to the gasoline fires. The three planes still able to fly were sent up on combat air patrol. In the sky they would be safe from another surprise raid. Crews and officers reorganized and reallocated jobs. Second Lieutenant John F. Kinney became engineering officer to replace First Lieutenant Graves who had been killed.<sup>15</sup> Kinney's principal assistant was Technical Sergeant William J. Hamilton, an enlisted pilot, and these two men began salvaging tools and parts from burned planes. Their efforts immeasurably aided future operations of VMF-211. Captain Herbert C. Freuler reorganized the ordnance section, Lieutenant David D. Kliever took over the radio section, and Captains Elrod and Tharin supervised construction of individual foxholes, shelters, and infantry defensive works in the VMF-211 area. Other work included mining the airstrip at 150-foot intervals with heavy dynamite charges to guard against airborne landings. Furrows were bulldozed throughout the open ground where such landings might take place, and heavy engineering equipment was placed to obstruct the runway at all times when friendly planes were not aloft. Plans called for continuation of the dawn and dusk reconnaissance flights, and for the initiation of a noon combat air patrol as well. It was hoped that these patrols could intercept subsequent enemy raids.

assisted by his civilian colleague, Dr. Lawton M. Shank, the contractor's surgeon, whose coolness and medical efficiency throughout the siege won high praise.

<sup>15</sup> *Kinney Interview*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Cunningham Interview*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> JICPOA Item No 4986, Professional notebook of Ens T. Nakamura, IJN, 1941-1943, 25Feb44, hereinafter cited as *Nakamura Notebook*.

<sup>14</sup> The battalion surgeon of the 1st DefBnDet, Lt (jg) Gustave M. Kahn (MC), USN, was ably

Elsewhere on the atoll new defense work progressed just as rapidly.<sup>16</sup> Emplacements, foxholes, and camouflage were improved at all battery positions. A Navy lighter loaded with dynamite surrounded by concrete blocks was anchored in Wilkes channel to guard this dredged waterway. Telephone lines were repaired, key trunk lines were doubled wherever possible, and every possible attempt was made to bury the most important wires.<sup>17</sup> Construction of more durable and permanent command posts and shelters began before the day ended in a cold drizzle. Working that night under blackout restrictions, aviation Marines and volunteer civilians completed eight blast-proof aircraft revetments. The atoll's four operational planes were thus relatively safe within these revetments when 9 December dawned bright and clear, and Captain Elrod's plane also was in a bunker undergoing repairs to its propeller and engine.

General quarters sounded at 0500, 45 minutes before dawn, and the defense commander set Condition 1. This readiness condition required full manning of all phone circuits, weapons, fire control instruments, and lookout stations. The four F4F-3's warmed up and then

---

<sup>16</sup> Approximately ten per cent of the civilian workers volunteered for military or defensive duties, and some attempted to enlist. Many of these men served with heroism and efficiency throughout the operation.

<sup>17</sup> "Surface lines could not seem to stand up although they were all paralleled. We wanted to bury them, but we could not do so by hand . . . considering the scarcity of men to do the work. We could not obtain permission to use the ditch diggers of the contractors. . . ." LtCol C. A. Barninger reply to HistSec, HQMC questionnaire, 18Feb47, 8-9, hereinafter cited as *Barninger*.

took off at 0545 over Peacock Point. They rendezvoused in section over the field and then climbed upward to scout 60- to 80-mile sectors along the most probable routes of enemy approach. At 0700 the fighters finished their search without sighting any enemy planes and then turned back toward the atoll. There the defense detachment shifted to Condition 2 which required that only half the guns be manned, and that fewer men stood by the fire control instruments. This permitted Marines to get after other necessary work around their positions. At the airstrip Lieutenant Kinney continued work on Elrod's plane, and the squadron's engineering problem made it evident that hangar overhaul and blackout facilities had to be set up. Major Putnam decided to enlarge two of his new plane shelters for this purpose. Entrance ramps were cut below ground level, and the revetments were roofed with "I" beams, lumber, and lightproof tarpaulins. These expedients allowed extensive overhaul and maintenance at all hours, and provided maximum protection for planes and mechanics.

As the morning wore on, men began to work closer to their foxholes and to keep a wary eye skyward. A dawn takeoff from the nearby Japanese-mandated Marshalls could bring a second Japanese bomber raid over Wake at any time after 1100. This "clock-watching" was justified. Disgustingly prompt, enemy planes from the *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla* at Roi arrived at 1145.<sup>18</sup> Marine Gunner H. C. Borth spotted them first from the water tank OP, and he shouted the warning over the "J"-line circuit. Seconds later the air-ground radio (again in operation with makeshift equipment) passed

---

<sup>18</sup> *Enemy Notes*, 1.

this alarm to the combat air patrol, and battery crewmen rushed to general quarters. Soon three bursts of antiaircraft fire, the new alarm signal,<sup>19</sup> were exploding from all sectors, and Wake stood by for its second attack of the war.

The leading Japanese planes approached from the southeast at 13,000 feet, and antiaircraft batteries on Peale Island and Peacock Point opened fire just before the first bombs were released. Minutes earlier the combat air patrol had made contact with one flank of the Japanese planes south of Wake, and Lieutenant Kliewer and Technical Sergeant Hamilton managed to cut off a straggler. They shot it down despite hot return fire from a top turret, and as the enemy plane spun away in flames the ground batteries' 3-inch shells began to burst among the Japanese. The Marine fighters broke contact and withdrew.

The first sticks of bombs exploded around Batteries E and A on Peacock Point and damaged a 3-inch gun in the E Battery position and a range finder at Battery A. Other bombs crashed along the east leg of Wake Island and into Camp Two. There direct hits destroyed the hospital, the civilian and Navy barracks buildings, the garage, blacksmith shop, a storehouse, and a machine shop. The falling bombs then straddled the channel at this tip of Wake and began to rain down on Peale Island. They made a shambles of the Naval Air Station which was still under construction, and

scored a direct hit on the radio station. This destroyed most of the Navy's radio gear.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile the antiaircraft guns continued to fire into the tight Japanese formation, and five bombers were smoking by the time Peale Island was hit. A moment later one of these planes burst into flames and blew up in the air. That was Wake's second certain kill. The others limped away still smoking.<sup>21</sup>

The hospital burned to the ground while the two surgeons saved first the patients and then as much medical supplies and equipment as they had time to salvage. Camp Two and the Naval Air Station were now as badly wrecked as the aviation area had been on the previous day, and four Marines and 55 civilians had been killed. But the defenders had learned some lessons, and the Japanese were not to have such an easy time hereafter. Major Putnam summed it up:

The original raid . . . was tactically well conceived and skillfully executed, but thereafter their tactics were stupid, and the best that can be said of their skill is that they had excellent flight discipline. The hour and altitude of their arrival over the island was almost constant and their method of attack invariable, so that it was a simple matter to meet them, and they never, after that first day, got through unopposed. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Defenders spent that afternoon collecting wounded, salvaging useful items from blasted ruins, and moving undamaged installations to safer spots. These jobs were to become painfully familiar on succeeding afternoons.

<sup>19</sup> Wake did not have an air raid alarm, and this traditional three-shot signal was the only alternative. Defenders tried to make an alarm system with dismantled auto horns wired to storage batteries, but it never worked. *Last Man Off Wake Island*, 65, 122.

<sup>20</sup> CO NAS Wake Rpt to ComFourteen, 20-Dec41, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> A Japanese report indicates that 14 of these bombers were damaged by antiaircraft fire during this attack. *Nakamura Notebook*.

<sup>22</sup> *Putnam Rept*, 10.

The Japanese attack on Battery E at Peacock Point and along the island's east leg suggested to Major Devereux that the enemy would plan their raids in a logical sequence to pass over the atoll's long axis. On the previous day they had struck Wake's aviation, and now they had bombed not only the Naval Air Station but the 3-inch battery which had engaged them so promptly during that first raid. Thus Peacock Point was particularly vulnerable, and to protect his remaining anti-aircraft weapons, Devereux ordered Battery E to shift to a new site some six hundred yards east and north. There the battery could manage its job equally well. And to make sure that its fire power did not suffer, the battery drew one of the unused 3-inch guns assigned to the "phantom" Battery F on Wilkes. This weapon replaced the one damaged by bombs.

To provide new hospital facilities, ammunition was cleared from the two most widely-separated reinforced concrete magazine igloos, and these were converted into underground medical centers. Each measured 20 by 40 feet and could accommodate 21 hospital cots. They met blackout requirements, and with lights furnished by two small generators could be operated efficiently at night. Medical supplies were divided between the two aid stations. Dr. Kahn was in charge of the Marine hospital in the southern shelter, and Dr. Shank maintained the Navy-civilian facility at the north end of the row of magazine igloos. Both were in use by nightfall that day.

During the night Battery E displaced to its new position. Aided by contractor's trucks and almost 100 civilian volunteers, Marines moved the guns, sandbags (too valuable and scarce to be left behind), fire control equipment, and ammunition.

Emplacements were dug at the new site, sandbags refilled, and the guns readied for action. By 0500, just in time for dawn general quarters, the battery was in position and ready to fire.<sup>23</sup> Dummy guns were set up at the old position.

On 10 December the Japanese confirmed Devereux's theory that they would maintain certain patterns of approach and attack. At about 1045, 26 enemy bombers appeared, this time from the east. Again VMF-211 intercepted, and some of the bombers were hit before they reached the atoll. Captain Elrod, leading the fighters, shot down two enemy planes after the 3-inch guns began to fire. Bombs hit Battery E's abandoned position at Peacock Point, but the new site was not threatened. On Peale Island Battery D received two successive passes by one enemy flight division. The first pass scored a damaging hit on the battery's powerplant, but the guns continued to fire on barrage data. One plane burst into flames.

On Wilkes Island, undamaged from the earlier raids, one stick of bombs lit squarely on a construction dump where 125 tons of dynamite were cached west of the "New Channel."<sup>24</sup> The resultant explosion stripped most of the underbrush off Wilkes, detonated all 5- and 3-inch ready ammunition at battery positions,<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> LtCol W. W. Lewis reply to HistSec, HQMC questionnaire, 28Feb47, 1, hereinafter cited as *Lewis*.

<sup>24</sup> The "New Channel" was a partially-completed waterway through the center of Wilkes.

<sup>25</sup> By this time the Btry F position was being activated, but it was not as yet in full commission. Marine Gunner McKinstry, with naval personnel and volunteer civilians, had started that morning to form an antiboat battery with this unit's three guns and the damaged gun inherited from Btry E.



and swept Battery L's emplacement clean of accessories, light fittings and other movable objects. Fortunately only one Marine was killed. Four others were wounded, and one civilian sustained shock. But materiel-wise, Battery L was in serious shape. All fire control instruments except the telescopes on Gun 2 had been blasted away or damaged beyond repair, the gun tubes were dented, firing locks were torn off, and traversing and elevating racks were burred and distorted. Equipment loss at Battery F, organizing that morning, was less serious. One gun was damaged from blast and flying debris. In addition, the 60-inch searchlight on Wilkes had been knocked end over end. This seriously damaged the light's delicate arcs, bearings, and electronic fittings.

After this raid Major Devereux again ordered Battery E to displace. This time it would set up north of the airstrip and near the lagoon in the crotch of Wake. The dummy guns at Peacock Point, damaged by this third raid, were refurbished during the afternoon of 10 December, and Battery E's unmanned fourth gun was detached for antiboat emplacement elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> Battery E's new position would be most advantageous, the battery commander reasoned:

Most all bombing runs were made from the east or west and the bombs were dropped along the length of the island. In this position the Japanese must make a run for the battery alone and most of the bombs would be lost in the lagoon.<sup>27</sup>

That night the battery personnel sweated through their second displacement, and

<sup>26</sup> This 3-inch gun, which figured conspicuously in the later defense, was located south of the airstrip and the VMF-211 area.

<sup>27</sup> *Lewis*, 2.

by next morning they were in position and again ready to shoot.

#### *GENESIS OF THE RELIEF EXPEDITION*<sup>28</sup>

After the Pearl Harbor attack, President Roosevelt warned the American people to be prepared for the fall of Wake. Yet before the *Arizona's* hulk stopped burning, plans were underway to send relief to the atoll. But with much of the Pacific Fleet on the bottom of Pearl Harbor, little assistance could be provided. Wake, like other outer islands, would stand or fall on its own unless it could be augmented from the meager resources then at Pearl Harbor. Marine forces on Oahu included two defense battalions, the 3d and 4th,<sup>29</sup> elements of the 1st Defense Battalion, and miscellaneous barracks and ships' detachments. Any personnel sent to relieve Wake would have to come from these units, and that meant that other important jobs would have to be slighted. There was a limited source of equipment including radar and other supplies at Pearl Harbor in the hands of the Marine Defense Force quartermaster; and fighter

<sup>28</sup> Unless otherwise noted the material concerning the Relief Expedition is derived from a magazine article by LtCol R. D. Heintz, Jr., "We're Headed for Wake," *MC Gazette*, June 1946.

<sup>29</sup> This battalion, which during 1941-1943 executed more overseas displacements than any other defense battalion in the Fleet Marine Force, pulled out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, during late October 1941, moved secretly through the Panama Canal, and arrived at Pearl Harbor on Monday 1 December. On 7 December the battalion manned a 3-inch battery at the Navy Yard, and also served some antiaircraft machine guns. Since it had just completed this overseas movement, and had its equipment ready for service, the 4th was a logical choice for its eventual role in the attempt to relieve Wake.

aircraft, needed almost as much as radar, were already en route from San Diego on board the USS *Saratoga*.<sup>30</sup>

On 9 December<sup>31</sup> Admiral Kimmel's staff decided to send relief to Wake in a task force built around this carrier, Cruiser Division 6 (cruisers *Astoria*, *Minneapolis*, and *San Francisco*), the nine destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 4, the seaplane tender *Tangier*, which would carry troops and equipment, and the fleet oiler *Neches*. These ships would comprise Task Force 14. While it sailed for Wake, Task Force 11 built around the USS *Lexington*, would make diversionary strikes in the vicinity of Jaluit some 800 miles south of Wake. A third task force, commanded by Vice Admiral Halsey in the carrier *Enterprise*, would provide general support by conducting operations west of Johnston Island.<sup>32</sup>

Men and equipment to aid Wake would be drawn from the 4th Defense Battalion, and on 10 December this unit was alerted for immediate embarkation. The destination was not announced, but it did not require much imagination for rumor to cut through military secrecy. "We're going to Wake" was the word that circulated all day while the batteries prepared to mount out. By nightfall the personnel and equipment were squared away, and units groped about in the blackout to assemble their gear for loading. But in the midst of this work came orders to knock off and

return to original battery positions. The CinCPac staff wanted to make a complete new study of the Pacific situation before it sent this relief off to Wake.<sup>33</sup> Besides, the task force had to await the arrival of the *Saratoga*.

CinCPac finally decided to make the attempt to reinforce Wake, and embarkation of certain units of the 4th Defense Battalion began two days later, on 12 December. By this time the Wake defenders had sent a partial list of their most critical needs, and Pearl Harbor supply activities filled this as best they could. These important items, which were loaded in the *Tangier* at pier 10 in the Navy Yard,<sup>34</sup> included an SCR-270 early-warning radar unit and an SCR-268 radar set for fire control. Also stowed on board were 9,000 rounds of 5-inch ammunition, 12,000 of the 3-inch shells with 30-second time fuzes, more than three million rounds of belted ammunition for .50 and .30 caliber machine guns, quantities of grenades, ammunition for small arms, barbed wire, antipersonnel mines, and additional engineering tools. Other equipment would enable the men at Wake to repair their bomb-damaged weapons. This included three complete fire control and data transmission systems for 3-inch batteries, needed replacement equipment for the atoll's 5-inch guns, electrical cable, ordnance tools, and spare parts.

Units of the 4th Defense Battalion embarked for this expedition included Battery F with 3-inch guns, Battery B with 5-inch guns, a provisional machine gun detachment drawn from Batteries H and I,

<sup>30</sup> These planes comprised VMF-221. The *Saratoga* had departed at maximum speed on 8 December (9 December on Wake). Ship's Log USS *Saratoga*, December 1941, hereinafter cited as *Saratoga* log.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout this section dealing with the relief attempt, west longitude dates and local times are used.

<sup>32</sup> CinCPac OPlan 39-41, 15Dec41, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Notes of interview by Capt S. E. Morison, USNR, with RAdm C. H. McMorris, 13Jan47, hereinafter cited as *McMorris Interview*.

<sup>34</sup> USS *Tangier* log, December 1941.

and a headquarters section drawn from the Headquarters and Service Battery of the defense battalion. First Lieutenant Robert D. Heintz, Jr., commanded this force when it completed embarkation on 13 December, but the command passed to Colonel H. S. Fassett just prior to the departure of the task force two days later.<sup>35</sup> After loading, the *Tangier* moved to the upper harbor<sup>36</sup> where Rear Admiral Fletcher's Cruiser Division 6 waited for the *Saratoga*. The carrier came in to fuel on the 15th,<sup>37</sup> and the task force sortied late that day and set course for Wake.

#### ENEMY PLANS AND ACTIONS, 8-11 DECEMBER<sup>38</sup>

Admiral Inouye, commanding the Japanese *Fourth Fleet* at Truk, had set numerous projects and operations in motion on 8 December. Current war plans called for him to capture and develop Wake, Guam, and certain Gilbert islands including Makin and Tarawa. By 10 December, when Guam fell, Inouye could check off all these jobs except the one at Wake.<sup>39</sup> Despite its small size this atoll was giving the admiral and his people at Truk and Kwajalein some moments of worry. The other islands had fallen to them with little

trouble, but they knew that Wake's defense was in better shape. They estimated that this atoll was defended by about 1,000 troops and 600 laborers. Wake's fighter planes were aggressive, and the flak from the island was at least prompt and determined. Between the Marine planes and this flak the *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla* surely had lost five of its planes, not counting four more "smokers" that the Wake defenders fervently hoped never made it back to Roi.

This *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla* was composed of *Air Attack Forces One* and *Three*. *Force One* flew shore-based bombers, and *Force Three* operated approximately 15 four-engined patrol bombers (probably Kawanishi 97s). *Force One* based on Roi, while *Force Three*, which was also bombing or scouting Baker, Howland, Nauru, and Ocean Islands, flew out of Majuro Atoll 840 miles south of Wake. The commander of this air flotilla had the mission of softening Wake for capture, and he was going about it in a creditable fashion. First he struck the airstrip to clear out the fighter planes, and then he figured to come back with the sky to himself and finish off his job. Subsequent targets had been the Naval Air Station, seaplane facilities, and other installations. With these missions accomplished, the pilots of the *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla* could settle down to the methodical business of taking out the antiaircraft and seacoast batteries. Thus the raid of 10 December concentrated on Peale where poor bombing and Battery D's fire held the Japanese to no gains, and on Wilkes where bombs set off the dynamite cache.

After those three strikes the Japanese decided Wake was ripe for a landing, and

<sup>35</sup> Col Fassett was to become Island Commander at Wake when the relief force arrived at the atoll. ComFourteen orders to Col Fassett, 15Dec41.

<sup>36</sup> *Tangier* log, *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> The *Saratoga* arrived in the Hawaiian area during the night of 14 December, but she could not enter the harbor until next day when the antisubmarine nets were opened. *Saratoga* log.

<sup>38</sup> Except as otherwise noted material in this section dealing with Japanese operations is derived from *Capture of Wake; Wake Attack; Nakamura Notebook; Enemy Notes*.

<sup>39</sup> *Campaigns of the Pacific War*, 47.

the job went to Rear Admiral Kajioka who commanded *Destroyer Squadron 6* in his new light cruiser *Yubari*. Kajioka planned to land 150 men on Wilkes Island to control the dredged channel, and 300 men on the south coast of Wake Island to capture the airfield. An alternate plan called for landings on the north and northeast coasts, but the admiral hoped to avoid these beaches unless unfavorable winds kept his men away from the south side of the atoll. The Japanese expected that a landing force of only 450 men would face a difficult battle at Wake, but this force was the largest that Admiral Kajioka could muster at this early date in the war. But if things hit a snag, destroyer crews could be used to help storm the beaches. The naval force at Admiral Kajioka's disposal included one light cruiser (the flagship), two obsolescent light cruisers for fire support and covering duties, six destroyers, two destroyer-transports, two new transports, and two submarines.<sup>40</sup> The *Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla* would act as his air support. Wake was so small that the admiral did not consider carrier air necessary.

The 450 men of the landing force constituted Kajioka's share of the special naval landing force personnel assigned to the *Fourth Fleet*. It is probable that they were armed with the weapons typical to a Japanese infantry unit of company or battalion size, and that their weapons

included light machine guns, grenade launchers, and possibly small infantry cannon. It is likely that assault troops were embarked in the two old destroyer-transports (*Patrol Craft 32 and 33*), while the garrison and base development echelon was assigned to the medium-size transports. The assault shipping from Truk arrived at Roi on 3 December, and on 9 December<sup>41</sup> the force sortied on a circuitous route for Wake.

The Japanese expected no American surface opposition, but they nonetheless screened their approach with customary caution. Two submarines scouted 75 miles ahead of the main body, and these boats were to reconnoiter Wake prior to the arrival of the task force.<sup>42</sup> Specifically they would try to find out whether the atoll defenders had any motor torpedo boats. Behind these submarines, and 10 miles forward of the main body, a picket destroyer maintained station from which it would make landfall and conduct a further reconnaissance. Ships of the task force neared Wake on the evening of 10 December. The weather was bad with high winds and heavy seas, but there was advantage even in this. The squalls provided a natural screen behind which the approach would surely remain undetected. Reports from the submarines and the screening destroyer indicated that Wake was not aware of the Japanese approach, and at 0300 on 11 December the

<sup>40</sup> *Yubari*; *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu* (2 old light cruisers, comprising Cruiser Division 18); *Oite*, *Hayate*, *Mutsuki*, *Kisaragi*, *Mochizuki* and *Yayoi* (6 older destroyers, comprising Destroyer Division 29 and 30); Patrol Boats 32 and 33, so-called (actually old destroyers converted into light troop-carrying craft with missions similar to the American APD); and *Kongo Maru* and *Konryu Maru*, both medium transports.

<sup>41</sup> *Capture of Wake*, II, 373 lists this date as 8 December, but other dates from this authority are consistently one day behind, and it is therefore probable that the date of 9 December is correct.

<sup>42</sup> The submarines were scheduled to arrive at Wake prior to dawn, and it is therefore not clear how they expected to make a visual reconnaissance that would be of much value.

task force made landfall and prepared to disembark the landing force. From Kajioka's flagship *Wake* was barely visible while the admiral led his force to bombardment and debarkation stations five or six miles off the atoll's south shore.

*THE ATTEMPTED LANDING,  
11 DECEMBER*

In spite of *Wake*'s black silent appearance to the Japanese, the atoll defenders had spotted the enemy. Lookouts reported ships in sight just prior to 0300, and as the shadowy outlines drew closer *Devereux* decided they formed an enemy force which included cruisers, destroyers, and some auxiliaries. The garrison went to general quarters, and *Devereux* ordered Major Putnam to delay the takeoff of his four airplanes until after the shore batteries began to fire. And these batteries were ordered to hold their fire<sup>43</sup> until they received orders to open up. Major *Devereux* reasoned that the enemy force could outgun his defense force, and that premature firing would only reveal the location and strength of the seacoast batteries and rob them of a chance to surprise the enemy.

Meanwhile the enemy force was having trouble with the bad weather that had screened its approach. Assault troops found it difficult to make their transfer to sea-tossed landing craft, and some of these craft overturned or became swamped in the high waves. By dawn at 0500, the flagship *Yubari*, still in the van, reached a

position approximately 8,000 yards south of Peacock Point. There she turned westward and commenced a broadside run parallel to the south shore of *Wake*. The other enemy ships followed generally along this course but kept approximately 1,000 yards further to seaward. Although the Japanese were not aware of it, the *Yubari* was being tracked along this course by the 5-inch guns of Battery B on Peacock Point. The camouflage had been removed from battery positions so that the guns could train.<sup>44</sup>

A few minutes later, the *Yubari* and the other two cruisers (*Tatsuta* and *Tenryu*) opened fire at area targets along the south shore of *Wake*. These salvos laddered the island from Peacock Point to the vicinity of Camp One. The high-velocity 6-inch shells which hit near Camp One ignited the diesel-oil tanks between the camp and Wilkes Channel, and only a repetition of *Devereux*'s order to hold fire restrained Lieutenants Clarence A. Barninger and John A. McAlister, respectively commanding the 5-inch batteries at Peacock and Kuku Points, from returning fire. The other Japanese ships, following the cruiser and destroyer screen, maneuvered to take stations for their various missions.

After completing her initial firing run the *Yubari*, apparently accompanied by the two destroyer-transport, reversed course in a turn which closed the range on *Wake*. By this time it was daylight, and by 0600 these ships were some 3,500 yards south of Battery A on Peacock Point.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Cdr Cunningham's postwar report states that Maj *Devereux* wanted to illuminate the enemy force with searchlights and to open fire much sooner, but that this request was denied. *Cunningham Interview*, 7. *Devereux* denies this, and he is supported by virtually all other records of the action.

<sup>44</sup> *Barninger*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> The range finders on the 5-inch guns of Btrys A and L had been rendered inoperative by previous bombings, and ranges therefore had to be estimated. This resulted in considerable variance among the later reports of this action. These discrepancies undoubtedly were aggra-

Battery A, with no range finder, had estimated the range to these ships, and the range section personnel were plotting the target while the gun section crews stood by to fire. The order to fire came from Devereux's command post at 0615, and the guns at Peacock Point opened fire on the *Yubari* and the ships with her while Battery L engaged the other enemy ships within range of Wilkes Island. Battery A's first salvo went over the Japanese flagship, and Lieutenant Barninger ordered the range dropped 500 yards. This fire from the beach caused the cruiser to veer away on a zig zag course, and to concentrate her fire on the Battery A guns. Her shots straddled the Marine positions as she pulled away rapidly. Barninger adjusted as best he could for the evasive tactics of the Japanese ship, and his guns soon scored two hits. Both shells entered the cruiser at the waterline amidships on her port side, and the ship belched steam and smoke as she slackened speed. Two more shells then caught her slightly aft of these first wounds, and she turned to starboard to hide in her own smoke. A destroyer then attempted to lay smoke between the troubled cruiser and the shore battery, but it was chased away by a lucky hit from a shell aimed at the cruiser. The *Yubari* continued to fire at Peacock Point until her 6-inch guns could no longer reach the island. Then, listing to port, she limped smoking over the horizon.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile Battery L had opened up from Wilkes on the three destroyers, two

---

vated by the long dispersion pattern characteristic of these flat trajectory naval weapons.

<sup>46</sup> The Btry A commander, whose comments are the source of this account of action against Adm Kajioka's flagship, believes that his guns scored two more hits on the cruiser before she got out of range. *Barninger*, 4-5.

transports, and the light cruisers *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu* which had broken off from the *Yubari* at the west end of her first firing run. These cruisers and transports steamed north at a range of about 9,000 yards southwest of Kuku Point while the destroyers (probably Destroyer Division 29 consisting of the *Hayate*, *Oite*, and either the *Mutsuki* or *Mochizuki*)<sup>47</sup> headed directly for shore and opened fire. At about 4,000 yards from the island they executed a left (westward) turn, and the *Hayate* led them in a run close along the shore. At that point Battery L opened fire. At 0652, just after the third two-gun salvo, the *Hayate* erupted in a violent explosion, and as the smoke and spray drifted clear, the gunners on Wilkes could see that she had broken in two and was sinking rapidly. Within two minutes, at 0652, she had disappeared from sight.<sup>48</sup> This prompted such spontaneous celebrations in the Battery L positions that a veteran noncommissioned officer had to remind the gun crews that other targets remained.

Fire then shifted to *Oite*, next in line behind the *Hayate*. This destroyer was now so close to shore that Major Devereux had difficulty restraining his .30 caliber machine gun crews from firing at her. A 5-inch gun scored one hit before the on-shore wind carried smoke in front of the target. With this concealment, the destroyers turned to seaward away from Battery L. Marines fired several more salvos into the smoke, but they could not spot the splashes. Some observers on Wilkes thought they saw the *Oite* transfer

---

<sup>47</sup> *Wake Attack*.

<sup>48</sup> Platt, *op cit.*, 3. The *Hayate* thus was the first Japanese surface craft sunk during the war by U. S. naval forces.

survivors and sink, but reliable enemy records indicate only that she sustained damage.<sup>49</sup>

Battery L now shifted fire to the transports *Kongo Maru* and *Konryu Maru* then steaming approximately 10,000 yards south of Wilkes. One shell hit the leading transport, and this ship also turned to seaward and retired behind a smoke screen which probably was provided by the two fleeing destroyers. Their course carried them past the transport area. By this time civilians on Wilkes had joined the defensive efforts as volunteer ammunition handlers, and the battery next engaged a cruiser steaming northward 9,000 yards off the west end of the island. This was either the *Tenryu* or the *Tatsuta*; but whatever her identity, she hurried away trailing smoke after one shell struck her near the stern. The departure of this ship, at about 0710, removed the last target from the range of Battery L. In a busy hour, this unit had fired 120 5-inch shells which sank one destroyer, damaged another, and inflicted damage to a transport and a light cruiser. Two Marines had sustained slight wounds.

Meanwhile the other half of the Japanese destroyer force (*Destroyer Division 30*) ran into its share of trouble as it moved west of Kuku Point on a northwesterly course. Led (probably) by the *Yayoi*, these three destroyers at 0600 steamed within range of Battery B's 5-inch guns on Peale. The Marines opened fire on the leading ship, and the Japanese promptly raked Peale with return salvos which scored hits in and about the positions of Batteries B and D. This shelling destroyed communications between Battery B's guns and the battery

command post, and put Gun Two out of action with a disabled recoil cylinder. Lieutenant Woodrow W. Kessler, the battery commander, continued his duel with only one gun, and used personnel from Gun Two to help keep up the fire. Ten rounds later a shell caught the *Yayoi* in her stern and set her afire. Kessler then shifted his fire to the second ship which was maneuvering to lay a smoke screen for the injured *Yayoi*. Under this concealment all three destroyers reversed course and retired southward out of range.

The Japanese force was now in full retirement. At 0700 Admiral Kajioka ordered a withdrawal to Kwajalein. Bad weather and accurate Marine fire had completely wrecked the admiral's plan to take Wake with 450 men. But commanders on the atoll took immediate precautions to guard against a dangerous relaxation of defenses. They reasoned that the Japanese might have carrier aircraft ready to continue the attack which the ships had started, and Major Putnam was already aloft with Captains Elrod, Freuler, and Tharin to reconnoiter the area from 12,000 feet. When this search located no enemy aircraft or carriers, the Marine pilots turned southwest to overtake the retiring Japanese task force. The fliers found the enemy little more than an hour's sail from Wake, and they swept down to attack.

Captains Elrod and Tharin strafed and bombed two ships (probably the cruisers *Tenryu* and *Tatsuta*),<sup>50</sup> and got their planes damaged by heavy antiaircraft fire

<sup>49</sup> The VMF pilots were not sure about the identification of their targets, but a consultation of all available sources of information seems to substantiate this account of the action.

<sup>49</sup> *Enemy Notes*, 1.

from these two targets. But the *Tenryu* suffered bomb damage to her torpedo battery, and the *Tatsuta's* topside radio shack was hit. Captain Freuler landed a 100-pound bomb on the stern of the transport *Kongo Maru*, and saw his target flare up with gasoline fires. After dropping their two bombs each, the fliers hurried back to Wake to rearm.

Two fresh pilots, Lieutenant Kinney and Technical Sergeant Hamilton, substituted for two of the original fliers during one of these shuttles between the atoll and the enemy ships, and the air attacks continued for a total of 10 sorties during which the Marines dropped 20 bombs and fired approximately 20,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition.<sup>51</sup> The destroyer *Kisaragi*, probably hit earlier by Captain Elrod, finally blew up just as Lieutenant Kinney nosed over at her in an attack of his own. One of the destroyer-transport also sustained damage from the air strikes.

This action was not all "ducks in a barrel" to the Marine fliers, and any damage to the scanty Wake air force was a serious one. Japanese flak cut the main fuel line in Elrod's Grumman, and although he managed to get back to the atoll he demolished his plane in a crash landing amid the boulders along Wake's south beach. Antiaircraft fire pierced the oil cooler and one cylinder in Captain Freuler's plane. He returned to the field safely, but he finished his approach on a glide with a dead engine that could never be repaired.

Accurate assessment of enemy losses in this first landing attempt is not possible. Japanese records indicate, however, that

the destroyer *Hayate* was sunk by shore batteries and the destroyer *Kisaragi* by the VMF-211 bombs. Two more destroyers, the *Oite* and the *Yayoi*, were damaged as was a destroyer-transport. The transport *Kongo Maru* was bombed and set afire. All three cruisers (*Yubari*, *Tatsuta*, and *Tenryu*) received injuries from air or surface attacks.<sup>52</sup>

Japanese personnel casualties can be fixed only approximately. Assuming that the two sunken destroyers were manned by crews comparable to those required by similar U. S. types (about 250 officers and men per ship), it would be logical to claim approximately 500 for these two losses with the fair assumption that few if any survivors escaped in either case. Personnel losses on the other seven ships damaged are not known, but it must be assumed that casualties did occur.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> The widely-credited claim, originated in good faith, that dive-bombing attacks sank a cruiser off Wake cannot be supported. All three cruisers returned to Wake less than two weeks later to support the final attack on the atoll. The officially established occasion of the loss of each is as follows: *Yubari* (Philippine Sea, 27 Apr44); *Tenryu* (Bismarck Sea, by submarine action, 18Dec42); *Tatsuta* (off Yokohama, by submarine action, 13May44). As indicated in the text the violent explosion and sinking of the *Kisaragi*, combined with recognition inexperience, probably accounts for the cruiser claimed. ONI StatisticalSec, "Naval Losses of All Nations," (located at NHD), 5Feb46, Table VIII.

<sup>53</sup> In a letter dated 22Nov51, Capt Tashikazu Ohmae, leading Japanese naval student of WW II, puts Japanese losses for this phase of the Wake operation at "nearly 500." Ohmae letter cited in Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), 41, hereinafter cited as *Marine Air History*.

---

<sup>51</sup> CO VMF-211 Rept to CO MAG-21, 20Dec41.