

The History of the 1st Division Through World War II

By Joel D. Thacker, USMC

This is a history of the Marine Corps' famous 1st Division. The account begins back in Feb. 1, 1941, when the 1st Marine Brigade became the 1st Division. The history carries through the Okinawa campaign, last ground battle before the occupation of Japan itself.

On Feb. 1, 1941, one of history's greatest fighting units—the 1st Marine Division—was born. It came into existence by change of designation from the 1st Marine Brigade.

At that time the brigade was under the command of Brigadier General (later lieutenant general) Holland M. Smith and was composed of the 5th Regiment, the 1st Battalion, 10th Regiment, and the 1st Marine Aircraft Group. The 5th Regiment was commanded by Colonel Charles D. Barrett, and Lieutenant Colonel Raphael Griffin commanded the 1st Battalion, 10th Marines while the 1st Marine Aircraft

Group was led by Col Field Harris.

The strength of the brigade was approximately 2,000 officers and men.

Before the “First” was born, the brigade had carried out practice landing operations in the Caribbean and had participated in amphibious maneuvers with the United States Atlantic Fleet.

About two months after formation, the Division's strength had been increased to approximately 306 officers and 7,288 enlisted men composed of Division Troops and the 1st, 5th, 7th and 11th regiments. This division would later lead America's offensive in the Pacific.

Early in June 1941, the division participated in joint maneuvers with the U.S. Army and the Atlantic Fleet. On June 13, General Smith relinquished command to BGen P.H. Torrey and assumed command of the 1st Corps (Provisional), U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

When the Japanese made their treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the 1st Division consisted of 518



officers and 6,871 enlisted men. Spurred by the need of American fighting men in the Pacific, the division increased its strength to 577 officers and 11,753 enlisted men by July 31, 1942. Meanwhile, BGen Torrey turned over his command to Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift on March 23, 1942.

Expansion from a prewar nucleus to a war strength division presented serious problems in training, equipping, and quartering, which were complicated further by the early detachment of a provisional brigade for immediate service in the Samoan Area.

Formation of this brigade, built around the 7th Marines (reinforced), withdrew from the division a considerable number of officers, noncommissioned officers and men trained and experienced in amphibious warfare.

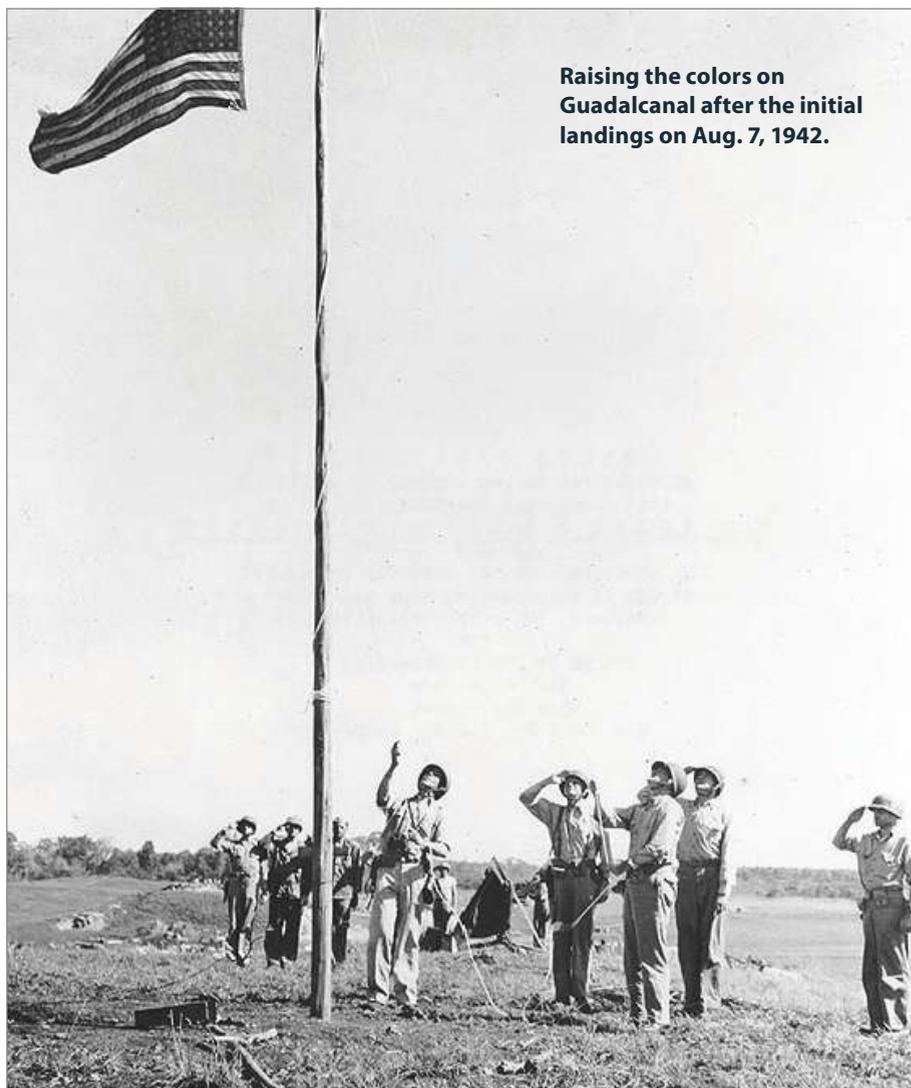
The loss was too great to overcome immediately, so the Division was reconstituted as a two-regiment division with supporting units. It remained a two-regiment Division until the arrival of the 7th Marines at Guadalcanal on Sept. 18, 1942. Arrival of the 7th returned the Division to the original triangular form of organization.

All units of the division (except the 1st Regiment, which remained inactive until March 1942) participated in intensive training at New River, N.C., during the period between December 1941 and April 1942.

Each reinforced combat team of the 5th Marines and one team from the 1st



RADM Richmond Kelly Turner, USN (left), and MajGen Alexander A. Vandegrift working on the flag bridge of USS McCawley (AP-10) during the Guadalcanal-Tulagi operation in the summer of 1942.



Raising the colors on Guadalcanal after the initial landings on Aug. 7, 1942.

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Marines, engaged in a 10-day landing drill at, prophetically enough, Solomons Island, Md. This came during March and April.

Although training had been proceeding at top speed, it was believed that the Division had not yet attained a satisfactory state of readiness for combat.

Then in mid-April came the first intelligence of a plan for the establishment of the SoPacAmphFor (The “Lone Wolf” Plan). The plan called for early transfer of the Division (minus the 7th Marines, reinforced) to New Zealand. A training base in New Zealand and intensive amphibious exercises there in preparation for actual combat were planned.

At that time, it was estimated the Division would not see action before Jan. 1, 1943.

In accordance with the “Lone Wolf” Plan, campsites were secured in the vicinity of Wellington, New Zealand. The division was scheduled to ship out in two echelons.

The first echelon, composed of Division Headquarters Special Troops, 2nd Battalion of the 11th Marines, and the 5th Marines (reinforced), embarked on the

Wakefield (formerly the SS *Manhattan*) at Norfolk, Va., and sailed on May 20, 1942, via the Panama Canal. *Wakefield* arrived at New Zealand on June 14.

The bulk of the remaining troops went from New River to San Francisco by rail and sailed June 22, 1942, on the SS *John Ericson*, *Barnett* and *Elliott*. By July 11, the remainder of the Division, including the second echelon (1st Marines, reinforced, and the 11th Marines), had arrived at New Zealand.

Just 12 days after the first echelon arrived in New Zealand, the division commander was informed of a plan for an offensive operation in the South Pacific. It was indicated the 1stMarDiv would draw the attack assignment. They were to be reinforced, according to plan, by the 2nd Regiment of the 2nd Division, 1st Raider Bn, and the 3rd Defense Bn.

The Solomon Islands area was named as the proposed theatre of operations with the Tulagi-Guadalcanal area as the probable specific objective of a landing attack.

Everyone concerned realized that perhaps the Japanese sneak-attack at Pearl Harbor had cut short the normal training

routine. The urgency and high national importance of the projected undertaking provided the answer—“the 1st” would attack.

At 9 a.m. on July 22, 1942, the transport group carrying the division left Wellington under naval escort for Koro Island in the Fijis. There they rehearsed the forthcoming Guadalcanal operation, after which they held a rendezvous with the remainder of the task force. At sunset on July 31, the entire force left the Koro area and began the approach to the Solomon Islands. The 1st was shoving off to make history.

The weather was on the side of the Marines. During the final two days of the approach to the Solomons, the sky was generally overcast with a low ceiling and occasional rain squalls—ideal weather for a landing.

At 2:40 a.m., Aug. 7, 1942, the task force split into two groups: The Tulagi group passed to the north of Savo Island, and the Guadalcanal attack group slipped in between Savo Island and Cape Esperance.

Beginning at 7:40 a.m., Aug. 7, the 1stMarDiv (reinforced) opened America’s offensive against Japan under the command of MajGen Vandegrift. Marines went ashore on the north coast of Guadalcanal and on the smaller islands of Florida, Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo while two naval task forces and other naval units gave their support.

The 1st Raiders, under LtCol Merritt A. Edson, reinforced by the 2nd Bn of the 5th Marines, landed on Tulagi, and the 1st Parachute Battalion landed on Gavutu and Tanambogo.

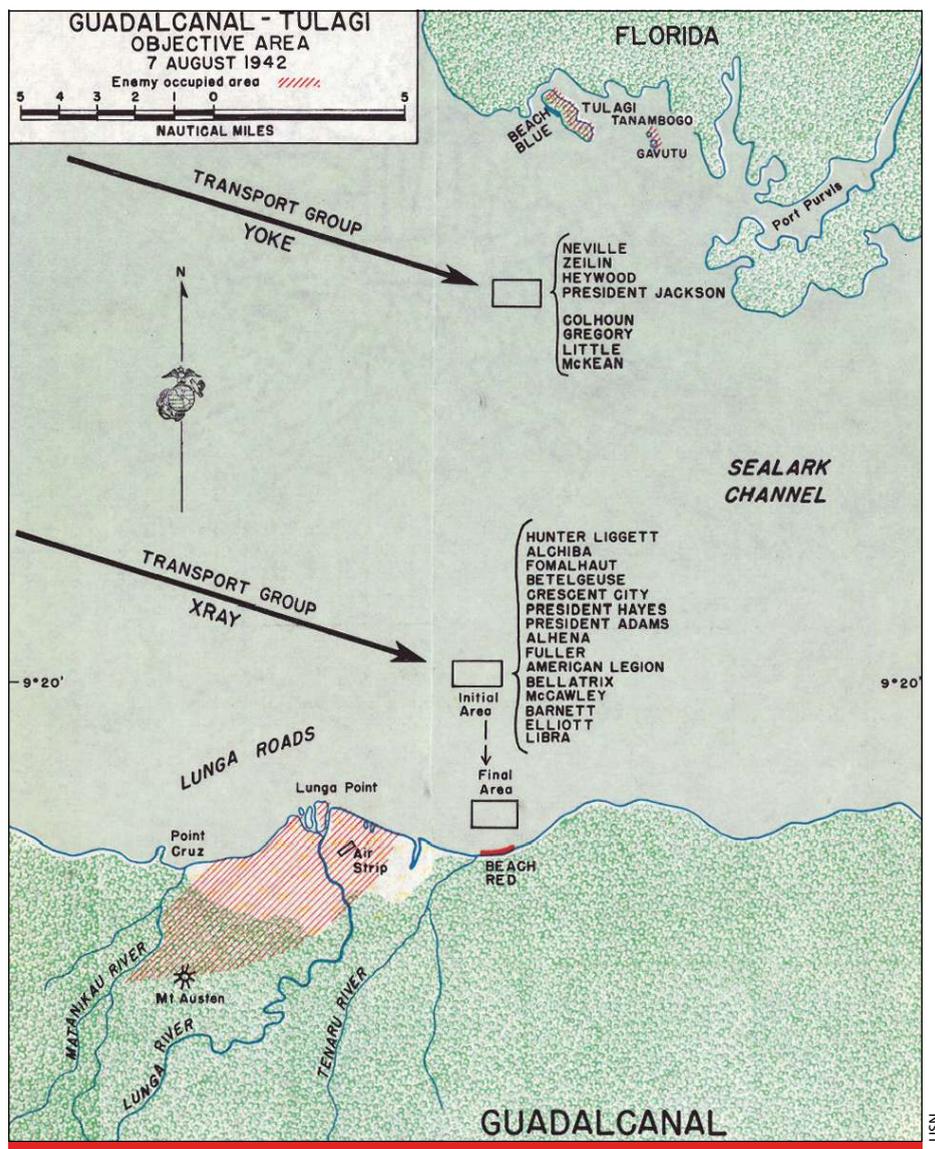
Gen Vandegrift was in personal command of the forces landing on Guadalcanal while the assistant division commander, BGen William H. Rupertus, was in general command of the landings of the smaller islands.

By the end of the first day, beachheads had been established on all of these islands with the exception of Tanambogo. A small American flag was hoisted at Kukum on Guadalcanal—the first marker on the long road back to Tokyo.

The bulk of the division took part in the Guadalcanal landing and met with light resistance. They soon seized the partially completed landing field. This airstrip became the center of war impact for ground, sea and air activities in the South Pacific until the Japanese were driven from the island on Feb. 9, 1943.

Meanwhile, landings on the smaller islands to the north met with considerable opposition and desperate fighting continued for two days.

It soon became apparent that the 1st Division was going to see some “rugged duty” on Guadalcanal. Shortly after the



beachheads were established firmly, it became necessary to withdraw the carrier-borne air support—the flattops were operating close to Japanese-controlled waters and were in grave danger.

Then the carriers shoved off, the Marines were left without air support except for the little coverage provided by long-range patrol and bomber planes.

There were no troop reserves in the Southwest Pacific with which to reinforce Marines in the Solomons. No land-based aviation was available and the night naval battle off Savo Island, in which the Allies lost four heavy cruisers and suffered heavy damage to a number of other vessels, had eliminated any possibility of immediate naval support.

Without air or sea protection the transports and supply ships were forced to flee to safer waters.

The Japanese didn't wait long before taking advantage of the Marines' lack of air and naval support. They began bombing our positions on Guadalcanal and made the adjacent waters almost

untenable during daylight hours. Their surface forces, coming in at night, bombarded the airfield at will.

The Japanese High Command, incensed at reverses ashore, began assembling troops to reinforce their scattered units, which had been routed from the vicinity of the airfield. They made plans for counterattacks against 1st Division forces defending the airfield perimeter.

The Japanese apparently underestimated the strength of the 1st or had little respect for its fighting ability. They landed reinforcements to the east of the airfield about 10 days after the Marines had landed. Hardly waiting for adequate artillery and other supporting elements, they hurled a detachment of approximately 1,200 men against Marines near the Ilu River.

At that time the Ilu River was thought to be the Tenaru River and this action was termed the "Battle of the Tenaru." This Japanese attack was repulsed by the 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, and supporting artillery. The enemy suffered heavy losses.

The 1st Bn, 1st Marines, then crossed the river farther upstream and attacked the Japanese on their flank, driving them into the sea and killing or capturing the entire force.

The Japanese then concentrated substantial naval reinforcements in the general area. Apparently, their purpose was to cut off communications of Marines to the south.

Our naval forces moved in to stop this threat and the Battle of the Eastern Solomons was the result. This naval action proved somewhat indecisive because the enemy retained practically full control of the sea, and the only supplies that reached the Marines on Guadalcanal during the remainder of August were those rushed in on light vessels.

Japanese naval units made no serious move for several weeks. Ashore, the Japanese reinforced their forces on the flanks of the Marine positions—poised for another attack to recapture the airfield.

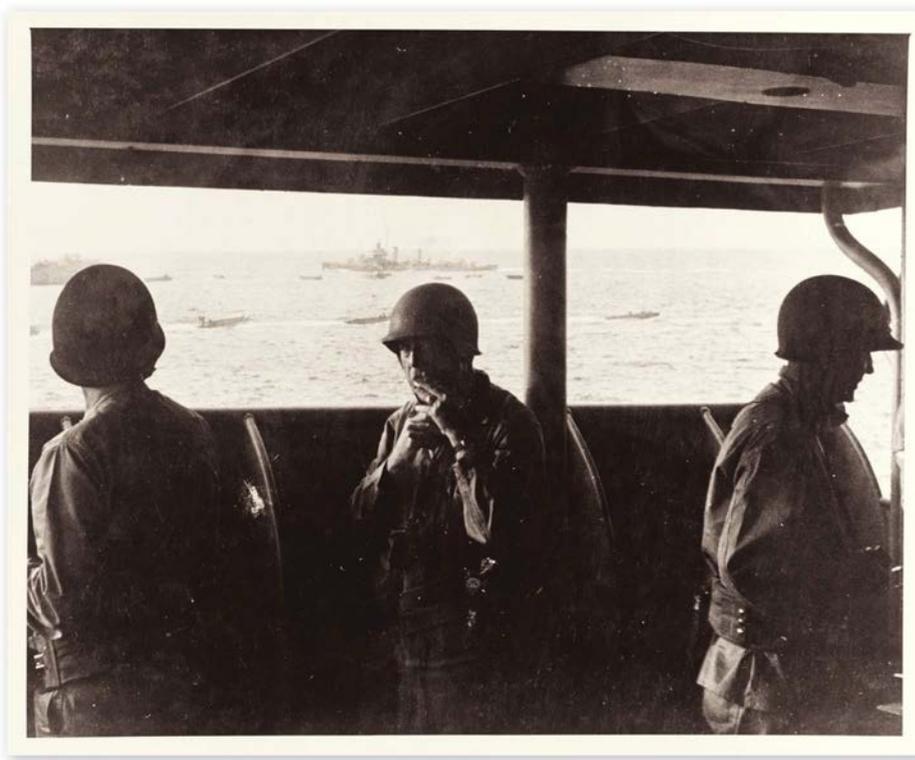
Gen Vandegrift knew the enemy was preparing to attack, but he was unable to determine the direction or probable force of the anticipated assault.

Then it came. Following the procedure they had used during the first attack (The Battle of the Tenaru), the Japanese launched an attack on the south side of the Marine perimeter during the night of Sept. 13-14. The spearhead of the attack hit a comparatively thin line held by the 1st Marine Raiders under the command of Col Edson. They were reinforced by the depleted 1st Parachute Battalion.

The issue was in doubt for several hours but the battle-worn Marines rallied against great odds and put up one of the most gallant and determined fights in the history of the Corps. At about dawn on the following morning, the 2nd Bn, 1st Marines (Division Reserve) reinforced the Raiders and Paratroops. All Marines on the line joined in a smashing counterattack and the Japanese forces were thrown back with heavy casualties. The enemy troops were chased right back into the jungle fastness.

Later it was estimated that approximately 2,000 Japanese were used in the attack. More than 600 dead were left on the field and many more were killed in mopping up operations that followed. During the afternoon of Sept. 14, the Japanese also attacked from the Matanikau River along the beach road, while another force struck across the Tenaru River in the vicinity of the "Big Bend." Both attacks were repulsed, and the Japanese again suffered heavy losses.

After the battle of Bloody Ridge, there was a brief lull in the fighting except for extensive patrolling by the Marines. Patrol reports indicated the Japanese were



Above: BGen William H. Rupertus, USMC, (center) aboard USS *Neville* (AP-16) during the landings on Tulagi, Aug. 7-8, 1942. BGen Rupertus, Assistant Division Commander, 1stMarDiv, was in charge of combat operations on Tulagi and the other nearby Japanese-held islands. Note landing craft in the background. The destroyer in the center is probably USS *Buchanan* (DD-484).



Marine officers on Tulagi Island in the Solomons. Seated on the steps of the staff house are, left to right, front row: LtCol O.K. Pressley, Col M.A. Edson, LtCol H.E. Rosecrans, and LtCol R.E. Hill. Second row: LT E.B. McLarney, MC, USN; BGen W.H. Rupertus; Col R.C. Kilmartin; and Maj William Enright. Third row: Captains Ralph Powell, Daryle Seeley and Thomas Philpott. The photograph was taken soon after the Marines captured Tulagi in August 1942.

building up practically an entire division to the west, in the vicinity of Kokumbona, in preparation for an all-out attack to recapture the airfield.

In the meantime, MajGen Vandegrift advanced his lines to the Matanikau River to prevent the enemy from moving artillery within effective range of the airfield.

When a Japanese naval force moved in for the obvious purpose of heavy bombardment—to cover the landing of additional troops and to knock out Guadalcanal's aviation—our naval units came out to meet them. On the night of Oct. 11-12, the two sea forces clashed. Both sides suffered some losses.

The enemy sea units returned the night of Oct. 13-14 and shelled the airfield and vicinity. The shelling proved a prelude for an attack on the morning of Oct. 14 by enemy land forces. They struck at the Marine lines from the east, west, and the south. Bloody fighting raged, but the enemy was thrown back.

On the afternoon of Oct. 21, following an artillery and mortar barrage, the Japanese launched another attack—this time on the Marines' forward patrol positions at the mouth of the Matanikau River. They used tanks, supported by infantry. The attack was broken up with the enemy losing at least one tank.

During the afternoon of Oct. 23, the Japanese again laid down a heavy barrage on Marine positions at the mouth of the Matanikau and followed up the bombardment with an attack by tank and infantry across the sand spit at the mouth of the river. Our 75 mm guns on half-tracks and 37 mm anti-tank guns knocked out one enemy tank after another, and the Japanese infantry which trailed the tanks, was slaughtered by machine gun, mortar and rifle fire.

The battle raged for nearly eight hours, but the Marine lines held fast. One Japanese tank succeeded in penetrating the line but was put out of action by a Marine who slipped a grenade under the track when the tank passed over his foxhole. Thirteen tanks were destroyed, and Japanese casualties were high.

The enemy struck again during the night of Oct. 24-25. A Japanese regiment made a thrust from the south through the woods between Bloody Ridge and the Lunga River. Fierce fighting continued until dawn when the enemy fell back, leaving their dead and dying sprawled over the battlefield and in the jungle which cloaked the retreat. The Japanese hit again the following night—heavier than before—but again were repulsed.

At the same time, a strong Japanese force, which had crossed the Matanikau



The officers of the 1stMarDiv on Guadalcanal, August 1942. MajGen Alexander Vandegrift, the Division's commanding general, is in the front row, fourth from the left. Another future Commandant, Col Clifton Cates, is third from the right in the front row.

the night of Oct. 23-24, attempted to out-flank the Marines' Matanikau lines. They succeeded in breaking through at one point but a hastily organized force, composed of the band and Headquarters and Weapons Companies of the 7th Marines, counterattacked and threw back the Japanese. The fighting was bitter and at close quarters in the darkness.

Meanwhile, the Japanese were moving fleet units toward Guadalcanal. Our carriers and naval forces moved out to intercept. And thus, the Battle of Santa Cruz was joined. Our airplanes gained an early advantage in the fight by putting two enemy carriers out of action. Our fliers practically wiped out four Japanese air groups. The engagement turned out to be a battle of carriers and definitely broke up Japanese attempts to bombard Guadalcanal.

The 1st had won its spurs in battle. On Dec. 9, 1942, after four months of continuous fighting, the Division was relieved by U.S. Army troops and units of the 2ndMarDiv. MG Alexander M. Patch Jr., USA, became the island's commanding officer.

The 1stMarDiv (reinforced) received the Presidential Unit Citation for the campaign.

On July 8, 1943, MajGen Vandegrift turned over command of the Division to MajGen Rupertus.

The 1st Marine Division was launched on a glorious career.

After the Guadalcanal campaign the 1st Division went into South Pacific rest camps, but it was back in action again on Dec. 26, 1943, when Marines hit the beach at Cape Gloucester on the western end of New Britain.

The 7th Regiment, under Col Julian Frisbie, made up the first wave. A beachhead was established north of Silimati Point. The 1st Bn, 7th Marines, advanced to the southeast and secured Target Hill while the 2nd and 3rd Battalions pushed inland, expanding the existing beachhead farther to the westward.

The 1st Marines, minus 1st and 2nd Battalions, came in about 30 minutes after the 7th. The 1st Regiment was commanded by Col William J. Whaling. The 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, landed on the opposite side of Cape Gloucester to block escape routes on the west coast and to prevent enemy reinforcements from reaching the airfield area.

The first night ashore Marines repulsed a number of strong enemy counterattacks,

and the next morning, Dec. 27, continued their advance on the airfield. The 1st Regiment pushed its lines to a point about 1 1/2 miles from the airfield. Meanwhile, the 7th Marines expanded the beachhead perimeter and improved their defense positions.

On Dec. 29 at 8 a.m. the 5th Marines, under Col John T. Seiden, began landing on Cape Gloucester. Just seven hours later an all-out attack was launched on the enemy-held airfield.

The 5th Marines advanced inland to a grassy ridge southwest of the airfield, then attacked to the northwest in an enveloping maneuver. The 1st Marines, supported by tanks, advanced to the west along the coast.

By nightfall, the 1st Marines reached the airstrip and set up a perimeter defense covering the southeastern side of the airdrome area. The 5th Marines established a line to the west of the airstrip from the coast to the right flank of the 1st Marines. The airfield was secured.

Shortly after midnight on Dec. 30, an enemy force moved up from the south and attacked positions held by the 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, on the west side of Cape Gloucester. The action that followed was called "The Battle of Coffin Corner."



USMC

A chaplain says a prayer for Marines who lost their lives in the capture of the airfield at Cape Gloucester. MajGen William H. Rupertus, Commanding General, 1stMarDiv which made the New Britain invasion, stands at left. A wrecked Japanese bomber forms a ghostly altar during mass, January 1944.

Nearly 100 Japanese were killed, and the rest of their force fled into the jungle.

Sporadic fighting and mopping up operations behind the airdrome area continued during the morning of Dec. 30. At 1 p.m. MajGen Rupertus sent a message to the commanding general of the Sixth Army. It read in part:

“First Marine Division presents to you as an early New Year’s gift, the complete airdrome of Cape Gloucester ... ”

At noon on Dec. 31, the American flag was raised over Cape Gloucester by MajGen Rupertus.

During the next few days, 1st Division forces were reorganized and a perimeter defense was established around the airdrome.

After capture of the airdrome, the 7th Marines; the 3rd Bn, 5th Marines; the 1st and 4th Bns, 11th Marines; the 2nd Bn, 17th Marines, and other units of the division were placed under the command of BGen Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., the assistant division commander. They were then assigned the mission of driving the Japanese from the Borgen Bay area.

The initial attack force shoved off from the beachhead perimeter at 10 a.m. on Jan. 2, 1944. They advanced toward the

rugged hills and ridges to the southeast.

For two weeks they fought courageously against a fanatical enemy heavily entrenched along the rivers and streams. The Marines had to overcome swamps and mud, the devilish kunai grass, tropical storms and other almost impossible obstacles of terrain and nature. The wily Japanese took full advantage of the terrain.

Hill 150 fell to the Marines on Jan. 6, and Aogiri Ridge was seized in a bloody battle on Jan. 9. The enemy threw a series of savage counterattacks at the ridge, but Marines held their positions. Hill 660 (called Manju Yamma by the Japanese) was attacked by Marines on Jan. 13 and 14. The fighting was savage, but the Marines took the hill on Jan. 15.

On Jan. 17, the 7th Marines were relieved by the 5th Marines, and the Borgen Bay phase of the New Britain campaign came to a close.

From Jan. 22 to Feb. 15, 1944, extensive patrolling of the western part of New Britain was carried out by 1st Division units. On Jan. 23, an amphibious force from the 5th Marines, supported by tanks, landed and captured Natomo Point. Then they advanced eastward to the Natomo River. A strong patrol was sent to Turitei,

and on Feb. 6, forward elements of this force reached Nigol enroute to Gilnit to contact an Army patrol from Arawe.

On Feb. 11, Col Fuller’s force arrived at Gilnit. They waited 48 hours for the Army patrol and then returned to Turitei, leaving one platoon at Gilnit. Contact with the Army unit was made on Feb. 17, and the next day Col Fuller’s force began the trek back to the 1st Division perimeter at Cape Gloucester.

A landing on Rooke (Umboi) Island in the Dampier Strait was made on Feb. 12, 1944, by a company from 1st Marines (reinforced). The unit met no opposition on the island, which lies a short distance west of New Britain.

It was on March 6, 1944, that the 5th Marines (reinforced) under the command of Col O.P. Smith moved from Iboki Plantation and landed near Volupai Plantation on the western coast of the Willaumez Peninsula. The battalions fanned out across the area, and on March 8, a patrol from the 2nd Battalion occupied the Talesea Airfield.

The three battalions of the 5th, supported by artillery of the 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines; 1st Tank Battalion; 1st Special Weapons Battalion; 1st Amphibian

D-day on Peleliu, Sept. 15, 1944. Marines on one of the "Orange" landing beaches seek cover from Japanese fire behind an LVT.



Tractor Battalion, and other small units launched a coordinated attack against the Waru villages on the morning of March 9.

By 1 p.m. the entire Talesea area was cleared of Japanese. Defensive positions were set up around the airfield and Talesea Point, and a perimeter defense was established around the Waru villages.

During the following week, units of the 5th Marines patrolled the Willaumez Peninsula area, wiping out pockets of resistance and driving the enemy forces westward toward Rabaul. The 5th Marines were relieved on April 25, 1944, by an Army regiment.

Meanwhile the 1st Bn, 1st Marines, had landed March 11, 1944, at Linga Linga Plantation on Eleanora Bay. After covering the area with patrols, which killed and captured more than 100 Japanese, the unit returned to Cape Gloucester on March 18.

The division was relieved in the Cape Gloucester-Talesea area on April 28, 1944, by Army forces under the command of MajGen Rapp Brush.

Thus ended another phase in the history of the 1st Division.

After the Marianas campaign, the Pacific offensive shifted to the south and west.

On Sept 15, 1944, the 1st Division stormed ashore on Peleliu in the wake of a lengthy naval and air bombardment. The division met strong opposition from veteran Japanese troops and encountered one of the worst coral reefs since Tarawa. Despite these obstacles, the 1st made a successful landing.

Opposition increased as Marines moved inland. The Japanese again had taken advantage of every feature of the terrain. They had machine guns concealed in

caves and snipers in the crags and trees. These defensive points inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing Marines.

Japanese mortar shells walked up and down the beach in a bloody procession and enemy artillery churned the water into a dirty, debris-laden froth.

The Japanese made three well-organized and determined counterattacks during the afternoon of the first day. They first hit at the center of Marine lines, then smashed at the left, and finally rallied for one more assault on the center. These attacks were spearheaded by enemy tanks, but most of them were destroyed by U.S. tanks, bazookas and antitank guns.

At dawn on the second day. Marines began cleaning out enemy caves and pillboxes. They threw bazookas, flame-throwers, mortars and tanks against the entrenched Japanese, but the intense heat,



USMC

heavy mortar fire, and stiff resistance from concrete fortifications slowed the advance of three Marine regiments.

This second day saw more enemy tanks on the attack. During the morning, seven Japanese tanks, attacking a detail of the division's commissary unit, were knocked out by a Sherman tank and three planes. Shortly after noon, a free-for-all tank battle broke out. Fifteen Japanese tanks were knocked out while the Marines lost one of their own.

By nightfall, the Peleliu airfield was in the hands of the 1st Division. Marines were then in position to assault high ground to the front.

The 1st picked up the attack again on the morning of Sept. 17, lashing out under a cover of naval gun fire, artillery and air bombardment. The day's heavy fighting resulted in the capture of the south part of

the island, including the town of Asias and tiny Ngarmoked Island off the southern tip of Peleliu. During the day the Eighty-First Infantry Division landed on tiny Angaur Island and forestalled any move by the Japanese to harass the Marines on Peleliu with artillery fire. This landing was supported by Marine heavy artillery emplaced on Peleliu.

On Sept. 19, at 7 a.m. the 1st again moved to the attack. On the right, the 5th Regiment advanced rapidly and seized the area of Ngardolok to the northwest while the 1st Regiment continued its difficult operations against rugged terrain and determined resistance along the west coast.

By Sept. 20, the 5th Marines had a secure hold on the eastern coast and the 1st Marines were making slow but steady progress in their sector. During the day, the 7th Marines moved into position on the right of the 1st Regiment.

An all-out attack by the 5th Marines completed the seizure of the entire eastern coast on Sept. 21. However, very little progress was made against the ridges along the west coast.

During the afternoon of Sept. 22, advance elements of the 321st Infantry Regiment, Eighty-First Division, moved from Angaur to Peleliu to relieve the 1st Regiment which had suffered heavy casualties in the bitter fighting on the ridge north of the airfield. After being relieved the 1st Marines moved into the area held by the 5th Regiment. The 5th was then sent into Division Reserve.

The attack was resumed the morning of Sept. 24 after an intense air and artillery bombardment. The 321st Infantry captured the village of Garekoru and then moved eastward. This advance was slowed by enemy resistance from Kamilianlul Mountain. During the afternoon, a Marine squadron of night-fighting Hellcats from the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing and a group of transports and patrol planes landed on Peleliu airfield.

The advance began to roll again on the morning of Sept. 25. The 321st Infantry Regiment reached the ridge line east of Garekoru. Shortly after noon the 1st Marines took over the line positions of the 5th Regiment. The 5th then passed through the 321st Infantry and launched an attack to the northeast. Then they moved up the west coast of the island and dug in for the night in front of Amiangel Mountain near the northern tip of the island.

By Sept. 26, the Japanese defenses on Peleliu had begun to crumble under the terrific pressure applied by our troops. Both the 5th Marines and the 321st Infantry chalked up new gains. Although the Japanese fought desperately, the 5th Marines took the hill about 1,000 yards

southwest of Amiangel Mountain and a second height which flanked this mountain on the north.

Old Glory was raised in front of the 1st Marine Division command post at 8 a.m. on Sept. 27. This was official confirmation of the fact that the situation on Peleliu was "well in hand."

By nightfall, the 5th Marines had advanced around the northern point of Peleliu capturing the remainder of the high ground on the northern part of the island. Although the enemy put up a stubborn defense from caves and natural barriers, Marines secured the larger portion of the island, except for a few pockets of resistance that still remained to be wiped out.

On the morning of Sept. 28, the 3rd Bn, 5th Marines, supported by armored LVTs and Sherman tanks crossed the coral reef along the northern coast of Peleliu and seized Ngesebus Island. Warships, aircraft and 1st Division artillery on Peleliu supported the attack. Corsair fighter planes of Marine Fighting Squadron 114 covered the landing.

Shortly after noon, this small amphibious force had captured the airfield and overcome all enemy resistance on Ngesebus with the exception of one pocket on the northwestern tip. Our forces also controlled the adjoining island of Kongauru, and a smaller unnamed island nearby was also in our hands. Capture of these islands eliminated the threat of Japanese gunfire to the Peleliu Airfield.

On Sept. 29, only one pocket of enemy resistance remained—Umurbrogol Mountain (Bloody Nose Ridge). Meanwhile the 3rd Bn, 5th Marines, completed the mopping up of Ngesebus Island. They were relieved by the 321st Infantry Regiment. Other units of the 5th Regiment continued blasting the Japanese from their last stronghold on the northern tip of Peleliu.

The main assault phase of the Palau Islands operation ended on Oct. 12, 1944, although fanatical Japanese in the remaining pocket of Bloody Nose Ridge continued to offer stubborn resistance. This pocket finally was wiped out on Nov. 27 by elements of the Eighty-First Infantry Division. This Army unit had relieved the 1st Marine Division during the middle of October. The 1st Bn, 7th Marines, the last unit of the 1st Division remaining on the lines, was relieved on Oct. 17.

First Marine Division casualties for the period from Sept. 15 to Oct. 14, 1944, were 842 killed, 4,963 wounded, and 126 missing—a total of 5,931 casualties.

At 8:30 a.m. on April 1, 1945, the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions, 3rd Amphibious Corps and the 24th Army Corps, which made up the newly organized Tenth American Army, began landing on the

west coast of Okinawa, largest island of the Ryukyu group.

The invasion of Okinawa, the strongest link in the Ryukyu chain that stretches from Formosa to the Japanese home islands, marked the end of the “island hopping” drive against Japan which began at Guadalcanal on Aug. 7, 1942. More than 3,300 miles had been covered and many changes had been made since that memorable date. When the 1st Division hit the beaches at Guadalcanal, less than 250 planes covered the landing; at Okinawa more than 1,500 carrier-based aircraft covered the assault.

The 3rd Amphibious Corps encountered light opposition on the Okinawa landing and even during the early advance inland. The beach area, however, was spotted with strong hill and trench positions.

Within four hours after the landing, the Marines had taken Yontan Airfield and the 24th Army Corps on the right had secured the Katena Airfield.

The 3rd Amphibious Corps was commanded by MajGen (later lieutenant general) Roy S. Geiger, MajGen Pedro A. del Valle led the 1st Division and MajGen Shepherd the 6th Division.

The 1st Division struck out to the east and by April 3, had reached the east coast. By the next day, Marines of the 3rd Am-

phibious Corps had occupied Katchin Peninsula on the east coast. The Marines stretched their lines across the narrow neck of the island from Yakada on the west coast to Yaka on the east.

After the northern part of Okinawa had been secured by Marines of the 3rd Amphibious Corps, the 1st Marine Division (reinforced) was relieved from Tenth Army Reserve and attached to the 24th Army Corps. This came on April 30.

Shortly before daylight on May 2, 1945, Tenth Army troops, supported by tanks and flame-throwers, opened a coordinated drive against the heavily fortified positions in southern Okinawa. The Japanese fought back with savage fury.

The Seventh Infantry Division on the east coast bypassed Yonabara Airfield and drove a deep salient into Japanese positions which extended beyond the southern end of the field. The Seventy-Seventh Infantry Division, reinforced by the 1st Marine Division, pushed ahead in the central and western sectors, driving toward the three major cities, Naha, Shun and Yonabaru.

The Japanese had massed tremendous concentrations of artillery and mortars. They had installed elaborate machine gun nests in pillboxes, concrete blockhouses

and reinforced caves. They were prepared for a last-ditch stand.

On May 4, the enemy hurled a vicious counterattack against the American forces. The Japanese brought into play their tanks, suicide boats, airplanes and pilot-guided flying bombs.

On the heels of this attack, four amphibious units attempted pre-dawn landings on both coasts—behind the American lines. The landing forces were composed of about 600 men.

Three of these Japanese assault units managed to land on the west coast but were trapped and quickly wiped out.

At dawn, more than 3,000 Japanese troops, spearheaded by 20 tanks, attacked Seventh Infantry Division positions. The attack came under cover of the enemy’s heaviest barrage of the campaign to that date. Marine Corps and Army heavy guns smashed the tanks, and Seventh Division infantrymen blocked the enemy charge in fierce hand-to-hand battles.

The 1st Division remained in the thick of the bloody Okinawa fighting until June 21, when Gen Geiger announced that organized Japanese resistance on the island had ceased. The last ground battle before the occupation of Japan itself had drawn to a close. 🇺🇸



Leathernecks from MajGen Pedro del Valle’s 1stMarDiv advance over a hill against the Japanese forces on Okinawa. The men near the crest kept low to avoid outlining themselves against the skyline. Each Marine keeps his trigger finger ready and a weary eye searching for any signs of the enemy.

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