Scenario List by Date

The following table lists the scenarios in chronological order. If you wish to play them in the order that the events actually or hypothetically occurred, use this list.

It also provides you with the name of the scenario author, the date, the location and also the size and time needed to play the scenario.

Remember, please, that size is relative and that the time frame is approximate. It may take less time or longer, depending on the player. The times are generalized.

Scenario sizes are determined by the amount of turns and the number of units in a scenario.

Scenario	Author	Date	Location	Size	Time
Taking it Personally	WBW	12/10/41	Guam	Medium	1 Hour
Hopeless Defiance	WBW	12/23/41	Wake	Medium	¾ Hour
First Blood	WBW	8/7/42	Tulagi	Large	2 Hours
Gavutu-It Begins	BWM	8/7/42	Gavutu	Large	2 1/2 Hours
1st Banzai	WBW	8/8/42	Tulagi	Large	1 1/2 Hours
Tanambogo	BWM	8/8/42	Tanambogo	Large	3 Hours
Death Patrol	WBW	8/13/42	Matanikau	Small	30 Minutes
Makin Raid	WBW	8/13/42	Makin	Medium	1 Hour
River of Blood	WBW	8/21/42	Ilu River	Large	1 1/2 Hours
River of Blood2	WBW	8/22/42	Ilu River	Medium	1 Hour
Protecting the General	WBW	9/13/42	Henderson	Small	30 Minutes
The 1st Matanikau	JR	9/27/42	Matanikau	Large	2 1/2 Hours
Comin' Down the Mountain	WBW	11/25/42	Mt Austen	Small	45 Minutes
Taking Viru	LM	7/01/43	Viru	Small	45 Minutes
Desperate Effort	LM	7/20/43	Bairoko	Medium	1 Hour
Desperate Effort 2	LM	7/20/43	Bairoko	Medium	1 1/4 Hours
3 Corner Hill	WBW	7/26/43	Munda	Small	30 Minutes
Red Beach Two	WBW	11/20/43	Betio	Huge	4 Hours
Devil by Tail	WBW	11/23/43	Betio	Medium	45 Minutes
Grenade Hill	BWM	11/24/43	Bougainville	Large	1 1/2 Hours
McCard's Showdown	WBW	6/16/44	Saipan	Small	15 Minutes
Tracks and Sabers	WBW	6/17/44	Saipan	Medium	45 Minutes
Hey-You!	BWM	7/21/44	Guam	Huge	4-6 Hours
Night of Banzai	BWM	7/25/44	Guam	Large	2 Hours
Iron Horses	WBW	7/25/44	Tinian	Medium	1 Hour
To the Point	WBW	9/15/44	Peleliu	Medium	1 Hour
To the Point(E)	WBW	9/15/44	Peleliu	Medium	1 Hour
Surprise Peleliu	WBW	9/15/44	Peleliu	Large	2 Hours
Another Bloody Ridge	WBW	9/16/44	Peleliu	Medium	1 1/4 Hours
Stein & his Stinger	WBW	2/22/45	Iwo Jima	Small	15 Minutes
A Marine Moment	WBW	2/23/45	Iwo Jima	Small	30 Minutes
Armored Surprise	LM	2/28/45	Iwo Jima	Small	45 Minutes
A Deadly View	WBW	3/6/45	Iwo Jima	Small	45 Minutes
Cushman's Pocket	BWM	3/7/45	Iwo Jima	Medium	1-1 ½ Hours
A Last Gasp	WBW	3/16/45	Iwo Jima	Medium	45 Minutes
Sniffin' Em Out	WBW	4/20/45	Yae-Take	Small	30 Minutes

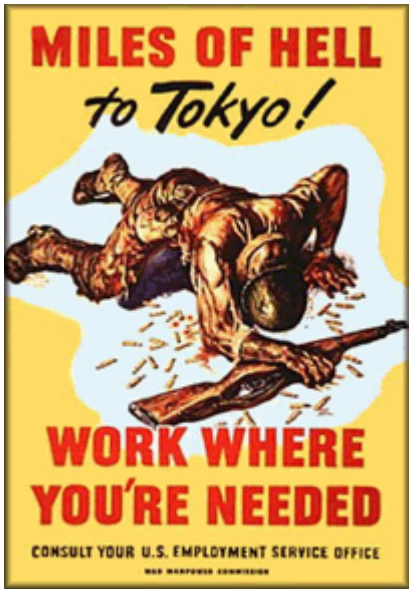
Out on a Limb	WBW	5/2/45	Okinawa	Medium	1 1/4 Hours
The Nightmare of W Draw	WBW	5/12/45	Okinawa	Large	1 1/2 Hours
Savage Night	LM	5/21/45	Okinawa	Large	1 1/2 Hours
Kyushu Killing Ground	WBW	11/1/45	Japan	Huge	3-4 Hours

Overview of the War In The Pacific

By Wild Bill Wilder

Events Leading to the War

Introduction



At the beginning of the twentieth century, the large nations of the world were gobbling up and staking claim on whatever territory might still be available. The only large area of discovery and conquest remaining was the Pacific Ocean. Extending over nearly 69 million square miles, the Pacific covers more than a third of the surface of the earth. It is the largest and deepest body of water in the world. Like tiny rocks crossing a large stream, it is dotted with island chains, which form the only landmasses across its great expanse.

The United States was a latecomer to this enterprise. Great Britain, France, Spain, and Holland had already acquired a number of new colonies when the USA finally began to pursue its own interests in the region. With the purchase of Alaska from Russia, the Pacific coastline of the country was extended for thousands of miles. The acquisition of Midway and Samoa pushed American influence to the west and south.

Hawaii, the Philippines and Guam also came under United States' control at the end of the Spanish American War. With the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 and a much shorter access route from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the two oceans were linked and the USA became a true two-ocean power.

On the islands so far to the west that it became east the Japanese viewed these acquisitions as foreign intrusions. There grew among her leaders and people a subdued yet vehement hostility toward western powers. The West had regarded Japan, as well as other nations of the Far East as backward, uncivilized and somewhat barbaric.

While it was true that industrialization and transportation was not as advanced in the east, it was more a matter of a lack of understanding of different cultures and ideals. This arrogant attitude nevertheless manifested itself in the colonizing of the Pacific, creating a strong negative attitude from Easterners.

Japan Assumes a Position of Dominance

Of all the nations of the east, Japan was the most ambitious and progressive. By the end of the 19th century, she had developed a strong military arm, with well-disciplined troops and up to date equipment. At that time, she too began assimilating other land areas. This would include the Ryukyu (including Okinawa), the Bonin (including Iwo Jima), and the Kurile Islands.

Using her growing naval and military strength, Japan also began to seek further expansion at the expense of her neighbors. After a short conflict with China in 1894-95, Japan annexed Formosa and the Pescadores to the south. A victory over Russia in 1904 enabled the takeover of Korea. By this time, the entire world began to recognize Japan as a world power in the Far East.

Japan took the side of the Allies in World War One, using her participation as a springboard to annex German territories in the Pacific. These included the Marianas (Saipan, Tinian, and Guam), Caroline and Marshall Island groups. This would later be confirmed with a League of Nations mandate.

After the war, the United States became apprehensive about the situation in the Pacific. The US was more concerned about Britain than Japan. Many American naval officers believed that Great Britain's historic dominance of the oceans should be challenged as a matter of course. Others, however, saw an inherent danger in Japan's growing navy.

It seemed at the time that this fear needed to be addressed on a world level. To exercise some sort of control over the situation, an international conference in 1921 set certain guidelines for future development of naval arms. The United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan signed a Five-Power Treaty in February 1922. It sought to avoid a naval armaments race by imposing limits of capital ships.

A 5-5-3 formula was adapted between the three greatest naval powers of the world. This meant that for every five tons of capital ship constructed by England and the United States, Japan would have the right to construct three tons. Further, no new capital ships would be built by any of these countries for the next ten years. Such an agreement caused the scrapping two million tons of battleships, or some sixty-six vessels.

It must be remembered at this point that "capital ships" referred primarily to battleships or battlecruisers. Aircraft carriers were considered largely experimental and thought to be of little significance in naval warfare (How that would change!). To avoid a total loss of some shipping, the treaty allowed the US and Japan the right to convert two ships each, originally designed as battle cruisers, to aircraft carriers. Air power at this time was also being minimized, although the experimental bombing and sinking of German battleships by General Billy Mitchell began to change that concept.

Japan seemed to be on the losing end of the treaty, but certain concessions were made in her favor. One, for example, was the prohibition of any sort of strong fortifications or large naval bases in the western Pacific, between Pearl Harbor to the East and Singapore to the west.

Japan, however, was given permission for limited defensive construction. With no one to really to take an interest in what was happening on those small and largely unknown Pacific islands, the builders had a free hand to lay the foundation for defenses that would later claim the lives of thousands of young Americans.

Later, by playing with the terms of the agreement, Japan secretly increased the size of her carrier fleet. Smaller carriers were constructed that would not conflict with the terms of the treaty. Further, secret fortifications, airfields, and extensive communication facilities were built by Japan on various key islands. The lack of interest or concern by the US or Britain during the 1930s allowed this to happen.

By 1931, Japan was reaching a crisis. The group of islands that form the Empire of Japan do not contain the natural resources for industrial development. Japan's population was growing at over a million a year. Agriculture alone could not sustain its economy. The severe economic depression in the United States had affected the entire world, and one of Japan's few exports, silk, had no market. Strapped due to a lack of raw materials, Japan saw the only way out as expansionism. It would mean taking by force, if necessary, the land areas that would provide the materials needed to sustain the people and the country.

The Rising Sun Extends its Rays

On September 18, 1931, Japan, under a pretext of an "incident" in Manchuria (to be later known as Manchuko), set in motion a plan to occupy the whole country. The League of Nations (forerunner of the United Nations) protested vigorously such an action, and Japan responded simply by withdrawing from the assembly altogether. It seemed that this League could not stop aggression in the east or west.

By now the military force in Japan had gained control, either outwardly or with powerful influence of the government, a dominating control of the entire country. Militancy was encouraged. New strategies for Japan's growth developed a bellicose, military stance against the western world and even some of her Asian allies. A strange admixture of medieval and modern cultures pervaded Japanese society, with the resultant confusion and unrest. The economy of the country continued to deteriorate, bringing further discontent to its people.

In 1936 a grand strategy was set in motion that would expand Japan's influence to eventually control the entire Pacific. It meant first of all, controlling the Soviet danger to the north, conquering, then conquering China to the west, and finally, firmly establishing a ring of defensive positions in the southern and eastern Pacific waters. Thus the Pacific Ocean would become Japan's enormous play pool! Fearful of standing alone in this endeavor, however, Japan signed a mutual agreement with Germany against Russian intervention of any sort. A year later, Italy also signed the agreement.

Tensions between China and Japan over Manchuko boiled over in 1937. Growing hostility finally erupted into an undeclared war between the two powers in July of that year. The Japanese army made serious gains into the heartland of China. The air force bombed major Chinese cities at will. The armies swept aside much of the disorganized Chinese opposition.

Much as the confrontation between Germany and Russia a few years later, there was so much land that it would be difficult to conquer all of it. China was the second largest country in the world, and was controlled not so much by a central government as a series of warlords who dominated certain sections of the country. One group finally became the strong opposing factor to Japan's attacks. This would be Chinese National Party, under Chang Kai-Shek.

After three years the war still continued. Then a new Japanese offensive was launched in April 1941 to control all Chinese ports. The erupting war of France and England against Germany had their eyes focused on their own problems in their own backyard. There was little attention given to what was happening thousands of miles away, when the existence of these major powers was in jeopardy.

This event gave Japan confidence to take even bolder steps, making conquests in the resource rich Indo-China. Oil, metal and food were plentiful in the area, and would greatly facilitate Japan's efforts. A few border incidents with Russia in Korea and Manchuko had proven disastrous for Japan. They made no further efforts in that direction. To give a clear warning to any that might intervene in her enterprises, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. Another non-aggression pact was signed with the Soviet Union late in 1940.

When Germany launched her attack on Russia in June 1941, Japanese leaders felt confident that there would be no further threat from the north. The Soviet Union, faced with possible conquest by the Wehrmacht was as the western powers the year before, far too occupied to take any military action against Japan. Thus assured, they began to concentrate on the strengthening their hold on the Pacific Ocean to their south and east.

The Point of No Return

The United States during these years of turmoil had sought a position of neutrality. America did not want to go to war. The two oceans surrounding her seemingly gave the country a buffer of security. Concerned over the expansionistic policy of Japan in the Far East, American warnings against such actions had become strong economic and shipping sanctions against the Empire. By the summer of 1941, Japan faced an almost total embargo on strategic imports including oil.

Without the fuel to run it, a modern army cannot make war. In response, the Japanese founded a new order in Asia. It was called "The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere." It would be controlled by Japan and would supply the raw materials she needed. It would include Australia, Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, New Guinea, New Zealand, and Thailand. Any nation objecting to its inclusion in the Sphere would be dealt with as an enemy.

Now the stage was set for an inevitable conflict. The United States had issued an edict to Japan that would mean her collapse. Japan would not leave China. The US said that she must. Only two alternatives remained to Japan. The first would be to capitulate to western wishes, which would signify a slow economic death for the country.

The second alternative was to so firmly establish her control of the Pacific Ocean that no nation could intervene in her overall plan of conquest and control. The latter would inevitably mean a war with the United States of America. In less than six months, it would explode across the wide expanse of the Pacific and Indian oceans and become World War Two.

The Japanese Strategy for War 1941-1941

The final decision to go to war with the United States was made on December 1st, 1941. A large carrier fleet had already sailed for Pearl Harbor and received the signal to proceed with its attack. Six days later, at 7:49 AM, on Sunday, December 7th, the first wave of Japanese torpedo planes and bombers gracefully swept over Pearl and the US forces peacefully resting there.

Within minutes, the American fleet was a horrid shambles, hulls ripped open by torpedoes, superstructures shattered by armor piercing bombs. The nearby airfields were laid waste and as the Japanese aircraft were being secured on the six carriers of the strike force, the American Pacific fleet had effectively ceased to exist! Fortunately, the two carriers assigned to the Pacific were at sea and escaped a sure death at Pearl. Immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack, other American positions all across the Pacific, including Wake Island, The Philippines and Guam came under the Japanese gun.

Most Japanese strategists recognized that this was not a final victory by any means. The only strategic value of the strike was to buy time for the Imperial Japanese military forces. This would give them the opportunity to prepare defensive positions in a ring around Japan that would keep her enemies at bay. It was hoped that after failing to penetrate those defenses, America would sue for a peace of some sort that would allow Japan to continue her own expansionist program without any major intervention.

In December 1941, Japan had within her naval fleet ten battleships, ten aircraft carriers, eight heavy and eighteen light cruisers, 113 destroyers and 63 submarines. It was a formidable fighting force, fully modernized and manned by some of the most capable seamen in the world.

America had been shaken to her foundation by the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the response was immediate. President Roosevelt officially declared war upon Japan under the authorization of the Congress of the United States. The viciousness of the "unprovoked and dastardly attack" would have an appropriate response. On declaring war against Japan, the United States had become irrevocably involved in the war in Europe. In England there was great rejoicing. Great Britain was the last bastion of freedom standing between Hitler and total domination of Western Europe. Churchill declared,

"So we had won after all! Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder. All the rest was merely the proper application of overwhelming force." It would not, however, come immediately. Instead, defeat after defeat would plague the United States as it geared up for a war on two fronts.

Wake Island fell, then the Philippines. The Chinese continued to retreat. Japanese forays began in Indo-China, Burma, and Malaya. Singapore was overrun. Rapidly the symbol of the Rising Sun extended itself over thousands of miles of land and sea, and the Allies could do nothing to stop it.

America Reels, then Recovers

During the first six months of 1942, most of the action of the United States fleet was defensive in nature. Some penetrations were made with swift aircraft carrier task forces on a hit and run basis. The Doolittle raid on Tokyo with Army B-25s flown from the carrier Hornet in April of that year brought a positive moment amid the wave of depressing news.

No real lasting damage against the Japanese occurred until the battle of Midway on June 4th, 1942. In a matter of minutes, two large naval forces confronted one another at a distance of hundreds of miles. They never saw each other. Not one large naval gun was fired against an enemy ship, yet the tide of the war in the Pacific was shifted in favor of the Allies. On that day, four of Japan's best carriers and a large number of her most experienced pilots came to a dreadful end. In a surprise maneuver, Admiral Nimitz used his limited resources to deal the Japanese Navy a defeat from which it could never recover.

From this point onward, Japan would adapt a defensive posture, seeking to hold on to its earlier gains. There would never be the major aggressive tactics executed on such a scale. Japan's moment of glory evaporated in the fiery heat of the battle of Midway. It was the turning point in the war in the Pacific. In July, the Japanese sought to overrun New Guinea. There, Australian and US troops fought hard to stop the invaders.

The fighting went on for months in the steaming jungles and on the mountainous heights.

The next month, August 1942, marked the first offensive by United States forces. The 1st Marine Division, hurriedly thrown together was shipped undetected to the Solomon Islands, and on the 7th made successful landings on Guadalcanal. The fighting would continue for this small island until February 1943, when no more Japanese troops could be found. Now not only the Japanese Navy, but also her soldiers could be beaten.

The Initiative Changes Hands - 1943

A series of battles were fought in the CBI (China-Burma-India) theater of war. These were not decisive battles in the sense that they affected over all strategy. They were, however, some of the most intense casualty producing conflicts of the war. Fraught with military jealousies and rivalries, the Allies offered little in the way of cohesive strategy or final victories. What this fighting did do was to tie up thousands of Japanese soldiers when they were so desperately needed in the Pacific to stem the tide of Allied progress through the island chains.

In developing a strategy for the conquest of the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur demanded, but did not get, preeminence in the planning and priority in the execution of the strategies developed by the Chiefs of Staff. It was finally decided that Admiral Nimitz would be in charge of the Central Pacific campaign while MacArthur would continue in the Western area of the war zone. Thus the New Guinea campaign would take second place to the efforts in the Central Pacific, aimed at the Philippines and from there to the Japanese home islands.

By September 1943, things were beginning to look grim for the Japanese. Their navy had suffered horrendous losses, which were not being replaced at an adequate rate. With Italy's surrender and German forces being ground down in Russia, it appeared that Japan was on her own. There would be no help from her allies. American submarines had by this time sunk over 800,000 tons of Japanese shipping and had so crippled the transport arm of the fleet that little could be done to either fortify defensive positions or challenge an ever bolder enemy.

The United States, on the other hand, with all her industries and people devoted to winning the war, was developing the largest, most powerful armed forces in the world. Unhampered by attacks from the air, the factories turned out a never ending stream of material to equip the soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen with all that was needed to win the war.

The Gilberts: The First Steps

The first steps toward the Philippines would be the taking of the Gilbert Islands. Three atolls (or smaller island groups) to be attacked were Abemama, Makin, and Tarawa. Admiral Turner's 5th amphibious force would do the fighting. The bloodiest fighting of this campaign would be on Betio, principal island of the Tarawa chain. 18,000 Marines of the Second Division assaulted the island. After one of the costliest amphibious assaults in history, the Marines fought for three long days.

Betio, small in size, would claim the lives of over 1,000 Marines, and all of the enemy force except 17 wounded soldiers and 129 Korean Laborers. The rest of the 4,800-man force died on the island. It was here, as never before, the intensity and devotion of the Japanese fighting man was etched in his own blood and that of his enemy.

A new strategy evolved for the advance in the Pacific. Islands deemed less important, or too strongly held, were simply bypassed. It was decided that rather than pay the cost in men's lives, these enemy strongholds would be left to "wither on the vine."

Such a place was the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul. Even though earlier plans called for its capture, it was decided to let air and naval strength pound it at a distance. Thus, from February 1944 until the end of the war, the enemy at Rabaul was surrounded, attacked from the air constantly, and completely neutralized as a threat to the Allied offensive. Here was an instance of a significant defeat without the use of ground forces. It was an evil omen for the increasingly underequipped Japanese forces.

The Threat to Japan draws Ever Closer - 1944

The Allied war in the Far East continued to gain momentum during the year of 1944. A new air weapon, the B-29 "Superfortress" bomber, was being developed. With a range of 2,000 miles, it could strike Japan from the air if bases could be taken from which they could be flown. Initial B-29 flights were made from China, but it was determined that they would be much more effective if flown from positions in the Pacific that were nearer to the Home Islands.

This plan coincided with the next island chain to be assaulted, which was the Marianas. This would also involve conquering the neighboring Marshall Islands, including Roi-Namur, and Kwajalein. Other atolls, such as Maloelap, Mili and Wotje would be bypassed. After tremendous air attacks and fire from surface ships, Kwajalein fell to the Allies on the 4th of February. Again a huge cost in American lives had been paid for this real estate.

Now as MacArthur continued to push toward the Philippines, the Japanese saw a new danger. Nimitz was quickly moving to the northwest and approaching the Japanese home islands. Reinforcements were rushed into the area. Many fell victim to American torpedoes while enroute, but by June 1944, some 60,000 Japanese troops occupied the Marianas.

The United States chose the three major islands in this group, Saipan, Tinian, and Guam to be the principal targets of invasion. Each one of these was large enough to prepare bases for the B-29 bombers, which in turn would bring the war to the Empire of Japan itself. Task Force 58, driving to the area, was the largest naval armada to date ever formed in the Pacific.

With 15 carriers, almost 1,000 aircraft, seven battleships and over 100 ships of smaller size, it appeared unstoppable. Saipan was the first target. Landings were made on June 15th, with over 600 LVTs bringing to the shores 8,000 Marines. Within two days, 20,000 troops were on land and in the battle.

In a desperate attempt to salvage the situation, the remaining naval air arm of Japan sortied to the area. As the fleets approached one another, the Americans struck the first blow. The newest and largest Japanese carrier, the Taiho, was hit by torpedoes from the US submarine Albacore and blew up and never even got into action. The Japanese airwave sent to strike the US fleet totaled 326 aircraft. They were expected and attacked mercilessly by American fighters. It became known as the "Marianas Turkey Shoot." They had only one hit on a capital ship at the cost of 240 aircraft.

In the American counterattack, the Japanese carrier Shokaku was torpedoed and sunk, as well as smaller carrier Hiyo, and the Zuikaku was badly damaged. The Japanese from this point onward had no effective naval air arm with which to combat the US forces.

On July 9th, Saipan was secured. Tinian and Guam also fell, but again the cost was heavy for the Allies. It was during the fighting for Tinian that another new Allied weapon, called Napalm (a type of jellied gasoline) was used against the dug in enemy. By August 1st, most of the Mariana Islands were securely in American hands. Casualties for both sides had been enormous. The United States had over 25,000 in this campaign alone.

The remainder of 1944 was marked by further invasions. On September 15th, the 1st Marine Division landed at Peleliu midway between New Guinea and the Philippines. The Japanese had begun to adapt a new strategy at this point in the war.

Instead of attempting to stop the invading enemy at the beaches, which was now proving impossible due to the massive pre-invasion air attacks and naval bombardments of the landing areas, they moved their defenses further inland. It would be there that the fiercest fighting would ensue. Well dug in and hidden, the Japanese soldier would fight to the death, either of himself or his enemy. The fanaticism of these troops seemed to grow greater with each battle.

Which Way to Go?

A heated debate about the advisability of the invasion of the Philippines went on for some time. Some leaders felt that they could be bypassed, and would offer no major problem in the effort to reach the Japanese home islands. MacArthur was outraged, and gave some of his most moving discourses on the importance of their capture.

His word, equivalent to America's word (or so he thought), had been given to the Filipino people. They must be liberated. It would be he, MacArthur, who would bring this to pass. Tragically, it proved to be some of the hardest and costliest fighting of the war for both the combatants and the civilian populations.

Leyte would be the first island to be assaulted. It was during this period that the "last hurrah" of the Japanese Navy was executed. Striking from three directions, the fleet consisted of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. There was no longer any Japanese carrier force available. As the American turned one way and then another to drive off the enemy, the landing forces were suddenly left exposed.

As Japanese battleships approached the transports, a small force of escort carriers with their destroyers fought a delaying action to hold off the enemy. One by one, a number of these valiant defenders were picked off by long range Japanese naval cannons. Strangely, just when victory was within their grasp, the enemy ships turned away from the battle. It was a close call, but a major disaster had been averted.

The fighting in the Philippines would continue for almost a year. General Yamashita, the one who had taken Percival's surrender at Singapore, continued to fight on tenaciously until August 15th, when he finally surrendered with 10,000 men under his command.

Japan Finds the Enemy on Her Doorstep - 1945

Iwo Jima – A Costly Advantage

As the struggle to re-conquer the Philippines continued, American strategy still aimed for the heart of Japan. In 1945, a new island chain, the Bonin Islands became the target of US forces. An island called Iwo Jima was a perfect place for airbases and a supply area for further attacks toward the Japanese home islands. There were already three airfields on the island.

Up until this point the B-29s were forced to fly almost 2,000 miles (14 hours flight time) to get to Japan from the Marianas, make their runs, and return. In between it was all ocean. Any bombers who were shot up, damaged, or suffered mechanical failure, were doomed to ditch in the sea with little hope of rescue. Iwo Jima, halfway between these points would be an ideal landing place for wounded birds to make emergency landings.

Further, these airfields were only 600 miles from Japan. In this way, escort fighters could be provided for the heavy bombers, offering them a much better chance at survival. By the end of the war, over 2,000 Superfortresses had made emergency landings on Iwo with over 20,000 crewmen saved!

The fight for Iwo Jima began on February 19th, after some of the heaviest preliminary bombardment from the air and sea ever executed. Three Marine divisions would join in the battle against over 20,000 men and 600 gun emplacements and pillboxes on Mount Suribachi and strung out along the island. It was the most severe fighting of the war to date and the US had over 25,000 casualties. It took 26 days to secure the island. The American leaders began to become more anxious as to what the final assault against Japan would cost in men's lives on both sides.

Okinawa: The Last Great Battle

It was now clear that time was running out for the Japanese. The Third Reich was breathing its last in Europe, and once that conflict ended, all the wrath of the Allied powers would be turned against the Japanese Empire. Among the Ryukyu Islands was Okinawa, some 350 miles from Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan. It was extremely suitable for fleet anchorages and airfields, and would serve superbly as the jumping off point for the final invasion of Japan.

Defending it were 100,000 men of the Japanese 32nd Army. The enemy still had some ships, and a sizeable air force. It would not be easy. It wasn't. Again the landings were made on April 1st with no opposition. The real fighting began inland. As American Marines and soldiers fought their way down the island, casualties on both sides skyrocketed.

During this time, what had been an occasional burst of gallantry became an organized wave of destruction. The Kamikaze force was formed. It consisted of thousands of planes that were nothing more than guided

missiles. Their mission was to destroy the enemy, knowing that it also meant self-destruction. Many of the young inexperienced pilots (some with only 10 hours of solo flying time) rejoiced in the opportunity to sacrifice themselves in suicidal attacks against the relentless enemy. To the Japanese, such a death was glorious and nothing less could be expected of the Sons of Nippon.

Again and again these airplanes drove through picket lines of destroyers and struck at carriers and battleships. Three capital ships were sunk and over 350 major warships suffered damage at the hands of the suicidal pilots. Even the great battleship Yamato, accompanied by a light cruiser and a few destroyers, sortied out to attack with only enough fuel to get to the battle area. It was engulfed in air attacks by over 300 airplanes and soon went under.

Next Stop: Japan!

The fighting for Okinawa came to an end on June 14th, except for mopping up operations, which would continue to the end of the war. By this time 110,000 Japanese and 12,500 Americans had been killed to take this one island. It was evident now that with America and her Allies knocking on the door, this type of fanatical, suicidal resistance could cost millions of casualties and would probably continue well into 1946.

The attack upon Japan itself would consist of two major invasions. The first, Olympic, would set the stage for the second, named Coronet, which would take place some fifty miles to the east of Tokyo. It was feared that the Japanese people would resort to a sort of national suicide type of fighting that would ultimately prove nothing.

With the death of Franklin Roosevelt on April 12th, 1945, it fell to the new president of the United States, Harry Truman, to make a final decision in the matter. As he considered all possibilities, he at last opted for the use of atomic weapons as the lesser destructive of the two alternatives.

Strong warnings were sent to the Japanese, who chose to ignore them. Then two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, on the 5th and 9th of August. The total casualties including dead and injured, amounted to about 150,000 men, women and children. Horrible though it may sound, such action still saved many more thousands of lives.

Five days later, on August 14, 1945, Japan agreed to surrender unconditionally. Emperor Hirohito, grieving over the loss of thousands of Japanese civilians under the deadly Atomic bombs, and equally fearful of more of the same, had no choice. He assembled the Imperial Council and prepares his transcript of acceptance of the terms of unconditional surrender.

Just before it was broadcast by radio throughout the nation, a mad last-minute attack by 1,000 soldiers on the Royal Palace was driven off by the Imperial Guard, who was ever loyal to the Emperor. Accordingly, hostilities came to a final official end on September 2nd 1945, when the surrender agreement was signed aboard the battleship Missouri. Some fighting continued in Manchuria and north China, where Russia was pursuing its own objectives. The war, however, in the Pacific Ocean, was now at an end. This was the final curtain to come down on the largest war ever to be witnessed by mankind.

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Eagle Against the Sun, Spector
Storm Landings, Alexander
Challenge for the Pacific, Leckie

Semper Fi - History of the US Marine Corps

By Wild Bill Wilder

"Always - The Corps!"

The history of the United States Marine Corps is an amazing one. It is a story of survival and adaptation in a changing world. The Marines are actually considered a part of the United States Navy, though they have become in a real sense, a separate entity.

They are considered a branch of the Armed Services just as the other organizations. While the smallest branch of the four, its size does demonstrate the Corps capabilities or usefulness.

It can readily be argued that the Marines are America's "Ready Force" today. From a simplistic organization of less than 1,000 officers and men in 1775, it has grown and expanded its duties until today it is a permanent part (authorized by law: The Douglas Manfield Act of 1952, Public Law 416, 82d Congress) of the US armed forces with a standing force of nearly a quarter of a million men.

The Continental Congress authorized a force of two battalions of marines on November 10, 1775. This was the birth of the United States Marines. Temporarily inactivated after the Revolutionary War, the Corps was re-instituted on July 11, 1798. The marines played a very active role in American military history throughout the nineteenth century, including the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the American Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the Boxer Rebellion in China.

Basically there have been four stages of overlapping growth within the Corps. The first phase began with the service of the Continental Marines in the American Revolution, which continued early into the twentieth century.

The primary purpose of the marines was that of "ship security." A small force of marines was included on the roster of every major US warship. Only in a secondary role would they serve as combat troops or landing operations. There were occasions when the marines served in land operations but they were rare.

The next step in the development of the Corps was the use of American naval forces in the Pacific and in Latin America (primarily Central America and the Caribbean) for prolonged military interventions.

This period began in the Philippines in 1899 (The Spanish-American War) and ended with the withdrawal of the 4th Marine regiment from Shanghai, China in 1941. During this period, an expansion program for the marines included the addition of artillery and air support units. It was quickly becoming a self-sufficient, fully integrated force.

The Marines Come of Age

At the request of the Joint Chiefs of Staff early in the twentieth century, the marines moved forward into the third phase of development. The Corps was to provide adequate forces to defend advanced US naval bases around the world, but in particular in the Pacific. Four marine defense battalions were formed and sent to various US bases, including Wake Island and Guam.

The United States was becoming uneasy with the development of affairs in the Far East. Japan had been

awarded many German possessions as a result of the Treaty of Versailles and it had extended their authority greatly. As the Japanese Empire took a bellicose stance toward the countries around them, a war in the Pacific was feared.

Contingency operational scenarios were drawn up to deal with such a possibility, including the infamous "Plan Orange." The surprise, savage attack by Japanese forces all throughout the Pacific and Asia shattered these ideas and sent planners back to start from scratch.

It was realized, however, that an amphibious force would have to be developed to counter such intentions and the marines seemed to be the ideal choice. This would lead to the Corps finding its niche, so to speak. It would fill a void within America's armed services for dealing with sea assaults and invasions. No units at that time were fully prepared for such a venture.

There were strong advocates within the Corps for just such a capability. Among them was a young major, Holland M. Smith, a veteran of the fighting in France in World War One. He would have the nickname "Howlin' Mad" given to him, not only for his initials, but also for his ballistic character.

An outspoken man, and a fierce defender of the marines and his point of view, Smith argued vociferously for the development of an amphibious doctrine to deal with hostile possibilities down the line. He envisioned a day when the marines, supported by naval gunfire and aerial bombing would be able to make successful landings on enemy held islands and beaches, previously considered impregnable.

The fiasco at Gallipoli when Australian and British troops were slaughtered in an attempted amphibious assault loomed large in the minds of many planners. Smith out-argued them. He termed his plan "a novel principle of war, the principle of doing the impossible well." Time would prove him and his theory to be correct.

Other visionaries saw a war with Japan as inevitable, as early as the First World War. Marine Corps Major Earl H. "Pete" Ellis, who had served and been decorated in France for his heroism predicted that Japan would strike first at the United States.

It would, of course, be necessary to counterattack across the wide expanses of the Pacific toward the Empire, utilizing Hawaii, Guam, and islands that would have to be retaken from the Japanese. This would only be done through amphibious assault. Ellis recognized that at that time there were no amphibious specialists within the armed services and no plan or doctrine on the matter.

This type of operation, requiring troops to emerge from the sea, unshielded in the face of withering enemy fire of all calibers from concealed and fortified positions would be probably the toughest type of assault. He wrote, "It is not enough that the troops be skilled infantrymen and artillerymen of high morale; they must be skilled water men and jungle men who know it can be done -Marines with Marine training." Many military authorities denied the possibility of such an operation. Time, of course, would prove them to be wrong.

Ellis was so impassioned with the idea that he decided to get a personal look at Japan's Pacific outposts. Disguising himself as a commercial traveler, he undertook a secret mission to the Marshalls and the Palaus. In the Far East, the motives of all western foreigners were suspect. He was watched closely.

While on the island of Koror in the Palaus, he took up with a native woman, and frequented the bars (he also had an insatiable thirst!). He often prowled around Japanese installations late at night. On May 12, 1923, he was reported by island inhabitants to have gone into a drunken craze and then die a few hours later. The Japanese authorities on the island simply reported that the American had fallen ill and died later. No one knows with certainty just what did happen to Pete Ellis.

Finally H. M. Smith won his argument. In 1933, the Fleet Marine Force, which was defined by the Department of the Navy as "a balanced force of land, air and service elements of the US Marine Corps which is integral with US Pacific and/or Atlantic Fleet. It has the status of a full-type command and is organized, trained, and equipped for the seizure or defense of advance naval bases and for the conduct of limited amphibious or land operations essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign."

A year later, the Corps put together a manual for landing operations that became a standard not only for the Marines, but also for the Army, who seven years later called upon the marines to help train several of its

divisions in amphibious techniques. World War II would be perhaps the Corps supreme moment of glory, when it carved in stone its contribution to the survival and security of the United States of America.

Moments of Glory

Since the Second World War, the Marine Corps has adapted a new stance. With units at the ready in naval fleets all over the world, it is considered a "force in readiness." It is part of the old Theodore Roosevelt saying, "Walk softly and carry a big stick." A vital part of the "big stick" are the marine units, combat ready, that are available at a moment's notice to land and do whatever their country calls upon them to do.

The Marine legend is a permanent part of history. Terms that might be thought strange to the American vocabulary, such as "Semper Fi"(always faithful), "Gung Ho" (work together), and "Leathernecks" (taken from the leather cravat that was once a part of the Marine uniform to protect their neck from enemy swords) are well known.

On the afternoon of the surrender of the Marine defenders on Wake, Major James P. S. Devereux sat on a log and experienced deep depression. It was at that moment that a group of marines under Japanese guard approached. They were a ragged group. All of them had been partially stripped, some to their undershorts. Many were without shoes. Unshaven, limping, with ragged bandages over various parts of their dirty bodies, their shoulders were hunched and their heads down.

The long weeks of siege and the final surrender had taken its toll on them too. They were lead by veteran sergeant Edwin F. Hassig. As they approached, Hassig saw his commander nearby. He stopped in his tracks, turned, and shouted, "Snap outta' this stuff, damn it! You're Marines!"

To a man, they raised their heads, squared their shoulders, and when the passed the Major, they were marching in perfect cadence with the pride of a drill team on the parade ground. That image burned itself into Devereaux's mind and helped sustain him during nearly four years of brutal Japanese imprisonment.

The flag-raising on Iwo Jima has ennobled and immortalized the Corps that James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy in World War Two, who witnessed it himself from an offshore ship made a classic comment. He stated to the now General H. M. Smith, "Holland, the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next five hundred years!"

Another epic stand of the United States Marines occurred in Korea at the end of 1950. When massive Chinese intervention into the war there threatened the possible total defeat of United Nations forces, it was the First Marine Division, nestled around the Chosin Reservoir in sub-zero temperature, that made a stand and a marching withdrawal back to Hungnam.

They came, carrying their equipment, wounded, and many of their dead. They came to the port with pride, heads held high. They had simply, as their general put it, "attacked in another direction." And so it goes. The pages of military history are filled to overflowing with great moments for the Gyrenes. Yes, it appears that the United States Marine Corps is here to stay.

SEMPER FI!

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Movieography - A Select List of Pacific Flicks

Wild Bill Wilder

The name "Movieography" is my own invention to include a list of what I consider to be well worth viewing, if you have an interest in the Pacific Theater of Operations in World War II. Some may be very hard to find. Some video companies can locate them for you, and usually at a very reasonable price, say $20 or less.

BATAAN (1943), A rear guard action by American troops as the rest of the allied forces move toward Corregidor. Stars include Robert Taylor, Desi Arnez (his first), Thomas Mitchell, and Lloyd Nolan.

WAKE ISLAND (1943), Not too historically accurate portrayal of the events on the island prior to its capture. The acting is great, with Brian Donlevy playing Major Devereux. Also appearing are William Bendix and Robert Preston as two Marine buddies.

ONCE BEFORE I DIE (1966), Not a lot of fighting, but accurately portrays the reaction of American and Filipino troops to the Japanese invasion of the Philippines at the beginning of World War II. Richard Jaeckel is superb as Lieutenant Custer. Others appearing include Ron Ely, Ursula Andress and other lesser-known stars.

GUADALCANAL DIARY (1944), A classic, with some classic stars. It is flavored with American propaganda, of course, since it was made during the war, but does give somewhat of an idea of the strained situation on the island for the First Marine Division.

GUNG HO (1943), The attack on Makin by Carlson's Raiders made such an impact in the States that a movie was made of it. Randolph Scott, who gives you the impression that he and Carlson must have been a lot alike, plays Evans Carlson.

THE GALLANT HOURS (1960), is a cinematic biography of Admiral William "Bull" Halsey, in the critical hours on Guadalcanal. It is a superb movie, and spiced with accurate historical tidbits. James Cagney plays Bull Halsey, and you feel that you know the man personally after you have watched the movie.

TOO LATE THE HERO (1971), Cliff Robertson plays the reluctant Lieutenant sent as an interpreter to accompany disgruntled British soldiers on a mission. Michael Caine also stars, and the two help make it a movie worth watching.

HALLS OF MONTEZUMA (1950), A whole bevy of Hollywood greats enhance this story of Marines running out of time. From the situation described, it sounds like the Peleliu invasion. Stars include Richard Widmark, Richard Boone, Jack Palance, and a number of others. Action scenes are great and a lot of material and vehicles from the Second World War were used.

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL (1956), Robert Wagner is an idealistic young lieutenant, who gets introduced to the harsh realities of war. This one looks at the darker side of the American endeavor, and underlines the fact that not all those who participated were of the heroic gender.

NONE BUT THE BRAVE (1965), After having crash landed on one of the lesser islands of the Pacific, a Marine platoon is confronted by the few remaining Japanese defenders. It is an interesting study of how each side views the other. One is first taken to the American camp, then to the Japanese. Stars include Frank Sinatra and Clint Walker. It is a good one.

MACARTHUR (1981), Gregory Peck always seems to fit well into combat films. He excels in this biography

of Douglas MacArthur. The life is traced from the beginning of World War II to his final speech at West Point after being dismissed by President Truman. Its long, but very entertaining; a more realistic look at "The American Caesar."

SANDS OF IWO JIMA (1949), now you knew I would not leave this one out. John Wayne wears cowboy boots or combat boots with equal ease. This saga of the invasion of Tarawa and Iwo Jima by United States Marines was my first real introduction to the war. I did not rent it.

I saw it at the Paramount Theater (long since gone) in Atlanta, Georgia at the age of 11. I stayed and watched it two more times, before an usher ran me out. It still entertains me today. How many times have I watched it? I guess still not enough. An excellent movie.

THE THIN RED LINE (1999), a rather unique approach to a war movie. Nick Nolte plays an outstanding battalion commander with grandiose ideas for advancement at the cost of the blood of his men. Others in starring roles are John Cusack, Sean Penn and Woody Harrilson.

I found it to be generally dull with some lively fight scenes. Those were worth the price of the movie. It did graphically portray the savagery of the fighting in the Pacific, where neither side gave quarter to the enemy.

Of course there numbers of other films done on World War II in the Pacific, but these are among my personal favorites from the aspect of the ground fighting. Many others could be included on other aspects of the war. Examples are "Tora, Tora, Tora," "Midway," "Air Force" (an old classic), "Purple Heart," "30 Seconds over Tokyo" and the newest as of this writing, "Pearl Harbor."

For documentaries, I would recommend the series, "CRUSADE IN THE PACIFIC," which would probably come on 6 videotapes. While definitely slanted the American way, and occasionally stretching the truth a bit to make the old USA look good, it is still a series worth watching.

Another one would be "GREAT BATTLES OF WWII: THE PACIFIC," prepared by Reader's Digest in 1987. It is hard to find, nothing but combat footage and propaganda films made during WWII. If you want raw, hard, realistic war, here it is!

And what could I possibly say about the classic "VICTORY AT SEA?" The price on the entire set has recently become very affordable. While not detailed on the individual battles, it is without a doubt one of the best documentaries on the war on the seas of the world, with a strong emphasis on the Pacific.

The Japanese Soldier

By Wild Bill Wilder

The early triumphs of the Japanese Empire at the initiation of World War II gave to the leaders what has been called "victory fever." While the earlier Japanese goals were restricted to establishing a far eastern empire, those in charge began to believe that they were unstoppable. With a little more effort, the entire Pacific Ocean could be their play pool.

The Japanese soldier occupying the rank and file of the army was also in a state of overconfidence. Remember, Japan had been at war for nearly ten years. Soldiers, sailors and aviators were experienced fighters. Even more, the Japanese soldier possessed tenacious fanaticism coupled with a barbaric ferocity in battle. Imbued with the code of Bushido, he considered himself a warrior.

Such an attitude shocked his western opponents. Throughout the war until very near the end, he showed a ready willingness to fight and die for his emperor and his empire. His training made it clear. He must not be captured, even if wounded. The soldier's manual stated, "Bear in mind the fact that to be captured means not only disgracing the Army but that your parents and family will never be able to hold up their heads again. Always save the last round for yourself."

The perception given to the soldier of the Japanese Army as to the enemy that he would face also affected his fighting ability. He had been told, "Westerners, being very haughty, effeminate and cowardly, intensely dislike fighting in the rain or dark. They cannot conceive night to be a proper time for battle-though it is excellent for dancing. In these weaknesses lies our great opportunity."

Though somewhat antiquated at the start of the war, the Japanese soldier knew his weapons and was quite proficient with them. He was skilled in attack methods too, especially at night. For such assaults he would smear his face with mud. The officers would wear a white cloth strips on their backs to identify them. They also doused themselves with pungent aromas and were told to "follow their noses" in the pitch blackness.

He was ideally equipped for jungle warfare. His uniform was the color of the foliage around him and he would add branches and leaves to his body and helmet. To keep up his body, he added salt to his tea and salt plums to his rice. He could carry heavy loads, often up to 100 pounds of equipment, including rice, powdered bean paste, powdered soy, hand grenades, a weapon and ammunition, a shovel, pickaxe and his tenting. Some artillerymen and engineers carried even more.

Though dedicated to fight to the death for victory, too often he merely fought and just died, a victim of medieval thinking on the part of his leaders. They believed that the spirit was even more important than his tools of war.

While to a certain extent true, the outmoded weaponry of the Japanese soldier was a hindrance. His rifle was often taller than he was. It would in no way be out of place to state that if the Japanese fighting man had been equipped with up to date weaponry and lavishly supplied to meet his basic needs as was often the case with the American military, the war in the Pacific might have been much more difficult than it was.

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US Naval Aircraft Designations

(From the Encyclopedia of the Pacific War, Dunnigan and Nofi)

Both the United States Navy and the Marines used a special coding to designate their squadrons. Each letter in the code had a meaning. The use of the "V" was in contrast to using the letter "Z" for lighter than air blimps (still in service in World War Two, and effective for submarine patrol).

After the initial letter, the next letters were used to indicate the type of aircraft within the squadron. Fighter squadrons, for example, used a "VF" code.

The last part of the coding was composed of numbers to identify the specific squadron. The codes we are most used to seeing in studying the history of World War Two stood for the following:

VB Bombing Squadron
VC Composite Squadron (mix of fighters and bombers)
VD Photo reconnaissance
VF Fighter Squadron
VP Patrol Squadron
VPB Patrol Bombing Squadron
VSB Scout Bombing Squadron
VT Torpedo Squadron

Marine squadrons were differentiad by adding an "M" after the V. For example, a Marine fighter squadron such as the first one to land on Guadalcanal was designated VMF 223 and the squadron of Dauntlesses carried the lettering VMSB 232.

A New Rifle For A New War

By Wild Bill Wilder

Only the Best!

It has been well said, "Americans love their guns!" Estimates are that the citizenry of the United States is the best armed of any country in the world. But this is not a new fad, or idea. It has always been that way, from the time of the long barreled rifles of the Colonial Army that decimated the British Red Coats up and down the coast of the Colonies during the Revolutionary War until now.

American pioneering in the field of weaponry has always been at the forefront. The desire for more powerful, practical guns led to the creation of the percussion caps, repeating arms, metal cartridges and the machine gun.

The availability of these weapons and peripherals was due in part to the huge industrial revolution in this country and mass production. Gunmakers here became legend, including John Hall, Samuel Colt, Remington and a host of others.

This firepower heritage is also evident in the Armed Forces of the United States. It is a clear-cut fact that soldiers equipped with the best weaponry available has been at the top of the priority list for all the branches of the military. In the area of small arms the push has always been toward more powerful, effective weapons for the soldiers.

Other countries might lean toward greater manpower, brilliant leadership, clever tactics or mass striking ability, but in the American army, the emphasis has been on the quality of the weapon. The soldier must have a weapon upon which he can rely or he will not do his job properly.

There have been bad moments in arms development, such as the early problems with the M-16A1 in its introduction in Vietnam, but by and large, the designers keep on until they get it right.

A Pressing Need

This was why the Ordnance Department of the Army spent forty years in pursuit of a good semi-automatic rifle for its troops. Experiments in the area began at the turn of the 20th century, but need forced the production of the Springfield Armory's single-shot bolt-action .303 rifle. It was rugged and accurate, but it was heavy and slow.

Working the bolt to eject the empty cartridge and insert a fresh one into the chamber took time. In war, time can mean life. Neither did it provide the firepower needed for a modern war of machine guns and cannons. Something more efficient was needed.

After World War One ended, ordnance experts put a high priority on the development of a high-powered, relatively lightweight weapon. It would have to be simple to maintain, light to carry and accurate, with real hitting power.

The theory was that such a weapon could double or even triple an infantry unit's firepower over a bolt action rifle in battle. It would improve the results, since theoretically a man would have to make only a slight adjustment in his sighting with a semi-automatic weapon, compared to the operation of a bolt to eject the empty cartridge and insert a new one into the chamber.

Other nations of the world had the same problem, but could not find an answer. Their solution was to provide their troops with lightweight machine guns to enhance the firepower of the rifle squad. The United States also had advocates of this idea, but they were voted down.

Large numbers of light machine guns were more expensive, complicated tactics, and could be cumbersome, thus hindering mobility. No, the answer would come in the form of an adequate semi-automatic rifle for the ordinary ground slogger.

During the 1920s this project became a top priority in the area of military research. Artillery, machine guns and the development of other ordnance took second place to this urgent need. In a streamlined army, mobility and firepower would have to go hand in hand. The specs sent out to designers was for a rifle that weighed less than 8.5 pounds; would be accurate up to 800 yards without special sighting equipment, and fired a bullet of no less than .276 caliber.

The Competition Begins

There were three promising contenders for the prize. Captain Julian S. Hatcher was an ordnance officer with an encyclopedic knowledge of gun design. John D. Pederson, an independent gun manufacturer seemed to have some promising ideas in the matter. Finally John C. Garand, an employee at the Bureau of Standards had done extensive work in the area of designing lightweight machine guns.

Eventually Hatcher dropped out of the race, but Pederson and Garand continued to design and experiment. In 1926 Garand presented a rifle to the Army, but it was found to be lacking. Seven years of work went down the drain and he began again, this time with a .30-caliber weapon.

Various tests ("The Pig Board" and "The Goat Board") groups used animals to simulate humans, anesthetized them, and ran firing tests on how the weapons destroyed flesh. After another four years of arguing and test models, it was finally decided that the rifle fabricated by Garand firing a .276 bullet would do the job. The Ordnance Department approved it unanimously.

When it reached the Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, it was completely rejected. MacArthur did not consider himself a marksman and he did not spend a lot of time shooting weapons. It was the size of the bullet that irked him.

Having been in war, he refused to give the men under his command a small bullet with which to dispatch the enemy. It would have to be a .30-caliber or nothing. Another three years of development by John Garand had been tossed by the way.

Undaunted, he went back to the "drawing board," and by the end of 1935 had come with a weapon that just might be the one. It was a gas-operated, .30 caliber, semi-automatic rifle that weighed 9.5 pounds. It used a clip that held eight rounds of ammunition. When empty, the clip was ejected and the bolt remained open for the insertion of a full one.

Its overall length was 43.6 inches and could be handled by the average soldier with relative ease. After inserting the clip and working the bolt once, the weapon could be fired again and again with only a squeeze of the trigger.

The rifle fired about 40 rounds a minute in the hands of the average soldier and up to 100 rounds a minute when used by an expert. It seemed to be the one! On January 6, 1936, it was officially classified as the "Rifle, semi-automatic, M1."

Production Wheels Grind

The wheels of the Army turn, oh so slowly! It took nearly two years to get through all the protocol and paperwork to the production line. When it finally began, in 1938, the earliest models were plagued with problems. The guns made by Garand for the testing had been carefully hand tooled. The models coming off the Springfield armory assembly line were mass-produced on older machinery that could not be properly adjusted to the fine tolerances in the M1's design.

One of the worst problems was the "seventh-round stoppage." Loaded with an eight round clip, the rifle tended to jam on the seventh round. A weak spring in the rifle itself that forced the bullets upward and then ejected the empty clip was found to be the problem. The rear sight was also a problem. It did not work well initially.

Discovering the problem to be in the outdated tooling machinery, new equipment was ordered. Rifles began to come off the lines at about 100 a day, which was still well short of the need. Even worse, the first batches of completed rifles were shipped off to England for the British Army.

During this time, the old war-horse, the NCO of the Army, continued to bad-mouth the weapon. The primary reason was that it was much easier to achieve "expert marksman" with a Springfield than with a Garand. In a day when a sergeant's top pay was $30 a month, the extra $5 was equal to one-sixth his pay. No one wanted to lose that bonus, so the weapon was talked down among the soldiers.

Brigadier General Sidney Hinds recalled, "When in 1941 we were first issued the US rifle, .30 M1 Garand, it was a gift from 'Uncle' received by most of us with varying emotions, attitude and conjectures. The old soldiers, most Experts and Sharpshooters with the Springfield said very frankly, 'Its no good.' 'You'll never hit the broad side of a barn.' 'You'll shoot up all the ammo in five minutes.' And so on, far into the night.

The Garand, in spite of the fine technical data and propaganda,' would have to be sold to the foot soldier on the ground and to really prove itself in the hard and bloody usage of battle." No one really wanted it initially. That would change with the coming of war.

In 1940, a few congressmen got wind of the ill rumors and held hearings (which they have ALWAYS loved to do) on the viability of the new weapon. The Garand was put to another test in May and won hands down over all competitors. It was then decided that the M-1 would be the rifle of the US Armed Forces.

The Marine Corps, dissatisfied with the Army's test, held one of its own in San Diego in May of that year. There had been in development in the Marine Corps another rifle, called the Johnson Rifle.

The three were put to a test together. Marine NCOs were not about to release the Springfield, so just prior to firing, a few M1 clips dropped in the sand did the job. The M1 jammed horribly, and made a very poor showing. The Marines would keep their Springfields (and their $5) for a time. It was no matter. There were not enough to go around, and the Army would gladly take them.

Not Enough to Go Around

By the beginning of World War II, the new rifle was still a scare commodity. Production had lagged far behind demand. Now with a war on, all trainees were obligated to use the old Springfield. Only troops going overseas would get the M1 Garand. Secretary of War Stimson urged General Marshall to relax production standards so that weapons could be produced more rapidly.

Marshall adamantly refused. He would stick to the old Army tradition of aiming for perfection in weaponry. This was a World War! Whatever rifle his soldiers carried, it would have to withstand the heat of the North African deserts, the sweltering humidity, and sand of the Pacific, and the mud of Western Europe. Only the best would be good enough. The British, who had lowered the standard for the Enfield Rifle, came to regret their decision. General Marshall never regretted his.

Swap, Trade or Steal

When the 1st Marine Division landed at Guadalcanal on August 7th, 1942, the standard weapon was still Springfield bolt-action rifle. There were only a few test Garands on the island. After a number of massed charges and attacks by the Japanese, Marines who had sweated blood working the bolts on those rifles were hungry for something better.

When US Army troops began to reinforce the Marines, they brought with them the new M-1 Rifle. At the risk of life and limb (worth far more than $5 a month), the Marines did everything in their power to get one.

In addition to being a very deadly weapon, the M-1 had 40 percent less recoil than the Springfield '03. It had only 72 parts compared to 92. The only tool required to take it apart and put if back together was one every soldier would have available - a .30-caliber bullet.

The pointed nose and the rim of the cartridge were all it took to take it apart and put it back together. The Marines began bartering with Japanese flags, swords and any other item of interest, trying to coax the new

rifle from its user.

It was only a matter of days till the Army troops discovered the superiority of their weapon and refused any such offers. Then came the looting, the stealing of weapons in the night. GIs were forced to tie their weapons to their bunks or to their own bodies to keep them from disappearing as they slept.

US Army Colonel John George tells in his book, Shots Fired in Anger, "Leathernecks were appropriating all they could lay their hands upon by 'moonlight requisition.' In daylight, they would come over to our areas to barter souvenirs with freshly landed doughboy units; any crooked supply sergeant who had an extra M1 could get all the loot he wanted."

At last, shipments of rifles for the Marines began reaching Guadalcanal, but by now the Marines were on their way back to Australia. By early 1943, most US units were equipped with the M1. It would continue as the primary weapon for another 15 years and still see service in 3rd world countries over 50 years later.

During that period, over 4,040,000 rifles were produceded by the Springfield and Winchester Armories. Major General Julian S. Hatcher, who had been one of the original competitors for the design of the weapon, commented on its use. "It is estimated that during World War II more shots were fired with the Garand than were ever fired with the Springfield in all its history."

Today in a new millenium, many armies of the third world countries still use and praise the old M-1 Garand. Like the B-52 and the Huey helicopter, the fact that they are still used in quantity in service indicates something of the long-lasting quality of the weapon.
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The Highest Honor

By Wild Bill Wilder

Introduction

(Note: On Guadalcanal, at least one member of every branch of the military service, the US Army, the US Marine Corps, the Air Force, the US Navy and the US Coast Guard was a recipient of the Medal of Honor in the epic struggle for Guadalcanal.)

One of the strange anomalies of war is in the area of recognition of individuals who go "above and beyond the call of duty." It has always seemed that the people most deserving of special recognition were the ones most uncomfortable with it.

They either felt unworthy of the honor, or that someone else deserved it more. Nowhere has this been truer than the bestowal of the MEDAL OF HONOR, the highest military award that can be given to an individual.

The fact of its value is attested through statements of great leaders through the years. President Harry Truman, a veteran of World War One, once told a gathering of World War Two recipients, "I'd rather have this medal than be president." George Patton, in his usual extravagant manner of speaking, whispered to one recipient as he placed the medal around his neck, "I'd give my immortal soul for that medal."

Since the Civil War, out of the millions of men and women who have served the United States in combat as of 1990, only 3,398 had received this dignified affirmation of bravery and sacrifice. Nineteen individuals have had this award given to them twice! Notice that I do not speak of Medal of Honor "winners." The word "win" is out of place here, as anyone who has received the medal would state most emphatically.

There was no competition between men to see who could be the bravest. Apparently no one ever had the thought in the back of his head as he risked life and limb, "Wow! Maybe I'll get the Medal of Honor for doing this." No, "win" is not a good word. This, of course, in no way implies that these valiant warriors were not winners. It is simply to state that receiving a medal for their actions was not their intention. In most cases it was a much higher motive that prompted to perform heroic and sacrificial actions.

The Origin of the Medal

The Medal of Honor was an idea introduced in the first year of the Civil War by an Iowa senator named James W. Grimes. The bill stated that its purpose was "to promote the efficiency of the navy."

It authorized a "medal of honor" for sailors and marines who distinguished themselves in battle. Three months later, the Army, never to be outdone, prevailed upon a Massachusetts congressman to secure a similar award for them. The first medal was described thusly,

"A five-pointed star, one point down. On the obverse the foul spirit of secession and rebellion is represented by a male figure in crouching attitude holding in his hands serpents, which, with forked tongues, are striking at a large female figure representing the Union or Genius of our country, who holds in her right hand a shield, and in her left, the fasces. Around these figures are thirty-four stars, indicating the number of states in the union."

The medals were hung from a ribbon with a blue horizontal top band above alternating vertical stripes of red and white.

The navy's medal would be attached to the ribbon with a rope-fouled anchor. The army's was an eagle, wings spread, astride crossed cannon and cannonball stacks.

The History of the Medal

In the early days, certain restrictions were placed upon the award. Limited at first to the "present insurrection," it was extended after the War Between the States and eventually became a permanent award. For some time it was limited to enlisted men only, while the American navy would award it to individuals in non-combat situations as well.

During the Civil War, the medal was given perhaps too frequently (1,520, nearly half of the total), but the guidelines for its bestowal became much more stringent at the end of the century.

The first medal was awarded to a physician, Army Lieutenant Bernard J.D.Irwin. On February 14, 1861. During the winter of 1860, the young surgeon volunteered to lead a relief expedition to rescue a patrol of cavalrymen trapped by Indians at Apache Pass, Arizona. Irwin took on a raging blizzard vicious Apaches and broke the siege, thus saving the beleaguered command from certain death.

During the Great locomotive chase through Georgia in 1862, six of the union soldiers who participated also received the medal. Later there were awards to Indian fighters, to men who were participants in the battles of San Juan Hill and Manila Bay during the Spanish American war and also at Peking in the midst of the Boxer Rebellion

After a time, it became necessary to more clearly define the regulations regarding the bestowal of the medal. It was decided that it would be given to one who performed an act of the most conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, FAR above and beyond the call of duty, in the presence of an armed enemy. It had to involve a personal risk of life. It also had to be a voluntary act which would not be subject to negative criticism. Finally, there had to be at least two eyewitnesses that could attest to the action. In this way, the medal would truly be the highest of awards that could be given.

To avoid the early abuses in the bestowal of the Medal of Honor, it was deemed imperative to create other awards for daring and courage that, while worthy of recognition and praise, did not meet the qualifications of the highest award. In this way the Medal of Honor was elevated to a "pinnacle" of a so called pyramid of honor.

Lesser decorations, therefore, would reward varying degrees of heroism and meritorious service. Each medal would have its own requirements and eligibility criteria to be assured of the proper level of recognition for the deed. During the First World War, an echelon of awards was established. The army created the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), which ranked immediately below the Medal of Honor. Below the DSC was the Silver Star. The navy also used the Silver Star, but substituted the Navy Cross for the DSC.

With the passing of the years, the design of the medal was brought under scrutiny and a change was decided upon. Since the Civil War had long been over, it was felt that the sentiments expressed upon it needed to be updated. The new design came from a Parisian jewelry firm of Messrs. Arthur, Bertrand, and Berenger. On November 22, 1904, a patent was issued to protect the new design.

The five pointed star of the old medal was retained. At its center appears the head of Minerva that is surrounded by the words, "United States of America." An open laurel wreath encircles the star. Above the star appears a bar emblazoned with the word, "VALOR." Finally atop the bar is an eagle with wings spread.

The new ribbon for the medal is a light blue, watered-silk material. It is spangled with thirteen stars. Two versions were used: one with a neck ribbon' the other with a breast ribbon. The former finally became the official version. The breast ribbon medal continued to be awarded throughout the Second World War.

The Value of the Medal

It was in World War Two that the Medal of Honor achieved the status it deserved. To be sure that the recognition was given to the most deserving heroes, special boards were created by the Army and Navy to carefully review each recommendation.

Even within these groups there were varying levels through which each recommendation had to pass, beginning at the division level. For the Medal of Honor, approval would have to come from Washington, D.C., where senior combat-tested officers reviewed the supporting documentation with careful scrutiny.

This became a lengthy process, but it did help to uphold the highest traditions for the award. During the Second World War over 13 million men served in the military. Only 433 received the Medal of Honor. This included 294 from the Army, 57 from the Navy, 81 Marines, and 1 coastguardsman.

In this case posthumous awards outnumbered awards to living heroes. Only 190 of these recipients survived to have their medals placed around their necks. To further emphasize the importance of the medal, the recipient would be brought to Washington whenever possible so that the president could personally make the presentation.

This is not to say that the system of recognition was or is infallible. Undoubtedly there were hundreds of others who performed deeds just as heroic or perhaps even more so, without any sort of recognition. In battles where all involved were killed or totally incapacitated, there were no witnesses to testify to the courage of other men. Furthermore, some people who received the Medal of Honor perhaps just weren't that deserving.

Politics even gets into the arena of awards for valor. Douglas MacArthur received the Medal in World War II, but for the life of me I cannot find in any biographies on the man a particular act that would justify such an action. It might be well to say that those who did receive the award were just representative of many who should have gotten it and did not.

And then among those who were Medal of Honor recipients, some stand out more than others. Besides General MacArthur, there was also Audie Murphy, who later gained fame in Hollywood and died in a tragic plane crash. Walter Ehlers, whose deeds are portrayed in one of these scenarios, shared the speaker's podium with President Clinton in the 1994 50th anniversary of the landings at Normandy.

Some of these men have a special significance attached to their recognition, such as Lt. A.R. Nininger, the first recipient of World War II, or Corporal Melvin Mayfield who was the last to be so honored. It is quite interesting that both of these individuals performed their heroic actions on Luzon Island in the Philippines, with a little over three years between the two occasions.

Then there was Col. Robert Cole, who led the first bayonet charge in the European Theater of Operations. There was also the case of Capt. Matt Urban, who received his medal 47 years after he had his moment of testing in France. PFC Sadao Munemori, a Nisei of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, was the only Japanese American to so recognized.

But what about the rest of these heroes? Who were these individuals? Just plain people, men who came from all walks of life. They range from a president's son to some of the poorest and most obscure of families. They came from big cities and from the country. Some never entered a high school classroom; others held graduate degrees. They ranged in size from gargantuan to minuscule.

Each was different, yet they all seemed to possess a common trait. And what was it? It seemed to be the ability to overcome their fear in the face of overwhelming odds and very possible death with a courage that was above anything that could be expected of them. It was a courage that deserved recognition such as the Medal of Honor. Men of valor, we salute you, living and dead!

The Passing Of The Dreadnaughts

By Wild Bill Wilder

One cannot escape the fact that the Marine campaign in the Pacific hinged largely on the success of its mother organization, the United States Navy, for success. A little known fact is that just prior to and immediately after World War Two, many of the brass hats of the US Navy still had their vision focused on naval power residing in the big guns of the battleships. The development of the war in the Pacific forced the United States to fight without what many considered their greatest asset. The Battleship fleet of the Stars and Stripes lay in smoldering ruins inside Pearl Harbor.

Had they been available, it might have taken longer for the US Navy to realize that there was a new force, a far greater and far reaching one than 16" or 18" rifles. The aircraft carrier and its angry buzzing brood of deadly dive and torpedo bombers suddenly made it clear that naval warfare was changing. As a result of the victories at Midway and thereafter by US Naval airpower, a burgeoning new project was put on hold and never resumed. The Navy had commissioned ship builders to begin a new super class of battleship, the "Montana" class.

These dreadnaughts would have been every bit the equal to the Japanese monster ships Yamato and Musashi. They would have been much larger than the Missouri or New Jersey, 70,000 tons or greater, sporting four 16" turrets and a multiplicity of smaller guns. They were to be named Montana, Ohio, Maine, New Hampshire and Louisiana.

In April 1942, their construction was put on suspension just before it began by President Roosevelt because of a lack of steel and an urgent need to replace carriers being lost in the Pacific. By the summer of 1943 the project was scrapped completely. The whole focus of the United States Navy had been swayed to the new type of naval warfare that would dominate the seas until today.

The Tenacious Underdog Of The Air

By Wild Bill Wilder

(Note: The Air Force was still a part of the US Army until after World War II when it became a separate entity. It's initials then changed from USAAF to USAF - United States Air Force, a tacit tribute to the vital importance of the airplane in war.)

August 22nd, 1942 marked the arrival of the first of a contingent of United States Army Air Force aircraft dubbed the P-400. It was a modified version of the Bell P-39 Aircobra. Its intended use was that of low-level attacks against ground targets. It did not have the capacity for high altitude flights. This would prove to be a big handicap initially for the flyboys of the US Army.

In their first engagements the American pilots suffered dreadful losses against the more agile Japanese Zero. The P-400s were just not equipped to dogfight with the enemy fighters. On August 30th, the Japanese conducted a fighter sweep over the island, looking for a fight. A mix of P-400s and Wildcats were in the air and engaged the enemy. In the ensuing battle, four of the P-400s were shot down and two pilots were lost. It was a grim beginning for the 67th Squadron. The surviving pilots, with much more experience than their Marine counterparts were as lambs for the slaughter. They dubbed their airplanes as "klunkers."

After a few more tragedies like the one described, the recommendation was made to remove them from Guadalcanal, but then a suitable role, the one for which it was originally intended, was found for the stubby little long-nosed fighter. It was determined that with its 37mm cannon (15 rounds) in the nose and its four machine guns would be very effective against Japanese troops and installations on the ground. It quickly became a scourge to the enemy and some even mentioned this long nosed "shark" in their diaries.

With powerful weapons and a bomb load capacity, the appearance of the distinctive cigar shaped airplane was always a welcome sight for Marines below in need of some help. One very unusual role for the P-400 was to use depth charges as bombs against Japanese ground forces. Robert Leckie, a Marine veteran and noted historian, mentions them in his book, "Challenge for the Pacific." He describes how the planes became "...devastating after depth charges were slung under their bellies and dropped into enemy held ravines. The concussions were dreadful; they literally blew the Japanese out of their shoes."

Once again individual ingenuity and grit would find a way to use what was at hand to get the job done.

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A Marine Moment
The Flag Raising on Suribachi
Wild Bill Wilder

Dreading the Moment

Many of the Marines on the transports headed for Iwo Jima had an uneasy feeling about what was to come. That uneasiness came in spite of the fact that one of the largest invasion fleets in history, with 16 fleet carriers and 8 battleships to protect it, and a total of over 200,000 fighting men of the United States was now about to descend on a tiny island called Iwo Jima. The largest Marine force ever assembled in history was contained within the fleet that sailed toward destiny.

At dawn on February 16th, General Kuribayashi and his men awakened to an awesome sight. Their island garrison of Iwo Jima was ringed with US warships. As daylight increased, minesweepers threaded their way through the waters to clear a path for the larger ships. Destroyers formed a protective screen on the seaward side. Among the ships present was the battleship New York, which had sailed with the British in World War One. The Arkansas was also present, commissioned in 1912, the oldest US battleship still in service. Indeed, many of these vessels were older than the men who served aboard them.

Aboard the flagship were special staffs to gather reports from spotting planes, keep track of targets, direct offshore gunfire and estimate damage. The escort carrier Wake Island carried planes with pilots specially trained in spotting for naval gunfire. The entire island had been mapped out in numbered squares. Each square was assigned to a warship and known targets within its borders marked and numbered.

The bombardment was set for three days. Holland Smith had pleaded for at least ten days of pre-invasion shelling, but TF 58 had a scheduled visit near the home islands of Japan. Admiral Spruance, therefore, allowed only the three days for the initial pasting of the island. General LeMay lent his B-29s to add to the bombing runs of the B-24 Liberators.

The first day was heavily overcast and the shelling produced minimal results. Less than 30 key targets out of a possible 700 were hit. The Japanese rejoiced in heavenly intervention. When the next day dawned clear and bright, Admiral Blandy had his ships to close to 3,000 yards.

Japanese gunners mistook rocket-firing LCIs as the first landing wave and lashed out with vicious 6-inch shellfire. The salvos were deadly accurate and 12 of the LCIs were either sunk or so heavily damaged as to be taken out of action. This premature action by the enemy, however, revealed their positions to careful observers. The Navy's big guns went to work on them. One large shore battery was blown out of its casemates and hung over the lip of the cliff like a giant fang blown out of the jaw of a dragon.

The third day was a repeat of the second. The battleships closed to within a mile and a half and their fire was lethal. A large number of enemy emplacements had been destroyed, but the new shelling had revealed dozens more that had been hitherto invisible. Admiral Blandy pleaded for more time. Admiral Turner, however, refused. He felt that the invasion should go as planned on the next day.

On February 19th, it was a bright, clear day. There was action all around the island. Navy planes zoomed in to strafe and bomb. Overhead Superfortresses dropped their deadly loads. The warships and rocket craft

thundered away at the coast and the heights of the volcano. Amidst the smoke, explosions and flame, the island of Iwo Jima sat silently, deathlike. Mount Suribachi, like an angry god, scowled from his heights, the grayish black sand of the beaches stood before them in the center, while the jumble of ridges, plateaus and hills were vaguely visible to the north.

Hitting the Beaches

The veteran 4th Marine Division, in company with the newly formed 5th (of which 40 per cent had combat experience, including the Marine Raiders and the Paratrooper Battalions) would lead the assault on the beaches. The Third, experienced fighters at Bougainville and Guam, would be in floating reserve.

The two divisions landed the first waves without major opposition, but as succeeding landings were made, enemy fire began to increase. Soon it was carnage as a deadly crossfire from the heights of Suribachi crisscrossed with volleys from guns on the plateaus from the north raked the beach areas. With grim determination they fought their way through to the other side of the island and isolated the area around Suribachi. Hundreds of Marines were cut down by rifle and machine gun fire. Mortar shells fell like rain. The wounded, after being taken to the beach area, found themselves just as exposed to enemy fire there as they had been on the line. The first two craft bringing in litters were blown out of the water. Corpsmen and doctors were cut down just as quickly as the combat infantrymen were.

Manila John Basilone, Medal of Honor winner at Guadalcanal, led his machine gunners up over the sandy slope into the fighting. Carrying his own gun, he cried to his men, "Let's get these guns into action!" Seconds later, a mortar shell landed right between his feet and Manila John abruptly ended his marine career. Another brave man who had survived the horrors of earlier battles had fallen prey to this one. On his extended and now lifeless left hand, the tattoo was still readable: "Death before Dishonor." The four men accompanying him were also cut down. Many other veterans of Guadalcanal would never leave Iwo Jima alive.

Troops waiting to be sent in watched from the decks of ships with binoculars, and called out each little bit of progress, much as a sportscaster announces a ball game. "Three tanks just rolled onto the southern airfield" or "another platoon just got off the beach!"

Taking Suribachi

By the end of the third day, the 28th Regiment had been pretty badly chopped up in its efforts to take Mount Suribachi. All of the approaches had been carefully set up for interlocking fire from automatic weapons firing from pillboxes, bunkers and caves. Yard by yard, the Marines advanced up the slopes. Tanks and halftracks supported by machine gunners and riflemen would keep one pillbox under constant fire, until engineers or flamethrower teams could get close enough to fire or successfully place charges to destroy the fortification.

Supporting the 28th were fighters from over a dozen carriers and the gunfire of battleships, cruisers and destroyers. They slowly made a shambles of Japanese defenses. Pillboxes lay lifeless, ripped apart. Gun emplacements were shattered. Tunnel entrances were smashed. The entire ominous mountain took on a grim silence. All that remained to get to the very crater of Suribachi was less than 200 feet and it seemed that nothing there remained alive.

Each assault would cost the lives of more Marines. Early the next morning, E Company of the Second Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Harold Schrier, picked its way cautiously up to the crater. Resistance was minimal. Schrier had taken with him a small American flag. Once at the summit, they checked the area. It seemed deserted.

Finding a 20-foot piece of pipe, they attached a small 54 by 28 inch flag and hoisted it over the island. Even though very small, the red, white and blue banner was visible to almost every Marine on the island. Once lifted, the brisk wind whipped out the flag and caused it and the pole to titter in the breeze. Tired, battle-fatigued men below gazed upward at the spectacle. A sudden wave of awe swept Americans on Iwo and the ships just offshore. The American flag was flying from the highest point of the island!

Reacting to the Moment

Marines wept, cheered and slapped each other on the back. Wounded men awaiting evacuation on the

beach asked to be lifted so as to see it. Ships that noticed the ensign flapping in the breeze sounded their whistles and horns. An apparent civilian, simply dressed in khakis and a sweatshirt to protect from the cool winds of a blustery, rainy day watched the flag go up with great interest. He was Secretary of the Navy Forrestal. He had been present for the invasion, and was on the beach that morning. He turned to General Holland Smith standing at his side and said, "Holland, the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years."

Just after the raising of the first smaller flag, two Japanese soldier appeared as if from nowhere. One tossed a grenade at the Marines, unsheathed a sword and charged the flag. Pfc. James Robeson, who had refused to get into the picture for the Marine correspondent of Leatherneck, Sergeant Louis R. Lowery, leveled his M-1 and dropped the charging enemy. The second Japanese soldier also tossed a grenade but was dead before his arm finished its arc. A search of the area revealed that no more of the enemy was present. The top of Suribachi was now the property of the US Marines!

The first flag had been for the Marines and Naval forces at Iwo Jima. But the Marine moment had not ended. Another flag would be raised on Suribachi, this one for the world and the glory of the Marine Corps forever. It was decided below that in order for the flag to be more visible, a bigger one should replace the first. Another one, twice the size of the first, was secured from LST 779 at shore and taken up the steep incline. With it went Joe Rosenthal, photographer for the Associated Press. Rosenthal had gone ashore on D-Day and had captured many of the memorable moments of the invasion on film. He saw where the flag was headed and was not going to miss the moment.

The first banner was taken down and the second attached to the pole. As the second flag went into place, Rosenthal cursed. He was in the process of getting some rocks piled so he would have a good vantagepoint and had not check the settings on his camera. As it was being hoisted, he snapped a quick photo.

As far as news criteria go, it was not a very good picture. Of the six figures in the picture, only one face could be seen and it was not identifiable. One figure was standing almost alone at the base of the pole and the other five were bunched together so tightly that two of them were almost indistinguishable. It may have been a bad news photo, but it was a masterpiece of a statement. No one man could be glorified. The six seemed to epitomize the entire Corps, no the entire nation, lifting the ensign of the country out of the ash to a victorious stance.

No one at that moment realized that it would eventually become the most published photograph of World War II. Soon it adorned a United States three-cent stamp, the first World War Two photo to do so. It also won a Pulitzer Prize for Rosenthal, and became the inspiration of the giant bronze monument to the Marine Corps raised in 1954 in Washington D.C., near Arlington Cemetery. Before the battle ended, three of the six men pictured for posterity would die on the island. Though occurring early in the fighting the event seemed to announce to the world that the United States would inevitably triumph.

The fighting would go on at Iwo Jima for another four weeks, but the flag flying from Suribachi was a statement to the world that the Marines were here to stay, and to win.

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Betio - The First Day

By Wild Bill Wilder

Introduction

Using the islands of the south and central Pacific as stepping stones, the American forces had begun to move inexorably toward Japan. The conquest of the Solomons and most of New Guinea had allowed Allied forces to come one step close to victory. A series of US Naval victories in the two years following Pearl Harbor had altered the balance of power and initiative in favor of the American forces. Japanese naval power had been severely crippled and would never recover from its losses to become a major threat again.

The Gilberts – A Step Closer to Japan The goal of Admiral Nimitz was the conquest of the Marshall Islands. He strongly disagreed with the MacArthur campaign, fighting every so slowly through New Guinea. Nimitz wanted to hit the enemy hard and move fast. Realizing the vulnerability of the slower troop and transport ships lying at anchor in the midst of hostile waters was not an ideal situation. For that reason, Nimitz hammered on the principle, "Get the hell in, and get the hell out!" Lightning assaults, with a quick completion of the task, was the standing order.

The islands of the Pacific were like stepping stones in a wide river. From Hawaii to Tarawa Atoll was nearly 2,500 miles, or the distance and a little more from the east coast of the United States to its west coast. To cover such a vast area and control it, the US forces would have to kick the Japanese completely out of an area, or make sure that the threat was completely neutralized. In the case of the enemy bastion at Rabaul, it was bypassed. The Gilberts would have to be taken, however, as they were the stepping stones to the Marshalls.

In the Marshall Islands the US Navy had an ideal site for good anchorage and adequate preparation for a drive towards either the Philippines or Formosa and from there to the home islands of Japan.

For that to be accomplished, however, the Gilbert Islands would have to be neutralized. Bougainville had been invaded on November 1st, 1943, and the fighting there was coming to an end. The next invasion was essential to controlling the Gilberts. Its main thrust would center on the Tarawa Atoll. This was due to the airfield on the key island of Betio (pronounced Beshio).

Such a threat to shipping and communication was not acceptable. The airfield would have to be taken. That meant that the island would have to be invaded and conquered. It would not be an easy task. Though only two and one half miles long and a half mile wide at its widest point, the island had been converted into a strong fortress, filled with every kind of gun, and defensive position imaginable.

The atoll had once been a British possession, but it had been occupied by the Japanese in December 1941. With the turn of events in 1942, it was decided to reinforce it and build an airfield there. This would serve as an important link in the defensive perimeter in the Central Pacific. For that reason a unit of the Special Naval Landing Forces was dispatched to Betio, along with a construction battalion. The new commander, Rear-Admiral Shibasaki, pushed the 4,000 men under his command to get ready for a possible attack.

The island was tiny, about 4,5000 yards in length and very narrow. It had the shape of a parrot lying on its back (the northwest corner was referred to as "The Parrot's Beak"), or of a tadpole, with its head pointed to the west and its tail wiggling off to the east. So small was Betio that Colonel Shoup, overall commander of the landing forces on the island and Admiral Shibasaki, commander of all Japanese forces, had their headquarters less than 1,000 yards apart in the heat of the battle.

It was an intensely hot there, and a cake-like dust clogged the nostrils continually. One breathed it in continually and choked on it. There was no potable water supply. Topographically, it was nearly completely flat and offered practically no defensive cover, save the sea wall surrounding it. Betio Island was so flat that the sea wall was built to keep the erratic tides from going so far inland.

And the tide was fickle. It was unpredictable, at least by the standards of that day. This factor alone would prove to create a near disaster for the invading 2nd Marine Division. As a piece of real estate, it was practically worthless; as a military objective, it would become priceless. Who can put a price on the nearly 6,000 men who died there in less than four days?

The airfield was finished by the end of October, but had not been put into use. Strong fortifications of concrete and thick palm-log with interlocking fields of fire and connecting covered trenches made this small island a fortress.

Weapons in size from the huge 140mm guns to the soldier's rifle were ready. There were a total of over 500 reinforced defensive positions scattered mainly along its slender coasts. They were of every type, from machine gun pits to stout steel shrouded naval guns.

Manning these positions were troops of the Special Naval Landing Forces, Japanese Marines. They were well-trained, well-disciplined troops, skilled in the use of all naval and army weaponry. They were imbued with the strong nationalistic spirit that adored the emperor and did not hesitate to give up one's life for "king and country." So confident and proud of the accomplishments of his *rikusentai* and the Korean laborers that Admiral Shibasaki boasted that 1,000,000 men could not take his island in over 1,000 years.

Less than 15,000 Marines of the Second Division would do it in less than four days. It would not be, however, without horrendous cost to both sides. In those 3 1/2 days of fighting, there more than 3,000 US casualties. Of the Japanese troops, less 100 of the original 4,000 survived. The Japanese were in no mood to surrender, and the Americans were in no mood to take prisoners.

It would be the lot of the Second Marine Division to take the island of Betio. After heavy attacks from the air and the sea, the troops boarded their LVTs and LCVPs and headed toward the northern shores, designated Read Beaches, One, Two and Three. In addition to the troops, a battalion of Stuart light tanks, and a Company of Sherman from the 1st Marine Crops Medium Tank Battalion would be landed to deal with the heavier enemy strongpoints. Marine engineers had been well trained in dealing with bunkers and pillboxes, satchel charges, flamethrowers, and dynamite was going in with them to get the job done.

A Number of errors in planning "Operation galvanic," however, proved disastrous for the Marines. The biggest mistake of all hinged on the fact that the Navy had no real accurate information on the island or the tides that washed its shores. The island had what was known as a "dodging tide," which meant that often and unexpectedly would rise to different levels. Occasionally it would not even cover the large coral reef that surrounded the island and linked the entire atoll.

The tragedy was that much of the invasion forces on the day of attack were not able to pass over the reef. The water there was just too shallow. Only the newer amphibious tractors, called LVTs could rumble through. Their treads simply gripped the coral just below the surface of the lagoon and passed over without major difficulty. LCVPs and other landing craft could not do so. The end result was that hundreds of Marines would become stranded on the coral reef. With disastrous losses to the LVTs in the first attacking waves, subsequent waves were forced to force their way through chest high water while Japanese machine gunners and cannoneers used them for target practice.

The losses were horrendous, but on they came, rifles lifted above their heads. Many fell into sinkholes on the ocean floor and never reappeared. Mortar rounds thumped and splashed into the midst of these men, hurling them in all directions. Sometimes they died one at a time. On other occasions a whole squad was taken out at the same time. Still they kept filing their way along to the shores, which themselves offered little safety. Many never made it. A young naval pilot, Lt. Commander Robert McPherson flying a Kingfisher observation float aircraft, watched in horror the scene unfolding below him. When Hill asked was water completely covering the reef, he grimly sent back the answer, "Negative." He sensed anger and helplessness by being a witness to the death of hundreds of his comrades in the waters below. He later wrote, "The water never seemed to clear of tiny men, their rifles held over their heads, slowly wading beachward. I wanted to cry."
As the first waves came into the island, the situation for the 2nd division became precarious. It was bloody chaos. When Colonel David Shoup arrived on the beach at 10:00AM, he waded onto the beach (his landing craft had been disabled by enemy fire) and looked in horror to what was going on all around him.

Marine bodies floated lifelessly in the tepid waters around him. Some were burned beyond recognition; others had various limbs missing. Some floated on their backs, empty lifeless eyes staring imploringly toward heaven. Those still living were bunched up against the seawall, as men seeking shelter from icy winds. But the winds were hot, filled with flying death of every size. One grizzly Marine sergeant refused to stay down. "Duck, hell! If you duck, you may lean over into one!"

Shoup struggled to get up on the beach. He had been wounded already and his leg was throbbing incessantly. There was no time, however, for any personal attention at that moment. He could feel the eyes of his young responsibilities staring at him questioningly. They looked to him in this dark hour as a camouflaged angel of light, come to give all the answers and resolve all the tragedies. He, at thirty-eight, barrel chested and bullnecked, was the "old man," and he would make it work. It was a solemn and heavy responsibility.

Many units had became confused and landed in the wrong place. Overall command was impossible. Many were trapped at the sea wall between the water and the higher ground inland. Very little progress was made. The tanks designated to aid the ground troops had their own disasters. Of the fifteen Shermans, only three got ashore.

One of them was damaged from a lucky shot from a Japanese light tank. Its turret ring was damaged and the turret would not rotate. It continued to fight. Most of the Stuarts of the initial waves were sunk before getting ashore. Many of the radios had gotten soaked with seawater and became inoperable. Weapons were jammed with sand and would not fire.

While the Marines huddled against the seawall, small independent groups, led by non-coms and any one else with some initiative, were formed to carry the attack to the enemy. Some of these were self-styled heroes who attempted to grab the glory of the moment and instead played the fool. As machine gun, mortar and cannon fire raked the beaches, Marines huddled as tightly as they could against the protective sea wall that ringed the island. It was suicide to stick one's head above that wall. Even these dedicated, brave Marines were cowed by the intensity and certain death that thundered and pinged all around them.

On to the scene came another officer, a new, young Lieutenant, bearing all the trademarks of a ninety-day wonder and a neophyte to fighting the Japanese in the Pacific (or anyone else for that mater!). He first glared at the young Marines against the wall, and then began cursing and deriding them. With foolhardy bravado, he suddenly climbed the sea wall, shrieked in a falsetto voice, "Follow me!" and stood up to face the enemy. The ripping sound of a Nambu machine gun was accentuated by a number of thumps as if something were slamming into human flesh.

The officer staggered and spun around as though twisted suddenly by a giant invisible hand. The young men below stared up in horror as a bloody stitching pattern appeared across his face and uniform. Hit twelve times, from head to crotch, he sagged, then crumpled back over the wall into the sand right in front of them. None of them moved. There was no need. Instead, they just crouched and stared at the dead officer at their feet.

Others along the line, however, not wanting to die on that bloody beach, after cowering against what little cover there was, slowly began to scale the wall, stand in a crouch and move inland. Attacking with rifles, bayonets, grenades, demolition charges, K-Bar knives and flamethrowers, they overcame one enemy position after another. The battle raged all that day, and by nightfall the situation was still in doubt. Some units had penetrated to the edge of the airfield, but holding the ground gained was an uncertain situation.

By the afternoon, with no cohesion between units on Tarawa, and reinforcements being cut to pieces trying to wade into the island, men began to realize just how tenuous the US hold on the beach really was. A strong enemy counterattack and it would be the end. Colonel Shoup, in charge of the landings on Red Beach, somehow got in touch with the flagship Maryland and radioed an urgent message to General Julian Smith, commander of the 2nd Marine Division: "Issue in Doubt."

This was the same message that came nearly two years earlier from the besieged Marines on Wake Island shortly before it fell. By the end of the day, however, Shoup sent a new message. It was simple, but it spoke volumes of the courageous tenacity of the 2nd Division Marines. It stated, "We are winning."

The Ultimate Misery - Guadalcanal

By Wild Bill Wilder

The island itself was typical of so many in the Pacific. From a distance, it indeed looked like a paradise. Once on the island, however, one's point of view quickly changed.

The 90 mile length of the place is drenched with rains, for example on Tulagi; the annual rainfall average is 160 inches! The rains were worst from November to March. Guadalcanal is also volcanic. It has a central spine of jagged peaks, covered with tropical rain forest, rising in places 8,000 feet above sea level.

On the southwest the mountains slope fairly sharply to the coast. In contrast, on the northeastern side, the land is more open, even to the point of some wide plains, with numerous rivers and streams slicing it up. These plains had been partially cleared for coconut plantations.

The rest of the area was covered by trees, dense brush, and open spaces covered with kunai grass, at times glowing to a height of seven feet. Calling it grass is a misnomer. The blades are thick and coarse, with cutting edges like a saw. It was definitely not the tropical paradise presented by Hollywood.

On disembarking to the island, the first thing to be noticed was the smell. Guadalcanal stank! Superabundant vegetation, quick to rot in the rich, hot, humidified sea air, turned to queasy slime beneath the thick canopy of trees that blocked out much of the sunlight. The odor was one of continual rot. The smell permeated everything on the island.

This also gave opportunity for the cultivation of every type of insect imaginable, including malarial mosquitoes and nameless bacteria. Rich in mud and coconuts, the island was wet the year round. This continual dampness, cultivator of every type of creature to make a man's life miserable, only added to human discomfort.

Then there was the insufferable heat. Under such humidified conditions life was almost unbearable. To men weighted down with equipment, it was physically exhausting just to move in such weighted air.

The tropical jungle was like a malevolent beast, arrogant and cruel. Its foul breath was a hint of what lay within its bosom. This included serpents, crocodiles, and centipedes. Land crabs scuttled over the jungle floor in the night, sounding amazingly like an infiltrating Jap. There were also scorpions, lizards, leeches, wasps were other constant companions as well as spiders as big as a man's fist.

The mosquitoes were worst of all. They were like constant clouds of annoyance and bearers of sickness. They carried with them all sorts of disease, primarily the dreaded malaria.

Not only did the physical discomfort make life a daily misery, but also the psychological element of feeling abandoned by one's own country was mentally destructive.

After less than two day, Admiral Fletcher, in charge of the task force protecting the Marines and their transports, pulled back from the battle. He felt that the carriers were in danger of being attacked from the air and the sea. Fletcher was never known as a bold man, and his decision to withdraw left the Marines and their accompanying transports veritably naked.

After the first disastrous naval encounter near Savo Island, in which four of the Six Allied cruisers assigned to protect the landing force were sunk by the Japanese Navy, the rest of the Naval Force with the transports also had to withdraw.

By the third day, Marines stared out an empty ocean. The Navy was gone! The waters around Guadalcanal were empty of Allied ships. The Marines were on their own. It would seem that way for many days to come.

Much of the original provisions shipped to them had already been condemned and sent to Panama for destruction. Somehow they were repacked and sent back to the First Marine Division. When time came to get underway, the dockworkers went on strike, and the Marines had to load their own transports.

While fighting and starving on the "Canal," sixty American merchant ships arrived at Noumea. They were carrying vitally needed supplies for the desperate, starving American troops locked in combat. The crews of these ships then refused to sail to Guadalcanal unless they were paid exorbitant amounts for overtime and for service in a combat zone. Their demands were rejected. The ships did not sail, and the Marines continued to go hungry.

During the hardest months of the battle for the island, some of the Navy brass wrote off Guadalcanal as a failure. General Hap Arnold, chief of the Air Force, would not allow planes to be sent to aid the troops there because he felt they would be wasted. A few leaders believed in the cause and stood with the beleaguered Marines.

General Patch, commanding American troops at New Caledonia, sent 10,000 pairs of shoes to the island after hearing that many of the Marines were fighting barefoot.

When some of the Marines complained of the hunger, Colonel Edson of the Raiders simply smiled and pointed at the Japanese lines. "They've got food. Go take it from them." That is just what they did. They confiscated rice by the ton, tinned meats, including fish and beef, and other food needed to survive.

The average Marine lost 25 pounds during his four month stay on the Canal. Many suffered from night blindness due to a lack of vitamin A in their diet. Their clothes rotted on their bodies, and there was nothing to replace them. The ammunition was low, and had to be portioned out with the greatest of care.

Other materials were desperately needed and unavailable. All of the heavy construction equipment had remained on the transports when they had been withdrawn. The only tools and machinery available were what the Japanese had left when they fled. The Americans utilized it to finish the airstrip and keep it going, even though it was under constant attack from the air and sea.

An example was the one small bulldozer. Only the operator could touch it. Under a standing order, anyone else approaching it was to be shot. It was used incessantly and proved to be an immense godsend to the construction crews. With no tools, little food, and a feeling of abandonment, the situation was indeed grim.

Add to all this a fanatical, tenacious enemy, whose sole purpose was the death of American servicemen, charging suicidally in head on attacks, creeping through the humid night, sometimes screaming, sometimes whispering, and you have a grim picture of what the First Marine Division had to endure for four months. Many Marines would classify it as the closest thing to hell that they had ever encountered in their lifetime.

In the Marine cemetery at the end of the battle of Guadalcanal, a mess gear tin nailed to a stake stood at the entrance with a message. Its words had been picked out with the point of a bayonet. It said:

> And when he gets Heaven
> To St. Peter he will tell:
> One more Marine reporting, sir -
> "I've served my time in hell."

In spite of all these adversities, the Marines had come to stay. Historians who write of the event classify it as far more than a campaign, or a fight for an island. Morison wrote, " Guadalcanal is not a name but an emotion, recalling desperate fights in the air, furious night naval battles, frantic work at supply and construction, savage fighting in the sodden jungle, nights broken by screaming bombs and deafening explosions of naval shells."

The stand of the United States Marine paralleled other heroic stands, such as Waterloo, Little Round Top, or Dien Bien Phu. It was a case in which both sides have resolved to have a showdown and prestige transcends everything. Winning was a matter of pride to both the Japanese soldier and the American Marine.

It was a matter not of supplies or terrain, but of will. Who would stand? Who would win? Both sides suffered terribly, but it would be the US Marines that would conquer and take the victor's crown.

Jacob Vouza - The First Hero On Guadalcanal

By Wild Bill Wilder

When the Marines began moving to shore in their Higgins boats while the large guns of the Allied cruisers in the channel loudly announced their coming, a Guadalcanal native named Jacob Vouza, watched it all happen.

It was he who announced to Martin Clemens, Coastwatcher, their coming. Vouza hated the Japanese and had already killed a few of them.

He was a Sergeant Major of the Constabulary of the island prior to the arrival of the Japanese. He despised them. Their arrogance and mistreatment of the natives made him hate them more. Vouza was very loyal to Martin Clemens and proved to be a great scout and good friend.

He was forty-five, an old man by Polynesian standards, but his body was lean and firm, his face broad and almost always smiling, his eyes, dark, keen and piercing.

The Marines took an instant liking to him. He responded in kind. He volunteered to scout the entire American perimeter from east to west and give reports of possible enemy presence somewhere toward Koli Point. As he departed, a Marine gave him a small American flag as a token of friendship. Vouza carefully tucked it away in his loincloth (called a "lap-lap") for the hard journey before him.

On August 20th an advance company of Japanese soldiers of the Ichiki party captured him. They took him before Ichiki and ripped off his lap-lap. The small flag fell to the ground.

A Japanese Naval petty officer, formerly a plumber for the Lever Brothers Company, and conversant in the native pidgin, began to question Vouza. He stubbornly refused any answers.

The Japanese tied him to a tree and began to torture him, smashing his body with their rifle butts and then repeatedly bayoneting him. Groaning, with blood seeping from various wounds, Vouza defiantly refused any information. In anger, one Japanese officer stabbed him in the throat. They left him for dead, still tied to the tree.

But Vouza was still alive, only unconscious. When he awoke it was dark. Sticky with his own blood and his body throbbing with pain, Vouza began chewing through the ropes that bound him. The final bayonet wound had entered the upper part of his neck, missing vital arteries and had penetrated his mouth.

In spite of the pain and the dizziness from loss of blood, the Sergeant Major finally broke free. He could not walk so he began to crawl toward American lines, his biggest concern, not for his well being but for the safety of his new friends.

Sometimes walking, sometimes crawling, the dying native finally reached Marine lines. He was taken immediately to Colonel Pollock, commander of the US defenses along the Ilu. In spite of his pain and being near death, he reported that between 250 and 500 Japanese were headed in that direction.

A Corpsman reported to Pollock's HQ to attend to the wounded Vouza. Looking at his wounds, he shook his head grimly and whispered, "He's a goner!"

That, however, would not be the case. Vouza would recover, though he would bear the scars of his ordeal forever. For his extreme gallantry and his efforts to warn the Marines, General Vandegrift personally awarded him the Silver Star in an open ceremony, pinning the medal to his lap-lap.

The Sergeant Major always wore it proudly. He further continued to serve as a scout for the Marines and led the Carlson expedition in November from Aola Bay back to Mount Austen. He was in truth, the first real hero of the intense struggle for Guadalcanal.

Tanks on Peleliu

Palau Island Chain, September 15th, 1944
By Wild Bill Wilder

Another Step toward Tokyo

In an effort to secure MacArthur's right flank as he prepared to attack the Philippine Islands, Admiral Nimitz thought it necessary to secure the Palau island chain to the east, including Angaur, Ulithi, Morotai, and Peleliu. Thus not only would a wider wedge be driven in Japan's defensive ring but these islands would also provide valuable air bases and deep anchorage for the gathering fleets and future operations headed toward the Japanese home islands. This would be the task of General Geiger's III Corps. The Army 81st Division would be in charge of taking Angaur and Ulithi while Peleliu would be the lot of the First Marine Division of Guadalcanal fame.

The Palaus were a string of volcanic islets with a coral reef seventy-seven miles long and twenty miles wide. At the southern end lay little Peleliu, an island about six miles long and two miles wide at it broadest. It was shaped like a lobster's claw, and was in fact a pair of peninsulas joined together by a causeway. The east coast was swamp and jungle. The west coast offered wide beaches, but they were heavily fortified. It was here that the famed aviatrix Amelia Erhart was supposedly downed, captured, and killed by the Japanese.

The Combatants Prepare

On the southern tip of the western side of the island lay the airfield, which was overlooked by a large rugged ridge to the north. Called the "Umurbrogol," the Americans who fought there would rename it Bloody Nose Ridge. What made it unique was the fact that it was composed of rock hard coral, covered with a thin topsoil, and sparse vegetation, thus offering little or no protection to the advancing marines.

It was honeycombed with caves, resembling a gigantic slice of Swiss cheese. These caves and crevices were to be fund at every level in every size, crevices small enough to hold one sniper, or a company of desperate Japanese. In fact the chief defender of Peleliu, Colonel Nunio Nakagawa had an eye for formidable defenses and immediately upon arrival from China with his 2nd Infantry Regiment (reinforced) went right to work. This was a well disciplined unit, with lengthy battle experience in China and very well equipped. They brought their weapons with them, including 24 75mm artillery pieces, 15 light tanks, and numerous machine guns, mortars and anti-aircraft guns.

Working feverishly and driving his troops, Nakagawa accomplished the impossible. In a period of four months, he had fortified around 500 of the caves, most of them connected by interior tunnels. Some of these caverns were five stories deep and included commissaries and barracks. If the top of it could have been lifted away, it would reveal a series of tunnels much like an anthill.

There was more. Nakagawa made sure that any possible landing areas were covered with landing obstacles, mines and a lethal defensive fire from well prepared, interlocking positions. Most of the artillery, including the new 200mm rocket launchers recently received from Japan were set in such a way as to be able to fire on the airfield to the south, the beaches to the west, and a small airfield islet to the north. Some of them had sliding steel doors. Strategically placed snipers, sappers and machine guns, with mutually protective lanes of fire, surrounded all fortified positions. Thus a Marine detachment might knock out one strongpoint, only to find that it was being fired upon from two or three others.

Gone for the most part was the idea among Japanese leaders of suicidal charges in the Bushido tradition. While initially frightening to the enemy, such actions had proven futile. The power of modern weapons rendered ineffective the mad rushes to overwhelm any defenders. In the light of such developments a new Japanese military policy of defense in depth had evolved and was being put into effect throughout the year of 1944. Instead of wasting good men in suicidal charges that accomplished almost nothing except the death of the participants, this type of defense would be very costly to any attacker. The Japanese soldier would have to be pried or blown out of his defenses. This meant costly delays for the Allies. It would further bring fulfillment of the new Jap slogan, "Before giving your life for the Emperor, take seven of the enemy with you."

The False Assumption

The 1st Marine Division, unaware of what awaited them, laughed and sang as they prepared to go into battle. Many held up four fingers to one another, which said, "It will all be over in four days!" General Rupertus, the new commander of the division, had stated clearly that the campaign to take the Palaus would be "short, but rough." He was only half right. It was not short, but it was rough…rougher than anything the US Marines had encountered up until that time.

The small size of the island made it appear to be only a minor conquest. Marine leaders contemplated a minimum of casualties. Unknown to the planners were the depth of the defenses and the tenacity of the Japanese who manned them. Actually, it would take eight weeks or 13 times what they had cheerfully estimated originally. So intense was the fighting that the Colonel "Chesty" Puller's 1st Regiment of Marines had suffered over 50% casualties after the first week. It finally had to be pulled from the line. No one in the invasion fleet could have any idea of the hell that Peleliu would become.

The Battle Begins

The Marines who dared to take a peek over the side of the LVTs were greeted with an awesome sight. Large naval shells ripped the shoreline apart. The troop-carrying LVTs were preceded by a wave of armored amphibian tractors, each mounting a 75mm howitzer. They were to take under immediate fire any surviving Japanese strongpoints once they reached the beach. Just ahead of them, Navy fighters, dive-bombers and Avenger TBFs armed with bombs and rockets were making runs all along the beach. With this kind of preparation, many Marines thought that the landings and subsequent advances from the 5 beaches would be relatively easy.

Reality quickly set in as Nakagawa's thousand-eyed mountain erupted in flame at the approaching Amtracks. In no time amphibious vehicles were hit and either exploded or floundered, while Marines carrying up to 100 pounds of equipment drowned in the foul sea water. Some of the LVTs made it in, and the surviving Marines quickly dug improvised holes to protect themselves from certain death. Men staggered about in the last throes of death, the crimson spouting from riddled faces or severed limbs. Unattached body parts littered the sand.

Five full Marine battalions came to shore in the first waves, one battalion to each of the five landing beaches (White 1 and 2, Orange 1,2 and 3). The troops of the 1st Marine Regiment were to turn left and begin attacking the ridge overlooking the beaches. Units of the 7th Regiment would move to the right to destroy any forces on the southern tip of the island. It was the lot of the 5th to push straight across the island and cut it in two, isolating the defenders in the south from those in the north. As the fighting grew in intensity, the entire 1st Marine Division would be onshore within 2 days of the initial landings.

At that point in the fighting, 30 M4A1 Sherman tanks of the 1st Marine Tank Battalion began to come into shore. They advanced in columns across the wide coral reef, each column led by and LVT in order to avoid any tank drowning out or being lost in a deep dip in the coral. When one of the lead LVTs was knocked out, the tank commander next in the column led the tanks of his platoon up the beach by trailing toilet paper out of his turret. The arrival of the tanks early in the fighting proved to be quite a help to the Marine infantry trying to advance.

Nakagawa's Surprise

The US ground troops got their bearings and rallied, then proceeded to advance. The 5th Marines continued to push to the east across the airfield. By early afternoon the regiment had completed its task and was beginning to clear out any enemy pockets of resistance still active in their area. It was at that point that Nakagawa committed his tanks straight into the juncture between the Fifth and First Marine Regiments. They emerged from a cluster of reinforced bunkers serving as Nakagawa's Headquarters on the northern end of the airfield. Guns from Bloody nose ridge fired in support. Infantry surrounded the tanks and many of them had climbed on board the tanks. The Japanese, sensing the surprise they had caused, raced suddenly ahead of their supporting infantry. Such an unwise move would seal their doom.

The Marines, taken by surprise, quickly rallied and fired back with everything that they had: bazookas, 37mm antitank guns, pack howitzers and finally the strafing and rocket attack of two Navy fighters on patrol nearby. Snipers rode on the fronts of the tanks or were slung on their rear in camouflage nets. Sharpshooting American riflemen picked them off one by one as the tanks whizzed past. The ones in the front fell from the tanks, often to be ground by the treads as the armor passed over them. Those in the nets

simply hung lifeless, like dolls in a Christmas stocking.

One Marine, Pfc. Ronald Acheson, armed with a flamethrower, suddenly emerged from his defensive position and charged forward. He ran straight at the lead tank and doused its front with a burst of jellied fire. As the T-95 careened to a halt, the next tank in line opened up with its machine gun and ripped open Acheson's chest. Mortally wounded, he fell to the ground. Another burst at the downed Marine ignited the chemical tanks on his back and he disappeared in a blinding ball of flame.

Several enemy tanks broke through the Marine lines, prodding with their ugly snouts and belching flame and shell. Their thin armor, however, did not offer much protection from point blank fire. Finally bazooka attacks began to take its toll. Three M-4A1 Shermans joined in the area of the attack joined the battle. One Japanese T-95 rammed into an amtrack in an attempt to butt it out of the way. It in turn was butted from behind by another amtrack and trapped between them. It was truly a sitting duck for an oncoming Sherman.

As the crew tried to escape, they were killed with rifle and machine gun fire from over a hundred nearby Marines. As more Shermans arrived at the battle site, low flying Navy Avenger bombers swooped down from the sky and joined the melee. In less than an hour, all of Nakagawa's armor was completely annihilated. The tank attack had been short-lived but did serve as a warning. If the Japanese had been better equipped with more modern tanks, the situation could have deteriorated quickly, leaving the beachhead in danger.

The tank battle, though one-sided from the start, did prove to be somewhat disconcerting to the Marines and was a signal of the determination of the defenders still alive on the island. There was still plenty of very costly fighting to be done to take secure their objective. The dying for Peleliu had barely begun.

By Land, Sea, and Air

Corregidor Island, Philippines, Feb. 16 1945
By Wild Bill Wilder

During the vicious fighting within the city of Manila, the Americans were also busy taking the island fortresses within Manila Bay. First came the overrunning of the Bataan peninsula by units of the XI Corps. The invasion began on the 14th, and the fighting lasted a week. The only real serious fighting occurred between the American 38th Division soldiers and the enemy at a place called "Zig Zag Pass," on Route Seven.

It was there that the Japanese had prepared a series of foxholes, pillboxes and trenches, all well hidden in the dense jungle growth. The commander of the 38th Division underestimated the strength of the enemy and committed his forces in a piecemeal fashion. The result was disaster. One regiment lost so many officers and NCOs in the fighting that it had to be withdrawn from the front.

The situation became more serious as the morale of the 38th floundered in the blood of American losses. The corps commander, General Charles Hall, finally relieved the 38th Division's commander and replaced him with General Chase, who had done such a fine job with the 1st Cav. Even Chase had a difficult time initially in getting the men to move. Once he saw the seriousness of the situation, however, he mustered additional forces, including armor and heavy artillery. It was only then that Zig Zag was cleared.

Other than that problem, There were no real serious engagements on Bataan. The other 1,000 Japanese defenders offered only scattered resistance as one of Hall's regiments drove through to the east coast. Another made a night amphibious assault at Mariveles, on the southwest tip of the island. The enemy was cut off and went into hiding. The biggest job now was flushing out the hidden Japanese. Compared to the carnage going on in the Capital, it was a relatively easy task.

Corregidor, the strongest fortress in Manila Bay was another story. The American forces had surrendered totally within 48 hours of the first Japanese landings there. In 1945, the struggle between American and Japanese would go on for 10 days. The assault began on February 16th, 1945. The initial attack was a combined air and sea assault at the same time.

One of the biggest problems facing the 503rd Regimental Combat Team in making the air assault was the size of the island. The tadpole shaped piece of land was barely long enough to make a paratroop drop feasible. The idea of squeezing an entire battalion into a sloping plot of ground barely 350 yards long by 250 yards wide seemed nearly impossible. It was decided, nevertheless, that the element of surprise on the enemy would make it worth the risk.

Following a heavy air and naval bombardment, troops of the 3rd Battalion of the 503rd began floating out of the sky and landing on what had been in the days before the war a golf course, parade ground, and polo field. Within in an hour of the air assault, Amtracks roared up filled with more troops of the 503rd.

The surprise was complete. Within a very short time, the paratroopers were firmly established and began the mission of rooting out the Japanese from the underground network of the island fortress. The jump had been a success, but estimates as to enemy strength were a total failure. It was guessed that about 1,000 of the enemy was in Corregidor.

The actual count was over 5,000. They were resolute in their desire to fight to the death. The dreadful hunt and kill procedure was repeated again and again as the paratroopers encountered resistance in every dark crevice of every tunnel. It seemed that the struggle might go on for weeks, but a sudden event changed all of that.

The fighting finally came to an abrupt, surprising end on February 26th, when Japanese troops, either by accident or on purpose, set off a huge store of ammunition and explosives hidden in the tunnels. An earlier blast on February 21st had been intentional. The Japanese engineers had been attempting to make an opening from within the fort to allow their fellow soldiers to escape. In this case, however, if there were a reason, other than a possible massive suicide attempt, it is not known.

The blast roared through the underground passages and ripped a large hole in the earth. Dozens of

Americans and hundreds of Japanese were blown into pieces, hurled bodily into the water of the bay, or buried, both dead and alive, beneath tons of rock and debris. It would never be known just how many perished in the series of explosions that ripped through the underground fortress.

The detonation forced nearly all Japanese remaining alive out into the open. Once there, they fought ferociously. The men of the 503rd suddenly found themselves engulfed in a flood of enemy troops, dazed, starved, and with a fanatically insane death wish. When it was finally all over, the entire Japanese garrison was dead, and one paratrooper in four was either dead or a casualty.

Of course, General MacArthur, as in other instances in the Philippines, had a ceremony arranged for this event. On March 2nd, he made a symbolic return to the island on a PT boat, just as he had been taken away some three years earlier. After music and a few speeches, the General stood at the podium. Gazing at the solitary flagstaff, still standing in from of the blackened, shattered main barracks building, General MacArthur ordered the American flag be raised there once more. "Have your troops hoist the colors to its peak," his voice boomed with emotion, "and let no enemy ever haul them down."

Tulagi - The First Blow

August 7-8, 1942, Solomon Islands
By Wild Bill Wilder

As the nineteen large transports carrying the First Marine Division and its equipment neared Guadalcanal, the men on board were more than ready for a fight. Having had to load the transports themselves due to a dock strike, then spend days in quarters so tight that it was hard to breathe; plagued with seasickness and dysentery, they were ready to kill anything!

Climbing down the slippery cargo nets draped over the sides of the ships with over 80 pounds of arms and equipment strapped to their bodies, trying to avoid the man's feet above him from crushing their hands, they often fell into the bobbing Higgins boats and then headed for the battle. There were 36 men to a boat, most of them retching in their steel pots. It had been a long rough voyage, but that was the tip of the iceberg in contrast to what lay before them.

The boats for each wave formed a ring, circling until they fanned out in a broad line and sped shoreward. The landings on Guadalcanal, after the initial pre-landing bombardment were without incident. Some snipers near the beach took a few pot shots and then ran for the jungle. The lack of opposition enabled two battalions of the Fifth Marines to splash ashore and swiftly establish a beachhead two thousands yard wide.

The nearby smaller island of Tulagi on the other side of Ironbottom sound was also being invaded by the First Marine Raider Battalion, commanded by Colonel "Red Mike" Edson. With a devious smile, cold eyes, and a soft, gruff voice, he was a poster Marine. His men respected him greatly. His Marines leaped from their boats and went into action quickly. Two companies charged straight ahead about 2/3rds across the island. Two more companies, following close after, moved to the northwest side and took control of it, then joined with the others.

As the Raiders attacked with three companies abreast, the Japanese suddenly opened up with a withering fire from hidden positions in the thick forest and various caves. Large trees with roots two feet in diameter provided strong natural protection for the machine gunners and snipers.

On the smaller island of Tanambogo, another fierce firefight ensued between Marine Paratroopers and Japanese defenders. Some Gyrene put up a small flag near the landing area. The tiny island suddenly resembled a nineteenth century battlefield with a Japanese flag on one end and the Stars and Stripes on the other, both fluttering in the ocean breeze. One angry Marine sergeant led a strong charge and yanked down the banner of the Rising Sun and stomped it into the mud.

As word of the attacks on the smaller islands reached Japan, the chief of the Japanese Naval General Staff made a special visit to the Emperor and informed him that the situation was well in hand. With one strong "Banzai" charge, he stated, the weak Americans would be easily driven back into the ocean.

The charge was to come that Friday night. Four waves of Japanese hit the American lines in succession. They attacked with mortars, machine guns and grenades. Derisive shouts could be heard as mortars coughed, machine guns chattered, and men grunted and screamed as they fought and died. The Japanese shouted, "U.S. Maline be dead tonight!," or "Japanese boy drink Amelican boy's blood!" The Marines responded with unprintable derision, saying that before the "nips" tasted blood, they would savor something much more foul.

The charges were made with rifles blasting, hoping to draw giveaway fire. Instead, grenades silently spiraled through the air, and with loud thumps, tore bodies apart. A handful of the attackers did break through to the

British residency, but got no further. The rear echelon of Edson's unit was as capable as the front line units. They tore into the attackers and dropped them quickly.

At dawn, most of the fighting was over. The Japanese had broken their back in the suicidal charges. These Marines were no ordinary fighting men. They were not the weakly unstable soldiers that had been described to them. On the battlefield, Pfc John Ahrens, an Able Company BAR man, lay dying, soaked in his own blood.

As his company commander, Lew Walt cradled him in his arms, he surveyed the scene around them. Nearby lay a Japanese officer, a sergeant, and thirteen enlisted men, all dead. Ahrens had been shot twice in the chest and bayoneted three times. He whispered to Walt, "Captain, they tried to come over me last night, but I don't think they made it." Choking back tears, Walt replied softly, "They didn't, Johnny. They didn't."

The last day was given to a final sweep of the tiny piece of hell by the remainder of the 1st Raider Battalion. By the end of August 8th, all resistance had ended on Tulagi. The Marines had met the scourge of the Orient and triumphed. The Japanese were not invincible after all. Further, the Marines had proven that they were capable of doing what they had been sent here to do: win the war in the Pacific.

There remained, however, a much harder test in the coming six month battle to first hold and then conquer the island of Guadalcanal, the longest campaign of the Pacific War.

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A Steel Hero

Gunnery Sergeant Robert McCard, USMC
Saipan, June 16, 1944
By Wild Bill Wilder

Once firm control on the Marshall Islands was secured, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered Admiral Nimitz to proceed to the Marianas. Located only 1,500 miles from Japan, they would become the site of air bases for the new B-29.

The target date set for the initial invasion of Saipan was set for June 15th. The three principal islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam would all have to be taken. These were the islands Magellan had called Los Ladrones (The Thieves).

A Spanish priest had renamed them the Marianas to honor the Queen Maria Anna. Except for Guam, a United States possession since the Spanish-American War, the islands had been mandated to the Japanese after World War I. The United States had dutifully followed a treaty with Japan and not fortified Guam. It fell easily to the Japanese on December 10, 1941.

Saipan was the principal objective. It is the largest island, with every type of terrain imaginable, including larger towns. The codename for the operation was "Forager." It was believed that about 20,000 Japanese defenders were located on the island. In reality, there were almost 30,000 under a divided command of Admiral Nagumo and General Hideyoshi Obata. These two did not get along very well, and this would create defensive problems later.

The attackers included the Marine 2nd and 4th Divisions, with the 27th Infantry Division was in floating reserve. The defenders were part of the 135th Infantry Regiment, the 47th Independent Mixed Brigade, the 5th SNLF Base Force, the Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force and the 9th Tank Regiment.

Air bombardment began on June 11th; naval gunfire on June 13th. On the 15th landings began. The Marine 2nd Division moved into the northern half of the landing area on the left, and the 4th headed in on the south. A diversionary force had already moved toward Garapan to the north, but Admiral Nagumo did not fall for the ruse. The landings were about to occur precisely where he thought they would.

Smoke and haze obscured the view of Saipan from the sea. The island did not seem all that menacing. The Japanese, however, had carefully hidden their artillery on Mount Fina Susa, facing the beaches. They had thoroughly prepared for an invasion on the west coast, and the guns had been pre-registered with little colored flags in the water to mark the range.

When the invasion fleet drew closer, accurate counter battery fire opened up on the larger ships. The battleship Tennessee took hits. More shells burst on the decks of the cruiser Indianapolis. The American warships lashed back.

Then over 160 Navy aircraft shrieked downward to plaster the mountainside. LSTs moved to the rim of the surrounding coral reef and disgorged nearly 800 amtracs, among them the newer models, such as the LVTA, with an open turreted 75mm assault gun.

The purpose of this amphib was not to transport troops, but to provide protection for the other LVTs. It

would form the advance wave, and then move inland with the troops, much like a light tank. Some of the transport LVTs also moved into the trees ringing the beaches, carrying troops much like a personnel carrier. Heavy artillery fire, as well as satchel charges being tossed into the open LVTs soon discouraged such tactics. The Marines would get out and walk.

The Marine divisions had landed on either side of Aetna Point, and soon had swept along both sides of it. This formed a salient in the American lines that had to be neutralized. As more waves of troops moved in, antiboat guns from the point opened up on them.

Soon a number of amtracs were either burning or sinking, with dead or dying Marines spilled into the waters of the lagoon. Destroyers moved in close and fired into the hill. The battle raged all during the day, but by its end, over 20,000 men were on shore and attempting to consolidate their bridgehead.

Casualties during the first day had been alarmingly high. The 2nd Marine division had over 500 dead; the 4th had taken more losses in the first day than in the entire campaign at Roi-Namur. And the horror was just beginning.

After two fanatical suicide attacks during the first night, the weary marines began to advance again. By now tanks of the 4th Tank battalion, 4th Marine division were onshore. It was no time before they would also go into action.

Gunnery Sergeant Robert McCard was ordered to bring up his platoon of Sherman tanks from Company A to offer support to the 2nd Infantry battalion. As the tanks attempted to maneuver over the ripped open terrain, they became spread out.

Soon McCard found his tank alone and under attack from four separate enemy strongpoints. He and his crew fought back valiantly and were able to neutralize to enemy positions. By now, it was evident that the enemy had the range on the tank and it was being battered to pieces. McCard ordered his crew to "bail out" while they still could.

One by one, the crew lowered themselves through the hatch in the tank's floor, scurrying to safety while McCard hurled grenades and fired his tommy gun at the advancing Japanese. Suddenly the enemy formed up and made a charge.

The gunnery sergeant climbed out of his hatch and cranked up the .50 caliber machine gun on the turret. Swinging the gun in a wide arc, he cut a swathe through the onrushing infantrymen. The fire was so intense that the first line was totally annihilated. The second group reached the tank.

The rest of the crew, hidden nearby watched in horror as the Japanese surged forward to the tank. McCard seemed to have a charmed life. Standing alone atop the smoking tank, he emptied another clip of the tommy gun into the human mass all around his feet as they clambered aboard "Amputator."

Now out of ammo, he then began using it as a club, swinging wildly at the enemy all around him. It was only a second until rifle fire and bayonets brought the valiant marine down. He suddenly disappeared in the squirming enemy mass and was shot and cut to pieces.

His sacrificial, heroic action bought time for his platoon to regroup and they were on the scene in a matter of moments. A hail of tank cannon and machine gun fire brought an abrupt end to the lives of the Japanese who were attacking.

The crew of Amputator later testified that McCard had taken out at least 20 Japanese soldiers all alone before he was killed. The Medal of Honor was given posthumously to McCard's wife six months after his death at Parris Island by the marine commandant.

That same night, the Japanese launched a strong armored counterattack against the beachhead that almost carried the day. Again armor of the 4th Tank battalion would go into action, and be responsible for taking out 10 enemy tanks.

A Deadly Diversion

Makin Island - August 17th, 1942

By Wild Bill Wilder

The Historical Background

It could be called ironic that once the United States was committed to World War II, with a primary focus of fighting the Germans, the first major American triumphs would take place in the Pacific. First there was the Doolittle raid on Tokyo, with 16 B-25 Mitchell bombers flown off the deck of a US carrier to do what the Japanese high command had predicted would never happen.

Two months later came the critical battle of Midway where the offensive punch was wrested from the Japanese in a period of one day, when nearly half the total Japanese carrier fleet was destroyed. Then on August 8th, 1942, came the first major ground offensive for the United States in the war with the nearly unopposed landings on Guadalcanal.

It was evident only two days after the landings that the 1st Marine Division, seemingly abandoned on Guadalcanal, was in a heap of trouble. Admiral Turner, in charge of Task Force 62, was forced to withdraw from Guadalcanal, leaving the Marines short of supplies, including ammunition, heavy equipment and food.

The loss of five allied cruisers in first large surface engagement between The US and the Imperial Japanese Navy in the battle of Savo Island had worsened the situation drastically for the Marines who had just come ashore. The Japanese had now gained control of the waters surrounding Guadalcanal and the Americans on the island were on their own.

Earlier planning by the US Navy, prior to the decision to start the war on Guadalcanal was for an offensive against the Japanese in the Gilbert Islands rather than the Solomons. When expediency, however, demanded a sudden change in Nimitz' strategy, a new decision was made. American leaders opted to execute a raid on the Gilbert Islands using Marine Raiders. The Navy did not have good information on just what was happening in the Gilberts. Neither naval nor air reconnaissance had provided any information of worth. Both Admiral Nimitz and Admiral King felt that such information was vital to any future planning.

In addition, such a move would throw the Japanese off balance with a new threat to their more vulnerable locations, thus taking some of the focus away from Guadalcanal. The Navy, however, was hurting at that time. The larger ships were needed to deal with the Guadalcanal invasion and to keep the Japanese fleet at bay.

Thus without enough offensive strength to stage a full scale amphibious landing, it was determined that two fleet submarines, the Nautilus and Argonaut, which were very large vessels with the capacity to carry around one hundred armed troops, would transport Lt. Colonel Evans Carlson and a part of his Second Raider Battalion to conduct the recon raid on Butaritari Island in the Makin atoll. The submarines would

move in close to the island in the dark, surface and from that point, the Marines would go ashore in large rubber rafts.

There was a radio station there, probably protected (though no one knew for certain just what else was on the island) by over 250 Japanese troops. It was hoped that the raid would cause the same sort of panic of the enemy that the Doolittle air raid on Tokyo had done some months earlier. It would signal to the Japanese that there would be a need to strengthen outposts, thus further draining their resources, pulling them away from Guadalcanal.

In hindsight, it did prove to be true. The Japanese, instead of sending two divisions to Guadalcanal, felt that there was an urgent need to bolster their defenses in the Gilberts and send a large body of troops to the islands in that area. Had they sent these soldiers to Guadalcanal, the story might have had a very different and very sad ending.

The two submarines used to carry the Raiders were among the largest in the American fleet. Each of them was a twenty-seven hundred ton boat. They would carry a total of 222 Marine Raiders as close as possible to the shore. The rest of the distance would be covered in large motorized rubber rafts. The journey would take eight days, and the Marines would be more than ready to leave the cramped quarters of the steel pigs and get ashore. After two days of fighting and dodging Japanese, however, they were just as glad to get back aboard them.

The Leaders

Lieutenant Colonel Evans Carlson, who commanded the 2nd Raider Battalion, was a devoutly religious and dedicated officer. He said, "It is necessary that you live close to the men, study them and teach them not only military techniques and maneuvers, but basic, ethical doctrines as well." It was a philosophy that he followed very scrupulously.

Carlson had begun his career in the ranks, serving in China for many years and then adopting the motto Gung Ho ("Work together") for one of the toughest mobs of fighting men ever brought together into a marine combat unit. They, like their leader, were lean and mean, and ready to fight. They had been trained for this type of mission, and were more than ready to tackle it.

The executive officer for the Raiders was Major James Roosevelt, the United States President's eldest son. He was well liked among the men, and, like his father, was a perennial optimist. He was often chided for his shaved head, which his men laughingly called an easy target for Jap snipers. A few of them did take a shot at it, but Major Roosevelt survived them and the raid.

The purpose of the raid was thus threefold: (1) the gathering of intelligence information, (2) the diversion effect, which partly succeeded and (3) the destruction and annihilation of the enemy garrison and all military structures on the island.

The Battle

Once the submarines were in place, the Marines began to disembark from the submarines. The forces were divided into two companies. Company A was commanded by 1st. Lieutenant Alvin Plumley. Company B was the responsibility of Captain Ralph Coyte. Each company had its own specific landing area. It was, however, a tempestuous dark night and the choppy ocean waters added to the confusion. As a result, the surf's roar drowned out the officers' orders and the right men did not always get into the right rubber landing craft. Carlson therefore decided to make a single landing, rather than two at different locations.

This turned out to be a fortunate decision, for at the landing area that would not be used, the Japanese, fearing some sort of attack, had that same day installed 8 machine guns. Any troops landing there would have been annihilated before getting out of their boats. One of the large rubber rafts, commanded by Lieutenant Peatross of Wichita Kansas, did become separated from the rest in the darkness, and by the

time they reached shore, he and his men were out of position and out of contact with the main Raider force. Once again the fortunes of war came into play and this situation would actually work out well for the Marines.

By 5:00 A.M., August 17th, all of the Raiders were ashore. Shortly after landing, a BAR man stumbled and his weapon released a burst. This incident alerted the entire island of the unwelcome visitors. This too worked to the advantage of the Raiders. Once alerted, the Japanese force left their positions and moved into the open to search them out. This would make them much easier to find.

Sergeant Clyde Thomason of Atlanta Georgia, and a squad leader of the scout platoon, led the reconnoiter for the Raiders toward the radio station. Thomason would later be killed by a sniper's bullet in the thick of the fighting. When the fighting ended eleven of the Raiders were killed and another twenty had been wounded. The enemy garrison on the island, however, had been virtually wiped out.

The men of the battalion carried a wide assortment of weapons, including the old reliable Springfield bolt-action rifle from World War I. Others carried Browning Automatic Rifles, Thompson submachine guns, Remington shotguns. At that point the newer M-1 Garand rifle still had not made it to the Marine forces in the Pacific. In jungle fighting at close quarters, the shotgun proved to be one of the most effective weapons to have. Some of the Raiders had acquired the Reising machine pistol (known as the grease gun), and it was another favorite. Finally, the invasion group carried inland a large assortment of explosive charges.

All were heavily loaded down with food, equipment, water, and ammunition. Still, they moved swiftly through the thick underbrush and soon encountered some natives of the island on the road. They showed themselves friendly toward the Americans. They hated the Japanese and were more than willing to help. Using what broken English they had, the natives gave the Raiders vital information as to the disposition of the Japanese defenders. Most of the enemy troops were bivouacked near the On Chong Wharf.

During their trek, the Marines found an enemy flag in one of the abandoned huts near the shore. Privates Pisker and Young wanted that flag. They soon began wrestling one another for the prize, with the end result that both owned one half of the enemy banner. It was an interesting incident, as it seemed to indicate that the Raiders were not too worried about anything. That apparent self-confidence would show itself again and again as a Raider trademark in battle.

The Marines continued moving through the trees and had neared the transmitting station when the enemy became aware of their presence. The scouts watched as a Japanese truck came down the road, then suddenly stop some one hundred yards In front of them. A large infantry force quickly jumped down from the vehicle and began searching the area. In a matter of minutes more arrived.

Seconds later a fierce firefight erupted when Marines opened fire with everything they had. The Japanese leaders, however, had deployed their troops well. At the same time, snipers already lodged in the trees around the Marines opened up with accurate and lethal rifle fire. Marines began to go down, some with screams of pain, others silently collapsing to the ground.

The primary targets of the snipers were any Marines who looked as though they were leaders. A cry suddenly went up from the east flank, "Lieutenant Holton has been shot and is dying! He needs help. Send a corpsman!" Thirty seconds later came the slow utterance by the same man, "Never mind!"

The rest of the Japanese defensive force had been delayed in getting to the battle. They soon began arriving to add to the carnage. Behind the initial charge of Japanese infantry came the light machine gun teams who quickly set up their weapons and opened fire. 2nd Lt. Wilfred Francois, the leader of the pilot raft that had brought the Raiders to shore was hit five times by a Nambu in his shoulder. One of the rounds was an explosive one and the Lieutenant went down bleeding profusely. He would survive the battle and later write of it in great detail.

Just before they arrived, they set up two mortars to pummel the Marines. Regrettably, they set up near an American machine gun, which immediately cut them to pieces after they had fired only a few rounds.

Blowing a shrill bugle, the Japanese broke from the trees and charged into the line, holding their rifles in front of them with bayonets fixed, and firing and shouting as they came.

The morning sun caught the glint of a saber, and the Marines clearly heard the screams of "Banzai!" as they came. Behind this charge, four machine gunners and a flamethrower operator, well camouflaged with foliage, crept up to the Marine lines. Once they were within less than 100 feet from the enemy, the Japanese rose from the earth firing. The Flamethrower, feared by the Marines, failed to ignite its fuel, and before its operator could try again, some 40 bullets hit him. His shattered body crumpled.

Marine Corporal Earles was lying down when a bullet ricocheted off the ground and hit him in the mouth, embedding itself in its roof. Spitting teeth and bullets, Earles seemed to go crazy. Screaming "I'll get those heathen. They ruined my face! Where are the bastards?" He began to run through the thick brush, shooting dead and live Japs indiscriminately. Then the Jap machine guns, riflemen and the snipers opened up on him.

No one ever knew how many of the enemy he took out before he went down, but it was estimated at over a dozen. The back of the Japanese attack was finally broken and they sullenly withdrew back into the jungle. The radio station was now totally abandoned, and it was an easy matter to take it out.

Meanwhile, Lt. Peatross and his men that had ended up landing in the wrong place finally came ashore far to the west. As they got onto the beach, a Jap messenger appeared on a path in front of them, strenuously peddling a bicycle. At first he was unaware of the enemy just ahead. Then he saw the Marines, stopped, dismounted and started to take his rifle from its slung position on his shoulder. He was a dead man before he could level his weapon.

Before they were done, Peatross' men killed eleven messengers on bicycles and one on a motorcycle. Thus, the Japanese communications network had been destroyed and they had no way of knowing what was happening over the island. All they could do was follow the sound of the firing and head blindly into the battle.

Once the mission had been completed, the Marines headed back to rendezvous with the subs. By this time, Japanese reinforcements were landing on the north coast. Some of the Marines watched as a Japanese gunboat escorted a small troop transport to the "King's Wharf." The submarine Nautilus had meanwhile moved to the northern beaches and took the both enemy craft under fire with its five-inch deck gun. In only minutes both vessels were sunk.

After the fighting, there was still plenty to do. It was imperative that the Raiders return to their original landing point, find their hidden rafts and return to the submarines waiting in the channel. It would not be that easy. During the Marine return to the southern shore of Butaritari, enemy planes swooped in above them, strafing and bombing them again and again. This action caused the Marines to further disperse among the trees and arrive in small groups all during the evening rather than in a single body of men. The disembarkation back to the subs during the night proved to be somewhat of a disaster, with about half of the Marines making it back to the subs that night.

Early the next morning, August 18th, the Nautilus surfaced near the shore in plain view and remained fully exposed to offer hope to the Marines still on the island. The subs were not about to leave until the troops still on the island had an opportunity to get there. Those still on the beach were well aware of the folly of trying to get the subs in broad daylight. Instead they hid out during the day.

Lieutenant W.S. Le Francois, wounded badly in the arm and shoulder in the previous day's fighting, found two of the rubber boats and some much needed ammunition. They had been so well hidden that they had been missed the first night. The disheartened Marines were able to get to the submarine and escape.

Nine of the Raiders were still not able to get to the beach and were later taken prisoner by the Japanese reinforcements that landed on the island on August 18th and transported to Kwajalein. At first they were treated well by their captors while waiting transfer to Tokyo; that is, until the Marshall Islands commander,

Vice Admiral Abe Koso, was made aware of their presence. Enraged that they had not been already executed, he had them beheaded at once. Abe would later be hanged as a war criminal for this despicable act at the end of World War II.

The Results

Opinions by historians vary on the results of this raid. Some felt that it was worth the effort, since there was little else that the United States could do at the moment. Others criticize the move, using the argument that this caused the Japanese to bolster defenses on many islands (including the infamous Tarawa atoll), which only caused greater casualties for the Americans in future invasions.

The event, however, was used for very positive propaganda, including the film, "Gung Ho," starring Randolph Scott. The nation was thrilled with the idea, and perhaps the morale of the nation needed that uplift in the midst of the depressing reports coming out of Guadalcanal. When the submarines arrived in Hawaii, Admiral Nimitz himself was on hand with bands and commendations to greet the conquering heroes.

While touring the submarines, Nimitz was introduced to Lt. Francois, still in sickbay from his wounds. The officers of the submarines had offered up their bunks for the more seriously wounded for the return journey. The young officer somewhat intimidated on being face to face with the tall lanky admiral, felt that he had to say something.

"I hope the admiral is pleased with the results of our efforts," said the Lieutenant rather unsteadily.

"Very pleased," replied Nimitz with a big, broad smile as he shook Francois' good hand, "Very pleased - a very successful raid."

The raid on Makin atoll had been a classic example of the use of the philosophy so espoused by Colonel Evans Carlson: "Gung Ho!" The Raiders had worked together and gotten the job done!

A River Of Blood

Ilu River, Guadalcanal, August 21, 1942

By Wild Bill Wilder

The War Gets Serious

The easy invasion of the main island of Guadalcanal and the successful fighting on neighboring Tulagi, Tonambongo, and Gavutu had been a good start. The early withdrawal of the carrier force coupled with the disastrous naval battle of Savo Island had brought early elation to an end. Vandergrift announced to his men that they had been left to fend for themselves.

The Marines of the 1st Division now found themselves without adequate supplies, air or naval support and were on their own. At first things did not seem that desperate. The Marines apparently had control of the island and were not impressed initially with their oriental opponent. Then a tragic occurrence emphasized just how serious things were early in the fighting for this piece of real estate.

A small expedition led by Colonel Goettge to the Matanikau to take some supposedly ready to surrender Japanese had ended in disaster. The entire group, except for three who swam to safety had been killed. The survivors saw from the water sabers flashing in the sun. The wounded Marines had been beheaded on the beach! It would not be forgotten...those sabers flashing in the sun!

Now early jubilation turned to somberness and serious determination. The Marines decided among themselves that this would be no Bataan. They would fight this hated enemy to the death. If necessary, they would drift into the jungle and fight guerilla style. There would be no surrender. If they died, they would die with a gun in their hands and not with hands in the air awaiting execution.

A big emotional lift came on August 20th, when 19 F4F wildcat fighters and 12 SBD-3 Dauntless dive bombers flew into the newly constructed Henderson Field. As the planes circled the island, Marines leaped up, threw their helmets in the air and cheered. One Marine shouted, "Now let the bastards come!" Finally there was a meager air umbrella to help these valiant men in holding this island.

The Marines are an Annoyance!

The Japanese General Hyakutake was annoyed at this interruption to his New Guinea campaign. Given erroneous estimates of only 2,000 US Marines on the island (Actually there were about 19,000 there), he dispatched the crack Ichiki Detachment to drive these uncouth and inept invaders into the sea. Ichiki's force was an elite group of the Japanese 28th Infantry Regiment.

They had been the only Japanese force to beat the Russians in 1939 and were scheduled to land at Midway. Now they had an opportunity to face the Americans and give them a bitter lesson in defeat. On August 18th, over 900 of Ichiki's men landed at Taivu Point, some twenty miles east of the Tenaru River. The heavier equipment and the rest of the force would come later in slower transports.

Even though Hyakutake had cautioned Ichiki not to attack immediately if any difficulties were discovered. Ichiki was not about to wait. His "blood was up," and no mere 2,000 inadequate enemy troops could

possibly stop his battle hardened, emotionally stirred troops from inevitable victory. His attack would be at night, because the only thing the American troops knew how to do in the darkness was "dance and sleep."

So confident was he that he wrote in his diary three days before the battle a prophecy of how events would unfold: “18 August -The landing, 20 August - The March by night and the battle, 21 August - The enjoyment of the fruits of victory." He got the first two right but failed miserably on his third prediction.

The Gyrenes Prepare for Action

The Americans, expecting some sort of attack, had strengthened their perimeter. The heaviest defenses were on the coast, because it seemed the most likely point of enemy attack. To the east was the 2nd Battalion, First Marines, under the command of Lt. Col. Alvin Pollock. They carefully prepared their defensive positions on the Ilu River (more like a creek) near the larger Tenaru.

A native scout, Jacob Vouza, had been patrolling the area and discovered the new Japanese force. Unfortunately they discovered him, found a small US flag given to him by the Marines among his possessions and proceeded to interrogate him as to enemy positions. When he would not divulge any information, they tied him to a tree, beat him, and bayoneted him continually (seven times in the chest and throat).

When he still refused to talk, they left him to die. A strong man, he chewed through the ropes that bound him, and crawled three miles back to US lines. Bleeding profusely and nearly dead, he told the Marines of the Japanese presence. He would survive the ordeal. For his gallant effort, he was made an honorary Sergeant Major in the Marines, and awarded the Silver Star.

Now aware of where the attack was coming from, the Marines made urgent preparations. Gun pits were dug; barbed wire was strung (wire confiscated from the Lever Brothers plantation; they had none of their own); and a few 37mm antitank guns were wrestled into place and loaded with canister. Inside the perimeter snub nosed 75mm and the larger, more robust 105mm howitzers were turned to the east. Now they waited.

Now They Come!

At approximately 12:00 midnight, listening posts reported Japanese voices approaching, and the clanking noise of weapons being set up. They were quickly called back inside the 2nd Battalion's defensive positions. The Ilu was a wide, shallow creek with a large sand spit going down the middle of it.

In the next hour, the Japanese came. At 1:18AM, sickly green flares rose in the air from the coconut groves on the east side of the Ilu. A Marine sentry fired into the darkness, and all hell broke loose. Flowing over the sand spit, the Ichikis charged, sprinting, hurling grenades, and shouting "Banzai!"

They blundered into the barbed wire and hesitated. They hacked wildly at it with their bayonets. Some hurdled over it. Bangalore torpedoes, long metal tubes with explosive charge within, designed to blow apart barbed wire defenses, were brought forward to make openings in the barrier.

Then what seemed to be a thousand scarlet flashes erupted from the west side of the river as the Marines opened fire. Machine guns chattered and shook. The crack of rifles split the night air. The muffled thumps of grenades and mortar shells made the earth tremble. Wet sand and body parts flew through the air. The antitank guns erupted fire once and again as canister rounds cut through the Japanese ranks like a scythe.

The enemy's first wave faltered as the attackers fell by the dozen. Screams of anger and pain were now accentuated the sound of hundreds of guns. Howitzer rounds added to the mad cacophony of the sound of battle. The Second wave charged through the first and continued to press the Americans. A third wave followed closely behind.

So many Japanese charged at once that there was no stopping them. Some managed to jump into Marine foxholes, shouting, "Maline, you die!" A BAR gunner suddenly found three Japanese soldiers in his hole. Grabbing his machete and swinging wildly, he decapitated one of them, and hacked the other two to death.

A machine gunner caught a rifle round in the head, but even in death his finger locked on the trigger and continued firing, cutting down ten more charging Japanese. Another gunner, Al Schmidt, blinded by a

grenade blast, continued to fire his weapon as the wounded and dying loader lay beside him and directed his fire. The antitank gun's barrel glowed a dull red from the constant firing. A Japanese grenade floated into the gun's position. It became silent.

Marine riflemen leaped into the dugout, and the gun began firing again. In the darkness, tall shadows mingled with shorter ones. The sickening crunch of rifle butts against skulls accompanied by grunts of pain and anger filtered through the din. In many areas of the line, it was a battle of thrusting blades, fists, knees and gouging fingers. Marine mortars began laying down a curtain of fire behind the Japanese attackers.

The Bloody Ilu

Suddenly Ichiki's men were trapped between the lethal firepower of the west bank in front of them and the devastating bursting mortar shells behind them. Now forward or backward was to die. And die they did. The attack came to an end shortly before sunrise. As daylight came, the still battle-shocked Marines saw clearly what their defenses had accomplished. Hundreds of Japanese lay dead in the water and on top of one another at the sand spit. Some bodies had already begun to bloat, as the blood stained water flowed past.

The First Battalion Marines now filtered past the Second's defenses and moved into the coconut groves on the other side to finish the job. On this day no prisoners were being taken. Goettge's ambush and the beheaded Marines were still sharply painful in their mind's eye. A platoon of M-3 Stuart tanks rumbled across the shallow waters and began hunting down Japanese stragglers. Lt. Col. Leonard Cresswell described the action of his First Battalion.

"We watched those awful machines as they plunged across the spit and into the edge of the grove. It was fascinating to see them bursting among the trees, pivoting, turning, spitting sheets of yellow flame."

By the evening, the treads of the Stuarts looked like meat grinders. As the Japanese were flushed from hiding, the tanks mercilessly ran them down.

Later on the same day Ichiki and a score of survivors were making a last ditch stand around their bloodstained flag. As men fell around him and the tanks approached his pathetically futile last stand, the colonel knelt in the sand, drew his pistol, and committed hara-kiri with a bullet to the head. The victory of what became to be known as the Battle of the Tenaru River had been won at the cost of thirty-four Marines killed. The Japanese had lost over 800 of the Ichiki force, which ceased to exist as a combat unit.

Edson's Ridge

By Wild Bill Wilder

With the die cast as to priorities in the Second World War, there was little that could be accomplished in the area of grand offensives in 1942. The catastrophic defeat suffered by Japan at Midway had begun to shift the hitherto nearly unimpeded offensive impetus from the Japanese to the United States.

The losses suffered in two days of air and naval combat 1,000 miles east of Pearl Harbor had stunted the growth of the "Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere," and had begun to place the enemy in a defensive posture. The moment had to be seized, however, by the United States, and there was little available with which to do it. Most of America's military output was going out as Lend-Lease for the fighting in Russia and North Africa, or it was destined to be a part of Operation Torch, the invasion of Vichy France.

In the Pacific, three US carriers and a contingent of cruisers and smaller ships darted around, looking for the right place and time for another victory. More was needed, however, and it would have to be a ground conflict in which America emerged triumphant. It was the United States that carried the biggest burden in the Pacific fighting and very little of positive effect has as yet been accomplished.

The Battleground is Chosen

The fall of Wake, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaya were severely depressing and gave the initial impression that the Japanese army was unbeatable. That was not the case, however, and it would be the Marines of the 1st Division that would prove such a hypothesis to be full of holes. The Japanese soldier, even with distinct advantages, could be conquered. He was vulnerable. He did make mistakes. He could be killed! It would be 11,000 battered and tattered Marines that over a period of four months, in a seemingly God forsaken place called Guadalcanal, that would make that point very clear.

And just what was this unknown piece of earth nearly lost in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean? It was an island, typical of so many in the Pacific. From a distance, it indeed looked like a paradise. Once on it, however, one's point of view quickly changed. The 90-mile length of the place is drenched with rains. Use Tulagi as an example. The annual rainfall average there is 160 inches, four times the normal amount in most areas!

The rains were at their worst from November to March. Everything stayed wet. The jungle floor, covered by huge rain forest trees, could not dry out. Mold and mildew devoured everything! It was 100% humidity all day, every day, and sometimes worse! Guadalcanal is also volcanic. It has a central spine of jagged peaks, covered with tropical rain forest, rising in places 8,000 feet above sea level. To the southwest the mountains slope fairly sharply to the coast. In contrast, on the northeastern side, the land is more open, even to the point of some wide plains, with numerous rivers and streams slicing it up.

These plains had been partially cleared for coconut plantations. What remained, or the larger part of the island was covered by huge trees, dense brush, and open spaces covered with kunai grass, at times reaching skyward to a height of seven feet. Calling it grass is a misnomer. The blades are thick and coarse, with cutting edges like a saw. It was definitely not the tropical paradise presented by Hollywood. If this were

paradise, every Marine on it would prefer to live without enjoying that "pleasure!"

On disembarking onto the island, the first thing you would notice was the smell. No, not a smell, it was a gut-wrenching stench. Guadalcanal stank! Superabundant vegetation, quick to rot in the rich, hot, humidified sea air, turned to queasy slime beneath the thick canopy of trees that blocked out much of the sunlight. The odor was one of continual rot. The dank, rotting odor permeated everything on the island.

This atmosphere gave opportunity for the cultivation of every type of oniferous insect alive, including malarial mosquitoes and nameless bacteria. This continual dampness, cultivator of every type of creature to make a man's life miserable, only added to human discomfort. The heat, under such humidified conditions, was almost unbearable. To men burdened with equipment, it was physically exhausting just to move in such weighted air. Instead of walking, one felt as though he were swimming.

The tropical jungle itself was alive, but resembled a malevolent beast, arrogant and cruel. Its foul breath was a hint of what lay within its bosom. This included serpents, crocodiles, and centipedes, which could crawl across the flesh in the night as one, slept fitfully, leaving a trail of swollen skin. Land crabs scuttled over the jungle floor in the night, sounding amazingly like an infiltrating Jap to a fearful ear.

There were also scorpions, lizards, leeches, wasps as long as your finger, and spiders as big as your fist. The mosquitoes were everywhere, all the time, and carried with them all sorts of disease, primarily the dreaded Malaria. Around its fetid shores, hungry sharks swam, waiting for an unsuspecting meal. They were always hungry.

The Marines Have Landed and the Situation...?

August 6th, 1942, and the Marines of the 1st Division were going ashore at Guadalcanal. Anticipated tough resistance never materialized. In a matter of hours, the first Marine scouts, under occasional sniper fire were at the edge of the partially constructed enemy airfield on the northern end of the island. The Japanese garrison, instead of fighting, simply melted away into the jungle, leaving bowls of warm rice and saki still on the dining tables.

It had been only eight months earlier that Admiral Nagumo had moved into position off Pearl Harbor with six fleet carriers for the initiation of the war. Now an American invasion fleet was entering what the Japanese considered inviolate territory. Their mission was conquest. Capturing the airfield on Guadalcanal and stopping the Japanese from cutting the supply lines to Australia was their primary mission.

The three leaders of the invasion stood on the deck of the carrier Saratoga, lost in a heated discussion. Admiral Jack Fletcher, weary and fearful of the loss of one or more of his remaining carriers, was adamant. He would stay two days to cover the landings, and then he would withdraw at least 100 miles to the southeast.

He had 89 ships under his command and 19,000 Marines ready to do their job, the largest invasion force ever assembled up until that time. Yet the naval commander still was uncertain. He could not risk the three last carriers, Saratoga, Wasp, and Enterprise. Vice Admiral Kelly Turner, in charge of landing operations argued fiercely against such a move. He was a man of bushy brows, always furrowed into a half-frown, rimless glasses and a vocabulary that would make an old sailor blush. He never hesitated to speak his mind and was doing so now. Such an action was suicidal and would more than likely sacrifice the entire Marine division. They needed support! They could not possibly hold without it.

The third party in the discussion was General Alexander Archer Vandergrift, who was in command of the 1st Marine Division. He noticed the uncertainty in Fletcher's voice, the weariness in his eyes and became concerned. Joining in the argument, Vandergrift strongly appealed the cause of continued naval support for the landings. It was all to no avail. Not two weeks, not five days, but at most two. Fletcher shook his head and turned away, saying as he did so, "This conference is dismissed."

Ashore and Alone

Once ashore, the Marines proceeded to consolidate their position. Even though the capture of the airfield was without major incident, the Marine capture of nearby Tulagi Island was another matter. Here the Japanese put up a fierce, suicidal resistance against Lieutenant Colonel Merritt (Red Mike) Edson's First Marine Raider Battalion. Edson was a slender man, with an iron set to his jaw and cold pale eyes that could pierce a man's soul. His voice was soft, but the authority it carried was enough.

Edson's men leaped from the Higgins landing craft, splashed through the surf and moved inland. One battalion skirted to the northeast and overran quickly the northern third of the island. The First lined up three companies abreast and moved across the tiny piece of coral and dank earth, killing Japanese as they went. By dusk, against intense sniper fire that seemed to come from every tree and building, the Marines owned all but one corner of the island. From there on that night the Japanese conducted the first Banzai attack of the war. Filled with liberal amounts of Saki and whiskey, the charged through the darkness into American lines, shouting obscenities in Japanese or using what limited English they knew.

"Banzai!" They shouted. "Hurrah!"
"Japanese boy drink American boy's blood!"

Marine replies were even more obscene, punctuated with machine gun and Springfield rifle fire that ripped enemy ranks apart. Grenades spiraled through the air, punching holes in the pitch-blackness with flashes of red and yellow. Five times they charged, and five times they were cut to ribbons. By dawn of the 7th, there was little left with which to resist. By the afternoon of the 8th, the only living Japanese on Tulagi were less than a half-dozen badly wounded enemy soldiers.

The other smaller islands, Tulagi, Florida Island, and the twin islands of Gavutu and Tanambogo. They were for the most part free of any Japanese intervention. On the main island, the Marines continued to advance and established a strong defensive perimeter well south of the airfield, now named after Major Lofton Henderson, a Marine Pilot who had given his life at the battle of Midway. It was now known as "Henderson Field."

On the second day, an enemy air raid of twenty-four torpedo bombers was observed by coast watchers and driven off by intense anti-aircraft fire. Even during the attack, sailors worked frantically to off load the equipment and get the rest of the division onshore. Time was working against them. Another attack on the 8th claimed the transport George F. Elliott, the first American ship among many allied vessels that would eventually line the bottom of Iron Bottom Sound.

With Fletcher's carrier forces withdrawn and no protection for his transports, Admiral Kelly was forced to withdraw. Many vital necessities had as yet to be unloaded, but now the Marines on Guadalcanal would have to fend for themselves. They were on their own.

As the days passed, the Japanese went into action. A series of naval engagements around Savo Island proved disastrous for the allied fleet. The waters around Guadalcanal now belonged to the Japanese, but only at night. The arrival of F4F wildcats, SBD Dauntlesses, P39 Aircobras and the twin-boomed P-38 Lightnings of the Army gave the defenders hope in a very dark hour. The first Japanese attack took place at the Ilu River, when the "Ichiki" Force was virtually annihilated.

Angry at this failure, General Hyakutake ordered into battle what remained of the "Ichiki" Group, 1,000 Marines of the Yokasuka Fifth Naval Landing Force and Major General Kawaguchi's Brigade of 5,000 Borneo veterans to eliminate this insidious western cancer. Faulty intelligence had estimated Marine strength at 2,000. Actually, there were nearly 11,000 on the island.

Japanese Reinforcements Arrive

The reinforcement effort would be protected by a large Japanese naval force, including three carriers and three battleships. Using the small carrier Ryujo as bait (the same strategy had been used with the Shoho in the Battle of the Coral Sea), Nagumo lured Fletcher's force into action.

The Ryujo was attacked and sunk. Then planes from the Zuikaku and Shokaku struck the US forces, damaging the Enterprise with three bomb hits. American forces nearly sank the seaplane tender Chitose and then withdrew. Nagumo was unable to relocate them.

Meanwhile, the Cactus Air Force launched vicious attacks against the Japanese landing force and drove it away. It would have to return in landing barges under the cover of darkness to arrive safely. The bulk of the force landed to the east of Henderson Field on September 6th at Taivu Point and immediately proceeded inland.

The bigger artillery pieces and most of the supplies were left at Tasimboko. Two days later, the Marine Raiders discovered the Japanese cache, attacked its defenders and wreaked havoc. They hauled the big guns into the sea, hurling their breechblocks into deeper water. They availed themselves of canned crabmeat, confiscated British cigarettes, and anything else of value to them. The rest of the material was burned or destroyed.

The ultimate insult was the taking of General Kawaguchi's dress uniform. The Japanese commander has specifically brought it with him for the surrender ceremonies when his glorious troops recaptured Henderson Field and drove the impudent Americans back into the sea. Now his fancy pants had been taken prisoner and the General would have to continue in his khaki field dress.

A Long, Hard Journey

The Japanese plan included a three-pronged attack, all to be conducted simultaneously. The Ilu force would strike from the east, the Matanikau force from the west, while Kawaguchi's main force of 3,000 would strike from the south, over a large ridge that bordered the southern end of the Marine defensive perimeter. The two flanking attacks were a diversion. Kawaguchi would take the bulk of his force and secure the major triumph. His men used as a rallying cry "Remember the Ichiki Suicide" (Ichiki had taken his life when his earlier attack across the Ilu river failed)

Led by Kawaguchi himself, the long, arduous march around the American perimeter began on September 7th. It was a nightmare. Hacking their way through dense, rain-soaked jungles, struggling up and down hills with heavy equipment, wading through treacherous swamps, they perspired profusely. They received scratches and cuts that quickly festered. The mosquitoes were unrelenting in their attacks. They staggered with fatigue and dysentery, but on they came.

The discovery of Kawaguchi's supply dump revealed to the Marine leaders the presence of the enemy reinforcements, but no one was sure from where they would strike. Something big was in the wind, but when and where? A careful study of maps and the terrain pointed out the most likely spot as a rugged, relatively barren ridge rising from the jungle about a mile south of Henderson. The Marines as yet had not occupied it. In fact, the entire southern perimeter was very weak.

Vandergrift had placed his greatest strength on the flanks and along the coast. The only available force to occupy the area was Red Mike's First Raider Battalion and units of the Marine Parachute Battalion (command by Captain Harry Torgerson, who had the seat of his pants blown off in the fighting at Gavutu). Edson, ever the optimist, told his men they were headed to a quiet rest area. They were ready for it. Weeks of combat and jungle marches had left them exhausted. But it was to be far from an area of rest for the Raiders!

Now It Begins

On the 12th of September, Kawaguchi had finally assembled two of his three battalions at the jump-off point, the northern slopes of Mount Austen. The last battalion had not yet caught up. No matter, the attack would

proceed without them. The force had suffered horribly from the difficult trek across country and was hardly in shape for what was to come. National pride, however, more than compensated for the physical maladies and the troops proceeded to the departure line.

An afternoon rain had drenched the 600 Marine defenders along the ridge and as night fell, the waterlogged troops sought some comfort and much needed rest. It was not to be. At 9:00 PM, a green flare was dropped from an overhead Japanese patrol plane. In less than half an hour, enemy ships began to bombard the ridge. The larger 8" shells from a cruiser had the sound of approaching freight trains as they passed overhead, but most failed to hit their target. The Marines were largely unscathed, just shaken.

The cacophony of the naval shelling ended and was replaced by the "whoomp" of mortar fire that peppered the ridge. That was joined by machine gun fire and shouts from the darkness, "US Marines be dead tomorrow! US Marines be dead tomorrow!" This was accompanied by the men slapping their rifle butts in unison as they advanced.

The charge was hard and fast. Japanese grenadiers came first, followed by riflemen and light machine gunners. They moved in columns abreast, their line stretching back into the blackness. Attempting to use the darkness as their ally, however, resulted in mass confusion among Kawaguchi's forces. They became disorganized and the result was a series of smaller close-in fights, with fists, feet, bayonets, trench knives and entrenching tools. Men struggled with men and strangled the life from them. It soon degenerated into a mindless melee where neither commander had control. The battle raged in each foxhole where a man fought to either conquer or repel.

Suddenly the Raider's line was penetrated! With some Japanese breaching the line. Seven Marines were cut off and never seen again. Their bodies weren't even found after the battle. Sadly for Kawaguchi, the advantage could not be held. The Japanese had spent themselves and could not hold their breakthrough. By 5:00 AM they had withdrawn back into the dense jungle.

The Grim Reality

The Raiders were stunned and hurt. Furthermore, their pride had been dealt a blow. The Japanese had driven them back. Losses that night forced Red Mike to consolidate his lines and withdraw further back on the ridge. With leaden feet, moving like zombies, the Marine Raiders and Paratroopers shuffled back to new positions. No sleep and the intense heat continued to suck at their energy. One man in three had become a casualty in the first attack.

One third of Edson's strength was gone. Now 400 able bodied Raiders and Para-Marines would try to hold a line 1,800 yards long against over 2,000 enemy troops. It was one Marine for every five yards against five Japanese soldiers. The odds were grim to say the least. Edson knew that Kawaguchi was not finished. There would be another attack and he had to be ready. Talking among his men, Edson flatly stated to them, "It is useless to ask ourselves why it is we are here. We are here. There is only us between the airfield and the Japs. If we don't hold, we will lose Guadalcanal."

On the other hand, Kawaguchi, while disappointed that the ridge had not been taken, was still in good spirits. The enemy had been pushed back and seemed to be in disarray. One more push, then over the ridge and the Japanese Army would present to Admiral Yamamoto and the Emperor a lovely present: Henderson Field. He was so anxious to get started that he scheduled this attack for 6:30 PM. It would all be over by midnight and the prize would be his.

The Japanese leaders at Rabaul were puzzled. Radio contact with the troops on Guadalcanal had been lost. But surely the airfield was now in General Kawaguchi's hand. Lined up along airfield, transports filled with troops and equipment were ready to be on their way to make their landings at Henderson Field, now most assuredly in friendly hands. Then the retaking of the island could be completed.

Just to be sure, four scout planes were sent to reconnoiter the area. When only three returned some hours later, riddled with antiaircraft fire, it was deemed wise to hold off on the movement of the air transports one

more day!

The Final Push

The attack began promptly on time. Kawaguchi would not wait for the preliminary shelling by offshore naval guns tonight. Nor would he hold up on the attack until the remaining battalion of his brigade had fully arrived. The 2,100 of Japanese finest should be able to easily sweep aside what puny resistance remained. Reports from scouts indicated that the enemy lines had shrunk and there had been a withdrawal.

The effeminate Americans would undoubtedly collapse with just a little more pressure. This final thrust would secure his dream of triumph. He was extremely anxious to gain his glorious victory. As darkness descended over the ridge, the Japanese mortars began spitting out a new rain of death on Marine positions.

Red Mike, however, had been busy all day. As most of his men tried to get a few hours of sleep, the Colonel ran from one place to another, preparing for the next attack that would surely come that night. He first secured the close artillery support of the 11th Marines 105mm howitzers, commanded by Colonel Pedro de Valle. In addition he moved back and forth across the ridge, finding better positions for his heavier machine guns.

Mortar crews under Edson's guidance had zeroed in on what would be most likely the lanes of approach by the enemy. Finally, he had done all he could. Wearily he returned to his command post, close to the front lines, informing his adjutant, "Nothing to do now, but wait for it to happen."

In only an hour, it did happen, or at least it began. The usual flare fell from the sky, this time dropped by " Louie the Louse," and the attack began. The distant darkness of the jungle suddenly seemed to open up in dozens of different places where tiny men in khaki uniforms were spat out from the thick foliage. "Oh, Lord!" Cried a lookout. "Here they come!"

And come they did! This time firing from the hip, the attackers moved briskly toward the foot of the ridge. Marine rifles and machine guns split open the blackness and produced horrid screams of pain from below. Then 105mm shells, whooshing low over Marine lines crashed into the valley just ahead of them. Marine Bill Keller thought they were too low. " I wasn't about to stand up, for fear of losing the top of my helmet."

The ranks of the Japanese were ripped apart by the explosions. The battlefield teemed with flashes of light and the roar of so many weapons firing simultaneously was terribly unnerving. In minutes, the lower slopes were dotted with dozens of bodies, some very still, others writhing in pain in the midst of the grass fires ignited by the falling shells.

Japanese machine guns, located in the fringes of the jungle, watched for the flashed of the heavier American .50 caliber guns. Once found, the Japanese sprayed them mercilessly. As a gunner fell, a loader, or ammo carrier instantly replaced him. One heavy machine gun team was killed, one by one, to the last man in less than thirty minutes.

The range soon closed. Even with the devastating fire emanating from the ridge, there were so many of the enemy that they were into American forward positions and the fighting again was hand to hand. Japanese officers whirled their "Samurai" swords in the air. Enlisted men frantically worked the bolts on their rifles, and fired as they charged. Some of the attackers were armed only with bamboo spears, but they fought as valiantly as their better-armed comrades did. In some areas hand grenade duels began, their flat explosions ripping limbs from bodies and filling others with hot, deadly shrapnel. Bayonets and entrenching tools also came into play.

One Marine reached for more ammo in the bandoleer at his feet. Suddenly he looked up into the face of a Japanese officer rushing towards him. With no time to fire, he threw up his Springfield rifle to fend off the sword thrust. The steel bit steeply into the butt of the weapon and neatly amputated two fingers on the Marine's right hand. Then both sword and rifle went spinning off into the darkness from the strength of the

blow. The Gyrene quickly reached out with his good left hand and found the throat of the officer. Kicking and choking his enemy, the Marine finished his deadly task and then went to find bandages and a corpsman.

The attack made some penetration on the right flank, where 1,000 Japanese concentrated their efforts against 100 Para-Marines. Though fragmented, the flank held. The assault finally ran out of steam and the remaining Japanese disappeared as quickly as they had materialized out of the darkness. Another attack, an hour later, closely resembled the first. It too failed. The American line bent under the strain and began to resemble a horseshoe. Five more attacks were launched during the night and none fared any better.

Shortly before the last Japanese effort took place, the Marines were nearly out of everything except guts. Edson grabbed a young corporal named Watson, who had some experience in calling in artillery supporting fire. By 12 Noon of that day, he would be Second Lieutenant Watson for the cool skill he demonstrated in calling down hell from the heavens on the relentless enemy. Watching carefully the rocket signals of the Japanese, he pinpointed their assembly points. Then round after round slammed into them. As he worked feverishly, the final attack began. Edson crouched beside Watson controlling the fire. He continued to bring it forward to his own front lines.

"Closer," whispered Edson. "Closer."

Now the ridge trembled and flamed as the shells landed within 50 yards of the most forward Marine positions. The terrified Japanese leaped into enemy foxholes to escape the hell around them. They were knifed by crouching Raiders and tossed them back out again. The horror of artillery is the way it tears men apart. It does not kill cleanly, but rips their flesh and limbs from their bodies, and hurls them into the air; it bursts internal organs with concussion, and singes away parts of the face away from the skull.

Now Marine mortars added to the holocaust. It was more than the attackers could bear. They withdrew once again. Now Edson sent a message to General Vandergrift's headquarters, short and simple: "WE CAN HOLD."

By morning, it was over. One of the most important battles of Guadalcanal had ended with the Raiders and Para-Marines, badly beaten up, but still "king of the hill." The Kawaguchis, meanwhile, had mournfully begun to retrace their steps back from whence they had come. One Japanese officer wrote of this newest ordeal: "I cannot help from crying when I see the sight of those men marching without food for four or five days, drinking from muddy puddles of stinking water, carrying the wounded through the curving and sloping mountain trails. The wounds couldn't be given adequate medical treatment. There was not a one without maggots. Many died." In fact, over 600 of them perished at the ridge, another 250 at the Tenaru, and another 100 at the Matanikau. The Marines counted 40 dead, 104 wounded and 12 that were missing in action. Only five of these would be found.

Thus this nameless spot on the island became another chapter of Marine legend. It would not remain nameless. So crucial to holding Guadalcanal and Henderson Field, the site would gain two names. It came to be known as "Edson's Ridge," or "Bloody Ridge, both of which seemed very appropriate.

As for the significance of this and other actions on Guadalcanal, a top staff officer at Imperial General Headquarters wrote early in the campaign, "We must be aware of the possibility that the struggle for Guadalcanal in the southeast area may develop into the decisive struggle between America and Japan. It is a fork in the road; one direction leading to ultimate victory for the Americans, the other leads to the final triumph for us."

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Yamamoto's Problem

Japan's Naval genius, Admiral Isoruku Yamamoto was beginning to become quite frustrated. After brilliant initial blows of supreme devastation against the United States and its allies, things were just not looking that good.

Because of the disaster suffered by the Japanese at Midway, Yamamoto had to be cautious with his carriers. There was nothing in existence to replace the four fleet carriers lost in that momentous battle of June 4th, 1942.

The Japanese fleet still outnumbered the Americans. His sailors were very skilled and well disciplined. A number of victories in the waters around Guadalcanal had proven that.

But the American Navy was improving rapidly. And while the loss of even one ship created an irreplaceable void in the Japanese naval arsenal, the American fleet was growing at an unprecedented rate. Soon Yamamoto's ships would be gravely outnumbered.

For example, at the start of the war, the United States had no battleships that were seaworthy. Now in less than a year there were two new ones that were more modern than most of his, the Washington and the North Carolina. Another, the Indiana, would soon put in an appearance. Then the two older battlewagons, the Maryland and the Colorado were in the Fijis and on call if needed.

The blunders of his admirals, Abe and Kondo, worsened the situation. The growing reticence of Admiral Nagumo to energetically go after the enemy bothered him a great deal.

The pride of the Japanese carrier fleet, its skilled pilots, had been decimated in the carrier battles of Coral Sea and Midway. The newer pilots coming on board could not begin to match the skills of their predecessors.

The feared Zero fighter was increasingly an easier prey to the better armed and armored Navy, Marine and USAAF fighters. The Betty, looking like cigar with wings, was the most reliable bomber in Japan's air inventory but was being overshadowed by increasing numbers of the heavy allied bombers, the B-17 and the B-24.

When P-38 fighters became stationed at Henderson, a sense of dread chilled the old admiral's heart. Here was a deadly fighter and ground support airplane that could definitely hurt his cause. Little did he know that it would be a P-38 that would send his aircraft a few months later hurtling into the jungle in flames.

When told of the plight of the Japanese Army starving to death on Guadalcanal, the admiral attempted to obtain permission to bring the mighty Yamato, one of two majestic Battleships, the biggest, most powerful in the world down to Guadalcanal to pound Henderson Field into the earth. Had he done so, the situation might have taken a favorable turn for Japan.

But the nation's fuel supply was becoming critical. Production in the oil fields of Asia was still not at full capacity. The massive activity of the ships of the Imperial Navy was devouring fuel at a much higher rate than predicted prior to the war. Oil tankers moving the crude black gold were often unsuspecting targets of American submarines. The mammoth battleship would devour more fuel than was possible to release at that time so it remained at Truk, out of harm's way.

Yamamoto needed a victory, a decisive victory to forestall what he had predicted before the war. Guadalcanal would have to be it. It was win here or lose the war. The options were clear in his mind. How to make the victory happen was a dilemma that he would, in spite of all his efforts, never resolve. Japan would eventually lose Guadalcanal and in so doing took the first step to losing the entire war.

Iwo Jima - Doorstep To Hell

By Wild Bill Wilder

The Next Step

At the beginning of 1945, the major thrust of the United States military was in the Philippine Islands. Joint Marine and Army forces had for the most part conquered the island of Leyte and were moving on to the larger Luzon. The fighting, hard and bitter, was nevertheless moving United States forces toward the ultimate goal of conquering the Empire of Japan.

It now seemed that the curtain was being drawn on the war in Europe. With Hitler's failed Ardennes offensive in December 1944, Germany had little to stop the Allied onslaught on that continent. The Russian Bear, angry and powerful, was at the eastern border. British, Canadian and American troops were camped out all along the Rhine River, preparing for the final sword thrust into the heart of the Third Reich. Already resources were being re-targeted for the Pacific.

The American Fleet in the Pacific at the beginning of 1945 was the most powerful naval armada ever put to sea. Dozens of capital ships, including carriers, battleships, and cruisers roamed the vast ocean with little fear. The submarine force had almost completely isolated the islands of Japan. Now deprived of the resources needed for war, Japan felt the angry noose of American power slowly throttling her life away.

Desperation gripped the military and civilian populace. Horrible myths of the atrocities that would be committed against the Japanese people were propagated daily to them. In addition, the cultural background of the Japanese forced them to vow their loyalty to the emperor to the death. Thus, huge militia armies, many armed with only poles with bayonets tied to them, or learning to wear and use demolition charges in suicide attacks, were being prepared for the final struggle for their homeland. In the military forces, the same suicidal spirit was being infused in the young men.

With little training, the honor of Japan was emphasized to the point that nearly the entire populace was setting their mind for the ultimate sacrifice. The Rising Sun was beginning to settle into the western horizon. The darkness of disaster, despair, and death was creeping in on them.

A Hard Rock in the Path to Japan

Once the American Joint Chiefs of Staff had made the strategic decision to retake the Philippine Islands rather than bypass them, any projections of assaulting Formosa or the Chinese mainland were abandoned. It seemed more practical to make a concerted drive for the Japanese home islands. In October, Admiral Nimitz was instructed to take control of the Bonin-Volcano group of islands to the northwest of the Marianas. This would provide a safeguard against any further intervention by Japanese forces against MacArthur's advance on Luzon.

His choice of islands was Iwo Jima. A small piece of volcanic outgrowth dominated by Mount Suribachi (a dormant volcano), it has been described thus. "The island was just four miles long-altogether, eight square miles-an ugly, smelly glob of cold lava squatting in a surly ocean." Suribachi is Japanese for "cone-shaped bowl." Iwo means "sulfur," and the rotten egg-like smell that permeated the island was clear proof of its volcanic origin.

Why pick such an unpleasant piece of black-sanded rock for an invasion? One of the reasons for this choice was that enemy air forces stationed there were a real hindrance to B-29 attacks against Japan. The 1,500 miles from the Marianas to Japan was long and filled with danger. Iwo was at the halfway mark. With two operational airfields and a third under construction, Japanese fighters could swarm into the air and blast at the big birds as they passed. By this time, Japanese pilots had become so desperate that if they could not shoot down a Superfortress, they would suicidally ram it out of the sky. Of course, any damaged aircraft or stragglers would be easy targets as they struggled to get back to their base.

As the American bombers passed, enemy radar on Iwo would detect them and give two hours advance warning to the Japanese Home Islands. Even further, Zeros from the island would attack the giant bombers both going to the target and also on the return trip. Japanese medium bombers, based on Iwo Jima made

numerous raids on the Marianas, attacking the airfields of the Superforts. Their attacks destroyed more B-29s on the ground than General Curtis E. LeMay's crews lost during their strike missions.

The second reason for taking Iwo Jima was closely related to the first. There were three airfields on the island. By controlling these, American forces would have facilities for escort fighters for the bombers. In addition, any aircraft damaged over Japan would not be forced to make the 1,500 mile return flight to Saipan or Tinian. Now wounded American birds had a refuge within reach.

One more vital factor was involved in the capture of Iwo Jima. By controlling the Bonin Islands, the United States would now have a forward staging and supply area for the next major assault on the Ryukyu Islands, principally Okinawa. After that, Japan's home shores were targeted for invasion. "Seldom before had an objective been so obviously necessary, and perhaps never before had so much counted on such a no-account place" (Leckie).

The Waiting Enemy

Defending this unattractive piece of real estate were 21,000 troops under the command of Lieutenant-General Tadamichi Kuribayashi. The general was an old cavalryman that had not made the transition to mechanized forces. To American intelligence he was an unknown entity. They could not get a feel for the type of commander that he was. They would. Marines fighting for Iwo would later spit and say, " He's the best damned general there is on this stinking island!"

Kuribayashi was an intensely loyal Japanese soldier. He had been one of the few commanders to have a private audience with the exalted emperor, Hirohito. It was he that had reorganized so effectively the Imperial Guards Division. In June 1944, he was given command of the defenses of the Bonanza. It was an impressive honor, since the islands lay with the very Prefecture of Tokyo.

The general was pure military, with little emotion. A small moon-faced pudgy man, he was all energy and ruthlessness. He was cold, curt and stern. He was also a strong disciplinarian and a firm believer in the Bushido Code of warriorhood. When one of his subordinates suggested that the island was not worth defending and simply should be blown out of the water, Kuribayashi had him transferred 160 miles to the north to Chichi Jima.

Those under his command did not like him. He provided no physical entertainment in the form of girls from the "Comfort Troops." He was against drinking and imposed strict rules prohibiting the distribution of sake and other strong beverages. His work ethic was intense. Arriving in June 1944 to prepare Iwo for defending, Kuribayashi knew that time was running out and he had to do all he could to prepare for the coming savage American onslaught.

He had labored hard to prepare the island against invasion. So confident was he that when Tokyo regrettably informed him that no reinforcements would be forthcoming, he replied that he had no need of them. The defenses they had spent months in preparing were formidable.

Kuribayashi's strategy was not that of "do or die" beach stands or reckless Banzai charges. Instead, he would methodically chew up the enemy as he attempted to move across the island. It would be a stubborn sustained defense designed to inflict maximum casualties and psychologically wear down any invaders. Inside pillboxes and bunkers, he had posted his "Courageous Battle Vows," in which the defenders promised to kill "ten of the enemy before falling in battle."

His strongest resistance would not come on the beaches, but from the 556-foot Suribachi and the plateau between airfields two and three. Between the two points, the landing American forces would be caught in one of the most withering crossfires in history. The ground was ideal for it. High cliffs close to shore protected the north. There was only one way for an amphibious force to get on Iwo, and the Japanese defenses were prepared to deal with it.

Where Peleliu had 500 caves, Iwo had 1,500. Just as at Tarawa, the tiny island was studded with strong fortifications. Blockhouses and pillboxes were constructed with walls five feet thick and ceilings ten feet high. They were strongly sandbagged and humped around with 50 feet of sand and piggybacked with

machine gun turrets. They were blended into the terrain so as to be almost indistinguishable.

His men had prepared over 600 large gun emplacements and hundreds of smaller pillboxes. These had been complemented with a complex system of cave defenses and deep shelters. To construct them, the diggers would have to wear gas masks to weather the intensely stifling sulfur fumes underground. Some were so hot that men could heat their meals from the protruding rocks within the underground complex.

Beneath the earth were 13,000 yards of tunnels connected to many of the 5,000 cave entrances and pillboxes. Under Suribachi there was a four-story galley, hospital, and ammunition dump. The general's own command post, located at the northern end of the island, was 75 feet underground with multiple entrances, exits, stairwells and interconnecting passages. What many Marines mistakenly took for fence posts dotted across the island were actually air vents for the complex tunnel system. It is estimated that there are still hundreds of Japanese buried beneath Iwo Jima even today.

It was already clear that the Japanese would fight to the death. Few prisoners would be taken. That meant that the American forces were going to have to kill over 20,000 of an enemy that would fight to the last breath. It was an ominous assignment.

An American Assessment

To many military planners, the small island did not appear to be a big problem. Samuel Eliot Morrison described the feeling of invasion designers. "The operation looked like a pushover. Optimists predicted that the island would be secured in four days." Some were bold enough to say that 72 hours would probably be enough. With a two-mile advance each day, the island would be conquered in no time.

Other leaders were not so optimistic about taking the island. General Holland Smith warned, "We may expect casualties far beyond any heretofore suffered in the Central Pacific." Nimitz himself confided to aides that he feared what the cost of capturing Iwo Jima might be. It turned out that these "prophets of doom" were far more accurate than the eternal optimists who merely planned and never fought.

Iwo was known as the "Doorstep to Japan." The small piece of terrain was only four miles long, (twelve square miles total), and resembled a pear. With the dormant volcano Suribachi, 550 feet tall on the southern tail of the island or the stem of the pear, the island spread in shape to the northeast. Fine gray volcanic ash covered the landing beaches just below Suribachi to the right and left.

From there, the terrain rose in a series of plateaus, earlier covered with scrub brush, but now blasted by six weeks of aerial bombardment by B-24s, it was a smoking, blasted wilderness of crags, caves, and canyons, ending in jagged ridges overlooking the sea to the north. It was definitely not the idyllic picture of the South Pacific held by so many in the 1940s. In fact, many who were there stated that Hell itself must bear some resemblance to the bleak, barren island. Many felt that the grey barrenness with its shell holes had to bear resemblance to the surface of the moon.

The gray ash, the nauseating sulfuric smell, the warped, grotesque foliage, the crags and crevices occasionally emitting yellowish and green clouds of volcanic gases painted a garish nightmare of desolation and death. It has been said that the first question to enter the mind of those arriving on the island was how to get off of it! Certainly the suffering by both sides in the fighting was hellish, to say the least.

To prepare for the invasion, an extensive and prolonged aerial bombardment was carried out by the 7th USAAF from the Marianas. In addition the island was subjected to 3 days of incessant naval bombardment. The task of taking Iwo Jima was given to the 5th Amphibious Corps, which included the 3rd, 4th and 5th Marine Divisions.

Even though the preliminaries had eliminated a number of deadly enemy gun positions, units of the 4th and 5th Divisions were hit hard by very accurate defensive fire. By the end of the day, over 2,000 of the troops of the landing force were casualties. Nevertheless, before February 19th was over, the Marines had cut the island in two and isolated Suribachi.

The Marines of the 3rd Division took Suribachi on February 23rd. What followed was a grueling, destructive, painfully slow advance up the island of death that went on day after day. Advances were measured by yards, and sometimes by feet. And this continued day after dreadful day. During the first week, mortarmen alone fired over 32,000 shells. Joining in the daily attacks was naval gunfire, close air support, artillery and

rocket barrages.

Ultimately, however, it was the Marine soldier or engineer, throwing hand grenades, planting satchel charges, or triggering flamethrowers that would win the day. It was the rifleman, bayonet fixed, that would take on a fanatical enemy in hand to hand combat that gained ground. Nimitz later said, "Uncommon valor was a common virtue." One Marine who fought on Iwo Jima gave this description of his feelings about the fighting. "It takes courage to crawl ahead, 100 yards a day, and get up the next morning, count losses, and do it again. But it's the only way."

It had been anticipated that it would be a matter of days to conquer the island. Instead, three full Marine Divisions, over 50,000 men, advancing abreast, slowly moved forward. Instead it would be over four weeks before the island could be declared secure. Finally, at the end, much as Hitler had done with von Paulus at Stalingrad, Hirohito promoted Kuribayashi to full general. It is not known whether he received the news or not. On March 24th he sent a last transmission to fellow soldiers on Chichi Jima, a nearby island. It was simple. "Goodbye." No trace of him was ever found.

It Begins

"Operation Detachment" was the name given to the campaign to take Iwo Jima. It would be the lot of the Fourth and Fifth Marine Divisions to go ashore first. The Third would be held in reserve off the island. This would be the largest single Marine Force ever assembled in history. Iwo Jima would be the fourth amphibious assault landing for the 4th Marine Division. The 3rd Division had gained hard experience in the fighting at Bougainville and Guam. The 5th was the newcomer to the war, but had been fleshed out by experienced fighters from former Marine Raiders and paratroopers. They formed the nucleus of a fine-tuned division.

February 19th, 1945. The morning began bright and clear. A cloudy haze lay over the island of Iwo Jima. Enormous shells crushed the air as they traveled miles to crash into the island's harsh terrain. Hellcats, Corsairs and Avengers carved fiery paths through the sand and rocks. The smoke rising from the early morning bombardment formed an evil umbrella over the silent brooding piece of enemy real estate. To the south sat Mount Suribachi like a squatting giant toad. The black sands of the beaches could be seen with peaks of the higher elevations to the north. It was a day designed for invasion and the Marines were ready!

The first waves, after a final massive naval bombardment moved with clockwork precision. The first landing craft moved through the Line of Departure at precisely 8:30 AM on February 19th, 1945. The leading assault wave was composed of LVTas, which were more of an amphibious armored fighting vehicle. They did not transport troops, but instead armed with 37 and 75mm cannon, would onto the beaches first. They were supported on their flanks by rocket firing LCIs. In two-minute intervals, the following waves of Marines would land.

Leaping from their landing craft, the Marines found themselves sinking to their ankles in the fine volcanic ash. Many of the lead assault vehicles could not maneuver the fifteen-foot terrace. This sudden elevation also blocked fields of fire for the AFVs. The landing beaches on the west side of the island extended north and east for about 3,500 yards from the base of Suribachi.

The Fifth Marine Division, landing to the south, would drive straight ahead to the west coast, splitting off Suribachi from the rest of the island. It was the task of the 28th Marine Regiment to take the volcanic heights. The Fourth Division would turn to the north and get the First airfield under American control immediately.

General Kuribayashi had studied carefully former US assaults and had determined that he would not seriously contest the beach landings. Once ashore, however, it would be a different story. To appease those in the High Japanese Command, he committed a battalion of troops to defensive positions just off the beaches. Naval gunfire and intense naval air support had wiped out nearly all of these defenders before the first LVTs touched the volcanic ash of the Iwo shore.

For the first few minutes following the initial landings, the enemy fire was light and intermittent. As the morning progressed, this changed rapidly. Within 90 minutes over 2,000 Marines had climbed those dark beaches. The island had been crossed from west to east. But that was enough. Kuribayashi's men were ready. They knew when to open up, and they did. As though a flag had been dropped, the Japanese defensive fire suddenly began, grew in intensity and accuracy until the entire beach area was under intense

bombardment. One battalion commander commented, "You could have held up a cigarette and lit it on the stuff going by."

And that was just the beginning. Some of the fire came from Suribachi itself, looking right down the throat of the landing Marines. Then to their north artillery of all calibers belched their payloads of death to pre-registered areas on and off the beaches. Huge 320mm Japanese mortars lobbed 700-pound shells on the beaches. Other less spectacular artillery and machine gun fire rained white-hot steel all over the invaders.

It was a horrible place to be and there seemed to be no place to hide. General Cates, commander of the 4th Division, watched the grim fireworks from the bridge of his flagship, the troop transport "Bayfield." He cursed and screamed as he watched his men ripped apart. He shouted to Robert Sherrod, war correspondent, " Look at that murderous fire on our Yellow beaches! There goes another hit square on a tank – burned him up!"

Men bled and died by the dozen. Sergeant Manila John Basilone, Medal of Honor recipient for his heroism on Guadalcanal, was now attached to the Fifth Marine Division. Leading his heavy machine gun squad from the landing craft, he shouted, "Let's get this stuff off the beach!" His gunners responded, sprinting up the beach toward the inland terraces. Their feet sank to their ankles in the soft, warm ash. The soles of their combat boots sensed the heat, the calves in their legs strained to break their bodies free. Then a blinding flash announced a mortar shell landing in their footprints. Manila John was suddenly no more. Neither were four of his men. They were ripped apart by concussion and zinging pieces of hot metal.

By now Sherman tanks were landing. Steel mesh, "Marston matting," had been placed over the ash to give the tanks some traction. It worked well, but quickly wore out from the pressure and grinding of the tracked monsters. As they began to maneuver inland a number were either destroyed or crippled by well placed large antitank mines.

Even naval torpedoes had been placed perpendicular into the ground with a special warhead to cause them to detonate with a blinding roar. When a tank tripped one of those, it simply disappeared. Even though the bigger part of the 4th and 5th tank battalions got on shore the first day, a number of them were taken out by every type of enemy gun and mine available.

By the evening of the first day, nearly 30,000 Marines with most of their equipment were on the bloody shores, but 2,000 of the initial landing force were casualties. Equipment on shore did not mean equipment at hand. Earlier in the day, one young naval officer was sitting on the beach with reams of paper to check in what was reaching the island. As cries for "ammo" echoed back to him, he left his papers, grabbed boxes of .30-caliber ammunition and headed inland.

Essential cargo-ammo, water, and food were a sprawling chaos. All about were gore, flesh and body parts. Many commented that never had they seen such a mangling of human flesh. Often one could only differentiate between American and Japanese by their footwear. Nothing above the knees (if it was there!) was identifiable.

One correspondent described what he saw. "Whether the dead were Japs or Americans, they had one thing in common. They had died with the greatest possible violence. Nowhere in the Pacific War had I seen such badly mangled bodies. Many were cut squarely in half. Legs and arms lay fifty feet from the nearest cluster of dead." Added now the stench of sulfur was the smell of blood and death.

Night brought very little relief to the intensity of the fighting. Bone-weary Marines waited nervously for a counterattack, a "Banzai" charge to materialize out of the darkness. It never came. Snipers continued to pick off careless Americans. The artillery, preregistered, continued to fire through the inky blackness.

Huge enemy rockets began their course across the night sky, initially filling the Marines with terror. Their sound was blubbering sound and red sparks trailed them. They turned out to be no danger, all of them overshooting the beaches and falling into the ocean. Soon the Americans began to joke contemptuously about them, calling them "Bubblie Wubblies." They did not joke about the other guns. They were proving far too deadly.

With the passing of the first day and night, Marines were on the island. They owned a space 4,000 yards

wide from north to south, 1,000 yards where the island had been crossed on the left and over 400 yards on the right flank.

The Fighting goes on…Painfully

For the next week, progress was painfully slow. The first airfield was taken in two days. Attacks against Suribachi were begun to take the pressure off the Marine advance with guns firing at their backs. The bulk of the force began the taking the fight to the heart of the evil island. On February 23rd, the American flag suddenly flutters from atop the volcano. Men all over the island see it and cheer. Some weep. Some cannot see it. They cannot see anything anymore. It is a momentous occasion and one that goes into the history books as a highpoint in Marine history, complete with photographs.

Corporal Tony Stein was a real weapons expert. He had devised is own special gun, an air-cooled machine gun he had lifted from a Navy fighter. He had even named it. He called it "the Stinger." It was a heavy weapon, but the Corporal could handle it. He carried on his hip with a leather shoulder strap. Attached all over his body were short belts of 30-caliber ammunition. Lunging on shore and heavily weighted down with his Stinger and rounds of ammunition, he covered the advance of his entire platoon with deadly accuracy.

He lashed out at pillbox after pillbox, killing twenty Japanese. During the firefight, Stinger was shot from his hands twice. He picked it up and continued his little war. Running out of ammo, he tossed his helmet aside, shucked his shoes and socks and ran to the beach to get more. He repeated this eight times. He made the trip to the beach count too, assisting some wounded comrade to aid. Increased enemy resistance forced his platoon back. He covered them with Stinger.

On his ninth trip, the enemy finally caught him in the open and shredded his left shoulder with mortar shrapnel. When told he would be evacuated, he refused. Told it was an order, he grudgingly boarded an LCM headed out from shore. Once on board the troop transport, he was given medical attention. The next morning he heard that his unit was being chopped to pieces in their fight over the first airfield. He sneaked aboard and LST going ashore and returned to his outfit. Stinger was waiting for him. He went back to the hell that was Iwo Jima.

On March 1st, 1945 his company was in action in the fighting for Hill 362A, in the center of the island. The enemy fire was deadlier than it had ever been. Even tanks could not make progress. Stein volunteered to lead a patrol to find a weakness in the Japanese defenses and relieve the pressure on his buddies. Nineteen men headed out, led by Stein. He would not be one of the nine survivors who returned. Finally the deadly Japanese bullet that had sought him for so long found its mark and he died where he fought.

By February 26th, Airfield # 2 was taken. Losses were heavy, especially in armor. In a week, the three tank battalions were reduced by a third. Mines, placed in the ground and carried by Japanese soldiers, along with well-hidden antitank guns, laid waste to the Shermans and Stuarts. A tank crewman was given less than a 20 percent chance of surviving the fighting for Iwo Jima. Marines of the Fourth Division attempted to take Charlie Dog Ridge to the north of the airfield, but were driven back. On the next day, they finished the job. It had taken a week to advance a mile up the island and there was no let up in enemy fire.

A course of action for the three divisions had now been defined. The Fourth and Fifth Divisions moved ahead on a broad front. The Third would be held in reserve and exploit any opening forged by the two leaders. There was little room for maneuver. It was a straight-ahead fight. General Howlin Mad Smith later described the attack. "It was an operation of one phase and one tactic. From the time the engagement was joined until the mission was completed it was a matter of frontal assault maintained with relentless pressure."

An intense series of Japanese defenses covered the area from east to west around airfield #2. Here the Fifth Division would struggle against an evil pocket known as Hill 382. To the east, the Fourth ran into the knives of what would be called "The Meatgrinder." Defensive strongpoints also earned their own deadly titles. They included The Hill, the Amphitheater and Turkey Knob. This was some of the highest ground on Iwo and infested with pillboxes, bunkers and machine gun pits One regiment took on each one of the three positions.

In each case the regiments reached the summits with relative ease, they were surprised to catch harsh enemy fire in their rear. Well-hidden pillboxes opened up in back of the attackers and decimated their ranks. The same scene was repeated in all three strongpoints. It became so bad that all units were forced to pull

back and lose the ground they had gained. During the night the Japanese returned and retook their original positions.

The next day the fighting began again. For seven days (February 25-March 3rd) it continued without letup. Marines took so many casualties that 400 pints of whole blood were used on the battlefield in a single day! To the left, the Fifth Division became innovative and rolled 55-gallon drums of gasoline and aviation fuel into Japanese positions, then fired into them, roasting the enemy. Rocket trucks were brought up to pummel the hillside. The defenders died to the last man.

On March 1st, what appeared to be the last Japanese alive on the hill popped out of a cave. He tapped a grenade on his helmet. The Marines nearby ducked for cover, then looked. The enemy soldier was crouching, holding the grenade to his ear, as if listening for something. He then tapped it again and put it back his ear. Nothing. He tapped it a third time. This time it exploded. The central defensive belt had crumbled.

A Break in the Line
By March 3rd, significant breakthroughs had been achieved. On Nishi Ridge, the remaining Japanese defenders, contrary to orders, launched a local suicide charge right into the 1st Battalion, 28th Regiment, Fifth Division's positions. For nearly two hours, men fought and died staring into each other faces as they did so. Bayonet, entrenching tool and fists were the weapons of choice. All of the Japanese attackers were killed.

On outpost duty some twenty yards ahead of the main Marine defensive line, two young Americans endured a nightmare. Sergeant William G. Harrell and PFC Andrew J. Carter were on duty in the darkness. They were close friends. Carter was watching while Harrell catnapped. Spotting shadows moving nearby, Carter nudged Harrell and warned him. He then expended a clip of ammo from his M-1 and took out four Japanese soldiers. Harrell, now fully awake, killed another two. Carter's rifle then jammed. He whispered to Harrell that he was going for another rifle. And disappeared into the darkness.

The sergeant maintained the vigil, picking off Japanese and preventing the charge from enveloping his company. Suddenly a grenade thudded into his hole. He felt for it in the darkness. It detonated, nearly severing his left hand from his arm. His legs were peppered with shrapnel and one was broken. He felt that his entire body had been shattered. It had.

Carter returned to the position moments later. As Harrell told him of his wounds, two Japanese appeared at their foxhole. One was an officer, wielding a saber. The other held a sputtering grenade. Carter aimed the borrowed rifle, but it misfired. Leaping up, he drove the bayonet into the throat of the officer, but the sword was coming down with great force and cut almost all the way through his wrist. Harrell fired his .45 with his good right hand into the other enemy soldier. His head literally exploded.

Collapsing back against the wall of his hole, Harrell felt he was dying. Carter was unarmed and in bad shape. Harrell told Carter that he would not make it and ordered him to leave. The PFC argued but knew he had no choice. "I'll be back with help" he said, stuffed his nearly amputated hand into his tunic for support and again vanished in the darkness. Harrell, now alone and with only his .45, prepared himself to die. He had eight rounds left and he was determined to kill eight more Japs before he would give in.

Suddenly a Japanese soldier jumped into the hole with him. Another appeared above him. Harrell could smell the foul breath of his enemy less than a yard away. The Japanese armed a grenade and placed it at Harrell's feet. He then started to crawl out of the hole. The .45 cracked. The intruder fell back into the hole with a scream and began convulsing. Grabbing the grenade at his feet with his good hand, Harrell shoved it into the belly of the other enemy soldier above him. It detonated, killing the enemy and carrying away the sergeant's right hand. He passed out from the pain and loss of blood.

Carter returned at first light and viewed the carnage along with the patrol accompanying him. They quickly put Harrell on a litter and got him first aid. Carter placed the sword on the stretcher beside the badly wounded buddy. They would later be called the "Two Man Alamo" of the Fifth Division.

For their courageous sacrificial actions, Carter would receive the Navy Cross and Harrell would have the Medal of Honor hung from his neck by President Harry Truman at the White House on October 5th, 1945. As the President decorated the sergeant, his eyes were fixed on the bright metal hooks where Harrell's

hands used to be. "All I can say, Sergeant," Truman whispered, "is that this medal is small enough tribute for what you have given for your country."

The End in Sight

On March 4th, Kuribayashi sent an urgent message to the homeland. He called for aircraft and warships to come to his aid and scatter the bombarding enemy ships. "Without these things, I cannot hold." He would not get them. The only strong reaction from the sea had come on February 21st, when kamikaze attacks on the fleet sunk the carrier Bismarck Sea, badly damaged the Saratoga and achieved significant hits on the carrier Lunga Point, an LST and a transport ship. On board the transport were the UDT teams that had survived a pre-invasion inspection of the shores. More of them would die on that ship than had died in their earlier mission.

It was that same day that a B-29 Superfort, "Dinah-Mite," radioed Iwo Jima. Sgt. James Cox took the transmission.

"This is Iwo. What is your trouble?"
"We are running low on gasoline. Can you give us a bearing for Iwo?"
"Course 167 for 28 miles. Do you prefer to ditch offshore to try to land?"
"We prefer to land."

Cox went outside and saw a small black cylinder far out on the horizon materialize into the stricken big bird. The pilot, Lt. Raymond Malo, circled the island twice, and then made a perfect landing on runway #1. The cheering of the watching Marines was as loud as the roar of the four engines when it touched down.

The first B-29 had made an emergency landing on the island that was proving so costly to the Marine invaders. It was the first of 2,251 Superforts with 24,761 airmen who made emergency landings on Iwo. Undoubtedly, some of these men were saved more than once, since there were only 600 B-29s based in the Marianas. Still, it put into perspective in graphic fashion the "why" of Iwo Jima to the fighting, dying Marines.

With an opening wedge driven through the central enemy defenses, the Third Marine Division advanced straight to the north. Another week of hard fighting would secure the islands northern extremes. Marines were now in control from one end of Iwo to the other. There were, however dozens of pockets of resistance that would have to be eliminated and at great cost.

On March 9th, a patrol of the Third Division clambered down the rocks of the heights to the north and filled a canteen with the sea water there. They sent it to General Schmidt, commanding all Marine forces with the inscription, "For inspection, not consumption." It was a classic testimony to the fighting determination of these brave warriors.

The night prior to this, on March 8th, Major Ikeda was unable to communicate with his commander. Sensing all was lost, he prepared his men with hidden supplies of sake. Now obsessed with a spirit of martyrdom, he led nearly 1,000 of his soldiers in a mad charge against the 21st Regiment of the 3rd Division. Their plan was to break through Marine lines, penetrate to airfield #1 and destroy aircraft and installations with explosives that were tied around their waist. The fighting was some of the harshest the island had seen to date.

Marines, who had never seen their enemy now stared into his crazed eyes, heard his shrieking "Banzai" or "Maline, now you die" cries, and fought him hand to hand. All the attackers were dead before the dawn. Many of those with explosives tied to their bodies became human bombs detonated prematurely by grenades and accurate M-1 fire.

On the night of March21st, Kuribayashi radioed Major Horie on Chichi Jima. "We have not eaten or drunk for five days. But our fighting spirit is still running high." Three days later, another short message was sent. "All officers and men of Chichi Jima – Goodbye."

The next night some 300 remaining fighting men from the northwest corner made a silent assault on the remaining American forces on the island. This time they did not shriek or howl, but moved quietly down the west coast to the beaches. There they fell upon the buildings of the USAAF's VII Fighter Command. The attack was totally unexpected and dozens of American troops, untrained in infantry fighting, were

slaughtered. Next they came upon the 5th Pioneer Battalion, an all black outfit. This time they were attacking men who knew how to stand toe to toe with them. 1st Lt. Harry L. Martin quickly organized a skirmish line from is black marines. In the darkness they beat back one charge, then two more. Armed with only a pistol, he attacked an enemy machine gun position, killing all four crewmembers with his small weapon. When he led a counterattack against another group of enemy soldiers, a grenade ended his life. He would be awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his courage in that dark hour.

Expensive Real Estate

Total Marine casualties were nearly 24,000, of which 5,000 gave their lives. Nearly the entire Japanese garrison in what may have been the most heavily fortified position in history was wiped out. It was the most expensive battle in terms of lives in which the United States Marines would be engaged. It was a proud but costly moment in history for these men and their corps.

General Erskine, commander of the Third Division dedicated the cemetery of the Third and Fourth Division with these words.

"Let the world count our crosses!" he cried.
"Let them count them over and over. Then when they understand the significance of the fighting for Iwo Jima, let them wonder how few there are. We understand and we wonder – we who are separated from our dead by a few feet of earth; from death by inches and fractions of inches.

"The cost to us in quality, one who did not fight side with those who fell, can never understand."

How true, how true!

Some question the value of elite fighting forces. Others wonder if the Marine Corps should be so classified. It has been stated as a military maxim that casualties of 30 percent are usually the most a fighting unit can endure without losing its combative spirit. That would mean that a squad of 13 men would suffer in its combat effectiveness with a loss of four of its members. The Marines at Tarawa suffered 40 percent casualties and took the island.

At Peleliu, they lost 56 percent of their force. On Iwo Jima, the 26th Marines lost 76 percent; on Okinawa, the 29th Marines suffered 81 percent casualties. Still they fought. Still they threw tenacious defenders into the water or into their graves. They fought an enemy who would not surrender. They struggled against stout defenses of palm log, concrete and steel. Enduring the worst of climates and geographical factors many times outnumbered by as much as six to one, they continued to fight.

If nothing else, the study in the islands war in the Pacific should make all aware of the rare courage and sacrificial spirit of the Americans who fought there. The United States Marines of World War II were undoubtedly some of the finest fighting men ever to be fielded in the world of mortal combat.

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Diary Of A Dead Man

Found in a burned out bunker at Tarawa (Fiction)
By Wild Bill Wilder

(This is a hypothetical diary with the last entry of Private Yamishura, located in the central command bunker of Colonel Shibasaki on Betio Island during the Marine assault in November, 1943. After the bunker had been destroyed by gasoline and dynamite thrust down the air vents, a bulldozer tank sealed all the exits. Once the island was secure, the bunker was reopened and over 100 dead Japanese soldiers were found within.)

This is the third day that the white devils try to destroy us. My hopes ran high on the first day, as high as the strong western breezes that run the fleecy clouds across the evening sky. Now those hopes have died, as many of my friends, in the horror of blasting and burning.

Commander Shibasaki is a strange man. With all hope gone, his enthusiasm is higher than ever. Here in this cramped, darkened bunker, filled with flesh, both healthy and sick, he urges us to remain true to our commitments. Yet I wonder sometimes, as I think of the dainty flower who is my woman, is this the way to make the sacrifice for the Emperor? Could there not be another way to make one's life a more valuable contribution? Oh, well, it is all too late now!

The shells have been falling like a heavy rain since the sun came up. They thunder around us, muffled by the thickness of the walls that protect us. Word reaches us that one of our two remaining tanks has just been hit by an artillery round and exploded. Each time one of these shells hits our bunker, it groans and shudders. Sand and dirt pour down upon us. The air, fills with the stench of gun smoke, dried blood, silt, and the dysentery that seems to grip so many. How many of us are in here? I can't count them, but it is too many!

Now the men at the apertures are firing. The cannon roars again and again. The machine guns chatter, and shells clatter on the packed earthen floor. Somoya, my good friend calls me to the opening from which he is firing. He tells me to look to the right. There is an American tank with smoke pouring from beneath it. Americans are climbing from within. They are doomed. The heavy machine gun rips them apart. They have no chance. One lies there very still now, with smoke still drifting up from his tunic.

Suddenly all three bunkers are under attack. One of the sergeants screams that American Marines are on the roof. My squad is ordered up the ladder and onto the roof to stop them. Grabbing our weapons, we quickly move up to the door at the top. As it pops open, rays of sunshine temporarily blind us. We clamber out in the open.

Nearby are American Marines. Some of them have what appear to be small suitcases and are gathering around the air vents. We open fire at once, and they do likewise. As I raise my rifle, its stock is suddenly shattered. It seems to fall apart. Then I can see nothing but a red glaze as a sharp pain rips into my stomach.

It is like a liquid fire that spreads throughout my entire body. I cannot stand. Lying on the roof of the bunker, I feel the coolness of the packed earth. Another soldier grabs my legs and pulls me back through the opening. As he does, my vision clears and I see legs all around me, some of my own men, others with the darker green. There are grunts and screams as men struggle violently with one another to kill and survive.

As I snake through the opening, I am passed from one man on the ladder to another, and roughly dropped to the floor of the bunker. Another soldier, whom I do not know, presses a dirty shirt onto my stomach and puts my hand over the wound.

"Hold it there!" he screams, and then returns to his post. There are wounded everywhere. The end must be near. Since I feel that there are only moments to be lived in this life, I am writing hurriedly what is happening here. Now I can smell petrol, acrid and strong. It fills the air. They have poured fuel into our vents. It is over. Goodbye, my Blossom. You will be my last thought as the..."

Epilogue: The charred remains of Private Yamashita along with those of another hundred or so Japanese were found in the battered stronghold of Shibasaki's headquarters. They had died at their post, defending to

the death the honor of Japan.

Look At Those Tanks Fight

By Wild Bill Wilder

The first offensive by the United States in the Pacific that would ultimately determine the initiative of the war occurred in the Solomon Islands at the end of the summer of 1942. It would be the invasion of Guadalcanal. Most people have heard of the island, with its momentous battles, but few are aware of other conflicts in the area around it.

There were other islands in the area that would have to be taken to assure the possession of Guadalcanal. They included Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo. These former British possessions overlooked the area and could become a possible threat later. Tulagi was thought to be the strongest of the three and would be attacked by the 1st Marine Raider Battalion under Colonel Mike Edson. The smaller islands of Gavutu and Tanambogo were believed to be garrisoned also by a smaller enemy force.

The defenders were a mixed force of troops, including SNLF, some construction workers, and some units belonging to the Yokahama Air Group in charge of the operation of the seaplane base there. Only the Special Naval Landing Force soldiers (equivalent to our Marines) were well trained fighting men. In such limited space, however, every man would be forced to fight. There was no place to go. It was fight and die right here. The total number of Japanese on the two islands was a little over 500 men.

It was decided that hitherto untested Marine paratroopers of the First Marine Parachute Battalion, backed by units of the Second Marine Regiment would have the task of conquering these tiny sprits of land. Gavutu was only 800 yards long and about 300 yards wide. Tanambogo was even smaller. Both were dominated by precipitous hills, which were actually volcanic outgrowths. The commander of the operation, Major Robert H. Williams, was concerned about the success of the operation, but enthused at the possibility of the Marine sky troopers proving their merit in battle.

Day One

Due to a shortage in landing craft, the Marines destined for Tulagi would be landed first; then the paratroopers would be taken in at about noon on August 7th. After preliminary bombardments by the light cruiser San Juan and the destroyers Monsson and Buchanan, the first wave carrying A Company headed to the shores of Gavutu.

The troops arrived largely without incident. The island's defenders seemed to be stupefied by the naval shelling. As the second and third waves headed in, however, the enemy began to respond with heavy small arms fire and rounds from antiboat guns. The firing came from hill 148 and the neighboring Tanamabogo. Major Williams was hit as he stepped from his landing craft and the command fell on the battalion's adjutant, Major Charles A. Miller.

Men began dying on the thin strip of beach, and the only solution was to move inland, even under fire. Slowly the Marines advanced, clearing the pier areas, where snipers sent bullets pinging off rocks, landing craft, and other buildings. The killing continued, and finally by mid-afternoon, a squad of A Company controlled the top of Hill 148. Sitting on that hill was similar to sitting on top of a volcano. Underneath some two dozen caves and trenches harbored Japanese. These caves would be reduced by explosive charges connected to long poles. Many were pushed into position by a huge blond engineer captain, Harry Torgeson. On the first attempt, his own trousers were blown off of him. When his men

pointed out his bare behind, he replied, "Don't worry about it! Let's get the next one!"

As the sunk began to sink behind Savo Island, there still remained the problem of Tanambogo. General Rupertus, Assistant Division Commander, called for air strikes on the islet, and directed Captain Crane of Dog Company to boat up and assault at dusk. Rupertus rejected protests from lesser ranking officers arguing that it would be far safer to wait until the next day, and the operation was on.

Crane's marines were met by murderous fire as the boats approached the landing point. Only one managed to beach; its occupants were shot to pieces. The other two, holed in half a dozen places, hastily withdrew to Gavutu. Those few who remained alive without transport retreated across the connecting causeway between the two islands, dodging and ducking as they ran. Tanambogo would have to wait.

Deep within the mountains of Guadalcanal, the noise of invasion cheered the spirit of Captain W.F. Martin Clemens, the coastwatcher. August 7th was a climatic moment for the Britisher. In his own words,

"I could hardly realize that help had come at last, and yet instinctively, I knew that it had...At five past twelve I picked up a message that marines had landed on Gavutu-so that's who they were. I had heard tell of the American Marines, but had never met them at close quarters...All day came a continuous glowing account of din and destruction. I heard over the air, 'I see a truck, I see two trucks, I see a hell of a lot of trucks! Sweep in low and you'll get a good haul.' I couldn't stand it any longer...I just had to see what was going on, Japs or no Japs!"

On Tanambogo, the few Marines that had made it ashore were now trying to get away. There were no boats available. They had either been sunk or withdrawn, due to intense enemy fire. It was now too dark to use naval fire or air support. For the Marines who were left, there was no escape except by wading or swimming, and there had to be covering fire.

All through the fearful night a little knot of thirteen Marines held the pier position, while their buddies slipped across the causeway. Finally just before dawn, the survivors also made it back across carrying their dead and wounded.

Day Two

Early the next day, reinforcements were sent into the battle. The Third Battalion came to Gavutu, as did C Company of the Second Tank Battalion and A Company of the Second Amphibian Tractor Battalion. Pack howitzers of the Third Battalion, 10th Marines, were dragged ashore. On the steep hill on Tanambogo, a Japanese flag arrogantly fluttered in the breeze. In anger, a Marine on the other island of Gavutu found some Stars and Stripes, and soon had them flying from atop Hill 148 in defiance.

With the dawning of the second, hot and humid, the Marines began to go into action. Machine guns on the beach of Gavutu opened up on the neighboring island. The destroyer Monsson moved in close and opened fire on the beaches of Tanambogo.

On the afternoon of the eighth, Captain William Tinsley, a tough Kentuckian, led I Company onto the oil and blood stained beach. With him came Lieutenant Robert Sweeney, putting his two Stuart tanks ashore. At the same time, K Company began crossing the coral causeway between the two islets.

The Japs fought back on both fronts. Their machine guns swung back and forth across the causeway like flaming windshield wipers. Even as one Marine dropped and then another, the members of K Company pressed onward. As they reached the end of the connector, Japanese rose out of hiding and suddenly the fighting was with bayonet, rifle butt, fists and teeth, man against man, and steel against steel.

At the same time, Tinsley's Company was also involved in close in fighting. Sensing the difficulty of the battle, he shouted at his company exec, 2nd Lieutenant Orval Jackson, "Where are those damn tanks?" Then like the cavalry galloping to the rescue, the two Stuarts rolled into the battle, all guns roaring.

To the surprise of the Americans, the Japanese did not seem to be afraid. Instead, they crowded around the two armored monsters with poles and crowbars to immobilize them. As the enemy charged toward

them, the 37mm cannon and machines of both tanks cut them to pieces. Even as some fell, other rushed into their place. Neither the tanks nor the supporting riflemen seemed to be able to halt the attack.

Lieutenant Sweeney opened the turret to better survey the situation, and immediately took a round through the head. He crumpled back into the turret hatch opening. At the same moment, a crowbar was thrust between the tread and drive wheel, and the tank ground to a halt. The remainder of the crew bailed out into a host of Japs, some armed with pitchforks and machetes.

By this time the marine raiders had gotten close enough to kill all the Japanese involved in the assault on Sweeney's tank with bullet and bayonet. The second tank, in the meantime, went into reverse to put some distance between it and the enemy and got hung up on a fallen coconut tree. Then an ingenious Japanese officer doused it with gasoline. In a moment, flames leaped from the tank engine compartment and its crew was forced into the open. The same gruesome fate awaited them.

Fortunately, an infantry squad following close behind the tank opened up on the Japanese attackers. Two of the eight crewmembers survived, although both were shot, badly burned and cut from numerous bayonet wounds. Robert Sweeney was one of the two survivors. He was evacuated and later transported to Tulagi Island at the newly established marine hospital. He survived the battle, but his wounds would out of the war and back to the United States.

The next day, forty-two dead Japanese were found all around the two tanks. They had fought well and probably turned the course of the battle. Sweeney had demonstrated courage beyond words and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his participation in the battle. Although not a Medal of Honor winner, he certainly deserves a place in the archives of heroes.

Captain Tinsley, angry at the loss of his men and the two tanks, ordered the first American bayonet charge of the war, and his men rushed into the Japanese defensive positions, firing, cutting, jabbing and cursing. The charge was so intense that even the fatalistic enemy could not resist it, and fled. Those that did not died where they stood. During the hours of darkness, Marine patrols scoured the tiny island and wiped out one enemy pocket after another. By the morning of the 9th, the final mopping up was completed. Both tiny islands were now fully owned by the American Marines.

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Tank Chatter

This material was taken from the book, "The United States Marine Corps in World War II by S. E. Smith")

Even though our focus is on the fighting on Guadalcanal, it is a fact that tanks even here had an impact on the outcome of Operation Watchtower. Armor would prove to be a vital factor in the success of the United States "island hopping campaign" from Guadalcanal to Okinawa.

To better understand just what went on inside these steel beasts and get a feel for what it was like, the following excerpt is included in this Mega Campaign. It comes from a document that was kept in Navy archives. It contains chatter from a tank company in action on Iwo Jima. The transmissions were captured by Navy radiomen on ships lying close off the island.

In the background of the transmissions, one could hear the chatter of machine gun fire. The voices of the men ranged from flat and authoritative, with moments of acid stress, to almost unbelievable male soprano during peaks of excitement. Red One is the tank company commander.

"This is Red One. Blue Two and Blue Three, move left a little, but be careful of the swamp."

This is Red Two, Red One. Heartburn says that he is ready to start shooting at those pillboxes."

"Tell Heartburn I can't receive him. You will have to relay. Tell him to give us a signal and we'll spot for him."

"Red Two, wilco."

"Heartburn, raise your fire. You're right into us."

"That's not Heartburn, Red Two. That's a high velocity gun from our left rear. I heard it whistle. Red One, out."

"Red Three, this is Red One. Can you see that gun that's shooting at us?"

"Red One, I think that our own gunfire."

"Dammit, it's not, I tell you. It's a high velocity gun and not a howitzer. Investigate over there on your left. But watch out for the infantry; they're right in there somewhere. Red Two, tell Heartburn, Down Fifty, Left Fifty."

"Red Two, wilco."

"Red Three, what are you doing? Go southwest."

" I am heading southwest, Red One."

"For Christ's sake, get oriented! I can see you, Red Three. You are moving northeast. Fox Love with hard left brake. Cross the road and go back up behind that house."

"But..."

"I don't know why I bother with you, Red Three! Yellow One, take charge of Red Three and get him squared away. And get that gun. Its too close!"

"Red One from Red Two. Heartburn wants to know if we are the front lines."

"Hell yes, tell him we're plenty front right now."

"This Red Two. Artillery on the way."

"Red One, wilco."

"Red One from Yellow One. I can see some Japs setting up a machine gun about a hundred yards to our right."

"Those are our troops, Yellow One. Don't shoot in there."

"The man at my telephone-I think he's an officer-says we have no troops in there."

"Yellow Two, go over there and investigate. Don't shoot at them. That man at your telephone probably doesn't know where the troops are. If they're Japs, run over'em."

"Yellow Two, wilco."

"Go ahead Yellow Two. What in God's name are you waiting for?"

"I'm up as far as I can go and still depress my machine guns."

"The hell with the machine guns. I told you to run over them. Run over them, Dammit! Obey your orders!"

"Yellow Two, wilco."

"Green Two, do a right flank and go up to the top of that hill. Keep in defilade. Red Two and Yellow One, open out a little more. Guide Right. Move out, now. And watch very closely; these troops are in a position to get into the same sort of trouble that they did yesterday. They're all screwed up, so be ready to move immediately."

"Green Three, where are you?"

"I'm on the left of the road, Red One, just below Green Two."

"Raise the muzzle of your gun so I can spot you."

"Green Three, wilco."

"I thought so. Move out some more. I can't tell whether you or Green One is at fault, but you are too close."

"Move over, Green Three! You're within ten yards of me now!"

"O.K. O.K., Green One. I'm movin'!"

"Yellow One, what have you to report on that machine gun?"

"Red One, a Jap stood up and threw a hand grenade at us so I gave him a squirt."

"Did you run over that gun like I told you?"

"No, Red One, we put an HE in it, and wrecked it. It's gone."

"Damn! Won't you people ever learn to conserve your ammunition?"

"All tanks, move out. Guide right and open out the interval to one hundred yards. Red Two and Red Three, you are too close. Why are you always too close? Open out to the left flank."

"Red One from Green Four. I am moving out to take a pillbox the infantry's pointed out. I will take care of it and let them catch up."

"Where is it, Green Four?"

"In that clump of bushes to my right. It's one of those coconut log things. It looks like it might be too strong to squash. Can you see it? Is it all right to fire in the slit?"

"Affirmative. But be careful."

"Wilco."

"See that mortar over there, Hap?"

"No I don't Fuzzy. Where?"

"To your right. I'm squirtin' now."

"O.K. I got it."

"Red One, this is Blue Two. I just passed six AA guns looked like they was in pretty good shape and just been deserted. I destroyed 'em anyhow."

"O.K. Blue Two, Wilco."

"Red One, this is Hairless. We've got some Japs bottled up in two caves in Target Area Four Baker. We'd like you to leave two tanks to watch them."

"You know damn well that's infantry work. We're a mobile unit, not watchdogs. Put your saki drinkers in there."

"O.K. Harry."

"Red One, out."

"All tanks, this is Red One. Start 'em up. Move out now. Guide right and form a shallow right echelon. As soon as we hit the flat ground around the airfield, spread out to 150 yard interval. All right, move out, move out."

The Goettge Patrol

By Wild Bill Wilder

In the first days of the Marine occupation of the northern end of Guadalcanal, a Japanese Naval Warrant officer was taken prisoner.

His interrogation was attended by Colonel Frank Goettge, divisional intelligence officer. The prisoner described that some of his comrades in the Kukum area were hungry, feeling abandoned and ready to surrender.

Since a white flag had been seen waving in the area, Goettge decided that a trip to the area might be productive. He talked with General Vandegrift who reluctantly gave permission for the effort.

The Goettge patrol set out on the morning of August 12th. They traveled in Higgins boats and disembarked at the mouth of the Matanikau River. It was composed of about 25 men, including some key members of the intelligence section of the 5th Marine Regiment. The rest were to serve as protection if things went wrong.

And they quickly did. Once landing Goettge set off in the lead with the prisoner tagging along with a rope around his neck. As soon as they began moving off the beach, a Japanese machine gun opened up, killing Goettge and the prisoner.

The flag that had been perceived as a surrender flag was actually a Japanese white battle flag, with the red "meatball" in the center. The enemy definitely did not have surrender in mind.

Thereafter ensued a harsh firefight as the surviving Marines drew themselves into a tight perimeter on the beach. A messenger was sent to get help. He swam to Red Beach, exhausted and cut badly from the coral.

One by one, the members of the Patrol were either killed or wounded. Two more Marines, seeing the hopelessness of the situation, they stripped and dove into the water, being fired upon as they swam away.

They too finally arrived at friendly lines and recounted that from the water, they could see the flash of sunlight as it glinted off something metal in the hands of the Japanese. It was caused by swords and bayonets hacking away at the still living but wounded Marines.

A new attitude seemed to grip the entire Division upon receipt of this report. The Japanese in their merciless killing of wounded Marines had set the tone. From this point, neither side would give quarter.

"Swords flashing in the sun," would remain imbedded in the minds of the Marines in all future engagements on the island. Few prisoners would be taken.

Saipan: Stepping Stone To Tokyo

The Mariana Islands, June 15, 1944
By Wild Bill Wilder

Steps to Invasion

Once firm control on the Marshall Islands was secured, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 12th, 1944, ordered Admiral Nimitz to proceed to the Marianas and occupy the 15 islands. There was a new purpose in taking these. They were considered Japan's "South Seas inner empire." Not only were they part of the process of advance across the vast body of water known as the Pacific Ocean, but their occupation served a special purpose.

All three of the major islands, Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, were large enough for numerous airstrips to be created. And these would not be ordinary airstrips. They were much bigger and much longer. They would serve as home for the newest weapon in the arsenal of the United States Army Air Force. It was a big winged bomber known as the "Superfortress." Its official designation was the B-29.

Being located only 1,500 miles from Japan, these mammoth warplanes would become the hammer with which the United States would begin pounding the home islands of Japan. Except for the daring Doolittle Raid with his small group of B-25 medium bombers flown of the deck of the aircraft carrier Hornet, the Japanese islands had remained far removed from the holocaust of war. That would soon change.

The three principal islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam would all have to be taken. It would not be an easy task. From Pearl Harbor to Eniwetok was a distance of 2,375 miles. It would be the forwarding staging base for the invasions in the Marianas, which were another 1,000 miles away in the other direction. Such an enterprise was formidable. The distance from the staging areas to the target meant that all the resources needed for the invasion would have to go together. There would be no shuttling of reinforcements or supplies. The distance was equivalent to launching an invasion against Europe from New York.

Admiral Nimitz had often contemplated taking the Japanese stronghold at Truk. These orders, however, superseded this strategy. The Marianas would form the central Pacific base from which operations could be launched toward the Philippines, Formosa, or the home islands themselves.

So if Truk would not be assaulted from the ground, Nimitz determined to destroy it from the air. On April 28th, 1944, huge flights of Hellcats from Task Force 58 roamed the skies over the Japanese bastion. Enemy planes responded to the challenge. In two days in a series of heated dogfights 59 of the defending fighters were shot down. Another 34 were destroyed in their nests on the ground. Only 12 flyable planes were left to the Japanese command.

Then came the American bombers. They completed their task with cruel efficiency. All the naval craft at Truk was annihilated. Everything on the airfields was obliterated. The Japanese fortress was so neutralized that air-sea rescues were performed in Truk Lagoon right under the noses of the enemy who was helpless to respond. Truk was finished. So were the Japanese strongpoints at Rabaul and Kavieng. These three "terrors" of the Pacific had now been effectively neutralized and posed no threat to the American advance in the Pacific. The outer defensive ring of the Japanese Empire had been crushed.

Now came the next step for the Admiral. It was a formidable task, but the feisty Nimitz was up to the task. He would have under his command some of the best leaders in the Pacific. Admiral Marc Mitscher would lead the fast carrier forces. The commander of the battleship fleet was Willis Augustus Lee. Admiral Ray Spruance would be in charge of the attacking Task Force. Richmond Kelly Turner would again orchestrate the landing operations. For the land forces General Holland Smith, grizzled chunky foul talking Marine for over 30 years was in command of all expeditionary forces. He also led the V Amphibious Corps. The assaulting infantry against the three islands would be the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions, with the US Army 27th Division in floating reserve. The 77th Army Division lay in reserve in distant Hawaii.

The Objective

There were 15 islands with the Mariana group. Saipan, Tinian, Guam and Rota were the primary targets. These were the islands Magellan had called Los Ladrones (The Thieves). A Spanish priest had renamed

them the Marianas to honor the Queen Maria Anna. Except for Guam, a United States possession since the Spanish-American War, the islands had been mandated to the Japanese after World War One. The United States had dutifully followed a treaty with Japan and not fortified Guam. It fell easily to the Japanese on December 10, 1941.

Saipan was the first and principal objective for the attack force. It is the largest island, with every type of terrain imaginable, including larger towns. The codename for the entire Mariana operation was "Forager." It was believed that about 20,000 Japanese defenders were located on the island. This was a serious underestimate. In reality, there were almost 30,000 under a divided command of Admiral Nagumo of Pearl Harbor fame and General Yoshitsugo Saito of the Japanese Army. Nagumo exercised control of the ground naval forces. Saito commanded the Japanese army troops, thus forming two separate and not too friendly command structures. These two leaders did not get along very well, and this would create defensive problems later.

Japan had throughout the war suffered a heated interservice rivalry that probably exceeded that which exists in all other countries. The defense of the Central Pacific area was no exception. Premier Tojo was an army man and was under constant scrutiny by Japanese naval leaders. In order to appease both sides in the issue of command, two separate forces were established in the Marianas, both under different commands. The lack of unified leadership and affable communications between Saito and Nagumo proved to be a constant detriment to the defensive operations both prior and during the US attacks on the islands.

The bulk of the defenders on Saipan were army troops. They numbered over 20,000. After April of 1944 practically no further reinforcements could get through to the islands. American submarines had formed a steel ring around the Marianas and blasted any transports trying to run the gauntlet. As late as June 6th, seven transports made a frantic run towards Saipan. The submarines Shark, Pintado and Pilotfish intercepted them. In a five day running attack, the American ships sank five of the transports with the Japanese losing nearly 2,000 soldiers and some much needed supplies.

So the Japanese leaders would make do with what they had. The army forces included most of the 43rd (Nagoya) Division, the 47th Independent Mixed Brigade and over 60 tanks of the 9th Tank Regiment. Under the command of Admiral Nagumo was the Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force, some Naval Guard troops and the men and planes of the 22nd Air Flotilla. His units numbered about 6,700.

Air bombardment began on June 11th; naval gunfire on June 13th. On the 15th landings began. The Marine 2nd Division moved into the northern half of the landing area on the left, and the 4th headed in on the south. A diversionary force had already moved toward Garapan to the north, but Admiral Nagumo did not fall for the ruse. The landings were about to occur precisely where he thought they would.

Smoke and haze obscured the view of Saipan from the sea. The island did not seem all that menacing. The Japanese, however, had carefully hidden their artillery on Mount Fina Susa, facing the beaches. They had thoroughly prepared for an invasion on the west coast, and the guns had been pre-registered with little colored flags in the water to mark the range.

The Landings Begin

As the invasion fleet drew closer, accurate counterbattery fire opened up on the larger ships. The battleship Tennessee took hits. More shells burst on the decks of the cruiser Indianapolis. The American warships lashed back. Then over 160 Navy aircraft shrieked downward to plaster the mountainside. LSTs moved to the rim of the surrounding coral reef and disgorged nearly 800 amtracs. Among them the newer models, such as the LVTA4 with an open turreted 75mm-assault gun. The purpose of this amphib was not to transport troops, but to provide protection for the other LVTs. It would form the advance wave, then move inland with the troops, much like a light tank. Some of the transport LVTs also moved into the trees ringing the beaches, carrying troops much like a personnel carrier. Accurate artillery fire, as well as satchel charges being tossed into the open LVTs soon discouraged such tactics. The Marines would get out and walk.

The Marine divisions had landed on either side of Aetna Point, and soon had swept along both sides of it. This formed a salient in the American lines that had to be neutralized. As more waves of troops moved in, antiboat guns from the point opened up on them. Soon a number of amtracs were either burning or sinking,

with dead or dying Marines spilled into the waters of the lagoon. Destroyers moved in close and fired into the hill. The battle raged all during the day, but by the end of it, over 20,000 men were on shore and consolidating their bridgehead. One thing was very clear. The Marines had landed and they were here to stay!

The Second Meeting At The Matanikau

Guadalcanal – October 25th, 1942

By Wild Bill Wilder

During the months of August and September, the United States Marines of the 1st Marine Division were just barely holding on to their positions at Guadalcanal. Some military leaders had begun to write off the invasion as a failure. Having been partially abandoned by the navy, under constant attack from land, sea and air, with little resupply and reinforcement, the situation for the Americans on the island seemed hopeless.

Nevertheless the Marines tenaciously held their ground against constant Japanese attack. On the other side, the enemy higher command simply considered the occupation of Guadalcanal a nuisance, a buzzing fly that needed to be swatted. Now they had discovered that it was not a fly, but an angry hornet with a mean sting.

About the time Admiral Halsey took over command of the forces around Guadalcanal, the Japanese Admiral Yamamoto met personally with General Hyakutake to reassure him that to retake the island he would have the support of four battleships, four carriers, and a host of other ships. He was ordered to end this situation once and for all.

Hyakutake, annoyed with the failures of his subordinates to do the job, transferred his headquarters to Guadalcanal. Ahead of him went the Sendai Division. He was pleased with his conversation with General Maruyama, commander of the Sendai.

The division's intelligence officer, Colonel Masumoto, having failed to obtain information on the sector of attack at the Matanikau by torturing a captured Marine, had beheaded the American in the honorable way and then started searching enemy bodies. A map was found showing numerous gaps in American lines at the Matanikau. Delighted, Hyakutake had copies of the map made for all subordinates, and ordered that the attack begin as soon as possible.

After landing far to the west of Henderson field, the Japanese force divided into three groups. They tortuously cut their way through the jungle to reach the Matanikau River. Once they drew near, Japanese artillery began to duel with American newly arrived 155mm Long Tom artillery.

They came out second best, badly mauled. The Japanese "Pistol Pete" had finally been silenced. Next, a series of uncoordinated attacks, first from the south and then the west were unable to breach American lines.

Maruyama came to the front at the river on October 24th. Even though the journey across country had cost him dearly in equipment and men, he felt confident that within two days he would be standing on Henderson Field, while his country's flag flew over it. He and his men were at the point on the map that indicated a gap in American lines. It was here that he would attack. How could he know that the map was a copy of one taken from a dead Japanese soldier by the Americans in August? No one had bothered to translate the notations in

English that told that the positions marked on the map were those held by the Japanese prior to the American invasion. In fact, the supposed gap into which he led his troops was filled with Chesty Puller's 1st Battalion of the 7th Marines.

In the pouring rain late in the evening of October 25th, the attack against supposedly weak American defenders began. The Marines opened fire against the attackers and charged toward the river. American and Japanese light tanks moved in closer to offer support.

Colonel Furumiya, in charge of his battalion was at the head of his troops, firing and shouting encouragement. He personally led the color company -the 7th- into the firing. Breaking through the wire and the enemy, they charged ahead. Inspired by the breakthrough, willing to follow their colors into hell, the Japanese soldier flowed toward the gap.

But the Marines closed it. Suddenly Furuyama and his men were cut off. Veering to the right, they headed directly into a group of heavy machine guns, led by Manila John Basilone. The gunners fired constantly into the horde of attacking enemy. As the barrels glowed red, Basilone screamed to his men to urinate into the water containers that cooled the guns. The guns continued to fire. So many enemy bodies piled up around the position that they had to be pushed away to clear the line of sight.

Basilone then raced back to headquarters to get more barrels and ammo. He was now barefoot and his feet squished through the deep muddy slime of the jungle. Running into Puller's CP, he gathered up spare barrels and half a dozen ammo belts, weighing fourteen pounds apiece. Back he raced to his position.

By now the Japanese had overrun two American machine guns and swung them around to try to attack the marine gunners. They could not figure out how make them fire and abandoned them. When Basilone returned, he found an abandoned gun, spread eagled it across his back, and ordered a crew to follow him.

They ran down the line and into a dozen enemy troops. It took only seconds to kill them all. Finding a better position, they set up the gun quickly and the slaughter continued. Basilone's efforts would earn him the Medal of Honor.

After hours of harsh fighting, with heavy casualties on both sides, the Japanese broke off the fight. They had lost too many tanks and men to continue the engagement. This would be the last major effort to retake Henderson Field. The tough Marines of the 1st Division had won their little war against all obstacles.

It was America's first major land victory against the Japanese Empire against overwhelming odds. Now it was clearly evident that the wily tenacious Japanese foot soldier was not invincible after all. By February of the next year, the Japanese evacuated their remaining soldiers on Guadalcanal and left it for the Americans.

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Guadalcanal, Hoyt
The Battle for Guadalcanal, Griffith
Challenge for the Pacific-Guadalcanal, Leckie
Guadalcanal-Starvation Island, Hammel

Henderson Field - Doing The Impossible

By Wild Bill Wilder

When the Marines began finishing the airfield on Guadalcanal, they had to rely on Japanese equipment to do the job. Most of the construction equipment and materials had sailed away to safety. Only one bulldozer had been left on the beach and few construction tools at all.

It was the task of the Marine 1st Engineer Battalion to get the field in shape for operations. They performed a miracle.

Beginning on August 9th, the engineers six enemy road rollers, four generators, six trucks, shovels and wheelbarrows and two rather exotic looking gasoline powered locomotives, that they renamed the "Toonerville Trollies."

By August 12th, a PBY landed on the airfield now called "Henderson Field." It had been named for the Marine Air Force Major Lofton Henderson who had been killed flying a TBF Avenger in the Battle of Midway.

A quick inspection and the field was declared fit for use. A week later a contingent of SBD Dauntlesses and F4F Wildcats from the auxiliary carrier Long Island zoomed in to land. The "Cactus Air Forces" was in business.

Mr Ishimoto

By Wild Bill Wilder

Prior to the Second World War, Lever Brothers had large coconut plantations located on Tulagi and also the northern coast of Guadalcanal. In addition to a small staff of Americans, a number of Japanese and native workers were employed. Among them was diminutive, arrogant Japanese carpenter known as "Mr. Ishimoto."

Martin Clemens, the British District officer on Guadalcanal, was in charge of the native constabulary. He had made the acquaintance of Mr. Ishimoto and taken an instant dislike to him. For that matter, Clemens disliked almost everything about his assignment, almost everything. He was a tall lanky Britisher in his early twenties. He was well respected in spite of his youth, especially by the natives of the island. They came to him with all their problems. He was kind to them, and they saw in him a good man, one to follow.

When hostilities broke out, it did not take long for the Japanese to arrive. By then most of the Europeans had departed. Clemens had stayed, now with a different role. He was now a coastwatcher. His assignment was to report Japanese movements through the Solomon Islands to the Allied Military authority. When asked if he would stay, Clemens replied to the natives in their pidgin, "No matter altogether Japan he come," he assured them, "me stop along you fellow." He formed a small but strong band of natives equipped with weapons and a strong will.

Among the arrivals was Mr. Ishimoto, now in the Japanese Navy, dressed in the uniform of a petty officer. He had been sent back to the island because of his knowledge of it. On May 28th, he arrived with an enemy scouting party. He slaughtered native cattle with machine guns, far more than what the Japanese needed. Then he inquired for the whereabouts of Mr. Clemens. His look was sinister and foreboding. All the natives agreed that Clemens had gone. Ishimoto was furious but could not ply any information from them.

After the Marines landed, little was seen of the evil little Japanese man. It appeared for a while that the arrival of Americans had sent him packing. But that was not to be. On August 11th, Ishimoto was called forward from Ichiki's headquarters to help interrogate a captured native. His name was Jacob Vouza. He had been caught with a small American flag. Ishimoto questioned him intently but got no reply. He angrily ordered him tied to a nearby tree, where he was tortured, bayoneted, and left for dead. All the while Ishimoto grinned with glee at the horrible scene. His disdain for the natives was never more apparent than at that moment.

When Vouza survived and reported the Japanese to the Marines (see the article on Vouza in this campaign), Clemens became very concerned. Mr. Ishimoto was a real threat. He had shown himself to be cruel in the extreme and his knowledge of the islands and the people there could pose great danger to them and even to the Marines.

While searching for Ishimoto's body among the dead Japanese after the first battle of the Tenaru, one of his scouts, Gumu reported. Ishimoto and other retreating Japanese had captured him. With them were two Catholic priests and three sisters that were apparently prisoners. Ishimoto tried to make Gumu carry his gear, but the native feigned sickness. Ishimoto angrily struck him in the face again and again and finally left in disgust. A little later another native reported. He and four of his friends had been carrying a wounded Marine back to the airfield. Ishimoto's party had discovered them. The Japanese hacked four of the natives to death with their bayonets but he had escaped.

After the Marine raid on Tasimboko, the enraged Mr. Ishimoto went to his prisoners and demanded that they convince the Americans to surrender. They refused. They still considered themselves to be neutral in the war. Shouting angrily at them, he had the troops under his command tie them up and toss them into a native hut. There they were tortured, then the women raped and all were bayoneted to death.

On October 11th, the Marines attacked a Japanese garrison at the village of Gurabusu. Clemens and a few of his natives were with him. They joined in the attack. A Japanese officer appeared out of nowhere wielding his sword. A Marine behind Clemens fired his Garand and killed him. After the fight, Clemens found a gold chalice belonging to the missionaries. It was being used as an ashtray. A nearby dead Japanese soldier, killed as he slept was wrapped in the altar cloth of the church.

Clemens and his natives began to search for the missionaries. They soon found their mutilated and partly decomposed bodies in shallow unmarked graves. The violent death they had suffered was still evident. A hardened Martin Clemens sent his natives on a search for Ishimoto. A report from another engagement a short distance away by another native was that the dead body of Ishimoto had been found.

His reign of terror on Guadalcanal had ended. Clemens hoped his death had not been a swift one.

Patrol Duty - A Hazardous Occupation

By Wild Bill Wilder

Throughout the island war in the Pacific, Marine commanders, often without adequate intelligence, relied heavily on both large and small patrols to establish contact with enemy forces. These patrols were his eyes to know where the enemy was and what he might be doing or attempting to do.

Some of the patrols on the island are better known than others, such as the ill-fated Goettge Patrol, or the Brush Patrol that made Vandegrift aware of new and numerous troops on his left flank in the first weeks on the island.

Normally patrols were smaller groups, usually about squad size - some ten to twelve men - sent out to only get information on the enemy, not to engage him. Lamentably, finding him also meant engaging him, placing the small group of Marines in mortal danger. In the early months, Marine leaders could not spare larger numbers, since the perimeter defense needed every man possible in order to be maintained.

Other patrols might include between one hundred - two hundred men. They were more of a reconnaissance in force. These had enough firepower to give any enemy they found a rather bad time of it.

Members of the patrols packed to travel light, often with only one canteen and a lot of ammunition. They learned quickly from their enemies, smearing their faces to keep the gleam of sunlight or moonlight from reflecting off their cheeks. They cut and placed branches inside the webbing of their equipment to help them remain concealed as they move through the dense underbrush of the island.

Their movement was extremely cautious, moving slowly, stopping often, listening, looking. Communication was primarily by hand signal only. They became quite proficient at it. Some patrols were not as successful as others. Early in the war the Japanese became also very adept at anticipating the Marine patrols, even setting them up and luring them onward.

The Japanese also adopted this method of intelligence gathering. Patrols were also used by them to size up an enemy's defensive position with probes and skirmishes. By so doing they could anticipate the Marine strongpoints and either avoid them or take them out first. Positions such as machine gun emplacements were a primary target for the Japanese in such endeavors.

One example of the deadliness of patrolling was in instance that occurred on Guadalcanal during the height of the fighting. On September 28th a large Marine patrol was scouting around the Lunga River south of the perimeter. Heavy Japanese machine gun fire suddenly overpowered the chattering of the jungle and replaced with the cries of mortally wounded Marines. From behind their weapons, the enemy gunners shouted in broken English tauntingly, "Come here, please, come here, please."

The patrol withdrew under heavy fire, unable to extricate or even find any wounded. And there were a number of them. Private Jack Morrison had been badly hit. He watched helplessly as a fellow Marine partially hidden by a fallen tree cried out for help. It came brutally in the form of a Japanese bayonet that was thrust again and again into the wounded body until the voice was stilled. Morrison gritted his teeth in angry anguish,

unable to help his buddy. He could not even see who it was.

Morrison kept passing out from the pain and loss of blood. He finally awoke to a whisper in his ear. PFC Harry Dunn had not been hurt but he had been cut off from any retreat. Looking at each body after the sun went down, he had found Morrison, still alive. With great difficulty he staunched the seeping flow of blood from Morrison's wounds. They would have to wait that night and all the next day, enduring heath, insect and an obsessive thirst that almost drove them insane. When darkness fell again, Dunn dragged and carried Morrison back to friendly lines, then passed out from exhaustion. Morrison was given emergency first aid and flown out on the next RSD to a base hospital and eventual recovery.

Dunn would later be killed in the final fights of the 1st Marine Division just prior to its withdrawal. He had proven again the accuracy of the Marine slogan, "Semper Fi." Morrison never forgot his benefactor that had given him a new lease on life with the rescue.

Patrols were perhaps the most hated part of the by the Marines. To many they seemed to be a death sentence. They were, nevertheless, one of the major keys to the war's successful conclusion by the Marines in the Pacific.

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Munda Trail, Hammel

A Last Look At Fallen Comrades

By Wild Bill Wilder

All during the month of December, Marines of the 1st and 2nd Division were being taken off the dreadful island. Some of them had been in action for four months. They were ragged, bearded, bony and weak. Some could hardly walk. Yet before they departed, all of them to a man visited the cemetery created on Guadalcanal.

It was called "Flanders Field" in honor of the Marines who had died in that battle of World War One. It had been a bloody fight, one of the toughest the Marines would ever endure. It was etched in blood into their archives. Nearly 800 of them had died there. Another 1,962 had been wounded. On top of that malaria and other diseases had taken its toll on 6,000 more. No Marine left the island the same.

In that cemetery, a small epitaph, picked out of a mess tin by the point of a bayonet adorned a simple wooden cross. It read:

"And when he gets to Heaven
  To Saint Peter he will tell:
"One More Marine Reporting Sir -
  I've served my time in Hell."

Talking With A Real Marine Raider

Interview by Wild Bill Wilder

This interview was done about two years ago with Mr. Dan Marsh, a real-life Marine Raider. He served in the Pacific till the end of the war. His son, Louie, has been a stalwart of the Raider team for the last 3 years. You'll enjoy this question-answer session with Mr. Marsh.

WB: In which branch of service did you serve during World War II and for how long?

DM: I served in the United States Marine Corps for three years and eleven months. I enlisted in Chicago immediately following Pearl Harbor, went through boot camp at the MCRD in San Diego and my serial number is 328582.

WB: What motivated you to become a Raider?

DM: There were many factors involved in my making that decision. Like all marines who had experienced a long period of training, I was eager to go overseas and become directly involved in the war. However, it was after talking to friends in the 2nd Raiders, becoming familiar with their unique organizational structure, equipment and specialized missions that I resolved to volunteer.

WB: Which Raider outfit did you serve with during the war?

DM: I was a member of the Fourth Marine Raider Battalion from its inception until the Raiders were deactivated in Feb. 1944 and re-designated the Fourth Marines.

WB: What was the training like in those days?

DM: This is really too broad a subject for this interview and I would prefer to refer you to our website where I discuss our training at length. However, I will provide a summary as follows: Our training schedules were comprehensive, embracing all phases of amphibious warfare including those peculiar to the Raider Battalions. They were intense, physically demanding and designed to equip us for the accomplishing of our missions under any and all circumstances.

Great emphasis was placed on night operations and the landing and exiting of beaches in rubber boats under unfavorable surf conditions. Also, the familiarization with and firing of all company weapons, hand to hand combat, the silent approach to and killing of the enemy with a knife without his uttering a sound. We were drilled in overcoming natural obstacles such as ravines, cliffs and rivers utilizing rope ladders, rappelling, death slides and whatever was at hand. Training was always a continually changing on going process.

As the war progressed and our field of operations moved from jungle, to atoll, to large land masses as Guam and Okinawa procedures were constantly revised. I will refer your viewers again to our website if they desire more information.

WB: In which conflicts/areas of the Pacific were you involved?

DM: The area of combat operations of the 4th Raiders was primarily New Georgia, BSI and the other islands in that vicinity. I was personally involved in the operations at Vangunu-Wickham Anchorage and Enogai Inlet-Bairoko Harbor. Following the deactivation of the Raiders, I participated in the amphibious assaults at Emirau, Guam and Okinawa the last battle of the war.

WB: What is your fondest memory of that period of your life?

DM: My most vivid and enduring memory is when we were at sea on our way to make the initial landing of the occupation of Japan. The task force was running under black out conditions and I was topside peering into the darkness. Suddenly, the command came over the bullhorn "light the ship". The lights of our ship and the entire fleet burst forth in a glorious display, penetrating the gloom, bouncing off the water and revealing the outlines of the entire task force. It was then and only then that I knew the war was over-----it was finished!

WB: Have you kept items and memorabilia of that time? Give us a few examples.

DM: The only memorabilia that I have are my green uniform, patches, ribbons, discharges and a certificate signed by Admiral Oscar Badger and General Clement certifying that I was a member of Task Force Thirty One. The reason for this is that the rear echelon lost every sea bag that I ever owned.

WB: Are there many Raiders still living today?

DM: Jerry Beau the historian for the U.S. Marine raider Association has determined through roster searches that there were 8,078 Raiders-7, 710 marines and 368 naval personnel. However, an accurate count of Raiders living today is just not feasible. I believe a reasonable estimate would be in the order of 1200 to 1500. The only certainty here is that our numbers are rapidly diminishing.

WB: Was it all worth it?

DM: I will always give an emphatic yes to this question because freedom is a priceless possession. The responsibility fell upon my generation to preserve the freedom of this nation and assist in liberating others who had been enslaved. I believe we met that responsibility at home and abroad and that is what is important.

WB: What do you think of your son Louie's activities in the gaming fields?

DM: Louie played war games long before the electronic variety became available. They have not only been a source of recreation for him but have also widened his understanding of military strategy and tactics. He has become very knowledgeable about the history of warfare including the various theaters of operation during World War II. So, I am very pleased with his continued involvement with war games.

WB: What is your opinion of the gaming sites and the attempts to recreate electronically some of those moments in history of which you were a part?

DM: Frankly, I do not understand how the system works but I certainly approve of the electronic recreation of historical events including those in which I was involved.

I think that in playing the games many may realize how precious is the legacy of freedom and peace they have inherited. This is not a popular subject today and is no longer taught in our schools, so I believe your games may in part at least fill that void.

WB: What reading sources do you recommend for that period of World War II?

DM: There are many categories of reading material covering that time frame including, official histories, non official histories, personal historical accounts, biographies and fiction based on personal experience. In the Good Stuff section of our website I have listed many of the finest of all these categories. Instead of duplicating that list here I will share a few sources that have been helpful to me.
Official History
History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II
Volume I Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal
Volume II Isolation of Rabaul

Personal Accounts

Bless 'em All - the raider marines of World War II by Major General Oscar F. Peatross (2nd Raider Battalion)

The Right Kind of War - John McCormick (4th Raider Battalion) My prejudice shows here, John is a friend of mine, we served in the same platoon in the 4th Raiders,

WB: Which is your favorite?

DM: Bless 'em All, in my opinion, fits both categories and is the most comprehensive and accurate historical account of the four Marine Raider Battalions available today.

WB: You have a marvelous website. I enjoy my visits there immensely. Is this your creation alone?

DM: I am very pleased that you have enjoyed visiting our website, but I am certainly not responsible for it's creation. Louie, my son, provided the design, layout, formatting, color scheme, up and down loading, and assumed all the responsibilities of Webmaster. I would never have authored the content of the site if he had not worked patiently and tirelessly to persuade me to do so. Without his encouragement and support I would never have completed the task. I think we would both agree that God created our website!

Here is the site URL: http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/3805/

WB: After your long years of life and service to God and your country, do you have any advice for the younger generation coming to the front of life today?

DM: I would give the advice that has been important to me since I learned to think. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all you ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5, NASB)

Lewis Chesty Puller - A True Marine

By Wild Bill Wilder

Lewis "Chesty" Puller enlisted in the Marines after studying at VMI. After being forced to discharge due to cutbacks, he re-enlisted as a private. He served tours in Haiti, Nicaragua and China, rising slowly through the ranks. He continued his studies and was recommissioned a few years prior to World War Two. It was on Guadalcanal that Puller gained renown for his courage in battle and compassion for his men. He earned a third Navy Cross in the fighting on the Canal.

He continued to serve well, performing outstandingly in the Peleliu Operation as commander of the 1st Marine Regiment. He also served as regimental commander during the hostitilities in Korea, serving with typical elan and boldness. It was during the battle for Seoul after the Inchon landings that a fourth Navy Cross was awarded to him.

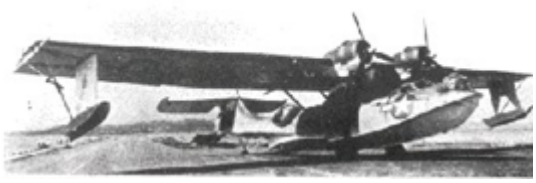
He eventually held the post of Assistant Commandant, United States Marine Corps. He retired in 1957 and died shortly thereafter. He was and is a legnd of the Corps. The most decorated Marine in the history of the Corps, he proved to be an ideal tactical commander. The legend of "Chesty" Puller lives on even today.

Sources:

The Pacific War Encyclopedia, Dunnigan and Nofi
Strong Men Armed, Leckie
Marine!, (Biography of Lewis Puller)

Major Mad Jack Cram

By Wild Bill Wilder



Things were at a critical state in October on Henderson Field. The incessant Japanese bombing of the airfield, in spite of heroic resistance by Marine and Army aviators and at a terrible cost, the Japanese planes had inflicted severe damage on the field and the installations.

Then came the cry that there was no fuel to fly the planes that still remained intact. General Roy Geiger, Marine Air commander was enraged. He demanded that fuel be found and taken to Henderson at once. It was and soon the few remaining Dauntlesses and Wildcats took to the skies again. Marines often watched the engagements in the sky and in the waters around the island, cheering mightily when one of the enemy was destroyed.

On October 15th, they saw a group of high flying Dauntlesses begin to peel off to attack approaching Japanese ships. They were going for the transports. To their amazement, a bulky navy blue PBY Catalina in among the SBDs began a bombing run. It was piloted by Major Jack Cram, flying General Geiger's personal aircraft. He had delivered torpedoes to Henderson Field and then requested that he be allowed to keep two of them. The PBY had been designed for reconnaissance over the waters. It was a floatplane, able to land on land or sea. It was not a combat aircraft.

But now it was, Major Cram put the PBY into a steep dive among the black puffs of enemy fire at a speed of 270 miles per hour. She had been built for a maximum speed of 160 miles per hour. Leveling off, then diving again, and then leveling off, he and the Catalina, "The Blue Goose," made a beeline for a Japanese transport at 75 feet above the water.

More enemy fire shook the Goose, but it flew steadily closer. Once in range, the Major hit the toggle switch once, then again. Two long silver missiles hit the water, caught their own power and roared just beneath the surface toward their target. Cram yanked back hard on the yoke and the Goose groaned painfully as its two engines bit the air hard trying to respond. Banking the Catalina, Cram watched as the first and then the second torpedoes found their mark. Huge geysers of water mixed with flame and thick black smoke indicated two hits. The transport had been broken in two by the force of the explosions and began settling toward a watery grave.

The fight was still not over. With five enemy zeroes on his tail, cram dove down to the point that ocean spray doused the bottom of his plane. The enemy fighters fired again and again, scoring numerous hits.
Then he was over Henderson Field. He was flying too fast too land and had to bank, then make for the auxiliary strip, "Fighter One." Marine antiaircraft gunners ripped into the pursuing Zeroes, shooting down two of them. Cram brought the Blue Goose in with wheels up. His hydraulics had been shot to pieces. He bellied into Fighter One and came to a rough stop. Geiger, standing nearby and watching the action, lit into Cram with a vengeance.

"Damn it Cram. I ought to court-martial you for deliberate destruction of government property." He stomped off in seeming disgust. His first stop was the headquarters of General Vandegrift where he began the paperwork to be sure Major Cram would get the Silver Star for his actions that day.

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Tanks On Guadalcanal

By Wild Bill Wilder

During the Marine campaign to take and hold Guadalcanal, tanks on both sides came into play in some of the more important battles for control of the island. A lack of adequate transport proved to be a problem. Companies A and B of the 1st Tank Battalion and Company C of the 2nd Tank Battalion (2nd Marine Division) were sent to Guadalcanal. Initially the tanks that the Marines were able to get ashore took up positions in the center of Vandegrift's horseshoe defense against the Japanese. In the event of an enemy breakthrough, they were to move forward and plug the hole.

Their first offensive action after the fighting on Tanambogo came at the Ilu River when a platoon of M-3 Stuarts of the 1st Marine Tank Battalion were used to mop up the battered Ichiki Force after a hard night of fighting. The Japanese responded with fanatical attacks with whatever weapons they had, including small arms and grenades. A few had magnetic antitank mines. It turned out to be a bloodbath for the enemy. When one tank was immobilized the others formed a protective ring around it till the crew was rescued.

Nearly a month later, the morning after the bitter fighting for Edson's (Bloody) Ridge, a force of six Stuarts set out to pursue what remained of Kawaguchi's attackers. Hidden Japanese anti-tank guns hiding in the tall grass south of the ridge, put there to cover any possible withdrawal took out three of the Stuarts and stopped any further advance.

American tanks, even after the 1st Marine Division had been withdrawn, were used at the Tenaru, at the Gifu and in other offensives until the Japanese were driven off the island.

Sources:

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Guadalcanal, Frank
Marines under Armor, Estes

Two Heros Of The Sea

By Wild Bill Wilder

Two old WWI four stack destroyers, the Little and the Gregory, were busy on September 4th shuttling Marine Raiders from Tulagi to Savo Island for a patrol and then to the main island of Guadalcanal to reinforce US positions there. Once their task was done, the two naval vessels did not retire to Tulagi Harbor, as they were accustomed to doing. Instead, Commander Hugh Hadley, senior officer of the two ships, decided that a little patrolling off Lunga Point might be a good idea. It would be nice to surprise some Japanese transports in the darkness and take them out.

They did not have long to wait. Shortly after midnight, a Japanese convoy entered the channel. Three Japanese destroyers, the Yudachi, Hatsuyuki and Murakumo, began bombarding American positions as a diversion while Japanese troops landed further to the west. Undetected, the two American destroyers went to battle stations and moved forward to engage the larger, more modern enemy ships. Suddenly, five flares from a PBY Catalina illuminated them clearly to Japanese gunners.

His intentions were good. He was not aware of the presence of the Little and the Gregory and thought illuminating the enemy ships might give the people on the island a chance to respond. Unwittingly he had revealed the two antiquated destroyers and thus doomed them to destruction. The light from the descending flares made the two American ships perfect targets. Both of them were woefully underarmed; with only one four inch gun, a few 20mm cannons and heavy machine guns. Their purpose was that of moving troops rapidly, not engaging enemy warships.

It took only moments for the well trained Japanese crews, with well-armed larger destroyers to get the range. Shots were exchanged. Almost immediately the Little's four-inch gun was disabled. Another hit the fuel lines and the vessel erupted in flames, further brightening the scene. As they tried to beach her, another salvo struck the bridge, killing all the officers there and jamming the rudder. Steam lines burst as the men dove from the flaming wreckage.

Now the focus was upon the Gregory. In less than two minutes it too became a flaming hulk, blazing from stem to stern. The order to abandon ship was given. Lt. Commander Harry Bauer, badly wounded, was helped into the water by his men. Hearing a sailor in the water pleading for help, Bauer ordered the men helping keep him afloat to go to the aid of the drowning seaman. In so doing Bauer himself drowned.

Elated with their victory, the three Japanese ships continued to pummel wreckage that once had been the Little and the Gregory. They purposely moved in and out of the debris that filled the waters, running down floundering American sailors or chewing them to pieces in their screws.

Finally they left the area. It would be morning before any sort of rescue could be attempted. By that time nearly both complements that had survived the fight had drowned. Only a handful was saved. It was another bloody night for the US Navy in this intense struggle for Guadalcanal.

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Betio - Three Of A Kind

By Wild Bill Wilder

The initial landings on November 20th, 1943, were almost a disaster for the troops of the 2nd Marine Division. A number of tactical errors and the fanatical determination of the defenders created serious doubt as to whether the beachhead could be held. Heroic small groups of Marines took on the enemy in his bunkers and blockhouses and slowly moved inland. One of the commanders on the island, Colonel David Shoup of the 2nd Regiment, notified the top brass on the battleship Maryland that the situation was in doubt but that he and his men were going to stick and fight it out.

And fight they did. Of the more than 40 tanks brought to Betio on transport, only a handful got ashore. The treacherous coral reef required that most be unloaded over a half mile from the island and driven in. The majority of them floundered and sank, often with the crews trapped inside. Four Shermans did get on the island, and one was immediately damaged by a lucky hit from a Japanese light tank. Another one was engulfed in fuel explosion when a depot was hit by artillery fire. Its crew was saved, but the tank was destroyed.

At the end of the first day, some troops had gotten as far as the airfield, but could progress no further. To the east, Red Beach was just barely holding on to what it had. It was fortunate that the Japanese leader Shibasaki did not launch a strong counterattack during the night. If he had, the Marines might have been finished. For some unknown reason, he chose not to do so. Both he and all of his officers were killed in the battle.

The second day (D+1) showed remarkable improvement in the Marine situation. More troops were being landed at Red Beach. A second group went ashore on the west coast of the island at Green Beach with little opposition. During the day the airfield was secured and the troops now turned east to take the remainder of the island.

On D+2 (November 22nd), the situation for the Japanese was becoming hopeless. Most of the strongpoints had been conquered and the Marines were slowly enveloping the island. Good progress was made all along the front except in the center, where Shibasaki had his headquarters. A trio of defenses works with interlocking fire had been constructed to resist the strongest shelling. They were so built that the approach to any one of them would expose the attacker to fire from the others.

They consisted of a steel pillbox, a heavy log emplacement and a large sand covered concrete bunker. The bunker was large enough to protect dozens of troops. The Marines assaulting these strongpoints included troops of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and a platoon of engineers of the 18th Marines. Two Shermans, "China Gal," and "Cecilia" were brought in for further support.

At 9:30AM, China Gal brought down the log emplacement, when she slammed several rounds into its interior. Antitank fire from the bunker disabled her. As the fighting continued, the decision was made to send in the engineers with satchel charges and flamethrowers. With every weapon available brought to bear as covering fire, the commander of the group, First Lt. William Bonnyman, led his men to the attack. Taking out a machine gun nest atop the bunker, they moved next to climb on the roof. As demolition charges were hurled at the doors and vents, a flamethrower was fired down the ventilation shaft.

Suddenly a group of Japanese soldiers burst from an exit on top of the bunker and assaulted the engineers. The Marines reacted quickly, tossing explosives into the charging mass. Even as the explosions occurred, they were accented by rifle and sub machine gun fire. Bonnyman opened fire with a Thompson submachine gun, and took out at least six charging Japanese. With help from his men, the force was cut down, but not before Lt. Bonnyman was killed. For his heroic action, he would receive posthumously the Medal of Honor.

Conditions within the bunker had become unbearable, and a number of the remainder of the troops within rushed out fighting and screaming, "now you die, Malines!" Some did, but the Japanese themselves did most of the dying. After the failed charge, the engineers poured gasoline down the ventilation shafts of the bunker complex, and then ignited it with bundles of TNT. Flames and smoke shot out of every aperture, and the ground trembled with the internal explosions.

By Noon the entire enemy strongpoint was destroyed along with its defenders. A later examination of the

strongpoint revealed that over 100 men, including Shibasaki had suffocated or burned to death inside. Now only one more day of hard fighting remained to finish taking Betio.

(Note: For an interesting fictional account of this event from the Japanese point of view, read the article, Diary of a Dead Man in this section)

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Tropical Dunkirk

By Wild Bill Wilder

Expanding the Toehold

With the resounding defeat of the Kawaguchi Force at Bloody Ridge, coupled with the arrival of the American Marine 7th Regiment at Guadalcanal, the situation had brightened considerably. At the same time, Japanese destroyers were slipping in reinforcements at night near the Matanikau, the number estimated at between 500 and 1,000 a day. They usually crept in just before dawn, unloaded quickly and beat a hasty retreat before the Cactus Air Force (planes based on Guadalcanal) were on the prowl. On some occasions they did not make it, which became the cause of great glee to the young Navy and Marine pilots. The destroyer transports Kagero, Kawakaze and Umikaze were hit and set ablaze. The Japanese were paying an expensive price trying to hold on to Guadalcanal.

Sensing a new threat from this area as well as the need for his men to go to the offensive, General Vandergrift, commander of the First Marine Division, counseled with his staff on plans for an attack. In his mind Marines were to attack. That was their nature. It was their training. Waiting for the enemy to come to you was just not in the makeup of the average leatherneck, officer or enlisted man!

It was decided to send elements of the 5th Regiment along with some of the newly arrived units of the 7th across the Matanikau to test the enemy's strength. It was called a "reconnaissance in force." In charge of the operation were two Marine heroes, Colonel Mike Edson, and Lt. Colonel "Chesty" Puller. Edson's abilities had already been proven on Guadalcanal. Puller was a veteran of the jungle wars in Nicaragua and proven tough. In physical appearance he was a short stocky fellow, with a mean look and a big barrel chest that seemed almost out of proportion to the rest of his body. If anyone ever looked like a Marine, it was old Chesty!

On September 27th, the units headed out and were soon across the river. Japanese resistance began to stiffen. There were indeed more enemy troops there than what had been anticipated, and soon the Marines were taking heavy casualties. The First Raider Battalion was sent across the Matanikau at the mouth of the river just north of the action to flank the Japanese. "You'll be close enough to them to hear them open up," Puller was told.

Action!

An hour later he did hear them. The only snag was that the answering Japanese fire appeared to be heavier than the American and was growing in intensity. Calling headquarters, Puller requested a report on the Raider's situation. They reply was "They hit them with everything but the kitchen sink. Front and left flank. Lots of casualties, I'm afraid. They cranked a round into Griffith's (new commander of the Raiders) CP; it wounded Sam and killed Ken Bailey (Exec of the battalion)." Thus the relief column, even before it was well into the action had lost two of its top leaders.

Radio contact was then lost with the Raiders, and no one knew of their status, until an SBD reported seeing American tee shirts on the beach of the Matanikau arranged so as to spell "HELP." When Vandergrift got the news, he told his staff, "Let's get 'em the hell out of there!" At almost that exact moment a jeep rattled up the hill. Out of it leaped a rumpled, barrel chested, short Marine with no helmet and a short haircut. It was Chesty Puller. He had gotten a ride on one of the covering LCVP landing craft and rushed back to headquarters to get permission to withdraw his men. Vandergrift smiled and told Puller to proceed to use whatever he needed to save the situation.

The Rescue

The orders were fired off immediately. Landing craft would proceed to the Matanikau, protected by the destroyer Ballard. As Puller's forces to the south withdrew, they would attempt to draw off the Japanese now encircling the Raiders. Once that was done, the Raiders were to go back to the beach and board the landing craft.

As the Ballard drew in close to shore, a Marine communications sergeant, Bob Raysbrook, appeared on the beach. Pulling out his semaphores, he began signaling the Ballard. The ship's skipper saw him and began

shepherding the landing craft ashore. He saw tracers streaking toward the sergeant on the beach and marveled at how the skipping and dancing Marine stayed alive. Suddenly other dim figures were taking cover near the beach, by half-squads, squads, and then platoons. They had reached their "tropical Dunkirk" and were being embarked. The Ballard then opened fire over the heads of the Marines to offer some help against a hard pressing enemy.

In the Kunai grass some 300 yards inland, Platoon Sgt. Tony Malinowski, Jr., A Company, 1st Raider Battalion, received word of withdrawal and set his men in motion. The last of the platoon file-closers, moving out on his way to the beach, noted that Malinowski was at the edge of the woods, still straddled out flat, with BAR clips all around him. He seemed to have no intentions of moving.

"Hey, Sarge, you coming?" A sudden burst from a Nambu machine gun hemstitched a line near them. The Private hit the ground and covered up. Malinowski Patted the frightened young man on the back, smiled, and said, "Move on out, Son, I'll be along soon." As the file-closer moved toward the beach, he could hear Malinowski's BAR rip off one burst, then another. The sergeant was covering his platoon's retreat. He was not one of those who boarded the landing craft. He never made it back.

As it had gone, the withdrawal was a success, but not without its price. Vandergrift had committed nearly one-third of his combat strength to the operation. The Japanese had succeeded in destroying one battalion, and had almost cut off two others. It was estimated that more than 2,000 Japanese had participated in the battle. Puller, in an evaluation of the action, later stated about the Japanese, "They're tough, they're well led, and they know how to use their weapons. We're just damned lucky we didn't get the royal s--- kicked out of us!"

There was a collective sigh of relief as the last boat docked at Kokum and the last straggler limped into the perimeter. Tomorrow, many new crosses would be added to the Lunga cemetery. It could have been worse. There was, however, little cause to cheer. It was not all victory for the Marine forces on Guadalcanal. It was evident now that the American troops on Guadalcanal still did not have the needed muscle to push the Japs off the island. That would have to wait a little longer. The rapid implementation to evacuate the troops and move back across the Matanikau kept a minor defeat from becoming a major disaster for Allied forces in the Pacific.

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Guam - Fighting Through The Maze

By Wild Bill Wilder
July 21, 1944

Of the three key islands of the Marianas, Guam was the largest. In addition, it was one of the few American possessions in the Pacific prior to World War II. It had been acquired as a part of the Spanish-American War settlement. It principal product was coal. Another aspect of its uniqueness was the fierce loyalty of its inhabitants, called Chamorros, to the United States. In their mind, Guamanian soil was US soil. They maintained that loyalty throughout the occupation, in spite of intense persecution. An effort by President Roosevelt to heavily fortify Guam just before the beginning of hostilities had been squelched by Republican senators, claiming that such action would be provocative to the Japanese. They really needed no provocation as was proven on December 7th, 1941.

On December 9th, 5,000 Japanese troops landed at Guam. Defending the island were 153 Marines and 80 Chamorros, armed with bolt action rifles and four machine guns. The highest ranking man was a sergeant. They never had a chance. Only one Marine, Corporal George Tweed escaped into the jungles of northern Guam. His presence there and the unwillingness of the Chamorros to turn him over to the Japanese cost the lives of hundreds of civilians in reprisal.

With Saipan finally secured, the American forces turned their attention to Guam. B-24 bombers and naval gunfire pounded the island night and day. This bombardment continued for over two weeks. Many of the towns on the island were completely leveled. Down in the holds of transports, the uncomfortable Marines waited to get ashore. The laying down of over 25,000 naval shells of 8" caliber and higher, however, would mean the saving of thousands of lives on the beaches of Guam.

A newly established force, the Underwater Demolition Teams, (UDT), or "Frogmen," performed with extraordinary heroism. By W-Day (D-Day on Guam), these teams had blown up nearly a thousand mines, tank traps, and other island defense obstacles. They even found time to leave a large sign on the beach: “ WELCOME MARINES!”

The island itself was similar in geographical makeup as Saipan. It was thirty miles long: limestone cliffs in the north, cleft with ravines, and heavily cloaked with rain forests. In the south, the tableland was spotted with jungle and rice paddies. In most places the coastal jungle was impenetrable. The only suitable landing sites were to the southwest. The principal targets, such as the old Navy yard, the airfield on Orote Peninsula, Apra Harbor, and the principal city of Agana were all located in this area.

Attacking Guam were almost 55,000 Marines of General Roy Geiger's III Amphibious Corps. It included the First Provisional Marine Brigade (later to become the Sixth Marine Division), the Third Marine Division, and the 77th Army Infantry Division. The Marines attacked this island with a special vengeance. Some of the NCOs and officers descending to the waiting landing craft had been buddies of the 153 Marines stationed on the island at the war's outset. To recover Guam would heal an old hurt.

The Third Marine Division went straight in at Chonito Cliff and quickly established a beachhead. Some six miles to the south, the 1st Marine Brigade attacked with both regiments abreast. Even with the intensive bombardment, some enemy 75 and 37mm guns were still alive and active. In the first two waves of attackers, 24 LVTs were knocked out. The casualties on the beach were often on their own. The Japanese had adapted a new strategy. Priority targets were now medical personnel, especially the corpsmen at the forefront of the battle. The Japanese snipers would purposely only wound an American Marine in order to get a good shot at

an attending Corpsman. The aid station of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Marines took a direct hit from a Jap 75mm gun, which killed or wounded all but one man.

Corpsman Robert Law saw a shell burst spread eight Marines around him. All were dead but one, whose right leg was shattered. His blood gushed from the gaping wound. Law gave the morphine. The wounded man smiled, and asked for something to hold. Law shoved two hard clods of dirt into either hand. He then pulled out his Kabar knife and proceeded to amputate the leg, then seal and bandage the wound. As he worked, the Marine said not a word, but squeezed the clods of earth to powder. After bandaging the stump, Law looked up. The Marine smiled again, and then passed out.

The battle for Guam would continue for 19 days. Casualties for the American were much lighter than those sustained on Saipan. By the time Guam had fallen, it had cost 7,800 Americans killed and wounded-839 soldiers, 245 sailors, and 6,716 Marines- but Guam now was again a part of the United States of America.

In reality skirmishes continued on the island even after the end of hostilities in 1945. Some surviving Japanese had escaped into the hills and initiated guerrilla warfare. Even then, some diehards refused to come out. On February 9, 1972 a Nipponese soldier named Shoichi Yokoi end twenty-eight years of exile and fighting. He came out of the jungles of northern Guam and surrendered to the amazed Guamanians, some of whom had not even been born when he disappeared into the jungle some twenty-eight years earlier. For the last nine years of his exile, he had survived on breadfruit, fish, coconut milk and meat. He was the last known Japanese soldier from World War II to surrender. The inhabitants of Guam think that there still might be some Japanese in hiding there.

It was the task of the 4th Marine Regiment to drive straight inland toward Mount Alifan, about 2,000 yards from the beach. Once off the beachhead, the Marines proceeded through groves of palm trees, with many concealed snipers. The area was defended by units of the First Battalion, 6th Regiment of the 48th Brigade. The hidden enemy took a steady toll of men as the Marines moved forward.

Private John Atkinson had been a minor league pitcher prior to enlisting in the Marines. He developed an unusual system for dealing with snipers. Once a tree was suspect, Atkinson would creep forward, get under the tree, pull the pin from a grenade, release the safety handle, then count, "one potato, two potato" (the grenade had a four second fuse), then toss it upward into the palm fronds and duck. In one instance, using this tactic, he bagged a half dozen palm fronds, two coconuts, and three monkeys, two with buckteeth!

Accompanied by Sherman tanks, the men of the Fourth penetrated a maze of bunkers and pillboxes and then sprinted through the muck of rice paddies, which had been fertilized with human waste. Finally they reached the foothills of Mount Alifan, while the lumbering steel giants supporting them bucked and roared, sealing off cave after cave. By nightfall they had established a beachhead more than a mile inland.

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Iwo Jima - Charlie Dog Ridge

By Wild Bill Wilder

On the fifth day of battle for Iwo Jima, it was apparent that this fight was going to be the costliest yet for the Marine Corps in the Pacific. Over 50,000 troops, including all command elements were ashore. Seabees were already working on airfield number one while still under fire to get it in shape for use by close support aircraft for the Marines. What was left of the 28th Regiment was completing its work on Suribachi. They had seen over 600 Japanese dead and estimated that bulldozer tanks had buried over 1,000 more, dead or alive. Now all over the southern end of the island, there was construction of all types getting under way.

Just two miles to the north, however, the fighting was more intense than ever. On February 25th, the battle for airfield number two was about to begin. Off shore fire from the Idaho and Pensacola ranged in on the airfield. Carrier planes made their bombing runs, but they did not carry enough ordnance to really do any damage. Leading the way for the new assault was the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 21st Regiment, and two battalions of the 24th Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. It was very hard going. More than 100 gun emplacements ringed the airfield. Most of these were located on a hill called Charlie Dog Ridge, just south of the air base.

Leading the way on the left flank was Company K. Its commander, Captain Rodney L Heinze, was hit after only forty five minutes into the battle. As he reached the edge of the runway, a grenade flew out of a hole with a metal cover, and shredded his thighs. The next time the cover raised on the hole, a BAR man standing over it. He quickly emptied his large clip of twenty quick rounds into it. The executive officer of the company, Captain Daniel Marshall, took over. In a matter of minutes, he had fallen to a sniper's bullet.

Further to the right, Captain C.S. Rockmore led his Company I straight at the pillboxes on the ridge beyond the airfield. He was a tall rugged man of twenty-three. A 7.62mm round ripped out his throat and killed him instantly. Within minutes, all company commanders had been killed or wounded. By noon, sergeants were leading most of the companies.

By now Company C, held in reserve, was called into the action. They madly charged into the enemy, zigging and zagging, as machine gun rounds stitched patterns around their feet. Closing on the enemy quickly, they dove into the trenches fighting with anything at hand. Weapons included bullets, rifle butts, bayonets, rocks, fists and teeth. The struggle was accentuated by grunts and cursing in English and Japanese. Only an occasional shot rang out. It was some of the fiercest close in fighting on the island. In thirty minutes it was all over. The advance had covered over 500 yards and a major breakthrough had been achieved at the second airfield.

In the center of the line, it was the lot of the 24th Regiment to strike straight at Charlie Dog Ridge and link up with the 21st on the left. The two battalions had pretty much things there own way until they reached the summit of the ridge. There, remnants of the enemy 109th Division were well emplaced on the opposite ridge and opened fire with everything they had. The leader, Colonel Ikeda, realized that this was the key to

protecting the heart of the defenses. If the ridge and airfield were taken, everything to the north would be soon under attack. Thus, he and his men fought tenaciously.

By the afternoon, the battalion command post suffered a direct hit from mortar rounds. Three men were killed. The commander of the battalion, Colonel Alexander Vandergrift, Jr., was wounded in both legs. His father was also a Marine. In fact, he was the commandant of the Corps, and the veteran leader on Guadalcanal. Even the general would suffer the pain of loss in his own family. The 24th continued to advance under fire. By now tanks had come in support.

As they rolled over the ridge, they took the enemy positions under direct fire. Two enemy antitank guns in a bunker to the west had been quietly waiting for the moment. Three quick rounds gouged holes into the side of one Sherman and started it smoking. As the crew began to bail out, a party of Japanese rushed from a nearby trench, screaming and firing. Two of the crew were hit and dropped instantly, while two more scurried under the tank for cover.

The tank commander, Sammy Hoskins, was still scrambling out of the turret. He quickly crawled around to the 50-caliber machine gun, cranked a round into the chamber and opened fire. The large caliber bullets ripped the attacking Japanese to shreds. One Japanese soldier ran into the side of the tank, detonating a hand grenade as he did so. The concussion knocked Hoskins from the tank with wounds in his hands and face. His fellow crew members grabbed his shirt and dragged him to safety under the covering fire of the 24th. By the end of the day, the ridge was firmly in the hands of the 24th. They weren't about to give it up.

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Okinawa - Taking Yaetake

After the initial landings of four divisions on April 1st, 1945 (the Army's 7th and 96th; the Marine's 1st and 6th) with landing craft stretched out for almost eight miles. The troops on shore made rapid progress and soon captured two airfields and cut the island in two. The Marine divisions then headed north, while the Army units went south. The southern end of the island was the best protected, based on three solid defensive lines. The American soldiers slammed into the defenses on April 9th and were stopped cold at Kakuzu Ridge.

The Marines had a somewhat easier time of it in the north. Once they reached the Motobu Peninsula (a piece of land jutting out from the island about the size of the island of Saipan), they cut it off from contact and reinforcement from the rest of the island, and then began taking out the enemy there. Colonel Takehido Udo, the commander of the Japanese forces there, had marshaled his men into the hills, and waited for the Americans to come to him. His was a war of attrition, striking at the end of the day, infiltrating in the night, and waiting in well prepared defenses.

Mount Yaetake, the principal height on Motobu, was attacked on April 13th. The Marines assaulted it from various points, thus dispersing enemy fire. Two Battalions of the 4th Marine Regiment and one from the 29th worked together to take the area on April 14th. On April 17th, Colonel Jean Moreau of the 1st Battalion, 29th Marines made a frontal assault on the last big hill of the Peninsula. As two of his companies attacked ahead with tank support, C Company scaled the sheer face of the south side and surprised the 3rd Company, 6th Battalion, whose attention had been focused on the head on attack. By noon of that day, the final height had been taken.
One Medal of Honor was earned on Motobu. Twenty-two year old Corporal Richard E. Bush was wounded and lying with other injured men behind some rocks. Suddenly a Japanese grenade fell into their midst. Without hesitation, Bush covered the grenade with his body. Amazingly, he survived the blast and lived to receive his award.

Okinawa - Knocking On The Front Door

By Wild Bill Wilder

It is only fitting that the American campaign to take Okinawa should be the last great battle in the Pacific War. The operation, called "Iceberg," was important to all the branches of service. Okinawa, an island 60 miles in length and of varying widths offered everything that was needed for the invasion of the home islands of Japan. There was ample space for the storage of supplies and troop lodging. This was very important for the ground war. A number of airfields were already on the island, and there was plenty of room for more. This would give the United States Army Air Force a good area from which to reach and hit Japan even harder, as well as work in support of naval and ground operations.

For the US Navy, more than adequate docking facilities and anchorages could hold hundreds of ships. Located in the temperate zone, the climate varied on the island. One thing that it always had plenty of: rain! The average rainfall was 120 inches, and in some areas, it was much more. This was a problem during the fighting to gain the island, and it would have been one in preparation for further conflicts. The mud would become waist deep at times, defying even tracked vehicles. The ground would become so saturated that during the fighting, plasma could not be administered from a rifle stuck into the ground by the attached bayonet. The soil would not support it. A fighting man would have to be taken from the line to hold the plasma in the air while it was administered to the wounded.

After Iwo Jima, the planners for the capture of Okinawa were fearful of what the losses might be. It turned out that their fears were justified. By this point, nearly all Japanese leaders knew that the war was lost. They continued the battle out of a sense of national pride, loyalty to their religion and their emperor, and some with the hope that a too costly war might cause the Allies to sue for a negotiated peace, and not unconditional surrender.

The American ground forces committed to the invasion of Okinawa totaled over 175,000 men from seven divisions; four from the Army, and three from the Marines. The naval armada approaching the island was almost the size of that of the Normandy invasion; and indeed, it possessed more firepower. Over 40 aircraft carriers, large and small, 15 battleships, and all the accompanying vessels covered the sea for dozens of miles. Even the British had committed a part of their fleet, with three carriers present. The Air Force bombed the island daily, using B-24 Liberators by the hundreds, and even part of the new B-29 fleet was diverted from its bombing missions over Japan to add to the destruction on the island.

Facing this massive force, Japan had on the island over 80,000 troops, including three divisions, an independent infantry brigade, a tank regiment and numerous service units. Over 10,000 Japanese sailors, now with no fleet, had been retrained and reorganized for ground fighting. This force, called the 32nd Army, was under the command of General Mitsuru Ushijima. He was of the caliber as General Kuribayashi of Iwo Jima. His strategy was the same. Instead of a strong stand on the beaches, he would allow the Americans on the island.

To counter this invasion, he had two solutions. The first was the completion of some of the strongest defensive positions ever built. As the US had improved in its firepower and attack capabilities, so had Japan gotten better at the construction of defenses to counter them. In addition, the multiplicity of caves in the limestone hills and coral outgrowths added to the possibilities. There were over 300 heavy artillery pieces, many of which were rolled out of secret hiding places on rails, fired, and then put back into hiding. There were

hundreds of mortars of varying sizes, from the 50mm "knee mortar" to the huge 320mm variety that lobbed charges of several hundred pounds. Automatic weapons abounded, including nearly 2,000 machine guns. Ammunition was plentiful. There was no lack of weapons. Defense were built on experience and made to last.

The second was the official organizing of suicide units, on land, at sea, and in the air (see the special note on "Japan's Desperate Alternative"). Japanese pilots had purposely flown their aircraft into American ships a number of times before, often with disastrous consequences for the ship and its crew, but there had never been any military sanction or formal request for such action. Now Kamikaze units were being formed all over the Empire. The Corps was called "Jinrai Butai," or, "The Corps of Divine Thunder." Young men, often in their middle teens, were given a few hours flight training, brainwashed in Bushido philosophy, and sent into the air with a bomb strapped to the aircraft; not to drop it, but to fly it into the biggest ship that could be found. This new strategy brought horrendous consequences as dozens of American ships were sunk during the battle for Okinawa. Even a flying bomb, called "Okha" (cherry blossom) was designed to be carried by a medium bomber to the target, where it would be released to fly into the nearest warship.

The Japanese Navy had designed human torpedoes, or "Kaitens"; a huge warhead with an engine and a compartment for one or two people who would guide it into the side of a ship. Also, hundreds of suicide boats, called "Shinyos," had been built. Only 18 feet long, each was powered by one or two automobile engines. A high-explosive impact fused warhead was carried in the bow and they had a maximum speed of 30 knots. They were used at Okinawa and were successful in sinking at least two US destroyers, the Charles J. Badger and the Hutchins.

The Imperial Navy had lost face in the battle for Iwo Jima, but now it would make its last hurrah. It would send its majestic super battleship, the Yamato, into the battle. There would be no carrier support. The Yamato would go it alone. It only had enough fuel to reach Okinawa. It was accepted that it would not return. Bulging with ammunition, it was to be escorted by a light cruiser and eight destroyers. Discovered by American submarines, hundreds of naval planes were quickly dispatched and pounced on the small fleet. They put the mighty Yamato under water in a matter of less than two hours with dozens of bomb and torpedo hits. The mammoth eighteen inch guns were never able to fire a salvo against American ships.

On land, banzai, or suicide attacks were common practice. In some instances, this type of assault was discouraged. It was felt that a Japanese soldier, well armed and hidden, could do much more damage to the enemy. This would become more and more the norm of Japanese military tactic. It still would be suicide, for the soldier supposedly had resolved his will to fight until he was killed. There would be no surrender. (This did not always hold true. Toward the end of the campaign on Okinawa, large numbers of Japanese began to give up to the Americans rather than die).

The attacks from the air and sea were designed to so batter the American fleet as to render it incapable of supporting the ground war on Okinawa, thus leaving US troops at the mercy of the Japanese. Once again the enemy had underestimated American resolve and fighting ability. The Navy did suffer severely, with 34 ships sunk, and 368 damaged. Nearly five thousand sailors were killed and an equal number wounded. This amounted to a ship casualty rate of one in four! Heavy training on damage control probably kept the count from being much higher. The fleet, however, held its ground, and supported the infantry on Okinawa through the entire campaign.

Thus the stage was set for what would prove to be the largest and hardest fight of the war in the Pacific. Never had action been seen on such a scale in this theater of war. For both sides, it proved costly in the extreme. For the Japanese it was an omen of death. When Okinawa fell, those on the home islands steeled themselves for an invasion, something that had not occurred in hundreds of years. They would fight with holy resolve. The United States, on the other hand, continued to make plans for the largest amphibious assaults and operations ever conducted. The thought of over one million allied casualties forced President Truman to find another way to end the war. The introduction of nuclear weapons into the history of mankind would usher in 50 years of terror, the residue of which is with us even today.

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Peleliu - The 1000 Yard Stare

By Wild Bill Wilder

This Palau stamp recreates a famous illustration of a U.S. Marine by Tom Lea, a writer and artist for *Life* magazine, who landed with Marines on Peleliu in September 1944.

The hopes of the 1st Marine division for a quick conquest of Peleliu were quickly shattered as the landing forces were decimated in their approaches to the beach. In spite of the intense artillery fire, however, the Marines secured the beach. Once ashore, the American forces began to seek out their objectives. The Seventh Regiment had the assignment of clearing the southern end of the island, including the airfield. Ringed with all sorts of fortifications, the Japanese fought tenaciously. Some pillboxes, casemates, bunkers and rifle pits still stood and from them came a lethal rain of fire on the advancing Marines.

Another new tactic of Colonel Nakagawa was called "passive infiltration." The Japanese would take refuge in their underground labyrinth, waiting until the Marines swept over them before reoccupying positions supposedly knocked out. They would strike the Americans from the rear or pop out unsuspected cave mouths. On the higher ground, when a position was attacked with flamethrowers or satchel charges, the defenders would run out to the other side and then return to resume fighting.

The fighting continued in the south for three days in a grinding, yard by yard fight. Finally the Japanese remnants were forced into a pair of the pillbox-studded promontories. There, fire from the land, air and sea converged on the enemy. Many of the enemy jumped into the water to escape, but American marksmen picked them off one by one. At last Colonel Hanneken, veteran of Guadalcanal and commander of the Seventh set a message to General Rupertus: "The Seventh Marines' mission on Peleliu is completed."

At the end of the first day, the First and Fifth Marines had moved to the north to the Umurbrogal or Bloody Nose Ridge. By nightfall the Marines were at the base of the hill. On the second day, Chesty Puller's Second Battalion of the First Regiment began to climb Bloody Nose Ridge. Up, up and up they struggled, climbing in 112 degrees, crawling over the cruel slashing coral, seeking refuge behind boulders. The sun was so intense that the Marines pulled their camouflage cloths from their helmets and hung them like little capes over the backs of their necks.

There was yet another problem, which would greatly affect Marine efficiency in the fighting. There was no fresh water on the island. All fresh water would have to be hauled to land from the off shore fleet. Considering the size of the operation, it would be a big job. The Navy did not handle it well. The scarcity of water in the searing heat of Peleliu became a problem of major proportions. In an attempt to resolve the situation, some cretin of a supply officer had floated water ashore in 55 gallon drums. The residual oil in the barrels had not been removed and thirsty Marines who drank this horrid mixture soon fell, sickened with water poisoning!

As the Marines struggled for the heights, they gasped for breath, shinnied up pinnacles, rolled down the steep inclines dodging bullets. They continued to reform, advance, and attack again. All around them enemy artillery and mortar shells thumped and crunched in their midst. Through the din cries for water, blood plasma and "Corpsman! Corpsman! Over here!"

When one height was taken, another faced them. Ground gained would be lost as enemy fire opened up from a new position. Nakagawa's fierce resistance slowly whittled away at Puller's men. By now help was coming from the air. The Marine 2nd Tactical Squadron had landed on the airfield at Peleliu. It was now a matter of a few minutes for the white nosed Corsairs to wing to the battle and strafe, bomb, and drop large canister of the jellied gasoline called napalm. Even with this opportune help, the Regiment continued to take losses. Soon the First Battalion was reduced to the size of an undermanned company. Some companies were down to 18 men.

As the men fought their way through the heat, the battle became savage. The ridge had become a monstrous thing. Wounded men lay on shelves of rock, moaning or screaming. Their cries brought a reaction from the Japanese defenders, and they were hit again and again until they became silent. Some even committed the ultimate sin for a Marine, throwing down their rifles and clawing their way back down the slope. As one Marine struggled up through the smoke of battle, something seemed to grab his legs.

Onlookers from below watched amazed as the Marine crumpled, disappeared and then stood again, holding a dead Japanese soldier up with one hand and a bloody bayonet in the other. Suddenly the dead Jap was hurtling threw the air, and then bouncing off the rocky outgrowths. A loud, throaty cheer went up from the Marines below.

Nearby a company commander ran up a slope, carried one casualty down, and laid him in a defilade beside a tank. As he stood, a mortar shell exploded close by and killed him. His exec, a Second Lieutenant, sprinted up to help. He was blown apart from a direct hit by an antitank shell. This company was now down to eleven men, with the highest rank among them that of corporal. It was finished as a fighting unit.

As the fighting continued, its intensity unabated, the Second Battalion joined the first to reinforce the effort. Sadly, both battalions together could muster a little over 100 capable combatants out of an original 2,200. Casualties in the entire regiment of 3,500 men would number 1,749. In addition, many more were lost to water poisoning, exhaustion, combat fatigue or blast concussion.

In spite of this, Puller's Force had killed 4,000 Japanese, about two of every five defenders on the island, and taken one third of its fortifications. When General Geiger heard of the casualties suffered by the First Regiment, he ordered the 321st Infantry Regiment of the 81st Division to replace them in the line. The fighting continued. It would take a month to declare the island secure, but another month would be needed to wipe out the last pockets of tenacious resistance.

Someone has said that the Japanese fought for their emperor; the British for King and country; and the American, for souvenirs. At least here, on this horrid island, that was not the case. In fact, no one seemed to want to keep anything to remind him of the ordeal of Peleliu. A veteran officer of the fighting stated, "It seemed to us that somebody forgot to give the order to call off Peleliu. That's one place nobody wants to remember." When a sailor asked a Marine being evacuated from the island if he had any souvenirs, the dirty, haggard Marine stared at him, then patted his rear. "I brought my ass out of there, swabbie! That's the only souvenir of Peleliu I want to keep!"

It had cost over 10,000 casualties, three times the number on Tarawa, and most of them from the First Marine Division. Many of those fine troops who had survived Guadalcanal would not leave Peleliu alive. Time Magazine in 1944 called it, "a horrible place." Nimitz later confessed that the taking of Peleliu was probably unnecessary. The airfield there would not have been the threat feared earlier, and did little to help in the attack on the Philippines. Even the name of the operation, "Stalemate," seemed to be a prophetic utterance of its outcome. Very little has been written on the horrors of Peleliu, many authors preferring to concentrate on more glorious moments in the war in the Pacific. Little mention can be found of such places as Bloody Nose Ridge, Death Valley, The Point, The Horseshoe, the Five Sisters, and Walt Ridge.

So intense was the fighting for this island that an enormous toll of Marines was taken from battle fatigue. It was here that the phrase, "The Thousand Yard Stare," had its beginning. It was based on an artist's portrayal of a Marine vacantly staring out of a haggard, bearded, dirty face. It would be one of the unforgettable pieces of art to come out of the war.

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Roi Namur - Trouble In Small Places

By Wild Bill Wilder

The islands of Roi and Namur were not a big item in the grand scheme of conquest in the Pacific. Located in the Marshall Islands, however, they would have to be taken. A strong Japanese force was located on both islets and needed to be neutralized in order to maintain the security of the larger island of Kwajalein. It would be the lot of the 4th Marine Division to take these two islets. They were well prepared for the task. In addition, Admiral Marc Mitscher, the tall, lean commander of Task Force 58, had 12 carriers and eight battleships to aid in the softening up of both.

For two days carrier aircraft tore into the Marshalls, and soon annihilated any Japanese threat from the air. The battleships moved in close to attack the shore defenses. The overall commander of the Battleships was Admiral Connolly. Wanting to be sure that the firepower of these naval behemoths was effective, he ordered the older battleship Maryland to move toward the shoreline. "Move really close in," he radioed to its captain. Parking herself less than a mile from the shoreline, her guns began pounding the Japanese. The American Marines were delighted, and whooped and shouted from the decks of the transports. That was the way it should have been done at Tarawa, and in gratitude they pinned the nickname "Close-in Connolly" on the commander.

On the morning of the invasion, February 1st, 1944, four battalions of land-based artillery on other nearby deserted islets hurled even more shells onto Roi and Namur. Finally the carrier planes came in for one last lethal sweep. When the Marines headed to shore, not a single Japanese officer above the rank of Major was alive to direct the defenses. Even the commander, Admiral Yamada, had been killed along with seven senior officers when a thousand pound bomb made a direct hit on his headquarters bunker on Namur. For the most part, the Japanese defenders were leaderless.

The island of Roi was taken without major incident. The only event on the island of major consequence was the accidental setting off of a warehouse full of torpedo warheads. The resulting explosion was so tremendous that the entire island seemed to disappear. A Dauntless Dive Bomber, spotting for the invasion commanders, was driven upward 1,000 feet by the force of the explosion. A gigantic red and brown cloud completely obscured the view from the air. "Great God Almighty!" exclaimed the dauntless pilot, Major Charles Duchin. "The whole damn island's blown up!" When the dust cleared, however, it was still there. Where the warehouse had stood, however, was a crater the size of an Olympic swimming pool. This incident caused more Marine casualties on the island than the actual fighting. Forty Marines were killed, and over sixty were injured.

At Namur, things were not quite that easy. The landings were made without major incident, but once the Marines began to move inland, resistance stiffened. The terrain was difficult, with huge shell holes and fallen palm trees. All of this provided good cover for the Japanese, who constantly sniped away at the attackers. Occasionally a Japanese soldier would come hurtling out of the shadows of the trees and leap on a tank with an antitank mine, or dynamite strapped to his body. Others climbed aboard with only grenades and tried to force them through the visual ports of the armor.

Some were successful. The Marines would watch in helpless horror as a tank trembled with an interior muffled explosion, usually followed by another that might rip the turret from the hull. In another instance, smoke began to pour from the apertures on the tank as it shook and trembled with one interior blast after another. Angry beyond words, the Marines continually sprayed the outside of the tanks with automatic weapons to keep them clear of suicidal attackers, and the constant pinging and clatter of shells hitting the tank's hull and turret was unnerving to those inside, to say the least.

At nightfall the Marines halted and the men dug in. The inevitable counterattack came under a clear pale moonlit night. It became a man-to-man struggle to the death. The combatants were not taking prisoners. They were taking lives. Sergeant Frank Tucker lay behind a tree and from there killed thirty-eight Japanese, firing ammunition brought him by Pfc. Stephen Hopkins, the son of Harry Hopkins. Tucker took bullets through his helmet, his canteen and his glasses, as well a bayonet thrust in the webbing of his pack, while young Hopkins received the rifle shot that killed him.

By the next morning, most active resistance had ceased. The work now consisted of finding those Japanese remaining alive and digging them out. It would take another two days of searching and killing to finally declare Namur completely secure.

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A Walk Down The Beaches At Saipan

June 15,1944

By Wild Bill Wilder

Toward the end of the afternoon on June 15th, one could walk on the beaches of Saipan with a degree of safety, though not without some caution. The Japanese defenders are still firing heavy weapons and the rounds occasionally make a "swhooshing" noise as they pass over. The vegetation at the edge of the beach is not that dense. It includes palms, fresh fruit trees and pandanus. Some of it has been ripped apart and shattered by the pre-bombardment shelling. The beach is also full of craters, some still smoking, which gives it the appearance of diseased face bearing the scars of a fierce battle. The odors of cordite, gasoline fumes, dried blood, and the beginning of human rot, combine to give the area a most unique smell.

Walking inland, there are American and Japanese bodies scattered about. Here there are two dead marines lying close to two dead Japanese. Another marine lies in a position often found on the beach. When death struck him down he had been charging forward across the beach; his legs were still in a sprinter's crouch, and his M-1 Garand rifle was still held in his extended right arm. There to the left, on the edge of a large crater lies another marine. According to his dog-tag, attached now to his sand-crusted boot, his name is Robert Forsberg. He is Catholic, and his blood type was O positive. He has some 15 bandaged wounds over various parts of his body, but from the sand stained brown beneath his body, the blood did not get there in time.

One must walk with caution, for there are still Japanese "tape measure" mines scattered along the beach. Even though small by comparison to most, they can still take off a leg.

Almost at the edge of the beach, a deserted Amtrak smokes from a hit it has taken. In an amateurish style, the name "Beast of Denver" has been painted on its side. A small white goat has taken refuge under its bow. Some 50 feet to the right is an abandoned Japanese 70mm howitzer, mounted on wagon wheels. Beside it are two ammunition wagons. Further to the right, about 200 feet away, is another LVT, this one bearing the strange name "Abatoir." Its right track extends behind, much as though the vehicle has been disemboweled.

Between the two amphibious tractors, there are seventeen dead marines, still waiting silently to be covered, loaded onto departing Amtrak's, and sent home. The total silence of the dead stands in sharp contrast to the lively cracks of automatic weapons in the distance.

Under a small tree that looks something like a cedar, someone has planted a tiny American flag, which flutters bravely in the evening breeze. Its appearance there, in such an unlikely place, seems to salute the heroic American dead still lying on the beaches of Saipan. They had paid the ultimate price so that a small piece of brightly colored cloth could wave here. Other marines will also die before the night is over. Perhaps both the living and the dead deserve a salute before the tiny flag to show a profound appreciation for their efforts and sacrifice.

This is how the beaches at Saipan looked toward sunset on the first day of the invasion. And it was only beginning.

Saipan - Reach The Beach

Wild Bill Wilder

After an American briefing officer had described all the adverse conditions of Saipan, a private's hand shot up. "Sir, why'n hell don't we let the Japs keep the island?" Saipan was one of the three major islands of the Marianas scheduled to be occupied by US forces. The other two were Tinian and Guam. None of them were a paradise by any means, but they were essential to the war effort. They would have to be taken.

By controlling them, America would have a site for the launching of the new B-29 Superfortress for raids against the Japanese islands. It was also the headquarters of the Japanese Central Pacific Fleet under Admiral Nagumo. It was imperative, therefore, that they be secured at any cost. Two Marine divisions made the initial assault against the west coast of Saipan on June 15, 1944. A diversionary attack by one Regiment did not fool the Japanese. The taking of the beaches at near Chalan Konoa was even more difficult than anticipated. By the end of the day, the Marines sought to consolidate and prepare the beachhead against a sure Japanese counterattack.

In the early hours of the 16th, a Marine captain thought he heard the noise of engines approaching the front lines. In the darkness it was impossible to see at a distance. He radioed to the ships offshore and requested a few star shells to light up his area. Within a minute, the front was illuminated and the Captain saw to his horror that enemy tanks were drawing a bead straight for him and his men.

A strong Japanese tank-infantry force came screaming out of the darkness. Three separate attacks, with over 40 Japanese pieces of armor, lashed out at the Marines of the Second Battalion, Twenty-third Regiment. The Japanese soldiers, pretty well "liquored up," rode the tanks, screaming and firing as they came. The officers all had their Samurai swords drawn, and slapped them against the sides of the tanks, much as a cavalryman would do to spur his horse to a even faster gallop. In coordination with the attack,

Japanese infiltrators had crept through the American lines and attacked from the rear and both flanks. It seemed to the Marines that suddenly the enemy was all around them. The viciousness of the assault broke through the front lines. An alarm went out to the forces at the water's edge. A few Marine tanks were near the water and struck out immediately to take on the Japanese armor.

Even some of the lightly armed LVTs, equipped with the 75mm Howitzer rolled inland to help slow down the fanatical Japanese advance. Captain Tokuzo Matsuya heroically drove his T-97 Chi Ha tanks into bazooka and open sighted artillery fire. The American tanks struck his force suddenly. One by one the Japanese tanks were taken out. Some of the Japanese tanks were the newer version of the T-97, with a 57mm antitank gun mounted in the turret. These would prove deadly to the lighter American M-5 Stuarts.

The fighting between infantry was extremely violent and hand to hand. It included rifle butt, bayonets, ammo boxes, grenades, and fists. Troops on the beach in charge of unloading incoming transports, as well as cooks and quartermasters were awakened, given a gun and sent into the fight. A couple of Jap tanks were able to reach the sands of the beach, but there they were promptly eliminated. The 105mm howitzers lowered their barrels, and aimed along their length, firing directly at the tanks. Timely intervention with starshells and indirect fire from off shore US ships also helped turned the tide. Captain Matsuya was found dead the next

morning beside his tank, samurai sword in hand.

By dawn, the battle was over. The Beach was still secure, and the Japanese were severely crippled by the expenditure of its few resources. From this point, except for a few uncoordinated "banzai" charges, the Japanese would adopt a defensive posture and make the Marines pay for every inch of ground gained on Saipan.

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Tank Fight On Tinian

By Wild Bill Wilder

Only three miles to the southwest of Saipan lay the island of Tinian. A rather lush, green piece of earth, it is probably the most attractive of the three major islands, and was perfect for the building of airfields. In fact, this island was the most ideal for the initiation of the plan of long range bombing raids by B-29s against Japan. Almost completely flat, with the dimensions of five by ten miles, it would be the site of five gigantic forty-seven hundred feet landing strips.

From here hundreds of the new B-29 Superfortresses would journey some 1500 miles over the vast Pacific to the home island of Japan, and begin to bomb them into submission with fire storm raids. It was from this island that the Army Air Force P-47 Thunderbolts first used America's newest weapon, napalm. Even more importantly, from these bases, the B-29 called Enola Gay took off to drop an even deadlier weapon, the atomic bomb, on Hiroshima.

As Navy Seabees worked on constructing the airbase on Saipan, the delayed invasions of Guam and Tinian began. Guam was invaded on July 21st, and Tinian came under attack by landing forces on July 24th. The principal attackers were the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions, who had just finished weeks of hard fighting on Saipan. With only two weeks to recover from that trauma, they were again thrust into battle. The Japanese defenders, numbering over 9,000, felt confident that they could hold the island. The two enemy commanders, Colonel Kiyochi Ogata of the Japanese Army, and Captain Goichi Oya, naval commandant, were not even on speaking terms. Interservice rivalry plagued the Japanese much as it did the United States. Each acted independently of the other.

Captain Oya was in charge of defending Tinian Town to the south. To do so, he had captured British shore batteries of enormous strength placed to fire seaward. Carefully camouflaged, large arrays of artillery, from 6-inchers to 75mm flak guns, were in a position to decimate any landing force. The beaches before the town were an ideal landing site, and Captain Oya was convinced that the Americans would strike there. Heavy air and naval strikes had been hammering the little island for weeks. Their effect was catastrophic for the Japanese. Even with the devastation created by the bombardments, the Japanese recovered and prepared to annihilate the invaders.

On the American side, a heated argument between Admiral Turner, commander of the task force, and General Holland Smith, in charge of the invasion forces. Fearing horrible losses if the invasion were to go in at Tinian Town, the Marine General had found alternate landing sites further to the north, near the Ulishi Airfield. It would be up to Admiral Spruance to settle the matter. Even though the White Beaches to the north were extremely narrow, one 60 yards wide; the other, 150 yards wide. Only about 5 LVTs could get into one beach at the same time, which would limit the inflow of troops.

Finally a new plan was established. The 2nd Marine Division would fake a landing at Tinian Town. This would draw the defenders to the area, and allow the Fourth Division to land with relative ease to the north. Before the enemy could react, the Marines would be ashore, and then the 2nd would be taken northward to reinforce the Fourth.

On July 24th, the US southern armada began approaching the enemy at Tinian Town. Captain Oya was elated. As the American warships neared, his large batteries opened fire. The gunners had a splendid target in the old battleship Colorado, laying only 3,000 yards offshore. With a series of accurate salvos, they hit the big battlewagon twenty-two times before she could get out of range. They also inflicted six hits on the

destroyer Norman Scott as it attempted to lay down smoke for the battered capital ship. By this time, the enemy guns had been spotted, and a lethal rain of American naval and air firepower rained down upon them.

In spite of his losses, Captain Oya was overjoyed at his "victory" in stopping the Americans. He could see the landing boats turning back and heading to their mother ships. Once loaded, the transports turned and headed north. About two hours later, Oya received word that the Americans had successfully landed up in the northwest and were pouring over narrow beaches there in incredible speed and volume. Now his remaining naval guns were still pointing seaward. They were of no use to him. He had been effectively taken out of the battle. The success or failure of the Japanese now lay in the hands of Army Colonel Ogata.

He too, however, had been deceived by the fake landings to the south, and did not have troops in the area where the Americans were landing. Battalion after battalion of the Fourth Marine Division burst from the fat bellies of the LSTs standing offshore and sped to shore. Over 500 amtracs brought them to land as LCI rocket boats darkened the sky with salvo after salvo of the deadly missiles.

The few large artillery pieces that Ogata had set up to defend these beaches had been already knocked out by accurate naval fire. The only thing slowing the Marines getting ashore were bevies of land mines, which ripped through the thin bottom armor of the LVTs as they proceeded up the beaches. As Ogata hurried men to the invasion site, naval and marine air power decimated their ranks. There was total confusion and little defense. By the end of the day, over 16,000 Marines were on Tinian, prepared to stay there. It had cost only 77 dead and 479 wounded,

On the first night, Colonel Ogata launched a series of three counterattacks against the Fourth Marine Division. They involved a force of nearly 2,000 men, or fully one third of his strength. After an intense night of fighting, the dawn came with his entire force wiped out. Now Ogata had no choice but to fight a slow withdrawal. The fighting would continue until his command finally consisted of himself and 255 others. That took seven more days. By this time the 2nd Marine Division had joined with the 4th. It cleaned out the northern end of Tinian, and then moved down the eastern half of the island. Both Divisions, side by side, simply steamrolled their way south.

On July 31st Tinian was declared secured. It was on that same night that Colonel Ogata joined his ancestors. He fell to machine gun fire on Marine barbed wire as he and his few remaining men made a mad last charge toward the enemy. Of course, there were the usual "mopping up" operations. On Tinian the Japanese really had no place to hide. What few remained chose suicide by weapons or by leaping into the ocean. Tinian has been taken with minimal losses. The Marines had only 127 killed and 1,771 wounded in the entire week. Compared to other islands, this was a masterpiece of maneuver. It was as close to perfection as the cruelty of war will allow. The dividends reaped by its capture made it a worthwhile effort indeed.

Early in the morning of the 25th, Ogata launched three series of suicide charges against the beachhead. 600 hundred screaming Japanese were wiped out as they struck the left flank, guarded by the 25th Marines. Thirty minutes later, a second attack in the middle of the line against the 25th Marines managed to break through. About 200 Japanese poured through this gap. They were met with muzzle-blasting artillerymen and counterattacking riflemen. They were killed to the last man.

A final charge was directed against the 23rd Marines on the right flank. This time there were close to 1,000 Japanese pressing hard. They were supported by five of the remaining Japanese tanks on the island. A various assortment of American tanks, artillery and self propelled guns were hurled into the battle. The Third Battalion of the 23rd Marines was the hardest hit. Their enemy was part of the 50th Infantry Regiment, seasoned veterans of the Manchurian campaign. These were tough soldiers, ready to fight and die. They did both that night.

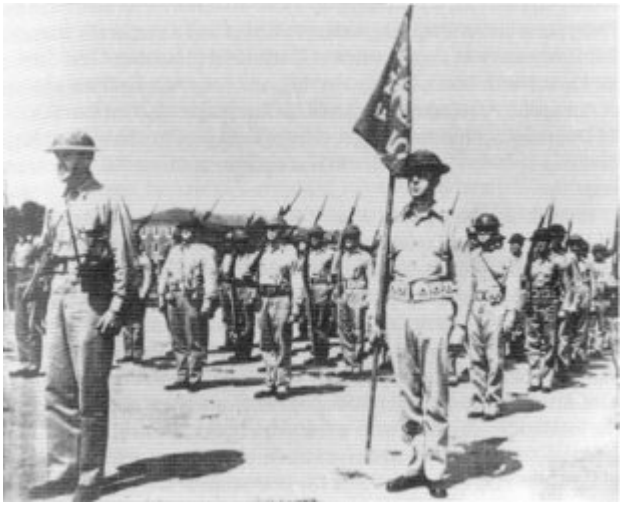
One Marine Lieutenant later described the fight. ‘‘The three lead tanks broke through our wall of fire. One began to glow blood red, turned crazily on its tracks, and careened into a ditch. A second, mortally wounded, turned its machine gun on its tormentors, firing into the ditches in a last desperate effort to fight its way free. One hundred yards more and it stopped dead in its tracks. The third tried frantically to turn and retreat, but our men closed in, literally blasting it apart."

The other two tanks got into a shooting match with half-tracks and bazookamen and came out losers. By dawn, the weary Marine defenders were presented a spectacular sight. After a muffled explosion, Japanese bodies would be hurled some fifteen feet into the air. The Marines watched in horror as the wounded blew

themselves up with magnetic mines. It was an end much more powerful and final than the customary hand grenade suicide.

Wake - A Hopeless Defiance
By Wild Bill Wilder

Wake's Growing Significance



The Japanese military was on a roll. After the "dastardly" attack on Pearl Harbor, forces of the Empire of the Rising Sun, with the spidery arms of conquest reached east into the Indian Ocean, destroying the British Naval presence and threatening Indochina, Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore and the oil rich islands to the south. In the eastern Pacific, the Philippine Islands, US Bastion in the Far East came under attack. Guam, one of the few US possessions in the Central Pacific, was swallowed up in an instant. They seemed unstoppable.

An annoying rock in the river of Japanese conquest was Wake Atoll. It consisted of three small islands, Peale, Wilkes, and Wake. The group is surrounded by a reef through which a channel between Wilkes and Wake leads into the central lagoon. Up until the 1930s, Wake had no importance. Once air travel began, it became an "in between" place. It had become a US possession in 1899, one of the positive results of the Spanish-American War. Initially it was only an insignificant spit of land in a big ocean.

With the establishment of international air travel in the early 1930s, Pan American Airlines established a stop there for its huge clippers (flying boats). It was a convenient stopover and refueling point for the Trans-Pacific Clipper Service. In 1935 a plush hotel was built there for the overnight accommodation of its passengers.

The islands themselves had little to offer. Rather barren, with few trees, a lot of scrubs, sea birds and a unique rodent indigenous to them, it was far from the pacific tropical paradise often imagined.

When hostilities between the United States and the Empire of Japan seemed inevitable, Wake suddenly became a very important place. The race to be prepared had begun. Early in 1941, a large contingent of construction workers and their equipment were shipped to the atoll. Their primary purpose was the construction of an airfield and seaplane base. The superintendent of the group was a burly, two-fisted Irishman named Dan Teters, an ex-college football player, with military experience as a sergeant in the First World War. The crew immediately set to work and within a few months much of the work was completed.

Preparations for Conflict

In October of that same year, about 400 young Gyrenes of the 1st Marine Defense Battalion arrived to garrison the island. Their armament included six 5" guns, relics that had been dismantled from World War one battleships, a dozen 3" guns for anti-aircraft protection, and numerous machine guns. Their radar equipment was still at Pearl. Their commander was a career Marine major named James Devereux, who had seen service in Nicaragua, China, and the Philippines. He was a no-nonsense, quiet type of commander, a "

by the book" Marine.

No one ever imagined that this tiny force could repel a major enemy invasion. Their purpose was to thwart hit-and-run attacks by the Japanese fleet and allow the base to serve an interdictory role to enemy naval movement. The airfield would provide a base of operations against Japanese shipping. Not anticipated in the least was the stunning extent of Japan's initial success.

Devereux worked his troops hard, emplacing guns and preparing weapons pits to cover every possible approach by enemy forces. Once that was done, he continued to push the battalion, excavating ammunition dump sites, command posts and air-raid shelters. Emplacements, gun pits and fortifications were all skillfully camouflaged. Riflemen and machine gunners practiced their skills. The Marines were kept busy seven days a week. Within a little over two months, the atoll had become an American fortress, stuck in the middle of enemy territory, much as the old outposts in the US west in the nineteenth century. The hostiles now surrounding them on all sides used the rising sun as their emblem of war.

WAR!

On November 28th, Commander Winfield Scott Cunningham, a naval officer with extensive experience in aviation arrived to take overall command of Wake. Devereux would be in charge of the ground troops on the three tiny islands. Two days later, a group of B-17s landed on the newly built airstrip for refueling. It was a grueling work experience for the Marines, who had to pump thousands of gallons of fuel by hand. Tragically, these same aircraft would be destroyed in the first Japanese bombing raids of the war.

Six days later, Wake received its very own contingent of aircraft. Twelve tiny Wildcat Fighters of Marine VMF-211 zoomed in from the early morning light to land on the newly constructed airfield. Leaving the carrier Enterprise, the flight had covered 200 miles. Their presence was a welcome sight to the inhabitants of Wake. Major Paul Putnam, in charge of the air group, was an old friend of Devereux, having served together in Nicaragua. Putnam expressed concern for the lack of revetments for his aircraft on the landing field. It left them exposed and vulnerable on the ground. It would be an omission of catastrophic proportions only two days later.

Monday, December 8th dawned bright and clear (being on the east side of the International Date Line, Wake was a day ahead of Pearl Harbor). The men would receive a well-deserved rest today. After an early muster and the raising of the flag (which from this day would remain unfurled until the fall of Wake), the men set about handling personal matters, some taking a swim in the lagoon, others playing cards.

Early on in the day, an alarm was sounded from the Pacific Fleet Headquarters at Pearl to All-American facilities that could receive it. Japanese aircraft were devastating the American fleet there. It was NO drill! Once he had confirmed the authenticity of the message, Devereux and the other commanders quickly went into action. The bugler sounded 'Call to Arms," and within 45 minutes all positions were manned and ready. Major Putnam dispatched four of his F4Fs on a CAP. The defenders at Wake were as ready as they could possible be. The attack was not long in coming.

At 11:58 AM, a flight of 30 Nell bombers, flying some six hundred miles from Roi-Namur, and using rainsqualls to cover their approach, skirted the Wildcats in the air and struck without warning. The attack was devastating! Seven of the eight aircraft on the ground were destroyed. The one left remaining was only good for spare parts for those who found refuge in the air. There was severe damage on all three islands. The Pan-Am hotel was left a shambles. As was the case at many allied installations, the surprise attack of the Japanese created havoc all across the Pacific.

The next day was a repeat performance of the one before, but this time the remaining American fighters were ready. Like angry hornets with stingers extended, the tiny, fat aircraft darted and twisted among the formation of Nell bombers, wreaking havoc. Of the 32 Japanese aircraft, two were shot down and another 14 severely damaged. The 24th Air Flotilla had been sharply rebuked and would use more caution in future attacks.

The air raid of December 10th scored some more hits on buildings. For the first time, the airfield itself came under direct attack, no doubt to keep the Wildcats from getting into the air. The big blast that came as a roaring crescendo to the day's attack was caused by a hit on a warehouse containing 125 tons of dynamite at construction Camp Two. The resultant detonation was felt everywhere! It sent debris flying into the air for hundreds of feet. Pieces of it landed on the other two islands. Rounds of ammunition were set off by the concussion and Camp Two was virtually leveled.

The Overconfident Japanese

Even with this bitter loss, the total damage had not been that serious, and all the big guns were still ready for action, even though a couple of barrels had been slightly bent by the force of the dynamite explosion. The Japanese pilots, however, based on the smoke and carnage seen from above returned glowing reports of their success. In their mind, the enemy defenses had been pulverized and could offer no serious resistance to any invasion.

This prompted the rapid approach of the Japanese invasion fleet to the atoll on December 11th. It included the newer light cruiser Yubari, with the commander of the invasion fleet, Rear-Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka aboard. Also present were two older cruisers, six destroyers, two destroyer transports and two submarines.

450 Special Naval Landing Force (SNLF, or Japanese Marines) was ready to be sent ashore. They were some veterans in the group, but with so much activity, a lot of new recruits were also included. One lamented that he had betrothed himself to his fiancée, and then was swept away into battle before the celebration. The troops would be split between Wilkes and Wake islands. There were just not enough of them available to tackle all three islands at once.

At 3:00 AM of the 11th, the enemy ships drew to within their own firing range on the American positions. A sharp-eyed lookout awakened Major Devereux, who immediately informed the 5" batteries. Realizing the limitations of his defenses, he ordered them to hold their fire until the enemy was within range. The antiquated guns did not have the reach of the Jap naval guns and would remain silent until the enemy drew near enough to be attacked. The four Wildcats would not leave the ground until the coastal batteries opened fire.

At 5:00 AM the Yubari began its first run, cruising to the southwest of Wilkes and Wake, firing as she moved. The rest of the fleet conformed to her actions. A number of hits were made including some diesel fuel storage tanks that created quite a picture of destruction. Little resistance came from the enemy onshore.

A Harsh Surprise

Lulled into overconfidence, the fleet turned inward for another run heading northeast, and in so doing closed the distance between them and the island enough for Battery A on Peacock Point, Wake Island, under First Lieutenant Barniger, to open fire. His first salvo passed over the cruiser, which immediately began jinking violently in the water, returning fire. Barniger dropped his range some 500 yards and let go another volley. This time, two 5" shells crashed through the cruiser's superstructure.

Two more hits created even more damage, this time to the boiler rooms. Pouring smoke, and glowing with internal fires, Yubari limped away. As a destroyer sought to lay a smoke screen for the stricken cruiser, it caught a shell in the forecastle, instantly killing its commander. It too staggered from the action and sought to put distance between itself and the deadly US guns.

By this time, Battery L, at Kuku Point on Wilkes joined the horrendous symphony of war. Even with an inoperative rangefinder, Second Lieutenant John McAlister sighted over the big barrels and scored three hits with three successive salvos on a destroyer some 4,000 yards offshore. When the third set of shells hit her amidships, she disappeared in a huge explosion. Her magazines had been detonated and it broke her back instantly, sinking her in minutes. Meanwhile on Peale, Battery B at Toki Point took on three destroyers that

were approaching, scored a hit on one and forced them to retire. These defenses were far from nullified. They had created havoc and severe damage to the invasion fleet in a matter of minutes.

By this time, Kajioka was finished. He ordered a general withdrawal. To his dismay, the four Wildcat fighters had now been launched and began bombing attacks with ordnance of 100 and 250 pound bombs as the ships pulled away. During the early hours of December 11th, they flew ten sorties; expending bombs and ammo, landing to replenish, up in the air again, and into another attack. With no air support, the ships, except for the fierce firing of their AA guns, were helpless. In two hours the F4Fs had scored hits on both of the other cruisers, a destroyer, a destroyer transport, and left another transport bathed in flames.

As the coup de grace, Captain Elrod took his Wildcat into a dive against the stricken destroyer Kisaragi. Dropping two one-hundred pound bombs on her stern, he looked back over his shoulder as he pulled up. He stared in amazement as the relatively tiny bombs detonated the primed depth charges at the rear of the ship. She was instantly torn apart by a tremendous explosion which almost took the F4F with it.

As the battered invasion fleet struggled away, another flight of Japanese bombers appeared from the northeast. The fighter pilots had their blood up for battle and pounced on them, shooting down two and setting fire to a third. Most of the bombs of the surviving aircraft were dropped into the sea and they turned tail and ran. The morning action had cost a total of four slightly wounded Marines. The Japanese, on the other hand, had suffered their first serious casualties of the war with the United States. The proud Japanese Navy, up until this point had remained untouched while inflicting devastating losses on American and British forces.

Hitherto untouched, the Japanese Navy had now lost two destroyers, a transport, seven other vessels severely damaged, 700 men killed and a number of bombers lost in action. Kajioka would suffer serious loss of face to his superior, Vice-Admiral Nariyoshi Inouye. The interview must have been unpleasant indeed!

"Send Us...More Japs"

It was on the 11th that Cunningham sent a message, prefaced with gibberish and ending in the same way. The decoders at Pearl picked out the words, "Send us...more Japs," and used it in a broadcast that also described Kajioka's harsh treatment by the Wake defenders. While an inspiration to the folks at home, it was the farthest thing from the truth that could be imagined. In actuality, it was the last thing that Wake needed at that moment.

What it needed was reinforcement, and soon. Admiral Kimmel at Pearl Harbor, while waiting for the arrival of Admiral Nimitz to take over the command of the Pacific Fleet, was at that moment forming a task force which would be sent to relieve the pressure on the tiny atoll and its beleaguered garrison. All that was available for immediate departure was the carrier Saratoga, three cruisers, nine destroyers, a troop transport and an oiler.

Two hundred more Marine volunteers (there were many more, but that was all that could be spared) and VMF-221, with eighteen antiquated Brewster Buffalo fighters were to be the element of reinforcement for Wake. Perhaps it would be enough. The big problem was that the oiler, essential to the operation, had a maximum speed of 12 knots and would slow the force greatly. Estimated arrival time was December 24th at the earliest.

Time Runs Out

Sadly, time was running out for the Marines and civilians at Wake. Bombing raids continued daily for another nine days. By this time only two Wildcats were still flyable and supplies were critical. Cunningham advised Pearl on December 17th that all structures had been demolished, along with most of the vehicles, machinery and other equipment. Fuel, furthermore, was dangerously low.

To encourage the defenders, a response was forthcoming, but it would have to be delivered in person. No one wanted to chance revealing the information and exposing the rescue force to disaster. On the 20th, a PBY landed at the shambles that had earlier been the Pan-Am pier. A young, clean cut ensign in a crisp, white uniform stepped ashore in amazement as he took in the devastation surrounding him.

Still perhaps with thoughts of a cool frosted glass to be enjoyed a little later, once his task had been accomplished, he asked directions to the Pan-Am hotel of a nearby group of island defenders. A grizzled, dirty Marine, with a tattered khaki uniform and a smell that only comes with days without bathing, saluted without enthusiasm, and laconically pointed to a nearby pile of rubble. "That's it...or that was it, Lieutenant." His expectations shattered, the officer then reported to Cunningham and Devereux, relaying verbally the information of the approaching relief force.

As soon as that was done, the officer was loaded down with dispatches from the commanders and mail from the rest of the men. As the PBY lifted into the air, the last physical contact with the outside world for the Wake defenders slowly diminished in the morning sunrise until it was gone.

The Japanese were also aware of the possibility of the arrival of reinforcements. Wake had already proved a tough nut to crack and they were not about to wait for the situation to worsen. Their own new attack force was drawing within range of Wake. This time two fleet carriers, the Hiryu and Soryu, accompanied by six heavy cruisers, another half-dozen destroyers and two transports with other 1,000 Japanese Marines were about to pounce.

Less than two hours after the departure of the Catalina, on December 21st, the first air attack began. It was clear by the type of aircraft used that carriers were nearby. This was a much more serious situation and time was running out. Three more attacks were launched that same day, continuing to pummel whatever remained intact on the islands and blowing it to pieces. Little could now be done to stop them.

The next day, it was more of the same, and the last two Wildcats made a valiant attack against thirty-three Val Dive bombers, escorted by six zeros. Lieutenants Frueler and Davidson jumped the formation, with Frueler tackling the escort, leaving the bombers for Davidson. Frueler turned one zero into a fireball, but another latched on his tail and seriously damaged his aircraft and wounding him. He was able to crash land on the airstrip but the Wildcat would never fly again. Nothing was ever heard from Davidson. Air support was at an end for Wake. Putnam equipped his few remaining men with weapons and placed them at the disposal of Devereux for ground fighting.

The Last Tragic Chapter

It would not be long in coming. Early on December 23rd, the destroyer transports began their landings under the cover of intense darkness at 3:00 AM. Troops were landed on all three islands and began a systematic conquest of each American strongpoint. The 3" guns, used before for anti-aircraft duty, were turned on the invading Japanese. It was to little avail.

In a matter of minutes communication from Devereux with the various friendly positions was lost completely. Fighting raged on each island, now hand to hand. On Wilkes a contingent of Marines charged into the advancing Japanese and annihilated them.

On Peale, two landing craft disgorged some sixty Japanese troops, which instantly charged some twenty Marines and fourteen civilians, under the command of 2nd Lt. Arthur Poindexter. He was last sighted firing his pistol into the rapidly charging Japanese before they engulfed him. Camp One was now in enemy hands.

The situation had degenerated from serious to desperate. Urgently Cunningham radioed to Pearl Harbor that enemy landings were in progress on all three islands. The chilling reply told the story: "NO FRIENDLY VESSELS IN YOUR VICINITY NOR WILL BE WITHIN THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS." Cunningham's last reply was, "ENEMY ON ISLAND - ISSUE IN DOUBT."

Some 300 miles from Wake, the relief force now stood in danger of surface battle or air attack. They could not possibly arrive in time to offer assistance to the troops on the atoll. In addition, every American ship would be needed for the sure to come larger naval engagements. The Saratoga was priceless and could not be lost at that point, so the group of ships was ordered to turn back. There would be no relief for Wake. There was no more time.

As day dawned, however, the US Marines still held the upper hand in some locations throughout the area. When the Japanese captured a 3" gun at Kuku Point, 2nd Lt. McAlister led an attack that wiped out the enemy and retook the gun. By 7:00 AM, the only live Japanese on Wilkes were two wounded prisoners. Ninety-eight of their comrades lay sprawled in and around the gun positions. These types of victories, however, were only momentary and could not prove decisive.

In the meantime, Devereux was without any sort of communication with the rest of the island group. He had drawn defense lines around the command post on Wake, and even these seemed to be at the point of caving in to the incessant enemy forays. Believing that Wilkes and Peale had already fallen, Devereux then received word of the message sent earlier to Cunningham from Pearl. There would be no reinforcements.

There was no need in continuing. The weary, disheartened Major now saw no alternative but surrender. Accompanied by Japanese guards, Devereux carried a white flag and went from position to position, telling his men to lay down their arms. By 1330, December 24th, 1941, it was all over. Wake drew strangely quiet. Wisps of smoke rose from various points as a final salute to the gallant defenders. The bastion of the Central Pacific was now under Japanese control. The stand made there, however, did raise an outcry throughout the United States, which would become a rallying voice throughout the war: "Remember Wake!"

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