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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST MARINE RAIDER BATTALION
(1ST MARINE DIVISION, FLEET MARINE FORCE) AT
TULAGI, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS, 7-12 AUGUST, 1942
(GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a rifle platoon leader)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION

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INTRODUCTION

To fully understand and appreciate the problems and difficulties confronting those participating in any combat action, be it ground, naval, or aerial, the reader must be thoroughly aware of all of the circumstances surrounding and leading to that action. So that the reader of this document may be fully cognizant of the whys and wherefores of the operation, let us briefly summarize the events of the ten month period prior to the initiation of the action about to be described.

Commencing on one of the blackest days in the modern history of the United States and continuing relentlessly, the Japanese had successfully expanded their island empire until they were threatening the very continent of Australia. Japan had seized the rich coastal regions of China; overrun Siam and Burma; wrested rich oil stores for her war machine from the Netherlands East Indies; punctured the myth of the impregnable fortress of Singapore; and delivered mortal blows to the American pride in arms with victories at Wake, Guam, and in the Phillipines. (1)

Few and far between were the scattered blows the collective impotent might of the Allies delivered against the growing power of the Japanese aggressor in the Pacific. On the 4th of May, Navy planes from the USS Yorktown had pounded a Japanese task force busily landing Japanese Marines at Tulagi, in the Solomon Islands. (See Map A) And in the succeeding three days the U. S. Navy's carrier task forces had dealt a severe blow to Japanese sea power in the Battle of the Coral Sea. (2)

(1) A-7, p. xi; (2) A-7, p. 26

While U. S. newspapers were still playing up the victory in the Coral Sea and proclaiming it the turning point of the war, elements of the First Marine Division were sailing from ports in the United States for Wellington, New Zealand, where, under the provisions of a plan called "Operation Lone Wolf", they were to have a six months' period of intensive training in their specialty, amphibious operations, with the prospect of being employed against the enemy early in 1943. (3)

Other elements of the same First Marine Division were already in the Pacific and undergoing a rigorous training program. The Seventh Marines, an infantry regiment of the First Marine Division, and the 1st Marine Raider Battalion had been rushed from ports on the west coast of the United States to British and American Samoa respectively early in April of 1942 when it was feared that the force of the Jap drive might carry as far as those Allied bastions. (4)

During the latter part of May there had been a conspicuous and alarming lack of fleet and air activity on the part of the Japanese in the South Pacific. It was obvious that something was in the wind but where the attack would be launched was a major problem in the vastness of the waters of the Pacific. Happily, for the eventual successes of the Allied powers, the United States supreme command outguessed its Japanese counterpart and there resulted on the 4th through the 6th of June, 1942 a battle which might well be considered the turning point of the war in the Pacific for the United Nations. (5)

The Japanese had aimed a major blow at Midway Island with the intention of seizing it and using it as a stepping stone for further attack on the Hawaiian Islands and the continental United States. During a three day battle,

(3) A-1, p. 13; (4) A-1, p. 18, Personal knowledge; (5) A-7, p. 58

carrier planes of the Navy, reinforced by land based aircraft of the Marine Corps and Army Air Corps, in one fell swoop, broke the back of the invasion by causing the Japanese force to retire to its own waters and restored, through losses inflicted on the Japanese fleet, the balance of sea power in the Pacific which had been overwhelmingly in favor of the Japanese since Pearl Harbor. (6)

PLANNING PHASE

It was obvious to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that now was the time to wrest the initiative from the Japanese and strike while the enemy was relatively confused and in the process of reorganizing his forces. (7)

So it was that on 26 June, 1942 Major General A. A. Vandegrift, USMC, Commanding General of the First Marine Division, with members of his staff, was called to Auckland, New Zealand to confer with Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, USN, the newly appointed Commander South Pacific. This conference, originally presumed by the Marine commander to be a routine affair at which he would report on the state of readiness and training of his command, revealed the rather startling fact that "Operation Lone Wolf" had been cancelled in favor of "Operation Pestilence" which called for an amphibious landing by the First Marine Division in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area around August, 1942. (8) (See Map B)

To mount this landing operation Vandegrift would have two combat teams of his own First Division: the Fifth, already at Wellington; the First, enroute to Wellington; a combat team of the Second Marine Division now at San Diego; plus the 3rd Defense Battalion from Pearl Harbor and the 1st Marine Raider Battalion from New Caledonia. Small wonder the consternation of Vandegrift's staff when they realized the awful enormity of

(6) A-7, p. 59; (7) A-7, p. 68; (8) A-1, p. 15

the task confronting them. A further dismaying factor was the announcement that Rear Admiral Kelly Turner, USN, who was to be Attack Force Commander and ~~so~~ responsible for placing the final stamp of approval on loading and landing plans, was in Washington and would not be available in the area for several weeks. (9)

Concurrently with the landing in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area other Allied forces in the Pacific were to step up the tempo of their raids on the Japanese. The British were to make a very heavy carrier raid in the vicinity of Timor; MacArthur was to bear down in the Southwest Pacific area in New Guinea and a diversionary raid would be made by Marines to be landed on one of the islands to the north. So was sketched the big picture of the first American offensive of the war, the start of the campaign to wrest from the Japanese the ill gotten gains of their island empire. (10)

Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Gavutu, Florida; names, nothing but names to a staff which must, in a period of less than forty days, come up with an operations plan which must be fool proof in the face of an enemy who had not yet been defeated in battle in the current war. An operations is predicated on a knowledge of the terrain and a knowledge of enemy dispositions on that terrain. There was not a staff officer in the First Marine Division who had the vaguest notion as to the nature of the terrain or the manner of the enemy's dispositions on that terrain. Nor did an unrelenting search among charts and files of the Allied Nations do much to throw any light on the question. There just did not appear to be any existing maps of the area selected for landing nor was there any one too familiar with the developments the enemy had made on the islands in his possession. A last resort solution to the problem found

(9) A-1, p. 15; (10) A-1, p. 15

troops wading ashore on D-day with hand drawn sketches which had been made by Australian and New Zealand guides who were purportedly familiar with the islands; poor aerial photos negligible in value; and a few guides who had formerly lived or visited in the islands. Intelligence information was taken from every available source, chief of which was the interpretation of the poor aerial photos previously mentioned and from reports submitted by the coast-watcher system. Of no little aid was a personal reconnaissance flight over the target area made by two of the division's assistant operations officers.

Hampered and beset by apparently insoluble problems the division staff nonetheless came up with a tentative plan of operations which called for almost simultaneous landings on Tulagi and Guadalcanal by elements of the division. Now came the acid test. Since the Attack Force Commander was not present to pass on the merits of the tentative plan it became necessary to translate the terms of an unapproved tentative plan irrevocably and irretrievably into a permanent plan by loading the Fifth Marines. This was necessitated by the pressure of time, the lack of adequate loading facilities at Wellington, and the imminent arrival in Wellington of the First Marines who had sailed from the States commercially loaded, causing a trans-loading operation at Wellington that they might leave combat loaded.

On 18 July Admiral Turner arrived at Wellington, gave tentative approval of the plan of operations for the landing, and ordered D-day postponed until 7 August, 1942. For the next few days the Navy and Marine staffs jointly worked out the final details for the overall operation which smoothed up along the following lines; two combat teams of the Division, the First and Fifth, would land on Guadalcanal with their immediate

objective the airfield the Japanese were rapidly bringing to completion; the 1st Raider Battalion with one battalion of the Fifth Marines in support would land and seize Tulagi; the 1st Parachute Battalion was assigned the mission of seizing Gavutu; and elements of the 3rd Defense Battalion would land on call and provide anti-aircraft and anti-surface protection for the beaches as needed. (11)

To insure secrecy the entire operation was disguised as a training maneuver for the edification of ever-inquisitive New Zealanders. Actually the only maneuver of the entire exercise was to be a rehearsal of the impending operation on the island of Koro, in the Fiji Islands, which had been cleared of inhabitants for the show.

BATTALION PREPARATIONS

So much for the big picture of the operation. Now let us take a look at the 1st Marine Raider Battalion which, at the time of all of this planning, was located near the village of Saint Louis, a small town about 18 miles outside of Noumea, New Caledonia. It might be well at this time to acquaint the reader with the organization of the Raider Battalion since it was a more or less bastard organization which had been worked out by the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Merritt Edson, on a trial and error basis until he was satisfied with the result. (12)

The Raider Battalion, as such, had been born in the period following the summer amphibious exercises in 1941 when it had been divorced from the parent Fifth Regiment and given status as the 1st Separate Battalion, which name was shortly changed to the 1st Raider Battalion. The battalion was specially trained and specially organized to operate in rubber boats from the vessels of Transport Division 12, a group of World War I destroyers which had been converted to troop carrying duty and

(11) A-6, p. 28; Personal knowledge; (12) Personal knowledge

graced with the name of APD. The battalion had the normal headquarters company, four lettered rifle companies, and a heavy weapons company composed of an 81mm mortar platoon and four machine gun platoons. The rifle companies, with a strength of about 125 officers and men, were slightly under the strength of a normal Marine rifle company since they were designed to be accommodated aboard the APDs, but they were built around the standard three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. To compensate for the loss of manpower in the company additional weapons had been added to the 8 man rifle squad and it was fashioned around two Browning Automatic Rifles. The battalion headquarters company had, in addition to the normal administrative sections and communications platoon, a demolition platoon which was the forerunner of the assault platoon not yet conceived at this time.

Since it had been proposed from its very inception to employ the Raider Battalion on the more difficult and dangerous missions assigned to the Marine Corps, the organization was composed entirely of volunteers. All of the company commanders and the greater percentage of the junior officers and senior non-commissioned officers in the battalion had been hand picked by the battalion commander who had been given carte blanche by Headquarters Marine Corps. So it is not at all difficult to understand why the morale and esprit de corps of the Raider Battalion was almost always at an extremely high level. (13)

As has been previously stated, the Raider Battalion had moved early in April of 1942 to American Samoa where it had been undergoing an extremely rigorous training program with considerable emphasis on night operations and landings. So this organization was one of the few participating in the operation which was partially acclimatized to life in the tropics, fairly adept

(13) Personal knowledge

at jungle operations, and ready, both physically and mentally, for combat. (14)

On moving from Samoa to New Caledonia in the latter part of June, 1942, the officers and men of the Raider Battalion got intimations that some sort of offensive must be pending in the South Pacific when they swung into a continuation of the very rigid training program with scarcely time to get well shaken down in their new camp. Yet another indication came shortly after their arrival when four hand picked teams of one officer and five enlisted marines per team were taken to the battalion operations tent and briefed on a special reconnaissance mission to be undertaken early in July. (15)

The cancellation of the reconnaissance missions resulted in much grumbling on the part of the men of the battalion who were becoming more and more anxious to get into combat of some sort and the scuttlebutt flew thick and fast. The clinching argument in favor of offensive action of some sort for the battalion was the sudden appearance in the harbor off Saint Louis of four APDs of TransDiv 12. Never in the history of the battalion had the APDs appeared unless there was a manuver or a landing exercise of some sort in store and this was not to be an exception to the rule.

With the arrival of the APDs all officers of the battalion were assembled and given a hasty briefing on the target area by the battalion commander. Since he made no mention of the mission of the battalion or of the general overall plan of the operation many of the officers made the faulty assumption that the Raider Battalion would be making a lone raid and were considerably surprised some two weeks later. (16) As one of the fundamental principles in the successful implementation of

(14) A-1, p. 17; Personal knowledge; (15) Personal knowledge;
(16) Personal knowledge

an amphibious operation is maintenance of ultra strict security measures, all liberty was cancelled and a double cordon of sentries was thrown up around the battalion area. And for a period of a week prior to embarkation and departure the battalion conducted daily landings from the APDs and word was allowed to leak out that the battalion would shortly be leaving for a major landing exercise further up the coast of New Caledonia.

It was rather difficult to conceal from the men of the battalion the fact that they were about to embark on an operation of some sort especially in light of two moves made by the battalion medical section. The first was the preparation of individual jungle first aid kits, the germination of an idea later brought to full flower for subsequent operations in the Pacific. The kits contained such items as insect repellent, water purification tablets, extra bandages, and a small supply of morphine syrettes. The second, and by far the more interesting, operation involved the repacking of copious quantities of spiritus frumenti, commercial brand, designed to aid in overcoming shock and in treating combat fatigue cases. Unfortunate indeed were the officers and men who urged the issue of both items prior to the departure for they were never to enjoy the benefits of the latter item under bivouac conditions.

The morning of 21 July, 1942 found the forward echelon of the battalion command party and the four rifle companies of the battalion, each reinforced with a machine gun platoon from Easy company, loading aboard the APDs in Saint Louis harbor. The deception and misdirection was still being maintained and was to directly affect the health and comfort of the men of the battalion at a later date. Officers and men alike carried both their field transport packs and bedding rolls from the camp to

the embarkation area, a distance of some mile and a quarter. As only four of the APDs of TransDiv 12 were present at this time it was impossible to embark the rear echelon of the command party, the balance of Easy company, and headquarters company and they were carried into action aboard the USS Neville, a personnel transport. (17) The personnel section of Battalion headquarters and the transportation platoon of the quartermaster section were left at the camp at New Caledonia to maintain and guard the camp pending the return of the battalion from the operation. (18)

With officers and men carrying all of their own individual equipment very little time was lost in the loading operation since little battalion or company equipment was to be loaded. A few tons of rations, water, and ammunition; all of the battalion's rubber boats and outboard motors; and the inevitable safe crammed with precious documents were quickly thrown aboard the vessels and the miniature convoy was soon underway. It must be brought to the attention of the reader at this time that there was no motor transportation of any sort, no tentage, nothing in the way of camp facilities carried by the battalion for this operation; a factor which became highly significant during the latter stages of the battalion's operations on Guadalcanal during September and October of 1942.

Aboard the vessels all company commanders opened the numerous heavy sealed envelopes they had been given and found therein all the necessary documents they would need to brief their commands thoroughly on the forthcoming operation. Included were copies of the tentative battalion plan, hand drawn sketches of the island (in lieu of maps still not available) and a few relatively poor aerial photos of the island. The operation plan as issued was only tentative and rather incomplete since the

(17) A-7, p. 82; (18) Personal knowledge

overall picture of the operation was still rather nebulous and cloudy, but it gave all company commanders sufficient information for purposes of preliminary briefing. And thus the battalion whiled away the shipboard hours preparing its weapons, attending ^{briefing} after briefing which was a relatively difficult proceeding aboard the APDs due to the cramped living spaces, and slapping green paint all over the Navy's glistening ships. This latter task was at the request of the skipper of TransDiv 12, Commander Hugh W. Hadley, USN, who was carrying camouflage to this degree with the expectation of being forced to lie doggo^{*} next to some jungle island while awaiting the return of troops to his ships. (19)

On 26 July a rendezvous was effected with the balance of the task force carrying the First Marine Division at a point some 400 miles southeast of the Fijis. (20) It is most difficult to describe the extreme jubilation of personnel of the Raider Battalion at the sight of some eighty ships covering the ocean literally from horizon to horizon as far as the eye could see. This armada of naval might represented the greater percentage of all transports and ships of the line the U. S. Navy could muster in the Pacific ocean area at this time and feeling was rampant that the very least in store should be a landing on the home islands of Japan.

The convoy formed and sailed for the island of Koro, scene of the rehearsal, and it was not long before the Raider Battalion was acquainted with the scope of the master operation plan, a copy of which was received aboard each ship via the mail ship. Also, detailed plans of the landings and rehearsals at Koro were promulgated to the command and all troops were assigned (19) A-8, p. 77; Personal knowledge; (20)A-7, p. 77; A-6, p. 16

to boat teams. Debarkation drill up to the very point of debarkation was assiduously practiced each day while underway to attain perfection. For the benefit of those not familiar with an APD it might be well to inject at this point a description of the vessel. Each ship carried four LCPs slung from electrically operated davits placed abaft the after stacks and it was customary aboard APDs to rail load the LCPs rather than fumble with landing nets. As a result of this procedure and because of the relatively small number of troops carried aboard it was possible to carry out the entire debarkation procedure from the time of calling away the landing force until the boats cleared the side in a matter of some 90 seconds. (21)

The rehearsal period at Koro, while not especially beneficial for the Raider Battalion, pointed out a few factors which required minor changes in the overall plan for the operation. Mechanical failures in many boats during the rehearsal period led to the establishment of a boat pool for the operation. Boat group formations were at first pretty well confused and the period of rehearsal was of inestimable value for the Navy coxswains who would be charged with landing the troops on the proper beaches at the proper times. Within the battalion the tentative operation plan was worked out without any serious failing and was adjudged acceptable for the "record run". The afternoon of 31 July rehearsal exercises were concluded, final plans for the operation were approved, and last minute detailed changes were issued to the various commands. That evening the task force departed the Fiji area and began the final move into the waters of the enemy.

Throughout the entire voyage through the Coral Sea and

(21) Personal knowledge

into the very teeth of the enemy all troops of the landing force concerned themselves with interminable briefings and with study after study of aerial photos and sketches until all members of the command reached a peak where they were most thoroughly familiar with the terrain, the enemy situation, locations of known installations, and all phases of the landing plan. And it was at this time that names and ranks of all officers of the battalion were temporarily relegated to a limbo to be forgotten and enlisted personnel were indoctrinated, with an understandable lack of difficulty, with the habit of calling their officers by such varied nicknames as "Red Mike", (Colonel Edson, the battalion commander) and "Silent Lou", (Captain Lou Walt, a company commander). (22)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

Leaving the battalion enroute to the objective ^{and its} personnel familiarizing themselves with the provisions of the landing plan, it might be well at this time to digress slightly and go into the terrain of Tulagi and the enemy situation there as it had been estimated from all available intelligence sources. (See Map C)

The island of Tulagi, the target for the operations of the Raider Battalion, is a relatively small island, shaped more or less like a banana, about two miles long on its northwest-southeast axis and about half a mile wide at its widest point. The northwestern point nestles closely to Florida Island and the divergence of the two islands forms a relatively commodious harbor capable of accomodating medium draft transports and other smaller shipping. Originally the island had been the seat of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the residence of the governor of the islands. The hill masses of the island form

(22) Personal knowledge

a long ridge running down the center of the longer axis of the island with the greater heights, about 350 feet, on the northwestern end of the island sloping gradually to Hill 208 and Residency Hill. Hill 281 rises abruptly from the sea at the southeastern end of the island and commands the low ground around the cricket field and the hospital and prison area. The British had developed only the southeastern end of the island where the limestone hills were relatively free of jungle growth, and Mother Nature had been allowed to run rampant at the other end of the island. A small gravel road capable of supporting only the slightest amount of wheeled traffic completely encircled the island at the beach line and there were numerous footpaths winding over and generally following the ridge lines giving relatively simple access to all parts of the island. Government Wharf, on the northern and sheltered side of the island, was capable of accomodating small inter-island steamers up to about 50 tons and provided unloading facilities of a sort. A deep cut, some forty to fifty feet deep, had been hewn from the limestone saddle connecting Residency Hill and Hill 281 and through this cut ran the main transverse foot path across the southeastern end of the island.

This much of the picture of the island was painted from word descriptions and sketches made by the guides who had lived on the island and a little further information was garnered from photo interpretation.

The Japanese had made no apparent improvements in the road net on Tulagi nor had they done anything to improve the existing docking facilities at Government Wharf or the numerous jetties in the vicinity of Chinatown. Photo interpretation disclosed the existence of a radio tower and station southeast of Hill 208 and also the suspected presence of two or more AA

guns on Hill 281 and a suspected coast defense or AA gun on Hill 208. An unidentified installation of some sort was located in the vicinity of the cricket field at the base of Residency Hill but positive identification could not be made despite continuing study.

It was suspected that Tulagi might now be the location of the command echelon of the Japanese in the southern Solomons and as such be garrisoned by approximately 500 men, the greater proportion of whom would be Imperial Marines or members of special Naval Landing Forces. Further, in the immediate area on Gavutu, Tanambogo, Makambo, and the southern coast of Florida, there might be another thousand men, principally laborers engaged in building up the seaplane base on Gavutu. (23)

Studies of profiles of beaches on Tulagi revealed the possibility of two adequate landing sites: one at the southwestern end of the island on the point in the vicinity of the cricket field and another on the same side of the island in the vicinity of the old cemetery. Since the type of beach, beach backing, and capabilities of each beach for supporting logistics were essentially the same it was decided that the best beach for the troop landing would be Beach Blue in the vicinity of the old cemetery where there appeared to be no sign of existing enemy defensive installations and the path through the coral reef was a good bit wider. Beach Red, the other beach, and Government Wharf would be utilized in landing supplies and heavier equipment for logistical support of the operation. (24)

THE LANDING PLAN

Brigadier General W. H. Rupertus, USMC, the Assistant Division Commander, was to be in overall charge of the landings in the Tulagi area which would include a landing by the 1st (23) A-1, p. 17; A-5, p. 4; Personal knowledge; (24) Personal knowledge

Parachute Battalion on Gavutu, the landing of the 1st Raider Battalion supported by the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines on Tulagi, and a landing at Halavo on Florida Island by elements of the Second Marines. A landing by a company of the Second Marines from division reserve would be made at H-20 at Haleta, on the southern coast of Florida, with the mission of knocking out a suspected naval gun which commanded the landing areas on Tulagi. Naval aircraft from the carrier task force would bomb and strafe all suspected installations on Tulagi for a fifteen minute period immediately prior to sunrise on D-day and bombardment by naval surface craft would follow up the air strikes. Close fire support missions from the USS San Juan, the USS Monssen, and the USS Buchanan would be fired from H-20 to H-5 on Beach Blue and naval aircraft would strafe the beach and the area immediately inland from the beach from H-5 until the first wave was ashore. H-hour was tentatively set as 0800 on 7 August, 1942 for the landing on Tulagi and as 1200 the same date for the landing on Gavutu. (25)

The battalion plan called for the battalion to land on Beach Blue on a 500 yard front at H-hour in three waves of LCPs. Baker and Dog companies would land in the first wave with Baker on the left, push straight inland from the beach and across the central ridge with Baker company pushing to the northern side of the island and Dog company swinging southeast and paralleling the ridge in a drive along the ridge toward enemy positions at the other end of the island. Able and Charlie companies and the forward echelon of the battalion command post would land in the second wave, Able on the left, and would then execute a turning movement pivoted on Charlie company at the beach and move along the southern side of the central ridge. Baker company, after

(25) A-2, p. 2; A-7, p. 84; Personal knowledge

securing the village of Sasapi, would echelon to the left rear of Dog company; Charlie company would echelon to the right rear of Able company and the attack would push to the southeast in that formation. The remainder of the battalion would land in the third wave to be followed in succeeding waves by elements of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines. (26)

The first objective of the battalion would be the line OA (Map C) which had been established primarily to allow for a brief reorganization and to give naval surface craft another opportunity to pulverize the southeastern end of the island before the battalion pushed off again. The battalion was then to push to the southern tip of the island, sweeping the enemy before it or bypassing pockets of resistance which would be cleaned up by elements of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines. Upon reaching the far end of the island the Raider Battalion would reembark in LCPs from either Beach Red or Government Wharf, whichever would be most practical, reload upon the APDs and proceed to Savo Island where it was to make another combat landing. At Savo the plan was to sweep the island of all opposition and reembark once again in the vessels of TransDiv 12. Early on the morning of D plus 1 the battalion would land still another time, this time on Guadalcanal at Cape Esperance from which point the battalion was to sweep along the northern coast of the island to make a link-up with the main landing at Lunga. (27)

The plan was sufficiently flexible in that it provided for the postponing of succeeding landings in the event too much opposition was encountered in any one of the three landings. We shall see shortly the outcome of the battalion plan.

THE BATTALION LANDING

Let us return at this time to the task force which,
(26) Personal knowledge; (27) Personal knowledge

during the night of 6-7 August, was steaming south of Guadalcanal making its approach to the target area. The journey from Koro toward the objective had been relatively uneventful, for the enemy apparently was doing nothing to scout out the presence in his own waters of a hostile surface force, but tension aboard all ships mounted steadily as the slow passage of time decreased the distance to the enemy beaches. Aboard the APDs carrying the Raider Battalion troops slept somewhat fitfully after a rather full day of briefing, equipment checks and inspections, and last minute conferences among leaders. Consequently very few of the troops were awake at 0250, 7 August when the task force split, the northern (Tulagi) force going to the north of Savo Island and the balance and bulk of the force passing between Savo and Cape Esperance. (28)

Still the enemy islands remained dark and there appeared to be no sign of enemy activity either ashore or in the waters adjoining the islands. It was still quiet and calm, perhaps the calm before the storm, at 0400 when troops were roused and fed the usual heavy D-day breakfast. The sleek APDs cut silently through the water at what seemed to be a snail's pace for interminable minute after minute as troops of the landing force disposed of the last bite of steak, gulped the last swallow of coffee, donned equipment, and fell in at debarkation stations for a final inspection and instruction.

Suddenly, at 0613, the vast silence was broken by the booming crash of naval gunfire to the south as guns of the fire support ships of the southern attack force commenced the bombardment of Guadalcanal. At the same time the sound of aircraft was heard overhead and a minute later the mounting crescendo of sound of diving planes was punctuated by the bark of their machine guns (28) A-7, p. 79

as naval aircraft began the merciless pounding of Tulagi. (29) Still there appeared to be little activity from the islands and it was quite evident that surprise, both strategic and tactical, had been achieved.

At 0630 troops on all APDs were ordered below decks as naval personnel began to prepare boats for lowering and two of the APDs, the USS Little and the USS McKean, began to move to a point much closer to the shore where they were to take up station as control vessels and mark the line of departure and boat lane for the landing on Beach Blue. (30) Crowded below decks in the cramped living spaces of the APDs, puffing on cigarettes despite a ban against smoking in quarters which was ignored at this time, hearing the muffled thunder and roar of naval gunfire which furnished a muted background for nervous high-pitched conversations, building up an ever increasing resentment against an enemy who had caused them to be so far from the peace and quiet of their homes, it is little wonder that troops welcomed the cry at 0730 which sent them racing up ladders, along slippery decks, and scrambling over the side to crowd into boats which were quickly lowered into the water and pulled away from the protecting sides of the APDs.

Now the most nerve wracking part of the operation; sitting huddled and crowded in the bottom of a plywood landing craft gave much time for thought and introspection as landing craft circled in the rendezvous area, jockeyed for position to cross the line of departure, and made the final run into the beach. And still signs of enemy activity from the island were only scattered. There was a little ineffective anti-aircraft fire put up against the air attack but there appeared to be no return of heavy caliber fire from the suspected naval gun installations on Hill 208 and from (29) A-7, p. 79, 80; (30) A-8, p. 179

the vicinity of Haleta on the island of Florida.

Naval gunfire ceased its preliminary bombardment at 0755 and troops in the landing craft now approaching the beach could see flight after flight of fighter aircraft circle briefly overhead, peel off, and come screaming down to make passes at the beach and the area immediately inland from the beach. At precisely 0800 the eight landing craft carrying Baker and Dog companies ground to a stop on a five hundred yard front about fifty feet from the water's edge and troops of the Raider Battalion poured ashore on an undefended beach. Minutes later Able and Charlie companies in the second wave were ashore and by 0825 all of the boats of the battalion with a single exception had discharged their passengers and pulled away from the beach. As fate would have it, that one boat which had failed to reach the beach was the boat carrying the battalion commander and part of his staff group as well as the company commander and command party of Able company. It had been disabled by an engine fire and was drifting aimlessly until picked up by a boat returning from the beach which, after a transfer operation, carried the command groups into the beach where they sought to catch their commands, at the time advancing slowly and warily toward the first phase line. (31)

As planned, Baker and Dog companies pushed inland from the beach, climbed the central ridge of the island where Dog company executed its turning movement and paused momentarily to allow Baker company to secure the unoccupied village of Sasapi and echelon itself to the left rear. Able and Charlie companies landed as scheduled and executed their turning movement as planned so that the entire battalion was formed in the shape of a huge wedge, the apex of which was on the ridge with the flanks echeloned to the rear and anchored at the beach line on the

(31) Personal knowledge

northern and southern coasts of the island. (32)

In this formation the battalion moved at a snail's pace toward the phase line some 1000 yards distant hacking and cutting its way through the dense undergrowth of the northwestern part of the island. Contrary to the picture which had been painted by those purportedly familiar with the island the central ridge line was not as evenly contoured as pictured but rather was cut up by innumerable ravines and gullies, many of which were well nigh impassable even for foot troops. On the southern slope of the ridge the right (3rd) platoon of Able company was confronted with a steep cliff about one hundred feet high which it was forced to bypass by going down to the beach behind Charlie company and then climbing back up the ridge. The trail along the back of the ridge had been pictured as a clearly defined footpath cutting straight up the back of the island but it was found, only after considerable difficulty, to be a poorly maintained, overgrown jungle pathway barely capable of being negotiated by the most hardy. (See Map D)

Fortunately for the battalion, the Japanese had not seen fit to place any defensive installations in this area. Instead, they had chosen the same approximate line which had been picked for the initial phase line and the initial reorganization. (33)

At about 1200 the battalion reached the line OA, some two and one half hours later than had been initially estimated in the division and battalion plans. On the southern slope of the ridge Charlie company stopped about 200 yards short of Hill 208 at the edge of the parade ground and regained contact with Able company which had been pushing a bit more slowly toward the phase line. The northern slope of the ridge was occupied by Dog company which was in contact with Able company on its right and elements

(32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-2, p. 31

of Baker company on its left. The left platoon of Baker company encountered the first organized position of the enemy just prior to reaching the phase line. This position was in the form of two small outposts which permitted part of the platoon to pass and then fired on the command echelon of the platoon killing the platoon leader, Lt. Eugene Key, and wounding his messenger. This resistance, which amounted to nothing more than a machine gun nest protected by a sniper tied high in a palm tree, was rapidly knocked out but it was the battalion's first introduction to the somewhat puzzling tactics a fanatical enemy was to adopt. (34)

After the briefest of pauses for reorganization the battalion attempted to jump off from the line OA in a coordinated attack but the attack ground to a standstill before it got fairly well started when Charlie company, on the right flank, received extremely heavy machine gun and small arms fire from well fortified positions on Hill 208 which had been apparently undamaged by the intense naval and air bombardment. Later investigation at greater leisure revealed the fact that these positions had been heavily reinforced by utilization of heavy layers of logs piled one atop another and Charlie company was held up for the better part of an hour since the positions could not be knocked out by mortar fire, nor could they be flanked due to the nature of the terrain. The emplacements were finally reduced by small arms fire and well placed grenades and demolition charges which killed all of the defenders. Throughout the remainder of the battalion area, though hampered and hindered by sniper fire and intermittent mortar fire, the advance continued and overran the northern portion of Hill 208 and Residency Hill in the southern sector of the island and the Government Wharf area in the northern sector.

(34) Personal knowledge

Able company, from positions atop the southeastern slope of Residency Hill, commanded the ground in the vicinity of the radio station and was able to sweep it by fire and force the scattered enemy on the low ground to retire to positions in the vicinity of the cricket field. Charlie company advanced along the low ground and reached positions adjacent to and in line with Able company along Residency Hill ridge before it was pinned down by extremely heavy fire from a bunker located on the west edge of the cricket field. Numerous coordinated efforts were made to move over the ridge line to knock out the bunker but they were successively repulsed by the enemy and in one of the unsuccessful attacks the company commander of Charlie company, Major Kenneth Bailey, was wounded and relieved by his executive officer, Captain Robert Thomas. (35)

At this point two light tanks from floating reserve were called into play to be used against the bunker but the tanks were a dismal failure. Considerable difficulty was encountered in landing the tanks due to the poor beaches and they failed to get off a round at the bunker position before they knocked themselves out bellying up in a drainage ditch. Continuous mortar fire against the bunker was having little effect and the rain of steel which Able company poured into the bunker from the heights of the commanding ridge had as little success. At this point three or four of the enemy were observed running into a small shack adjacent to the bunker but sheltered from the fire of Charlie company by a fold in the ground. Able company directed a considerable amount of fire at this building and finally sneaked a rifle grenadier within range of the building. Due to the confusion of battle and the fact that he was bothered immeasurably by countless snipers in trees which fringed the cricket field, the grenadier scored a direct hit but the grenade did not detonate because he

(35) A-5, p. 3; Personal knowledge

failed to pull the pin. Fortunate indeed were the personnel of Able company sitting on the ridge approximately 200 yards above and beyond the building that the grenadier had been slightly remiss for later examination revealed the rather startling fact that this building was the munitions and demolition storehouse for the Japanese defenses and, had it been hit, would probably have blown the southeastern end of the island off the map. Rather harsh measures for neutralizing a pill box or bunker position!

At this same time the machine guns of Easy company which were emplaced in sight defilade positions on Residency Hill ridge were suffering extremely heavy casualties as a result of sniper fire directed at them from the trees in the cricket ground area. It was found necessary to spray the tops of all the palm trees in the area with hundreds of rounds of machine gun fire before the snipers were eliminated and the guns could be moved a little bit forward to be employed against the bunker position. Of no little assistance in eliminating snipers from the area was the sharp-shooting of Lt. Henry Adams, the battalion S-2, a veteran match shooter who employed a sniper rifle equipped with telescopic sights to engage in the counter-sniper duel.

One platoon of Charlie company, the right platoon under Lt. Clay Boyd, succeeded in manouvering along the beach line beyond the zone of fire from the bunker and reached positions in the vicinity of the hospital area when they were pinned down by a terrific volume of small arms and automatic fire from positions in and near the hospital and positions on the slopes of Hill 281. This action began about 1500 that afternoon and it was not until the coming of dusk that Boyd was able to comply with orders and extricate his platoon from its position and withdraw to the relative safety of the company area on Residency Hill ridge. (36)

(36) Personal knowledge

In the meantime, the attack had been progressing a little more smoothly on the northern side of the island where the resistance was quite a bit spottier but, nonetheless, just as ferocious. The company commander of Dog company, Major Justice Chambers, had been wounded by a mortar burst shortly after the company jumped off from the phase line and his command had passed to his executive, Captain William Sperling. (37) Sperling had pushed his company along the northern side of the ridge through spasmodic resistance offered by Jap snipers tied in trees, under houses, and in any location a small body could possibly be squeezed. His company had knocked out machine gun positions tucked away in small limestone caves, each position resisting with a fanatical tenacity until the last crew member was no longer able to squeeze a trigger. By dusk he had moved along the northern side of the island until he reached and occupied the northern slopes of Hill 281, but between his company and Able company on the southern side of the island there existed a gap in the lines. This gap had opened late in the afternoon when the support platoon of Able had been unable to advance after being committed to fill the gap but the breach was closed by inserting George company of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines, under Captain Harold Richmond. (38)

The onset of darkness found resistance continuing in the ravine west of the cricket field and on the slopes of Hill 281 and it was apparent that Tulagi would not be secured that day so the Raider Battalion began to prepare defensive positions for the night along the line held at the time. That line stretched from Dog company area on the northern slope of Hill 281 around Residency Hill ridges within the sectors of George company and Able company thence through Charlie company sector down the main Residency Hill ridge to the point in the vicinity of Beach Red.

(37) A-5, p. 2; Personal knowledge; (38) A-5, p. 3; Personal knowledge

Baker company was held in mobile battalion reserve in the Government Wharf area and the remainder of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines was furnishing protection and security for the landing of supplies and evacuation of casualties at Beach Blue. The battalion command post was located in the residency itself and the demolitions platoon was given the mission of furnishing command post security. (39)

Darkness brought a lull in the hostilities and gave the men an opportunity to take their first break to open up the inevitable can of "C" rations. So too, it gave commanders an opportunity to review the day's events and take quick stock of the situation. It was evident that the operation was not going exactly as planned and that the proposed landings on Savo and Cape Esperance were not only out of the immediate picture but might well be cancelled entirely. Logistical problems were grave and pressing since Beach Red could not be used for landing supplies and the Government Wharf area, though open and free of enemy, could not be approached by landing craft because of the situation on Gavutu and Tanambogo. Consequently the few supplies being landed were coming in via Beach Blue and thence by hand carry to the front line units. Evacuation was by litter from the lines all the way to Beach Blue and via landing craft to the transport area. The beach had not originally been intended to be used logistically but pressure of circumstances was forcing its use. The capacity of the beach was woefully inadequate to accommodate the needs of the troops and could not begin to handle the heavy equipment of the 3rd Defense Battalion. But the overall picture was not completely black and there was every prospect that resistance could be partially or completely eliminated the following day.

Along the front lines troops encountered considerable difficulty in digging in due to the nature and composition of

(39) Personal knowledge

the soil and, consequently, most of them ceased their efforts after barely moving the top soil and dropped in their tracks to get what sleep they could prior to dawn and the inevitable attack. The defense as initially established was in accordance with all prevailing doctrine; the outposts were cautioned to remain ever alert and one man was kept awake and watchful in each platoon defense area. But before the night was over the Jap was to show that the standard doctrine of defense was not applicable in every situation as he threw away the copy books and relied on his ingenuity and fanatical devotion to his supreme commander and emperor to conquer.

At the outset, conditions were much as had existed during many peace time training exercises for it appeared that the enemy was enjoying the restful night air as much as our own troops in catching up on lost sleep. Sentries peered through the darkness challenging and advancing visiting patrols exactly as they had been trained. The only untoward circumstance appeared to be the unusual amount of night noises being made by the birds. But at 2230 the calm of the night was shattered by violent bursts of machine gun fire as the enemy launched a coordinated assault along the entire battalion line and drove the surviving outposts, literally nothing more than local company security, reeling back to the main line of resistance. Initially the enemy was able to effect a penetration between Charlie and Able companies before men were sufficiently awakened to return the fire and they likewise succeeded in silencing the section of Easy company machine guns located on the right flank of Able company. This savage counter-attack was to have a far reaching effect on future American tactics for it was but the first of thousands upon thousands of night attacks which the fanatical Japanese would launch across the broad expanses of the Pacific in the years of

war to come and our tactics were, of necessity, adapted and geared to this type of warfare.

The battalion reeled under the impact of the attack but, largely through the personal heroism of many of the individual officers and men in the front lines, was able to repulse it without serious losses. In the period immediately following the first attack and while the Jap was organizing his forces for another blow at the line, an attempt was made to straighten the lines once again but in the confusion and darkness contact had been lost permanently and it was deemed advisable to roll up the exposed flank of Able company and redispense the right flank platoon. This move had been barely completed when the regrouped and reorganized Jap struck again and there ensued for a period of about 30 minutes a skirmish which, though seemingly of minor importance, in a large sense was the turning point of the battle for Tulagi since it broke the back of the Japanese offensive spirit. In this brief period fierce hand to hand combat raged in most sectors of the line, particularly in that sector occupied by Able company. Here the Jap tried every ruse he knew to get Marines to open fire and reveal positions but to no avail. Groups of Japanese would talk loudly and bang on sticks in attempts to draw automatic fire; enemy machine guns fired short bursts, displaced to fire another short burst before displacing once again; and a hail of small arms fire fell on the battalion position. But the skirmish soon relaxed into a grenade throwing duel in which the Americans had a distinct advantage because of the fiery string of sparks which a Jap grenade emitted after being armed and thrown making it relatively easy to follow the course of the grenade through the air, locate it, and return to the sender. During this brief period, one Marine in the left platoon sector of Able company threw over 75 American grenades and returned many

Japanese grenades back down on the enemy as they tried to climb out of the ravine and reach the battalion position on the ridge. The entire period was marked by the outstanding leadership of small unit commanders and squad leaders who appeared to be simultaneously in all parts of the line whispering words of encouragement and cheer to their men. To the outstanding quality of leadership on the part of these individuals might well be attributed the successful outcome of the engagement.

The Japanese retired again to reorganize and regroup his forces preparatory to another attack and Marine unit leaders took advantage of the lull to redistribute hand grenades, the only type of ammunition being expended. Three times again the enemy tried to force the Marine line back but, though he did make minor infiltrations in places, he never did break the defense and never did exploit the penetration he made in his initial assault on the position. (40)

Rarely had a sunrise been greeted as enthusiastically by the men of the battalion as it was on the morning of 8 August for the coming of dawn drove the enemy back to his caves, dugouts, and bunkers. Shortly after sunrise, as the men in the lines were recovering the bodies of the dead and the aid men were treating and evacuating the casualties of the night's battle to the aid station in the vicinity of Beach Blue, carrying parties came forward with ammunition to replenish badly depleted stocks, and with water and rations they had been unable to bring up the preceeding night.

It was at this point also that landing craft began moving two more battalions of the division reserve into the Tulagi-Gavutu-Tanamongo area, the direct result of misunderstanding of a message sent the night before from Tulagi which had caused

(40) Personal knowledge

General Rupertus to request additional reinforcements from the division commander. Since additional troops were pouring into the beach on Tulagi, the remainder of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines were moved from the beach area to the northern slopes of Hill 281 in preparation for the final attack aimed at cleaning out the island of further enemy. Elements of the Second Marines took over beach defense duties and assisted with evacuation of the wounded and unloading of supplies at the beach area.

At about 0900, E and F companies of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines passed through Dog company and pushed up the slopes and around the southern end of Hill 281. The left platoon of F company cleared the prison area and pushed almost to the hospital area before they were stopped but the crests and the southern slopes of Hill 281 commanding the cricket field fell before the determined attack of fresh troops. However, possession of the high ground did not mean possession of the island for the center of resistance in the cricket field area still held out with no apparent intention of capitulating. At this point, mortars and machine guns took over and for a period of several hours blasted and raked the area as thoroughly as was possible with 81mm and 60mm mortars and 30 caliber light machine guns. It would have been an ideal situation for employment of naval gunfire for the lines were well clear of the target and a destroyer could have leveled the area in the four hour period during which mortars and machine guns pecked away. But Marine Corps organization at that time was such that Naval Gunfire Spotters did not accompany each landing team and all of the spotters were with division on Guadalcanal. The only mission which Naval Gunfire would undertake was a pre-planned mission and no provision had been made for fires in this area.

As the troops sat on the high ground and waited for mortar and machine gun fire to soften up the center of resistance a bit before the jump-off they enjoyed the advantage of grandstand seats for two air raids which the Japanese directed against the unusual concentration of shipping in Sealark Channel. On D-day the Japs had attempted two raids on the transport area, the first a high-level bombing attack which had been eminently unsuccessful in that the greater percentage of the planes had been downed with no damage to shipping, and the second, a dive bomber raid which produced a hit on the USS Mugford but resulted in loss of most of the aircraft. On D plus 1 the Japs changed their tactics and tried a low-level attack with bombs and torpedoes and, though they lost all but one of the 26 aircraft participating in the raid, scored heavily when a blazing bomber crashed into an open hatch on the USS Elliott, a transport, setting her afire to such an extent that she was scuttled and a torpedo hit blew a gaping hole in the side of the USS Jarvis, which disappeared only hours later with all hands while limping back to home waters. (41)

These air raids, which the troops enjoyed fully as much as a double feature, were to have a profound effect on their futures though they little realized it at the time. Not all of the troops were enjoying the show of the air raid, however, for Charlie company of the Raiders and George company were engrossed in repeated attempts to advance over the ridge line down into the ravine to wipe out the last pocket of resistance. But to the dismay of all, the numerous attempts availed nothing for the enemy positions were well dug in and resisted fiercely. Finally, at about 1500, George company pushed down the ravine and was able to draw the fire of most of the defenders in the area while Charlie and Able company of the Raiders sneaked around the nose

(41) A-7, p. 91

of the ridge and knocked out the large bunker which had been the keystone of the defensive installations in the cricket field area. With the fall of the main dugout the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines pushed down the slopes of Hill 281 and organized resistance on the island ceased. (42)

Before dark on the same day two additional sweeps of Hill 281 were made by various units of the Raiders and the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines and on each additional sweep cave positions with a few resisting enemy were located and mopped up. Darkness fell while the Japanese language officer of the Raiders was still trying to persuade some holdouts in a large cave in the cut between Government Wharf and the cricket field that further resistance was useless but he might have been talking to the limestone hills for the results attained. Outposts were set up at either end of the cut and on the bridge overhead to eliminate any enemy who might attempt to escape during the night and they did eliminate some ten Japanese in the course of the night. Gone was the most likely source of enemy prisoners the battalion was offered since the position of the Japanese in the cave was obviously hopeless but they steadfastly refused to surrender despite the odds against them. And though it was known that there were enemy still remaining in the cut it was not suspected that so many dugouts and caves had been overlooked in the two day operation for the night was literally crawling with Japanese prowling for food and water to sustain life. The night was confused, to say the least, as the Japanese wandered throughout the Marine positions causing friend to shoot friend and disturbing the sleep of many of the exhausted troops on the island.

There are two other situations which, though not actually a part of the operations of the Raider battalion, are so

(42) A-5, p. 4; Personal knowledge

inextricably tied up with the fortunes of the battalion that a word must be said about them at this point. The first was the situation on Tanambogo, the island adjacent to Tulagi which commanded the Government Wharf area and the water approaches thereto. Resistance on Tanambogo had been extremely fierce and though fire, including the direct fire of a destroyer, had been directed against installations on the island almost constantly from the afternoon of D-day it was not until late in the afternoon of D plus 1 that a successful landing was made and resistance overcome. Tied up with the situation on Tanambogo was the logistical problem, rapidly going from bad to worse since the 60 day replenishment carried by all units could not be landed over the inadequate beach near the cemetery. Landings of supplies had made the beach resemble a china shop lately visited by a rampaging bull and immediate measures were necessary to effect a normal offensive pattern of supply flow from ship to shore. Some supplies had been landed late in the afternoon of D plus one in the vicinity of the prison after that area had been cleared but such landings were primarily emergency measures to avoid returning the loads to the ships. Darkness, bringing with it the blackout of the ships and a halt to trips by landing craft, fell before working parties could be assembled in the Government Wharf area to unload landing craft there.

The second, and by far the more serious, situation was the concern of Naval commanders afloat over the diminishing number of aircraft available to them and over losses in shipping suffered during the day. These losses were almost inestimable because there were just no replacements anywhere other than in construction yards in the States for the vessels which had been lost. Fears of the commanders were so grave that a conference was called aboard the flagship, the USS McCawley, and it was

decided that the Navy task force would leave the area the following day, D plus 2, as soon as the remaining troops had been discharged. (43) Here indeed was a crisis without parallel; an amphibious operation only partially completed and both air and naval support to be withdrawn.

With the exception of the scattered infiltrations made by individuals searching for food, the night of 8-9 August was relatively quiet until about 0145 when the muted roll of heavy naval guns could be heard in the direction of Savo Island. Soon great pillars of flame leaped skyward and the stillness was further rent by the sound of heavy explosions such as those made by magazines of a naval vessel exploding. Marines awoke, listened to the sounds of the battle for a few minutes, and then fell back and dozed again secure in the assumption that the Navy was pouring the coal to the enemy. Actually the shoe was on the other foot, and in little more than forty minutes that night the balance of sea power once again shifted against the Allied Nations as HMAS Canberra, the USS Quincy, the USS Astoria, and the USS Vincennes were lost in action to the enemy. (44)

Such losses as these could mean but one thing to the despairing naval command and with the coming of dawn all troops of the 3rd Defense Battalion who had been waiting to land on Tulagi were put ashore as rapidly as landing craft could make the run to the beach. But the unloading of supplies was not at all organized as there were insufficient personnel remaining aboard ship to work more than one hatch at a time and, as a result, the flow of supplies was not at all normal. Large naval coast defense guns came ashore with no ammunition or fire control equipment; case after case of fifty caliber ammunition but no guns to fire the ammunition; and only a small part of the ration load of the

(43) A-7, p. 93; (44) A-6, p. 37; Personal knowledge

ships was sent to the beach before they weighed anchor and departed hastily for more friendly waters.

Ashore, patrols from the Raider Battalion were sweeping the island thoroughly searching out the hiding place of all the remaining survivors of the enemy force on Tulagi. The technique employed in the elimination of these survivors was universal throughout the island; a cave would be located and a burst of automatic fire usually would rouse the enemy's will to resist and he would return the fire, indicating that the cave was still occupied; the patrol would then put in a call for a demolitions team which invariably sealed off the entrance to the cave with a very heavy charge. One cave on the slopes of Hill 281 was the scene of an experiment in prisoner-baiting which back-fired with near fatal results for the baiter. Gunnery Sergeant Angus Goss, platoon sergeant of the demolitions platoon, in attempting to capture prisoners for interrogation threw grenade after grenade into a cave in an attempt to cause the defenders to abandon their position but the grenades were returned almost as quickly as they were thrown. Goss threw at least twenty grenades, each with the shortest possible fuse, into the cave but some adroit Japanese would spot the brilliant-hued grenade and throw it back at him. Abandoning the grenades as useless since they were easily spotted even in the gloom of a cave, Goss tried some hand-fashioned grenades of his own making but was caught short and unable to get back behind his shelter when an extremely short-fused block of TNT wrapped with nails was thrown back before he completed his recovery and seriously wounded him. Though badly wounded, Goss was determined to get his prisoners and walked toward the cave with every intention of entering it but the automatic riflemen covering his activities forestalled him and reduced the resistance within the cave without further ado.

(45) Personal knowledge

On the afternoon of D plus 2, command of the island was transferred from the Commanding Officer of the Raider Battalion to General Rupertus and the battalion passed into island reserve awaiting further orders.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In the light of retrospection, it is my opinion that history must place upon the operations of the Raider Battalion the stamp of approval and success inasmuch as the enemy resistance was overcome and the island fell to Allied forces. But I am equally confident that, had the Raider Battalion possessed in 1942 the knowledge and techniques now employed in amphibious operations, many of the casualties suffered by the battalion in the operation could have been avoided. In eliminating, with the aid of the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines, enemy resistance in the amount of some 500 troops of whom 3 were captured and the balance killed, the Raider Battalion suffered a total of 90 casualties in the two days of fighting. Of this total, 3 officers and 33 enlisted were killed in action and 4 officers and 50 enlisted were wounded in action and evacuated from the island. (46)

One of the vital prerequisites in the planning of an amphibious operation is a basic amount of information about the target area and the enemy troops on the target. In this operation information was culled from all available sources but, in many cases, the intelligence disseminated was quite at variance with actual locations and dispositions. The crystal ball must have been exceedingly clear when the prediction of strengths and dispositions in the Tulagi area was made for the figures given were remarkably accurate but were the only correct estimate made by division throughout the entire operation. But the terrain study made of Tulagi was quite another matter for entirely too much (46) A-4, p. 4; Personal knowledge

reliance was placed on the testimony of the Australian guides who supplied sketches of the island. In the majority of cases the testimony of these guides was not entirely trustworthy for though they were entirely familiar with the southeastern or inhabited end of the island few of them had ever been to the farther end of the island and, if they had, most assuredly not cross country as the troops proceeded. Witness the plight of the platoon of Able company which ran into an impassable cliff at a point where supposedly reliable sources stated that the ground sloped gently and evenly down the ridge to the beach. It would appear that sufficient time was available from the point of initial consideration of the operation at very top levels to alert friendly air for sufficient photo coverage of the island and to allow photo interpretation time to consider the photos and coordinate the preparation of contoured maps of the island.

Again, intelligence placed much value on the interpretation of aerial photos which located naval guns at Haleta, on Florida, and atop Hill 208. Due consideration was given these factors in the preparation of the operation plan and heavy naval gunfire was placed on these points. But, though interpretation of photos revealed an unidentified position in the vicinity of the cricket field, it was apparently overlooked in the planning and the actual bunker located there was the keystone of the defensive installations in that area. Had naval gunfire or air been placed on the target I am quite certain that the position could have been eliminated or partially destroyed in the pre-landing bombardment and would not have delayed the advance of the battalion as it did. Here I believe that it was a joint responsibility of operations and intelligence to give this installation adequate coverage despite the fact that no positive identification could be made. The ounce of prevention is still worth the pound of cure.

The ship to shore phase of the operation was the essence of perfection for this type of operation and emphasized the benefit the Navy and Marine Corps had derived from their many years of experimentation with this particular type of warfare. All landing craft delivered their personnel at the appointed beach, at the appointed hour, and in the prescribed formations; There is nothing more that can be demanded of a Navy coxswain in this respect.

The preliminary bombardment by naval surface forces and the strikes by naval aircraft were well timed and very well coordinated at the outset but as the operation developed and ground action was initiated it was apparent that there was a lack of coordination between the two and, frequently, air missions were flown at targets which would have been much more remunerative for naval gunfire. This was a direct result of a system of spotting and controlling naval gunfire which did not place spotters with each landing team or with each assault battalion. Since an amphibious operation usually precludes the use of artillery during the initial phases of the ground action it should have been recognized that naval surface forces would be serving as the supporting artillery for the assault units and naval gunfire spotters should have been placed with each assault battalion. This fault was remedied almost immediately after the island had been secured but it is my belief that the presence of a spotter with the Raider Battalion and the employment of either naval gunfire or air missions against the bunker position on the afternoon of D-day would have enabled the seizure and occupation of the entire island on the first day of fighting with a consequent lessening of casualties. Marine Corps tables of organization now authorize a naval gunfire liaison team, with a specially trained naval line officer, and an air liaison party per battalion

landing team; a practical solution to the problems encountered at Tulagi and other islands in the Pacific. (47)

One of the principal concerns of the commanders in this operation was the failure of the logistics system. The failure did not materially affect the immediate operation since troops were able to accomplish the mission with the initial allowances of ammunition landed on D-day. However, in the succeeding days and weeks, troops were at an extreme disadvantage in attempting to prepare adequate defensive installations on the island because of the acute shortage of equipment; nor did it improve their dispositions to be eating only two meals a day because of the shortage of rations. This was due partially to the withdrawal of the transports ahead of schedule but flexibility in the supply plan might have forestalled the entire situation. There were insufficient troops both ashore and aboard ship to handle the amount of supplies to be unloaded and it is my opinion that, had the amount of supplies scheduled to be landed actually been put ashore, boats could not have been unloaded and the fighting continued at the same time without a sacrifice of some sort. The manner of unloading on D plus 2 when the transports pulled out was a sad commentary on the Marine Corps combat loading system and should never have occurred had the transport quartermasters been fully aware of the situation ashore.

The night action on the ridge emphasized the importance of the calibre of small unit leadership and the necessity for maintaining a high state of discipline and training within a command.

Another factor which, in my opinion, lengthened the period of hostilities on the island was the reluctance of higher commanders to allow troops to use tear gas grenades against cave
(47) Personal knowledge

positions for fear that the Japanese nation might retaliate with the use of more deadly gases at a later stage of the war. The cave positions were extremely difficult to clean up with the weapons then at the command of the fighting Marine and most vividly demonstrated the need for weapons of a special sort to be used against fortifications of this type.

In summary it must be pointed out that this operation was part of the first offensive action of the war in the Pacific, conceived in haste, and mounted in the same manner. Many, many errors were made by both sides but American militarists profited from the mistakes and corrected and adapted both weapons and techniques to counter and overcome the errors. The Japanese, on the other hand, was unable, by his very code of arms, to profit from his wanton mistakes and, consequently, later suffered destructive defeat in detail.

LESSONS

American military knowledge was enhanced considerably by this operation but neither time nor space permit great detail here so some of the more obvious lessons to be pointed out are:

1. Accurate and detailed intelligence is a prerequisite to the successful implementation of an amphibious operation on a hostile beach.

2. Sketches, drawn by hand and recalled by a faltering memory, are not a fit substitute for contoured maps, aerial photos or mosaics for use in planning or conducting a combat operation, particularly an amphibious operation.

3. Achieving surprise at a strategic level is of paramount importance in an amphibious operation. The additional gain of surprise at a tactical level does much to minimize losses in the initial landing and may determine the eventual outcome of the entire operation.

4. A centralized controlling agency is necessary and vital to the successful coordination of air and naval gunfire support in an amphibious operation.

5. A substantial force of specially trained and specially organized personnel is required to unload supplies most expeditiously at the beach and move them to combat troops inland.

6. Highly trained and efficient transport quartermasters can do much to facilitate the flow of supplies from ship to shore during the initial critical periods of an amphibious operation.

7. Special assault weapons are necessary to effect the complete neutralization of a well defended cave or bunker position.

8. The quality of small unit leadership on the part of junior officers and senior non-commissioned officers can frequently turn the tide of a bitterly fought engagement.

9. The state of training and discipline within a command is a vital factor in determining its employment in combat.

10. Rehearsals of impending amphibious operations contribute much to and are a direct cause of the success of the landing.