

US Army

Munda Point VSR

Preliminary Study Guide

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Revision History

V0.1 (2022) First Draft

Preliminary Study Instructions

I) Overview.

- A) This Army University Press-Combat Studies Institute Virtual Staff Ride (VSR) examines the Battle of Munda Point during the New Georgia Campaign in the Pacific Theater during World War II. The staff ride examines the 43rd Infantry Division's and later the XIV Corps' effort to seize Munda Airfield from Japanese defenders between 29 June and 5 August 1943. It studies Joint Operations in Forcible Entry and Amphibious operations, operational decisions at corps and division level, tactical decisions at division, regimental, and battalion level, and the unique challenges of warfare in jungle environments. The challenges of sustainment in forcible entry operations and jungle warfare are also considered. A module dedicated to health service support is available to participants.
- B) The material in this packet is designed to assist in preparing for the VSR and consists of readings for the entire group, readings for assigned small groups, and annexes for information on weapons and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). The readings provide context for the strategic situation, operational situation, and tactical situations covered in the staff ride. It is recommended that participants read all the required material and take notes for use during the staff ride.
- C) Staff rides are not lectures; they are facilitated discussions for professional development. The better prepared the participants are, the more they will benefit from the staff ride.

II) Required Readings.

- A) All participants should read CMH Pub 5-5, Northern Solomons. This PDF file is included or may be downloaded from the CMH website at no cost:

<https://history.army.mil/html/books/072/72-10/index.html>

- B) Divide the staff ride participants into groups. The readings may be completed by the entire group, or groups can assign readings to individual participants for discussion in the field study phase. Some of the readings are more extensive for some groups than for others.

1) All Groups:

- Strategic/Operational Background
- Lessons Learned from Guadalcanal
- Operation TOENAILS
- New Georgia Occupation Force (NGOF)
- Marine Defense Battalions
- Concept of the Operation
- Jungle Warfare Techniques and Problems

2) Group 1: US 43rd Infantry Division.

- The Early Landings
- From Zanana to the Barike River
- Fighting the Plan
- Terrain Favors the Enemy
- Fighting the Enemy
- Seizing Laiana Beach
- Reincke Ridge

- XIV Corps Offensive
 - Ilangana
 - Shimizu Hill
 - Seizing the Airfield
- 3) Group 2: Japanese Southeastern Detachment.
 - Terrain Favors the Enemy
 - The Japanese Defense of New Georgia
 - The Japanese Withdraw
 - 4) Group 3: US XIV Corps.
 - Committing XIV Corps
 - Reorganization
 - XIV Corps Offensive
 - 5) Group 4: US 37th Infantry Division.
 - XIV Corps Offensive
 - Bartley Ridge
 - Horseshoe Hill
 - Guarding the Right Flank
 - Bibilo Hill
 - 6) Medical Module: Army Medicine on New Georgia

III) All materials used in this preliminary study guide were taken from US Government publications available in the public domain.

Small Group Readings

Strategic/Operational Background

The great Japanese bastion at Rabaul on New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago posed a double threat to the Allies from 1942 through the early months of 1944. Bristling with warships and airplanes, it menaced the line of communications from the United States to Australia, and it blocked any Allied advance along the north coast of New Guinea to the Philippines. Reduction of Rabaul was therefore the primary mission, during this period, of the Allied forces of the South and Southwest Pacific Areas.

Early Pacific Strategy

Throughout the early months of 1942 the Japanese threat to the Allied line of communications had mounted steadily. The enemy's capture of Rabaul in January placed him in an excellent position to move south. Well situated in relation to Truk and the Palau Islands, Rabaul possessed a magnificent harbor as well as sites for several airfields. Only 440 nautical miles southwest of Rabaul lies the New Guinea coast, while Guadalcanal is but 565 nautical miles to the southeast. Thus the Japanese could advance southward covered all the way by land-based bombers. And since none of the islands in the Bismarck Archipelago-New Guinea-Solomons area lay beyond fighter-plane range of its neighbors, the Japanese could also cover their advance with fighters by building airstrips as they moved along. By May 1942 they had completed the occupation of the Bismarck Archipelago. They pushed south to establish bases at Lae and Salamaua on the northeast coast of New Guinea, and built airfields in the northern Solomons.

At this time the Japanese planned to cut the line of communications and isolate Australia by seizing the Fijis, Samoa, New Caledonia, and Port Moresby in New Guinea. But even before they were turned back from Port Moresby by the Allies during May, in the naval battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese had postponed the attacks against the Fijis, New Caledonia, and Samoa and had planned instead the June attempt against Midway. Although they managed to seize a foothold in the Aleutians, they failed disastrously at Midway. With four aircraft carriers sunk and hundreds of planes and pilots lost, the Japanese could no longer continue their offensives. The Allies were thus able to take the initiative in the Pacific.

At the time of the Coral Sea engagement in May, a small Japanese force had garrisoned Tulagi in the Solomons, and shortly afterward the Japanese began building an airfield at nearby Lunga Point on Guadalcanal. Just before they learned of the Japanese airfield under construction on Guadalcanal, the Joint Chiefs capitalized on the Midway victory by ordering the South and Southwest Pacific Areas to begin the advance against Rabaul. The operations, as set forth in the Joint Chiefs' orders of 2 July 1942, were divided into three phases. The first, or "Task One," was the seizure of Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the Solomons, and of the Santa Cruz Islands. Since possession of the Santa Cruz Islands did not prove necessary, they were never taken. Task Two included the capture of the remainder of the Japanese-held Solomons and of Lae, Salamaua, and other points on the northeast coast of New Guinea in the Southwest Pacific Area. Task Three was the seizure and occupation of Rabaul itself, and of adjacent positions.

Lessons Learned from Guadalcanal

Sustainment Preparations

On Halsey's orders South Pacific agencies had begun assembling supplies and developing bases and anchorages for the invasion of New Georgia as early as January 1943. Admiral Turner, remembering his experiences in the Guadalcanal Campaign, suggested that supplies for the invasion be stockpiled on Guadalcanal, and in February movement of supplies to Guadalcanal (under the appropriate code name DRYGOODS) began. In spite of the fact that the port of Noumea, New Caledonia, was jammed with ships waiting to be unloaded, in spite of the fact that port facilities at Guadalcanal were so poor, and in spite of a bad storm at Guadalcanal in May that destroyed all the floating quays, washed out bridges, and created general havoc, enough supplies for the invasion were ready on Guadalcanal by June. This was accomplished by Herculean labor at Noumea, by routing some ships directly to Guadalcanal, and by selective discharge of cargo from other ships. The effects of the storm at Guadalcanal were alleviated by using the ungainly-looking 2½-ton, six-wheel amphibian truck (DUKW) to haul supplies from ships to inland dumps over open beaches. By June 54,274 tons of supplies, exclusive of organization equipment, maintenance supplies, and petroleum products discharged from tankers, had been put ashore. In addition many loaded vehicles, 13,085 tons of assorted gear, and 23,775 drums of fuel and lubricants were moved from Guadalcanal to the Russells in June. Bulk gasoline storage tanks with a capacity of nearly 80,000 barrels were available on Guadalcanal.¹ Although Noumea and Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides were still the main South Pacific bases, Guadalcanal was ready to play an important role. The South Pacific commanders had insured that haphazard supply methods would not characterize TOENAILS.

Air Component Command and Control

One innovation in the command of supporting planes had apparently arisen from Maj. Gen. Alexander A. Vandegrift's recommendations based on his experiences in invading Guadalcanal.² Halsey directed that on take-off from Guadalcanal and Russells fields planes assigned to missions in the immediate area of operations would come under control of the local air commander (the Commander, New Georgia Air Force). Direction of fighters over Task Force 31 was to be conducted by a group aboard a destroyer until direction could be conducted ashore on Rendova. Similarly, bomber direction for direct air support would be handled aboard Turner's flagship McCawley until bomber director groups could establish themselves ashore.

Operation TOENAILS

Terrain and Weather

New Georgia is the name for a large group in the central Solomons which includes Vella Lavella, Gizo, Kolombangara, New Georgia (the main island of the group), Rendova, and Vangunu, Simbo, Ganonnga, Wana Wana, Arundel, Bangga, Mbulo, Gatukai, Tetipari (or Montgomery), and a host of islets and reefs. (Map 7) From Vella Lavella to Gatukai, the cluster is 125 nautical miles in length. Several of the islands have symmetrical volcanic cones rising over 3,000 feet above sea level.

In addition to the multitude of small channels, narrows, and passages, navigable only by small craft, there are several large bodies of water in the group. The Slot, the channel sailed so frequently by

¹ COMSOPAC War Diary, 1 Jan 43 entry; Extract of recommendations submitted by COMAMPHIBFORSOPAC, Incl F to memo, Gen Peck for Gen Breene et al., 16 Jan 43, sub: Notes on Mtg Held in War Plans See COMSOPAC, 14 Jan 43, in USAFISPA File No. 381, Preliminary Plng COMSOPAC and COMGENSOPAC, Jan-June 43, KCRC; Ltr, COMSOPAC to COMGENSOPAC et al., 24 Feb 43, sub: Assembly of Sups for Future Opns, in USAFISPA G-2 Hist Sec File, Plng for New Georgia Opn, OCMH; The History of USAFISPA, Pt. I, Vol. I, p. 178, and Pt. III, pp. 649-51, 661, 669, 673-74, OCMH; ONI USN, Operations in the New Georgia Area, p. 3.

² Ltr, COMAIRSOPAC to COMSOPAC, 4 Jun 43, sub: Availability of Aircraft at MAINYARD [Guadalcanal] for TOENAILS Opn, in USAFISPA G-2 Hist Sec File, Plng for New Georgia Opn, OCMH.

the Japanese during the Guadalcanal Campaign, lies between New Georgia on one side and Choiseul and Santa Isabel on the other. Marovo Lagoon on New Georgia's northeast side is one of the largest in the world. Vella Gulf separates Vella Lavella from Kolombangara, which is set off from New Georgia by Kula Gulf. Blanche Channel divides New Georgia from Rendova and Tetipari.

The island of New Georgia proper, the sixth largest in the Solomons, is about forty-five statute miles long on its northwest-southeast axis, and about thirty miles from southwest to northeast. It is mountainous in the interior, low but very rough in the vicinity of Munda Point.

New Georgia proper was difficult to get to by sea except in a few places. Reefs and a chain of barrier islands blocked much of the coast line, which in any event was frequently covered by mangrove swamps with tough aerial prop roots. The best deepwater approach was the Kula Gulf which boasted a few inlets, but Japanese warships and seacoast guns defended much of the shore line of the gulf. There were protected anchorages in the southeast part of the island at Wickham Anchorage, Viru Harbor, and Segi Point. Munda Point, the airfield site, was inaccessible to large vessels. East and west of the point visible islets and reefs, and also invisible ones, barred Roviana and Wana Wana lagoons to large ships. Rounding the lagoons like a crude fence on the seaward side is a tangled string of islands, rocks, and coral reefs—Roviana, Sasavele, Baraulu, and others, some with names, some without. These all have cliffs facing the sea (south) and slope down to sea level on the lagoon side. The channels between the barrier islands were too shallow for ships. Nor could ships reach Munda Point from Kula Gulf and Hathorn Sound. Diamond Narrows, running from Kula Gulf to the lagoons, was deep but too narrow for large vessels.

Across Blanche Channel from Munda and her guardian islands lies mountainous Rendova, which could be reached from the Solomon Sea. Rendova Harbor, though by no means a port, offered an anchorage to ocean-going ships.

New Georgia Occupation Force (NGOF)

...the New Georgia Occupation Force, initially included the following units:

43^d Division

9th Marine Defense Battalion

1st Marine Raider Regiment (less two battalions)

136th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm howitzers), 37th Division

Elements of the 70th Coast Artillery Battalion (Antiaircraft)

One and one-half naval construction battalions

Elements of the 1st Commando, Fiji Guerrillas³

Radar units

Naval base detachments

A boat pool

Creating the New Georgia Occupation Force, and attaching all ground troops to it (instead of attaching the supporting units to the 43^d Division) made another headquarters necessary, and threw a heavy burden on 43^d Division headquarters. General Hester commanded both force and division, and the 43^d Division staff was, in effect, split into two staffs. The 43^d Division's staff section chiefs (the Assistant Chiefs of Staff, G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4), as well as officers from Harmon's [CG, US Army Forces in the South Pacific and advisor to ADM Halsey, Commander of US Forces in the South Pacific]

³ This unit included besides the Fijians some Tongans and a few Solomon Islanders. See [British] Central Office of Information, *Among Those Present*, pp. 53-56. American documents list this unit variously as "1st South Seas Scout Company," "South Pacific Scouts," "native troops," and erroneously, as "1st Company, 1st Fiji Infantry," which was a different unit serving at Port Purvis on Florida.

headquarters, served on the Occupation Force staff sections, and their assistants directed the division's staff sections. Brig. Gen. Harold R. Barker, 43^d Division artillery commander, commanded all Occupation Force artillery – field, seacoast, and antiaircraft.

From the start General Harmon was dubious about the effectiveness of this arrangement. He was "somewhat concerned that Hester did not have enough command and staff to properly conduct his operation in its augmented concept."⁴ On 10 June, with Halsey's concurrence, he therefore told Maj, Gen, Oscar Griswold, commanding the XIV Corps and the Guadalcanal Island Base, to keep himself informed regarding Hester's plans in order to be prepared to take over if need be.⁵

Intelligence/Special Operations

...Allied intelligence agencies were able to keep a fairly close check on enemy troop, ship, and plane movements by means of radioed reports from observers operating behind the enemy lines. These observers were the coastwatchers, members of an organization, the Coastwatching Service, established before the war as part of the Directorate of Intelligence, Royal Australian Navy. Their territory originally embraced New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Solomons, but later islands of the Netherlands Indies were added to the network. Initially the coastwatchers were all British, Australian, or New Zealand civil servants or planters, commissioned in the Australian armed forces, but as the war progressed qualified men from the American forces were also assigned. The coastwatchers were part of the Allied Intelligence Bureau of the G-2 Section of GHQ. Those in the Solomons reported their observations directly to South Pacific agencies.⁶

These intrepid men were greatly aided in their work by the devotion and help of the natives. The Melanesians in general remained loyal to the Allied cause, and throughout the war rescued shot-down airmen and stranded sailors, worked as guides, bearers, and laborers, and a select few stayed with the various coastwatchers.

As the interior of the New Guinea-Bismarcks-Solomons area was little known and practically unmapped, the coastwatchers proved an invaluable source of information on terrain. In addition, their hideouts served as bases for the patrols that thrust behind the Japanese lines in advance of nearly every Allied operation.

During the first months of 1943 coastwatchers covered the Solomons thoroughly. Buka Passage, between Bougainville and Buka, and Buin on southern Bougainville had been the sites of coastwatching stations for several months, and in October 1942 flying boats and submarines took watchers to Vella Lavella, Choiseul, and Santa Isabel.⁷

At Segi Point on New Georgia was Donald G. Kennedy, a New Zealander who was District Officer in the Protectorate Government. Like Resident Commissioner William S. Marchant, the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia, and various other officials and members of religious orders, Kennedy remained in the Solomons when the Japanese came.⁸ At Segi Point Kennedy organized a network of white and Melanesian watchers covering Kolombangara, Rendova, Vangunu, Santa Isabel, and Roviana. A

⁴ Ltr, Harmon to Handy, 15 Jul 43, quoted in part in Hq SOPACBACOM File, Suppl New Georgia Material, OCMH.

⁵ Rad, COMGENSOPAC to COMGEN MAINYARD, 10 Jun 43, Hq SOPACBACOM File, Suppl New Georgia Material, OCMH.

⁶ See Comdr. Eric A. Feldt, RAN, *The Coastwatchers* (Melbourne and New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); MIS GHQ FEC, *The Intelligence Series, IV, Operations of the Allied Intelligence Bureau, GHQ, SWPA*. The Royal New Zealand Navy also operated a coastwatching system east of the Solomons.

⁷ By July, unfortunately, the Japanese were hunting the Bougainville coastwatchers so resolutely that the stations there had to be abandoned. See Feldt, *The Coastwatchers*, Ch. XI.

⁸ [British] Central Office of Information, *Among Those Present: The Official Story of the Pacific Islands at War* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), pp. 11, 43.

Euronesian medical practitioner was posted on Santa Isabel. On Roviana Sgt. Harry Wickham of the British Solomon Islands Defense Force organized the natives to keep watch over Munda Point.

Kennedy raised a guerrilla band to protect his hideout at Segi Point, for the Japanese occasionally sent out punitive expeditions to hunt him down. The primary mission of the coastwatchers was watching, not fighting, but Kennedy and his band were strong enough to wipe out several patrols that came too close. On one occasion Kennedy and his men, aboard the ten-ton schooner *Dadavata*, saw a Japanese whaleboat systematically reconnoitering the islets in Marovo Lagoon. They attacked with rifles, rammed the whaleboat, sank it, and killed or drowned its company.⁹

In addition to gaining information from terrain studies, interrogation of former residents, and coastwatchers' reports, South Pacific headquarters was able to augment its knowledge of New Georgia by a series of ground patrols. The first such expedition was directed by General Vogel. Four officers and eight enlisted men from each of the four battalions of the 1st Marine Raider Regiment assembled on Guadalcanal on 17 March, then sailed to Florida to board amphibian patrol planes (PBV's) which took them to Segi Point. After Kennedy furnished them with native scouts and bearers, patrols went out to reconnoiter Kolombangara, Viru Harbor, Munda Point, and other areas. Traveling overland and by canoe, they carefully examined caves, anchorages, and passages. Their mission completed, all parties reassembled at Segi Point on 9 April.

The raiders' reports indicated that troops in small craft could be taken through Onaiavisi Entrance to a 200-yard-long beach at Zanana, east of the Barike River. From there they could strike westward toward Munda.¹⁰ Before D Day, additional patrols from the invading forces went to New Georgia and stayed.

From November 1942 until D Day, Munda and Vila airfields were continuously subjected to air and naval bombardments. Vila, located in a swampy region, was practically never used by the enemy. From January until D Day, Allied cruisers and destroyers shelled Munda four times at night, Vila three times. The net result of the continuous air bombardment and the sporadic naval shelling was that the Japanese could not base planes permanently at Munda. It was used, and only occasionally, as a forward staging field.¹¹

Marine Defense Battalions

For decades before Japan gambled its future on a war with the United States, the Marine Corps developed the doctrine, equipment, and organization needed for just such a conflict. Although the Army provided troops for the defense of the Philippines, the westernmost American possession in the Pacific, the Marine Corps faced two formidable challenges: placing garrisons on any of the smaller possessions that the Navy might use as bases at the onset of war; and seizing and defending the additional naval bases that would enable the United States to project its power to the very shores of Japan's Home Islands.

As a militaristic Japan made inroads into China in the 1930s, concern heightened for the security of Wake, Midway, Johnston, and Palmyra Islands, the outposts protecting Hawaii, a vital staging area for a war in the Pacific. (Although actually atolls — tiny islands clustered on a reef-fringed lagoon — Wake, Midway, Johnston, and Palmyra have traditionally been referred to as islands.) By 1937, the Marine

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁰ I Mar Amphib Corps, Report on New Georgia Ground Reconnaissance: 21 March-9 April 43, 18 Apr 43.

¹¹ Morison, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal*, pp. 322-47; Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*, pp. 106-10; U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials* (Washington, 1946), I, 142, 192; USSBS, *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, p. 43; USSBS, *The Thirteenth Air Force in the War Against Japan*, p. 6; Southeast Area Naval Operations, II, Japanese Monogr No. 49 (OCMH), 19; Southeast Area Air Operations, 1942-44, Japanese Monogr No. 38 (OCMH), pp. 7-11.

Corps was discussing the establishment of battalion-size security detachments on the key Pacific outposts, and the following year's War Plan Orange proposed dispatching this sort of defense detachment to three of the Hawaiian outposts — Wake, Midway, and Johnston. The plan called for the units to deploy by M-Day—the date of an American mobilization for war —"in sufficient strength to repel minor naval raids and raids by small landing parties."

Envisioned as combined arms teams capable of delivering intense firepower, defense battalions were expected to have their greatest impact in the kind of campaign outlined in the Orange plan. The Navy's seagoing transports provided strategic mobility for the defense battalions, but once ashore, the units lacked vehicles and manpower for tactical mobility. Because the battalion became essentially immobile when it landed, each member had a battle station, as on a ship, to operate a particular crew served weapon or other piece of equipment. As configured in 1939 and 1940, a defense battalion could achieve mobility on land only by leaving its artillery, searchlights, and detection gear and fighting as infantry.

Marine Corps defense battalions could operate as integral units in support of a base or beachhead, positioning their weapons and equipment to cover assigned sectors and meet specific threats. Moreover, they might form detachments with a size and armament suitable for a particular task, such as defending various islets within an atoll or protecting separate beachheads. Although relatively static when in place, the ability of the battalions to divide in this fashion provided a kind of flexibility that may not have been fully appreciated in 1939, when the basic concept placed one battalion, though of variable size, at a given place.

Because a defense battalion could, in effect, form task organizations, it somewhat resembled the larger infantry regiment, which could employ battalion combat teams. Actually, the seacoast and antiaircraft artillery groups are almost small battalions, while the other three separate batteries (searchlight and sound locator and the two machine gun units) are undeniable batteries in the accepted sense of the word.

By October 1941, the tables of organization for the new defense battalions had certain features in common, each calling for a headquarters battery, a sound-locator and searchlight battery, a 5-inch seacoast artillery group, a 3-inch antiaircraft group, and a machine-gun group. The specific allocation of personnel and equipment within each battalion depended, however, on where the battalion deployed and the changes "prescribed by the Commandant from time to time." In brief, the defense battalions adhered to certain standard configurations, with individual variations due to time and circumstance. The average battalion strength during the war was 1,372 officers and men, including Navy medical personnel. Like manpower, the equipment used by the defense battalions also varied, although the armament of the typical wartime unit consisted of eight 155mm guns, twelve 90mm guns, nineteen 40mm guns, twenty-eight 20mm guns, and thirty-five .50-caliber heavy machine guns, supplemented in some instances by eight M3 light tanks.

Elements of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions supported the Army's XIV Corps in the central Solomons campaign. The strongly reinforced 9th Defense Battalion, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William J. Scheyer, participated in various aspects of the fighting. The 155mm and antiaircraft artillery groups landed on 30 June at Rendova Island, just off the coast of New Georgia. In the confusion of the Rendova landings, during which the assault waves arrived off schedule and out of sequence, antiaircraft gunners doubled as infantry in eliminating light opposition, and members of the 155mm unit, looking for firing positions, clashed with Japanese patrols. The heavy guns set up and registered in time to support the main landings at New Georgia's Zanana beaches on 2 July. The 90mm antiaircraft guns also were ready that same day, fortunately so, since the Japanese launched the first of 159 air raids carried out during the campaign. The battalion's antiaircraft weapons downed 46 aircraft, including 13 of 16 in one formation.

The main landing on Zanana beach, New Georgia, took place on 2 July under the cover of fire from anti-aircraft guns and 155mm artillery on Rendova. Machine guns and light anti-aircraft weapons promptly deployed from Rendova across the narrow strait to New Georgia to help protect the beachhead there. Light tanks from the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions helped Army troops punch through the Japanese defenses barring the way to the principal objective, Munda Point airfield. The M3A1 Stuart light tanks and their crews defied jungle, mud, and suicidal counterattacks in spearheading a slow and deliberate attack. The tank gunners fired 37mm canister rounds to strip away the jungle concealing Japanese bunkers, followed up with high-explosive shells to penetrate the fortifications, and used machine guns to cut down the survivors as they fled.

Concept of the Operation

The general plan of maneuver called for assault troops from Guadalcanal and the Russells to move to Rendova, Segi Point, Wickham Anchorage, and Viru Harbor on APD's, transports, cargo ships, minesweepers, and minelayers. Segi, Wickham, and Viru would be taken by small forces to secure the line of communications to Rendova while the main body of ground forces captured Rendova. Artillery on Rendova and the barrier islands was to bombard Munda, an activity in which ships' gunfire would also be employed. On several days following D Day, slow vessels such as LST's and LCT's would bring in more troops and supplies. They would travel at night and in daylight hours hide away, protected from Japanese planes by shore-based anti-aircraft, in Wickham Anchorage and Viru Harbor. About D plus 4, when enough men and supplies would be on hand, landing craft were to ferry assault troops from Rendova across Roviana Lagoon to New Georgia to begin the march against Munda. Coupled with this advance would be the amphibious seizure of Enogai Inlet in the Kula Gulf to cut the Japanese reinforcement, supply, and evacuation trail between Munda and Enogai, and thus prevent the Japanese on Kolombangara from strengthening their compatriots on New Georgia. Once Munda and Enogai were secured, it was planned, Vila on Kolombangara would be seized and further advances up the Solomons chain would follow.

Turner organized his force into five groups. (Chart 7) The Western Force (Task Group 31.1), which Turner commanded in person, would seize Rendova and make subsequent assaults against Munda, Enogai, and Kolombangara. The Eastern Force, under Rear Adm. George H. Fort, was to take Segi, Viru, and Wickham. Task Group 31.2, consisting of eight destroyers, would cover the transports. No ships' gunfire support was planned in advance, but all ships, including transports, were ordered to be ready to deliver supporting and counterbattery fire if necessary.

The New Georgia Occupation Force, under General Hester, included the Western Landing Force (under Hester) ...the Eastern Landing Force (under Col. Daniel Hundley) ...naval base forces for all points to be captured; the reserve under Col. Harry B. Liversedge, USMC; and ...the New Georgia Air Force.

Two ground force units which Turner retained temporarily under his direct control were small forces designated to make covering landings. The Onaiavisi Occupation Unit, composed of A and B Companies, 169th Infantry, was to land from two APD's and one minesweeper on Sasavele and Baraulu Islands on either side of Onaiavisi Entrance to hold it until the day of the assault against the mainland through the entrance. The landing of the occupation unit was scheduled for 0330, 30 June. The Rendova Advance Unit, C and G Companies (each less one rifle platoon), was to land from two APD's on Rendova at 0540 to cover the landing of the main body of the Western Landing Force. The latter, about 6,300 strong, was to start landing on Rendova at 0640, 30 June.

General Hester...made few changes in Turner's original plan, but in details that affected small units, he made quite a number.

First, he divided his Western Landing Force into two parts: The Northern Landing Group, consisting of Colonel Harry B. Liversedge's 1st Marine Raider Regiment (less the 2^d, 3^d and 4th Battalions)

and the 3^d Battalions of the 145th and 148th Infantry Regiments (both of the 37th Division); and the Southern Landing Group, comprising all the remaining elements of the Western Landing Force. Detailed schemes of maneuver were left to these subordinate commanders, but over-all supervisory responsibility remained with Hester.¹²

The Southern Landing Group, initially under the direction of General Wing [ADC 43 ID], would seize beachheads on Rendova and its outlying islands on D-Day. When the 43^d Division command post moved to shore from the flagship McCawley later in the day, General Hester would resume active control of this force. To prevent air interference at this stage of the game, Hester requested air strikes on enemy-held Northern Solomons bases, simultaneous bombing of the Vila (Kolombangara) and Munda areas, and continuous air cover for troops and shipping in the target area.¹³

The general expected that by D-plus 4 days his force would be established firmly in its first beachheads and that patrols would have discovered and staked out adequate channels through the barrier reefs to Zanana and Pirake beaches. At this time the 172^d Infantry (Colonel David N. M. Ross) would execute the shore-to-shore movement to Zanana Beach in small increments and, on a 2,000-yard front, begin a westerly march along the coast, astride the coastal track, to the Barike River.

The following day the 169th Infantry (Colonel John D. Easen), to advance to Rendova in the fifth echelon of transports during the night of 3-4 July, could land behind the 172^d, push inland through the jungle-swamp, and deploy along the Barike on the 172^d's right flank, thus presenting a united, two-regiment front to the enemy, with the Barike designated the line of departure for the final drive on Munda.

¹² Turner Ltr ; Boyd Interview; LtCol William D. Stevenson Ltr to CMC, 22Feb51.

¹³ CornSoPac, Weekly Air Intelligence Combat Reports 18Apr43-25Dec43.

Munda Point

The Early Landings

Admiral Turner's ships that were assigned to Rendova arrived off Guadalcanal in the morning of 29 June.¹⁴ They had come up from Efate bearing the assault troops of the Western Landing Force's first echelon. They weighed anchor late that afternoon and made an uneventful journey through the mist and rain to Blanche Channel between Rendova and New Georgia.

The night of 29-30 June was short for the six-thousand-odd troops aboard Turner's ships. Reveille sounded at 0200, more than four hours before the ships hove to off Renard Entrance, the channel leading to Rendova Harbor.

First landings were made by the Onaiavisi Occupation Unit—A and B Companies, 169th Infantry. These had come from the Russells in the destroyer-transport Ralph Talbot and the minesweeper Zane to land on Sasavele and Baraulu Islands before daylight in order to hold Onaiavisi Entrance against the day that the New Georgia Occupation Force made its water-borne movement against the mainland. Later in the morning B Company's 2d Platoon outposted Roviana Island and the next day wiped out a Japanese lookout station. These landings were not opposed. The Japanese had maintained observation posts on the barrier islands but had not fortified them.

The landing of the 172d Infantry on Rendova was somewhat disorderly. C and G Companies, guided by Maj. Martin Clemens and Lt. F. A. Rhoades, RAN, of the coastwatchers, and by native pilots, were to have landed from the destroyer-transports Dent and Waters on East and West Beaches of Rendova Harbor at 0540 to cover the main body of the 172d Infantry when it came ashore.¹⁵ But again the weather played the Allies foul. The mist and rain obscured the Renard Entrance markers and the white signal light on Bau Island that the reconnaissance party, present on Rendova since 16 June, had set up. As a result the APD's first landed C and G Companies several miles away, then had to re-embark them and go to the proper place.

Meanwhile, the six transports took their stations north of Renard Entrance as the destroyers took screening positions to the east and west. By now the clouds had begun to clear away, and visibility improved. The troops gathered on the transport decks, and the first wave climbed into the landing craft at the rails, carrying their barracks bags with them. The order "All boats away, all troops away" was given aboard Turner's flagship, the transport McCawley, as the sun rose at 0642. Four minutes later Turner warned the first boats as they headed for shore, some three thousand yards to the south: "You are the first to land, you are the first to land—expect opposition."¹⁶

As the landing craft moved shoreward the waves became disorganized. When the craft reached Renard Entrance between Bau and Kokorana Islands, there was confusion and milling about until they began going through the entrance two abreast toward the narrow East and West Beaches that fronted Lever Brothers' 584-acre plantation.

As the first landing craft touched down about 0700, the troops sprang out and ran across the beaches into the cover of the jungle. C and G Companies reached Rendova Harbor about ten minutes

¹⁴ There were six transports, two destroyer-transports, and eight destroyers.

¹⁵ C and G Companies, 172d Infantry, and A Company, 169th Infantry, had received special physical conditioning and training in jungle fighting and small boat handling. They were given the somewhat romantic title of "Barracudas." Clemens, a former district officer in the government of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, was a major in the British Solomon Islands Defense Force, and had been a great help during the Guadalcanal Campaign. Rhoades had been a plantation manager before the war.

¹⁶ CTF 31 War Diary, 30 Jun 43 entry.

after the troops from the transports, and they joined with the main body and moved inland toward the Japanese.¹⁷

The Japanese Rendova detachment—about 120 troops from the *229th Infantry* and the *Kure 6th Special Naval Landing Force*—had been alerted early during the morning of 30 June. The alert proved to be a false alarm and they went back to sleep. The next alert—their first realization that they were being attacked—came when the American assault craft hit the beach. As it was too late for the Japanese to man their beach defense positions, they posted themselves in the coconut plantation about one hundred yards behind East Beach. Radiomen tried to warn Munda but could not get the message through. A lookout at Banieta Point fired four blue flares and signaled headquarters by blinker.

The Japanese could not hope to do more than harass the Americans. The special naval landing force commander, hit in the face by a burst from a BAR, was an early casualty. When about a dozen men were dead, the disorganized Japanese fell back into the jungle. They are reported to have lost some fifty or sixty men, while killing four Americans and wounding five, including Col. David M. N. Ross, the 172d's commander. By the end of the day the Americans had pushed inland one thousand yards. The 105-mm. howitzers of the 103d Field Artillery Battalion were in position to cover Renard Entrance, the north coast of Rendova, and the barrier islands.

During most of the morning the Japanese did little. The Rendova garrison had not amounted to much; after the war the Japanese explained that the Munda and Rabaul commanders had not expected the Americans to land on the offshore islands. "Therefore," a postwar report states, "the landing on RENDOVA Island completely baffled our forces."¹⁸ But Turner and General Hester were operating very close to the Japanese air bases in southern Bougainville and the Shortlands, and these presented the greatest danger. Fortunately for the Americans, the Japanese were not prepared to counterattack at once.

The commanders at New Georgia were not the only Japanese surprised by the invasion. Those at Rabaul were taken equally unaware. ...after 26 June, when Allied movements seemed to slow down (Turner's task force was then rehearsing in the New Hebrides), the Japanese command concluded that the Allies had been simply reinforcing Guadalcanal on a grand scale. Kusaka pulled his air units back to Rabaul. Thus it was that although a submarine had sighted Turner's ships south of New Georgia about midnight, Kusaka, with sixty-six bombers, eighty-three fighters, and twenty reconnaissance seaplanes at his disposal, could do nothing about the invasion for several hours.

Turner, whose plans called for unloading to be completed by 1130, was first interrupted by a false air raid alarm at 0856. The ships stopped unloading and steamed around in Blanche Channel while the thirty-two fighter planes covering the landing got ready to intercept. The reported enemy planes failed to appear, and unloading was resumed.

The first real enemy air attack, a sweep by twenty-seven fighters, came just after 1100. The Allied fighter cover shot most of them down before they could do any damage, but Turner's schedule was further delayed by the necessity for going to general quarters and getting under way.

By about 1500 all but about fifty tons of gear had been unloaded. Turner ordered the transports and screening destroyers back to Guadalcanal and they speedily took their departure. Shortly afterward

¹⁷ 43d Division documents give no data on the planned composition and timing of assault waves. They are at variance regarding the time of landing. The 43d Division and New Georgia Occupation Force reports (which are virtually identical) state that C and G Companies landed at 0630 and that the main body began landing at 0745. These assertions are undoubtedly incorrect. The 172d report states that C and G Companies went astray but landed along with the main body about 0700. And the 43d Division's time of 0745 is contradicted by that division's G-3 Journal which states that the division command post opened on Rendova at 0730. CTF 31 War Diary states that the first troops hit the beach at 0656.

¹⁸ Southeast Area Naval Operations, II, Japanese Monogr No. 49 (OCMH), 36.

twenty-five Japanese bombers, escorted by twenty-four fighters, came down from Rabaul. The majority of the bombers were shot down...

Six thousand men of the 43d Division, the 24th Naval Construction Battalion and other naval units, and the 9th Marine Defense Battalion had come ashore with weapons, rations, fuel, ammunition, construction equipment, and personal baggage. The Japanese had lost Rendova and several planes, and although they enthusiastically reported inflicting heavy damage to Turner's ships, they admitted that, "due to tenacious interference by enemy fighter planes, a decisive blow could not be struck against the enemy landing convoy." "The speedy disembarkation of the enemy," they felt, "was absolutely miraculous."¹⁹

With the capture of the beachhead, General Hester dissolved the 172d Regimental Combat Team and returned the field artillery, engineers, and medical and communications men to divisional control. The build-up of troops and supplies for the attack against Munda and Vila was ready to begin.

The second echelon of the Western Force came in on LST's the next day. This echelon included the 155-mm. howitzers of the 192d Field Artillery Battalion and the 155-mm. guns of A Battery, 9th Marine Defense Battalion. Succeeding reinforcements continued to arrive at Rendova, Segi Point, Viru, and Wickham through 5 July until virtually the entire New Georgia Occupation Force as then constituted was present in New Georgia, with the main body at Rendova.

The Japanese were unable to do anything to prevent these movements, and did little damage to the beachhead. Only Japanese aircraft made anything like a sustained effort. The Japanese reinforced their air strength at Rabaul and sent planes forward to southern Bougainville and the Shortlands. On 2 July Admiral Kusaka had under his command 11 fighters and 13 dive bombers from the carrier *Ryuho*, 11 land-based twin-engine bombers, 20 fighters, 2 reconnaissance planes, and a number of Army bombers that were temporarily assigned. The same day foul weather began closing in the rearward Allied bases. About noon the Commander, Aircraft, Solomons, from his post on Guadalcanal, ordered all Allied planes back. This left New Georgia without air cover. To make matters worse, the 9th Marine Defense Battalion's SCR 602 (a search radar designed for immediate use on beachheads) broke down that morning, and the SCR 270 (a long-range radar designed for relatively permanent emplacement) was not yet set up.

Kusaka sent all his planes to New Georgia. They reached the Rendova area in the afternoon, circled behind the clouded 3,448-foot twin peaks of Rendova Peak, then pounced to the attack. Many soldiers saw the planes but thought they were American until fragmentation clusters dropped by the bombers began exploding among them. The Rendova beachhead, with its dense concentrations of men and matériel, was an excellent target. At least thirty men were killed and over two hundred were wounded. Many bombs struck the fuel dumps, the resulting fires caused fuel drums to explode, and these started more fires. Three 155-mm. guns of the 9th Marine Defense Battalion were damaged. Much of the equipment of the 125-bed clearing station set up by the 118th Medical Battalion was destroyed; for a time only emergency medical treatment could be rendered. The wounded had to wait at least twenty-four hours before they could receive full treatment at Guadalcanal.

The troops on Rendova had been making ready since 30 June, but some of their efforts were marked by less than complete success. Hester had ordered aggressive reconnaissance of the entire area east and north of Munda. Starting on the night of 30 June-1 July, patrols from the 172d Infantry were to pass through Onaiavisi Entrance and Roviana Lagoon, land at Zanana, and begin reconnoitering... The 43d Division patrols were to operate from a base camp west of Zanana established on the afternoon of 30 June by Capt. E. C. D. Sherrer, assistant intelligence officer of the New Georgia Occupation Force.

At 2330, 30 June, despite a false rumor that Onaiavisi Entrance was impassable for small boats, patrols left Rendova on the eight-mile run to the mainland. The next morning regimental headquarters

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 29, 37.

discovered that the patrols, unable to find the entrance in the dark, had landed on one of the barrier islands. The next evening the 1st Battalion, accompanied by Colonel Ross, shoved off for the mainland but could not find its way. Thus it was concluded that the move should be made in daylight. Accordingly, A Company, 169th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion, 172d Infantry, moved out for Zanana on the afternoon of 2 July. Native guides in canoes marked the channel. Everything went well except that about 150 men returned to Rendova at 2330. Questioned about their startling reversal of course, they are reported to have stated that the coxswain²⁰ of the leading craft had received a note dropped by a B-24 which ordered them to turn back.²¹ By the next morning, however, the entire 1st Battalion was on the mainland.

...the 1st Battalion, 172d Infantry, established a perimeter of 400 yards' radius, wired in and protected by machine guns, 37-mm. antitank guns, and anti-aircraft guns. Here General Wing set up the 43d Division command post, and to this perimeter came the remaining troops of the 172d and 169th Infantry Regiments in echelons until 6 July when both regiments had been completely assembled. Ground reconnaissance by 43d Division soldiers, marines, and coastwatchers, aided after 3 July by the 1st Company, South Pacific Scouts, under Capt. Charles W. H. Tripp of the New Zealand Army, was still being carried on. The advance westward was ready to begin.

From Zanana to the Barike River

Once the 169th and 172d Regiments had landed at Zanana, General Hester had originally planned, the two regiments were to march overland about two and one-half to three miles to a line of departure lying generally along the Barike River, then deploy and attack west to capture Munda airfield. (Map 9) The regiments were directed to reach the line of departure and attack by 7 July, but by the time the two regiments had reached Zanana all operations were postponed one day.

The overland approach to Munda involved a march through the rough, jungled, swampy ground typical of New Georgia. The terrain between Zanana and Munda was rugged, tangled, and patternless. Rocky hills thrust upward from two to three hundred feet above sea level, with valleys, draws, and stream beds in between. The hills and ridges sprawled and bent in all directions. The map used for the operation was a photomap based on air photography. It showed the coast line and Munda airfield clearly, but did not give any accurate indication of ground contour. About all the troops could tell by looking at it was that the ground was covered by jungle.

The difficulty of travel in this rough country was greatly increased by heat, mud, undergrowth, and hills. Visibility was limited to a few yards. There were no roads, but a short distance north of Zanana lay Munda Trail, a narrow foot track that hit the coast at Lambeti Plantation. Engineers were making ready to build a road from Zanana to Munda Trail, and to improve the latter so that it could carry motor traffic.

Having made their way from Zanana to the line of departure on the Barike, the two regiments would, according to Hester's orders, deliver a coordinated attack against Munda airfield, which lay about two and one-half miles westward. The 172d Infantry on the left (south) would be responsible for a front extending inland from the coast. The 169th Infantry's zone of action lay north of the 172d's; its right flank would be in the air except for protection given it by South Pacific Scout patrols operating to the north. The attack would be supported by General Barker's artillery and by air and naval bombardments.

Two days after the beginning of the two-regiment attack, a heavy naval bombardment would prepare the way for an assault landing by the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, and the 9th Marine Defense Battalion's Tank Platoon at 0420, 9 July, at the west tip of Munda Point.

²⁰ A coxswain is an NCO is the commander of a boat or other small naval vessel.

²¹ There seem to be no further available data regarding this interesting but absurd excuse.

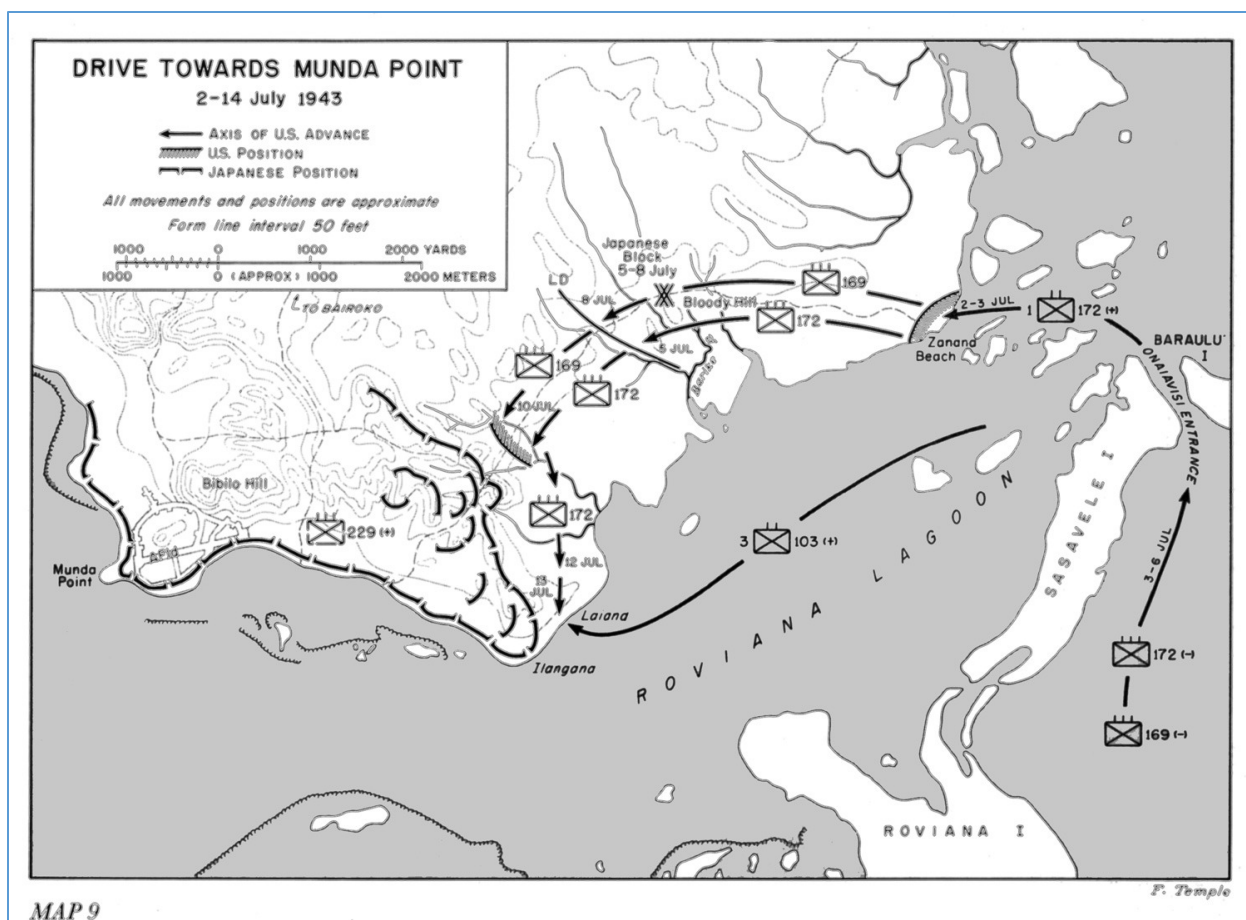


Figure 1. 43 ID's advance from Zanana

Hester and Wing did not expect to meet any serious opposition between Zanana and the Barika River, and their expectations must have been confirmed by the experience of the 1st Battalion, 172d. On 3 July Colonel Ross had ordered this battalion to remain at Zanana, making every effort at concealment. The message was apparently not received, for on 4 July the battalion, accompanied by A Company, 169th Infantry, easily marched to the Barika River, meeting only small Japanese patrols on the way.

Next morning Captain Sherrer of the G-2 Section led a patrol of six New Zealanders, twelve Americans, and eighteen Fijians from his base camp toward the upper reaches of the Barika River. They intended to set up a patrol base on high ground suitable for good radio transmission and reception. Normally they would have avoided detection by moving off the trails and striking out through the wilderness, but, laden with radio gear, they followed Munda Trail. As they approached a small rise that lay about two miles from Zanana, and about eleven hundred yards east of the line of departure, they met enemy machine gun fire. They replied with small arms, and the fire fight lasted until dusk when Sherrer's group disengaged and went south to the bivouac of the 1st Battalion, 172d, near the mouth of the Barika. B Company, 172d, went out to investigate the situation the next morning and found the Japanese still occupying the high ground, astride the trail. Attacks by B Company and by A Company, 169th, failed to dislodge the Japanese. By afternoon of 6 July, however, the three battalions of the 172d Infantry were safely in place on the Barika, the 1st and 3d on the left and right, the 2d in regimental reserve.

But the 169th Infantry, commanded by Col. John D. Eason, was not so fortunate. That regiment's 3d Battalion, under Lt. Col. William A. Stebbins, set out along the trail from Zanana to the line of departure on the morning of 6 July. Natives guided the battalion as it moved in column of companies, each company in column of platoons, along the narrow trail. The men hacked vines and undergrowth to make their way more easily. Shortly after noon, General Wing ordered Stebbins' battalion to destroy the point of Japanese resistance that Sherrer had run into.

Fighting the Plan

The 3d Battalion, 169th, apparently did not run into the block on 6 July. It dug in for the night somewhere east of the block, but does not seem to have established the sort of perimeter defense that was necessary in fighting the Japanese in the jungle. Foxholes were more than six feet apart. The battalion laid no barbed wire or trip wire with hanging tin cans that rattled when struck by a man's foot or leg and warned of the approach of the enemy. Thus, when darkness fell and the Japanese began their night harassing tactics—moving around, shouting, and occasionally firing—the imaginations of the tired and inexperienced American soldiers began to work. They thought the Japanese were all around them, infiltrating their perimeter with ease. One soldier reported that Japanese troops approached I Company, calling, in English, the code names of the companies of the 3d Battalion, such stereotypes as "come out and fight," and references to the Louisiana maneuvers.²²

The men of the battalion, which had landed in the Russells the previous March, must have been familiar with the sights and sounds of a jungle night, but affected by weariness and the presence of the enemy, they apparently forgot. In their minds, the phosphorescence of rotten logs became Japanese signals. The smell of the jungle became poison gas; some men reported that the Japanese were using a gas which when inhaled caused men to jump up in their foxholes. The slithering of the many land crabs was interpreted as the sound of approaching Japanese. Men of the 169th are reported to have told each other that Japanese nocturnal raiders wore long black robes, and that some came with hooks and ropes to drag Americans from their foxholes. In consequence the men of the battalion spent their nights nervously and sleeplessly, and apparently violated orders by shooting indiscriminately at imaginary targets.

Next day, the shaken 3d Battalion advanced with I Company leading followed by L, M, Battalion Headquarters, and K Companies. It ran into machine gun fire from the Japanese trail block at 1055. I Company deployed astride Munda Trail, L Company maneuvered to the left, K was initially in reserve. M Company brought up its 81-mm. mortars and heavy machine guns but could not use them profitably at first as banyan trees and undergrowth blocked shells and bullets. The mortar platoon then began clearing fields of fire by cutting down trees. B Company of the 172d also attacked the block from the south.

I Company launched a series of frontal assaults but was beaten back by machine gun fire. Three platoon leaders were wounded in these attacks. K Company came out of reserve to deliver a frontal assault; its commander was soon killed. Neither it nor any of the other companies made progress. The Japanese were well dug in and camouflaged. Riflemen covered the automatic weapons. Fire lanes had been cut. The enemy weapons had little if any muzzle blast, and the Americans had trouble seeing targets. Some tried to grenade the enemy but were driven back before they could get close enough to throw accurately. At length the 81-mm. mortars got into action; observers operating thirty yards from the Japanese position brought down fire on it. Some Japanese are reported to have evacuated "Bloody Hill," as the Americans called it, that afternoon. At 1550 the 3d Battalion withdrew to dig in for the

²² 169th Inf Hist, 20 Jun-30 Sep 43, p. 5.

night.²³ After dark the Japanese harassed the 3d Battalion again. According to the 169th Infantry, "a sleepless night was spent by all under continued harassing from enemy patrols speaking English, making horror noises, firing weapons, throwing hand grenades, swinging machetes and jumping into foxholes with knives."²⁴

On 8 July, the 1st Battalion, 169th Infantry, which had been behind the 3d within supporting distance, was ordered to bypass the 3d and move to the Barike while the 3d Battalion reduced the block. On 7 July General Wing had ordered Colonel Ross to use part of the 172d against the block, but apparently by the afternoon of 8 July no elements of the 172d except B Company had gone into action against it. On 8 July the 3d Battalion, 169th, and B Company, 172d, struck the block after a mortar preparation and overran it. The 3d Battalion lost six men killed and thirty wounded, and suffered one case diagnosed as war neurosis, in reducing the block. The trail from Zanana to the Barike was open again, but the attack against Munda had been delayed by another full day.

By late afternoon of 8 July, the 1st Battalion, 169th, had reached the Barike River and made contact on its left with the 3d Battalion, 172d; A Company, 169th, had been returned to its parent regiment; the 3d Battalion, 169th, was behind and to the right of the 1st Battalion. With the two regiments on the line of departure, Hester and Wing were ready to start the attack toward Munda early on 9 July. Hester told Wing: "I wish you success."²⁵

By 7 July General Hester, after conferences with General Wing and Colonels Ross and Eason, had abandoned the idea of the amphibious assault against Munda by the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, and the 9th Marine Defense Battalion's tank platoon. He was probably influenced in his decision by the strength of the Munda shore defenses. The plan for the attack on 9 July called for the 169th and 172d Regiments to advance from the Barike, seize the high ground southwest of the river, and capture the airfield. The 172d Infantry was to move out astride the Munda Trail with the 1st and 3d Battalions abreast. Each battalion zone would be three hundred yards wide. Battalions would advance in column of companies; each rifle company would put two platoons in line. The 169th Infantry, maintaining contact on its left with the 3d Battalion, 172d, would advance echeloned to the right rear to protect the divisional right flank. The 1st Battalion was to advance abreast of the 172d; the 3d Battalion would move to the right and rear of the 1st.

The division reserve consisted of the 2d Battalion, 169th, which was to advance behind the assault units. Antitank companies from the two regiments, plus Marine antiaircraft artillerymen, were defending the Zanana beachhead. In Occupation Force reserve, under Hester, was the 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, on Rendova. H Hour for the attack was set for 0630.

The regimental commanders planned to advance by 200-yard bounds. After each bound, they intended to halt for five minutes, establish contact, and move out again. They hoped to gain from one to two thousand yards before 1600.

General Barker's artillery on the offshore islands inaugurated the first major attack against Munda at 0500 of 9 July with a preparation directed against rear areas, lines of communication, and suspected bivouac areas and command posts. After thirty minutes, fire was shifted to suspected centers of resistance near the line of departure. In one hour the 105-mm. howitzers of the 103d and 169th Field Artillery Battalions, the 155-mm. howitzers of the 136th Field Artillery Battalion, and the 155-mm. guns of the 9th Marine Defense Battalion fired over 5,800 rounds of high explosive. Starting at 0512, four destroyers from Admiral Merrill's task force, standing offshore in the Solomon Sea, opened fire at the

²³ The 169th Infantry History (p. 4) claims that the block was destroyed on 7 July, and that a day was lost when the 1st Battalion, 169th, moved ahead of the 3d on 8 July. But messages in the 43d Division G-3 Journal indicate that the block was still active on 8 July.

²⁴ 169th Inf Hist, p. 4.

²⁵ 43d Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Jul 43.

area in the immediate vicinity of the airfield in accordance with plans prepared in consultation with General Barker. Naval authorities had originally wanted to fire at targets close to the line of departure as well, but the 43d Division, fearing that the direction of fire (northeast to east) might bring shells down on its own troops, rejected the proposal.²⁶ Between 0512 and 0608, the destroyers fired 2,344 5-inch rounds. At 0608, four minutes before the bombardment was scheduled to end, some Japanese planes dropped bombs and strafed one ship; the destroyers retired.

H Hour, 0630, came and went, but not a great deal happened. The 1st Battalion, 169th Infantry, reported that it was ready to move but could not understand why the 172d Infantry had not advanced. At 0930, General Wing was informed that no unit had yet crossed the line of departure. Several factors seem to have caused the delay. Movement as usual was an ordeal. The Barike was flooded. Soldiers, weighted with weapons, ammunition, and packs, had to wade through waist-to-shoulder-deep water. The river, which had several tributaries, wound and twisted to the sea. It crossed the Munda Trail three times; the spaces between were swampy. The men, sweating in the humid heat, struggled to keep their footing, and pulled their way along by grabbing at roots and undergrowth. Leading platoons had to cut the wrist-thick rattan vines.

At 1030 General Barker returned to the 43d Division command post from a tour of the front and reported that at 1000 the 172d Infantry was a hundred yards beyond the Barike, but that the 169th was still east of the river. The only opposition had come from the outpost riflemen that the Americans usually called "snipers." At the time these were believed, probably erroneously, to be operating in the treetops.²⁷

By 1630, when it dug in for the night, the 172d had gained some eleven hundred yards.²⁸ The 169th had made no progress to speak of. The 1st Battalion got one hundred yards west of the Barike; the other two apparently remained east of the river.

The 169th was facing about the same obstacles as the 172d, but it is possible that the 169th was a badly shaken regiment before the attack began.²⁹ The night before the attack, 8-9 July, the 3d Battalion was bivouacked near Bloody Hill, and the other two lay to the west. When the Japanese made their presence known to the three battalions, or when the Americans thought there were Japanese within their bivouacs, there was a great deal of confusion, shooting, and stabbing. Some men knifed each other. Men threw grenades blindly in the dark. Some of the grenades hit trees, bounced back, and exploded among the Americans. Some soldiers fired round after round to little avail. In the morning no trace remained of Japanese dead or wounded. But there were American casualties; some had been stabbed to death, some wounded by knives. Many suffered grenade fragment wounds, and 50 percent of these were caused by fragments from American grenades. These were the men who had been harassed by Japanese nocturnal tactics on the two preceding nights, and there now appeared the first large number of cases diagnosed as neuroses. The regiment was to suffer seven hundred by 31 July.

The 43d Division resumed the attack on 10 July. The 172d Infantry, reporting only light opposition, advanced a considerable distance. The 169th Infantry, with the 1st Battalion in the lead and the 2d Battalion to its right rear, advanced successfully until it reached the point where the Munda Trail was intersected by a trail which ran southeast to the beach, then circled to the southwest to the native

²⁶ Merrill thought the 43d Division was generally too cautious. See Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*, p. 179.

²⁷ Whereas the Japanese, like the Allies, used trees whenever possible for observation posts, it is doubtful that "snipers" used many trees in the jungle. See Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, p. 318. Anyone who has ever climbed a tree in the jungle can testify to the difficulties a man with a rifle would encounter—lack of visibility, tree limbs in the way, and the innumerable little red ants whose bite is like the prick of needles.

²⁸ From 1100, 8 July, to 1300, 9 July, this regiment was commanded by Lt. Col. Charles W. Capron. Colonel Ross, wounded on 30 June, had apparently been ordered to Rendova for medical treatment.

²⁹ The 172d was either not subjected to night harassing or was not sufficiently bothered by it to report it.

villages of Laiana and Ilangana. Reaching this junction about 1330 after crossing a small creek on two felled tree trunks, the leading battalion was halted by machine gun fire. When the 1st Battalion was stopped, Colonel Eason decided to blast the strong point. While the infantry pulled back a hundred yards, the 169th's mortars and the Occupation Force artillery opened fire. Barker's guns fired over four thousand rounds of 105-mm. and 155-mm. high explosive, shattering trees, stripping the vegetation, and digging craters.³⁰ At the day's end, the Japanese were still on the high ground; the 169th Infantry, after advancing about fifteen hundred yards, was forced to bivouac in a low swampy area. The American commanders concluded that they were nearing a main defensive line. They were right. The high ground to their front contained the main Japanese defenses that were to resist them for weeks.

Terrain Favors the Enemy

Although patrols of New Georgians, Fijians, Tongans, New Zealanders, and Americans had reconnoitered the area, their information could not always be put to good use. There was no accurate map on which to record data, nor were there any known landmarks.

In the jungle, orthodox skirmish lines proved impractical. As men dispersed they could not be seen and their leaders lost control. At any rate, movement off the trails was so difficult that most units moved in columns of files, the whole unit bound to one trail. Thus one or two Japanese, by firing on the leading elements, could halt an entire battalion.

The Occupation Force intelligence officer had estimated that the main Japanese defenses lay 1,600 yards from the Barike, anchored on Roviana Lagoon and extending inland to the northwest. This was correct, except that the defense line on the ridges was actually about 2,500 yards from the Barike's mouth. Beyond the main defenses, the Japanese outposts, using rifles, machine guns, and sometimes mortars and grenade dischargers, were well able to delay the advance.

By 11 July the advancing regiments were still in trouble. Progress had been slowed by the enemy, and also by the supply problems arising from the fact that the troops had landed five miles east of their objective and thus committed themselves to a long march through heavy jungle. Now the regiments, in spite of their slow advance, had outdistanced their overextended supply line.

The 118th Engineer Battalion had made good progress in building a jeep trail from Zanana to the Barike River. Using data obtained from native scouts, the engineers had built their trail over high, dry ground, averaging one half to three quarters of a mile per day. There was little need for corduroying with logs, a time-consuming process. When they ran into trees too big to knock down with their light D-3 bulldozers, the engineers blasted them with dynamite. Lacking heavy road-graders, the 118th could not make a two-lane, amply ditched road, but it managed to clear a one-lane track widened at regular intervals to permit two-way traffic. Near a five-foot-deep, fast-running stream east of the Barike the engineers hit soft mud. To get to ground firm enough to permit construction of footbridges and two thirty-foot trestle bridges, they were forced to swing the road northward parallel to the river for two and one-half miles to get to a firm crossing. The advancing regiments crossed the Barike on 9 July, but several days were to elapse before the bridges were completed.

Thus there was a gap between the end of the road and the front. To bridge the gap, nearly half the combat troops were required to carry forward ammunition, food, water, and other supplies, and to evacuate casualties. Allied cargo planes were used to parachute supplies to the infantry, but there were never enough planes to keep the troops properly supplied.

³⁰ One fortunate concomitant of artillery fire was better visibility as the heavy shellings tore the jungle apart.

Fighting the Enemy

With fighting strength reduced by the necessity for hand carry, with his right flank virtually exposed, and his extended supply line open to harassment by the enemy, Hester decided, on 10 July, to change his plan of attack in order to shorten the supply line. If a new beachhead could be established at Laiana (a native village about two miles east by south from Munda airfield), some five thousand yards would be cut off the supply line. Patrols, operating overland and in canoes, examined Laiana beach at night and reported that it was narrow but suitable, with a coral base under the sand. Unfavorable aspects included a mangrove swamp back of the beach and the fact that the Japanese main defenses appeared to start at Ilangana, only five hundred yards southwest of Laiana, and arch northwest toward the Munda Trail.

But the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Hester ordered the 172d Infantry to swing southward to Laiana, seize and hold a beachhead from the land side, then advance on Munda. The 169th Infantry was to continue its attempt to drive along the Munda Trail. Hester ordered the reinforced 3d Battalion, 103d Infantry, at Rendova, to be prepared to land at Laiana after the 172d had arrived.

Seizing Laiana Beach

At 1000, 11 July, the 172d Infantry disengaged from the attack, turned south, and started moving toward shore through knee-deep mud. The regiment tried to keep its move a secret, but Japanese patrols quickly observed it, and mortar fire soon began hitting it. The wounded were carried along with the regiment. The advance was halted about midafternoon after a gain of some 450 yards. Both 1st and 3d Battalions (the 2d had remained behind to block the trail and thus cover the rear until the 169th could come up) reported running into pillboxes. Aside from the mortar shelling and some infiltration by patrols between the 172d and the 169th, the Japanese appeared to have stayed fairly still.

The march was resumed on 12 July with the hope of reaching Laiana before dark, for the regiment had not received any supplies for two days. Colonel Ross reported that the carrying parties equaled the strength of three and one-half rifle companies. Despite this fact, and although food and water were exhausted, the regiment kept moving until late afternoon when leading elements were within five hundred yards of Laiana. There machine gun and mortar fire halted the advance. At this time scouts confirmed the existence of pillboxes, connected by trenches, extending northwest from Ilangana. The pillboxes, which the Americans feared might be made of concrete, housed heavy machine guns, and were supported by light machine guns and mortars.

That night (12-13 July) Japanese mortars registered on the 172d's bivouac, and the troops could hear the Japanese felling trees, presumably to clear fields of fire.

His hungry, thirsty regiment was without a line of communications, and Colonel Ross, concerned over the Japanese patrols in his rear, had to get to Laiana on 13 July. With the artillery putting fire ahead, the 172d started out through mangrove swamp on the last five hundred yards to Laiana. The enemy fire continued. The advance was slow, but late afternoon found the 172d in possession of Laiana. It organized the area for defense while patrols sought out the Japanese line to the west.

Reincke Ridge

While the 172d had been driving to Laiana and getting ready to attack westward, the 169th Infantry was pushing against the high ground to the north. On 10 July, the day before the 172d turned southward, the 169th had been halted. It faced Japanese positions on the high ground which dominated the Munda-Lambeti trail junction. The Munda Trail at this point led up to a draw, with hills to the north (right) and south (left). The Japanese held the draw and the hills.

The regiment renewed the attack on 11 July just before General Hester replaced Colonel Eason with Col. Temple G. Holland, but made no gains. When Holland took over the regiment, he ordered the

advance postponed until the next morning. The exact nature of the Japanese defenses was not yet completely clear, but it was evident that the Japanese had built mutually supporting pillboxes on the hills.

Holland's plan for 12 July called for the 1st Battalion to deliver the attack from its present position while the 2d Battalion enveloped the Japanese left (north) flank.³¹ The 3d Battalion, temporarily in division reserve, would be released to the regiment when the trail junction was secure. The 169th attacked as ordered but bogged down at once, partly because it became intermingled with elements of the 172d, which was starting for Laiana. When the units were disentangled the two battalions attacked again. The 1st Battalion ran head on into Japanese opposition but reported a gain of three hundred yards. The 2d Battalion received enfilading fire from the northernmost ridge but kept its position. A second attack, supported by a rolling barrage, was attempted in the afternoon. The infantry, unable to keep pace with the barrage which moved forward at the rate of ten yards a minute, fell behind and halted. At the day's end, Holland, who reported to Hester that his regiment was badly disorganized, asked General Mulcahy for air support the following day.

Next morning, 13 July, after thirty minutes of artillery fire and a twelve-plane dive-bombing attack against the south ridge, the 169th attacked again. All three battalions were committed. The 2d Battalion, in the center, was to assault frontally up the draw while the 1st Battalion, on the right, and the 3d Battalion on the left, moved against the north and south ridges with orders to envelop the Japanese.

The 3d Battalion, with I and L Companies in line and M in support, struggled forward for four hours.³² It pushed four hundred to five hundred yards into the Japanese lines and managed to secure its objective, the south ridge, which it named Reincke Ridge for Lt. Col. Frederick D. Reincke, who had replaced Stebbins in command on 8 July.

The other two battalions were not as successful. The 2d Battalion, with E and F Companies in line and G in support, met machine gun fire in the draw, halted, was hit by what it believed to be American artillery fire, and pulled back. The 1st Battalion, attacking the north ridge, found it obstructed by fallen limbs from blasted trees and by shell and bomb craters. The Japanese who had survived the bombardments opened fire from their pillboxes and halted the assaulting companies. The battalion, now operating without artillery or mortar support, tried to assault with rifle and bayonet. Some men started to climb to the ridge crest but were killed or wounded by machine gun fire. B Company lost three of its four officers in the attempt. Japanese artillery and mortar fire cut communication to the rear. The battalion returned to its original position.

The 1st and 2d Battalions took positions on the flanks and rear of the 3d Battalion, which held Reincke Ridge. The Japanese held the north ridge and the draw. To the west they held the higher ground called Horseshoe Hill. To the south was the gap left by the 172d when it turned south. In spite of the 3d Battalion's exposed situation Holland and Reincke decided to hold the hard-won position which was the only high ground the 169th possessed. Its possession was obviously vital to the success of an attack against the main enemy defenses.

All that night and all the next day (14 July) the Japanese tried to push the 3d Battalion from Reincke Ridge. I Company was hit hard but held its ground with the loss of two men killed and nineteen wounded. Artillery and mortar shells kept exploding on the ridge top, while Japanese machine guns covered the supply route to the rear. During its first twenty-four hours on the ridge, Reincke's battalion suffered 101 casualties; L Company consisted of just fifty-one enlisted men by the end of 14 July.

On the same day Holland reorganized the other two battalions. The regimental Antitank Company had landed at Zanana on 13 July and been assigned the task of carrying supplies forward from

³¹ Ltr, Col Holland to Gen Smith, Chief of Mil Hist, 12 Oct 53, no sub, OCMH.

³² K Company had been detached to guard the regimental command post.

the trail's end. This task had eased, because the engineers finished bridging the Barike on 12 July and by 14 July had extended the trail to within five hundred yards of the 169th's front lines. Rations, water, and ammunition were parachuted to the regiment on 14 July. Colonel Holland relieved part of the Antitank Company of its supply duties and assigned sixty of its men to the 2d Battalion, twenty to the 1st. He also sent patrols south to cover the gap to his left. Late in the afternoon he reported to Hester that morale in his regiment had improved.

Committing XIV Corps

As early as 10 July, Generals Hester and Wing were far from pleased with the performance of all units and commanders. On 10 July Wing, who had visited the command post of the 3d Battalion, 169th Infantry, on 8 July, directly ordered the regimental commander to relieve the 3d Battalion's commander and put Colonel Reincke in his place.

Three days prior to this relief, the 145th Infantry Regiment (less the 3d Battalion, serving under Liversedge) of the 37th Division, which had been standing by on Guadalcanal in area reserve, had been dispatched to Rendova. The first echelon sailed on 7 July, the second two days later. The regimental commander, Colonel Holland, had hardly arrived on Rendova when Hester relieved the commander of the 169th Infantry and ordered Colonel Holland to take over the regiment temporarily. Also relieved were the executive, intelligence, and operations officers of the 169th. Leaving Lt. Col. Theodore L. Parker in command of his old regiment, Holland took his own executive, intelligence, and operations officers and eighteen enlisted men from the 145th to headquarters of the 169th.

Meanwhile problems of higher command for New Georgia had not ceased to concern Admirals Halsey and Turner and especially General Harmon. On 5 July Harmon was on Guadalcanal, as were Turner and General Griswold. After informing Turner and Griswold of his views, he radioed to Halsey a recommendation that the forward echelon of the XIV Corps staff be sent to New Georgia about 8 July to prepare, under Hester, to take over supply, administration, and planning. Once Munda airfield fell, Harmon urged, Griswold should become commander of the New Georgia Occupation Force. Such a change was necessary, Harmon explained, because Hester's small staff was not capable of bearing the responsibilities that would soon be thrust on it.³³ The South Pacific commander replied to Harmon the next day, telling him to augment Hester's 43d Division staff as he saw fit.

Griswold received instructions on 10 July to take six officers from his staff and fly to New Georgia on 11 July in an amphibian plane. The remainder of the XIV Corps staff would follow by water on 12 July. On orders from Halsey, which the admiral expected to issue after the capture of Munda airfield, Griswold would assume command of the New Georgia Occupation Force. Turner's authority over the Occupation Force would cease, but he was to continue to support the operation. Halsey repeated to Turner his instructions regarding plans for taking Kolombangara, and told him that, if Griswold approved the idea, Hester would command the ground forces in the attack.³⁴

Griswold arrived at Rendova on 11 July just as Hester and Wing were changing their plan of attack against Munda and sending the 172d Infantry to seize the Laiana beachhead. The XIV Corps commander was not long in reaching a judgment regarding operations to date. Griswold urged that the 25th Division and the remainder of the 37th Division be sent into the battle at once. Although he reported, "Enemy resistance to date not great," he did not think the 43d Division would ever take Munda. It was, he declared, "about to fold up."³⁵

³³ Rad, Harmon to COMSOPAC, 5 Jul 43, Hq SOPACBACOM File. Suppl New Georgia Material, OCMH.

³⁴ Rad, COMSOPAC to CTF 31, 9 Jul 43; and Rad, COMGENSOPAC to CG XIV Corps, 10 Jul 43, in Hq SOPACBACOM File, Suppl New Georgia Material, OCMH; XIV Corps G-3 Jnl, 10-11 Jul 43.

³⁵ Rad, Griswold to Harmon, 13 Jul 43, quoted in SOPACBACOM, History of the New Georgia Campaign, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 39, OCMH.

Before leaving for Koli Point on Guadalcanal to be nearer the scene of action, Harmon ordered Griswold to hasten his preparations for assuming command on New Georgia. All ground forces assigned for the operation, he told Griswold, would be available by the time he assumed command. Harmon promised to alert one regimental combat team of the veteran 25th Division for movement, but it would be dispatched to New Georgia only if he specifically approved.

Of the assigned 37th Division forces, the 145th Infantry, like the 136th Field Artillery Battalion, was already on hand in New Georgia, the 1st and 2d Battalions at Rendova and the 3d Battalion under Liversedge along with 3d Battalion, 148th Infantry. Admiral Turner at once ordered Col. Stuart A. Baxter, commanding the 148th Infantry in the Russell Islands, to alert Headquarters, the 1st and 2d Battalions, and the Antitank Company of his regiment for immediate movement to New Georgia. These movements would put two full infantry regiments of the 37th Division in New Georgia.

On the 16th, Griswold proposed that the 37th Division units operate under control of their division commander, Maj. Gen. Robert S. Beightler, and that Beightler and his senior staff officers fly to New Georgia for conferences and personal reconnaissance. Harmon agreed, and Beightler left for New Georgia in a PB4Y on 19 July.

On arriving at Guadalcanal, Harmon ordered Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, commanding the 25th Division, to get one regimental combat team ready for transfer to New Georgia. Collins, who on Griswold's departure had become island commander and as such responsible for Guadalcanal's defense, decided that the 161st Regimental Combat Team could most easily be spared from its defense missions. On 14 July he directed Col. James L. Dalton, II, regimental and combat team commander, to be ready to move on twelve hours' notice.³⁶

...Harmon ordered Griswold to assume command of the New Georgia Occupation Force at midnight of 15-16 July, and to seize Munda and join forces with Liversedge as soon as possible. Griswold took over command as ordered. Hester reverted to command of the 43d Division.

With the offensive stalling, General Griswold was facing his first experience in commanding a corps in combat. His problems were formidable, although some progress had been made. On the Munda front the 169th and 172d Infantry Regiments, also behind their schedule, had laboriously made their way from Zanana across the Barike to Laiana and the vicinity of Reincke Ridge and were in contact with the main Japanese defenses. These forces were obviously not adequate to break through and capture the airfield, but additional regiments were on their way. Aside from the difficulties presented by the enemy and the terrain, Griswold was confronted by an abnormally high rate of mental illness, and by the need to improve the Occupation Force supply system so that the regiments would be taken care of in the normal manner instead of by emergency air drop. Obviously, it was a case calling for generalship of a high order.

The Japanese Defense of New Georgia

A policy of "active defense" would be pursued in the Solomons in order to reinforce New Guinea and pursue an "aggressive offensive" there.³⁷ The Japanese were determined not to yield "an operational route for the proclaimed enemy Philippines invasion."³⁸

Imperial Headquarters' orders for the Solomons required the *8th Area Army*, in co-operation with the *Southeastern Fleet*, to hold the central and northern Solomons. Army and Navy authorities at Rabaul disagreed over exactly where the forward defense lines should be located. The Army favored the Bougainville area, holding that it would be too difficult to supply the islands farther south. The Navy

³⁶ The regimental combat team consisted of the 161st Infantry; the 89th Field Artillery Battalion; A Company, 65th Engineer Battalion; and A Company, 25th Medical Battalion.

³⁷ Southeast Area Naval Operations, I, Japanese Monogr No. 48 (OCMH), 55.

³⁸ 18th Army Operations, I, Japanese Monogr No. 41 (OCMH), 55-56.

insisted on New Georgia and Santa Isabel as outposts for Bougainville. Each service went its own way. The Army assumed responsibility for the defense of the northern Solomons. The Navy took over land defense of the central Solomons.

Having insisted on the necessity for holding New Georgia and Santa Isabel, naval authorities then complained that this responsibility placed an excessive demand on naval strength, and asked...for some Army ground troops for New Georgia in addition to the few who were already there. In March the *Southeastern Fleet* sent the *8th Combined Special Naval Landing Force* to New Georgia, and another, the *7th*, to Santa Isabel.³⁹

Thus in early 1943 the Japanese were holding a network of mutually supporting air and naval bases arranged in depth, running in two converging arcs through New Guinea and the Solomons to Rabaul. From the defensive point of view, these positions would serve to protect Rabaul, the Netherlands Indies, and the Philippines. Offensively, these bases could support advances southward, and although the Japanese had decided on delaying action in the Solomons, they were determined to take the offensive in New Guinea.

Japanese Plans

On 2 July, with the Americans in possession of Rendova, Segi Point, and Viru Harbor, the Japanese altered their command on New Georgia.⁴⁰ By mutual agreement Maj. Gen. Noboru Sasaki, commander of the *Southeastern Detachment*, took over direction of all Army and Navy forces in New Georgia. This action brought Rear Adm. Minoru Ota's *8th Combined Special Naval Landing Force* under Sasaki, who was under the tactical control of the *8th Fleet*. Except for small detachments on Vella Lavella, Gizo, and other islands, the 10,500 men in Sasaki's joint force were about evenly divided between Kolombangara and Munda. At Kolombangara, under Col. Satoshi Tomonari, were two battalions of the *13th Infantry*, most of the *3d Battalion*, *229th Infantry*, the *Yokosuka 7th Special Naval Landing Force* (less elements), and artillery and engineer units. Guarding Munda, where Sasaki and Ota maintained their headquarters, were Col. Genjiro Hirata's *229th Infantry* (less two battalions) and artillery, engineer, communication, and medical units. The main body of the *Kure 6th Special Naval Landing Force* was concentrated at Bairoko.

Sasaki was well aware that the Americans would attack Munda. He could see the troops moving from Rendova to the mainland. Munda field was receiving shellfire from the American 155's. If further proof was needed, Japanese patrols had brushed with the Allies near Zanana on 3 July, and the next day the *229th Infantry* reported a clash with about five hundred Americans in the same place. Immediately after the invasion of Rendova Sasaki had instructed Tomonari to alert his units for possible transfer to Munda and directed that two 140-mm. naval guns and two mountain guns be moved from the Bairoko area to Munda. After receiving the *229th's* report he brought the *3d Battalion*, *229th Infantry*, from Kolombangara through Bairoko to Munda to rejoin the regiment on 4 July.

³⁹ Composed of the Kure 6th and the Yokosuka 7th Special Naval Landing Forces, the 8th Combined had been activated in Japan for service on Guadalcanal but did not get there before the evacuation.

⁴⁰ Unless otherwise indicated this chapter is based on SOPACBACOM, History of the New Georgia Campaign, Vol. I, Ch. III, OCMH; the jnls, diaries, and after action rpts of COMSOPAC, CTF 31, NGOF, XIV Corps, 43d Div, 43d Div Arty, 1st Mar Raider Regt, 145th Inf, 148th Inf, 169th Inf, and 172d Inf; 8th Area Army Operations, Japanese Monogr No. no (OCMH); 17th Army Operations, Vol. II, Japanese Monogr No. 40 (OCMH); Southeast Area Naval Operations, Vol. II, Japanese Monogr No. 49 (OCMH); Outline of Southeast Area Naval Air Operations, Pt. IV, Japanese Monogr No. 108 (OCMH); Operations of the 1st Battalion, 169th Infantry (43d Infantry Division) in the New Georgia Campaign: 30 June-18 July 1943 (Northern Solomons Campaign), a monograph relating the personal experience of a battalion intelligence officer, prepared by Maj. Jack Swaim; Ltr, Lt Col Marvin D. Girardeau to Chief of Military History, sub: Comments Re Hist Monogr, Marines in Central Solomons, 6 Feb 57, with inclosures, OCMH.

On the same day, Sasaki proposed a counterlanding against Rendova. As their artillery pieces lacked the range to hit Rendova, the Japanese on Munda could not retaliate when shells from American 155's crashed on Munda field. Sasaki therefore suggested that the main body of the Munda garrison board landing craft, avoid recognition by mingling with American craft, and assault Rendova amid the resulting confusion. This interesting plan might have succeeded and caused a disaster to the Allies. More probably, by removing the Munda troops from their strong defense positions, it would have saved the Americans a lot of fighting. *8th Fleet Headquarters* apparently vetoed the proposal.

Also on Independence Day General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka, who wished to hold New Georgia at all costs as a key outpost for Bougainville, considered the problem of holding the island in relation to the general defense of the Southeast Area. They decided to strengthen New Georgia and to hold New Guinea with the troops already there. Imamura agreed to give four thousand more *17th Army* troops to Sasaki. These, including additional units from the *13th* and *229th Infantry Regiments* plus artillerymen, engineers, and medical men, were to be shipped in echelons from Erventa in the Shortlands to Kolombangara. Warships would transport them. It was the first echelon of these troops that Admiral Ainsworth's task force kept from landing on the night of 4-5 July.

On 5 July the Japanese naval officers' worries regarding New Georgia were increased by Hester's build-up at Zanana and Liversedge's landing at Rice Anchorage. The Japanese assigned ten destroyers to transport the second echelon, which was to be put ashore at Vila in the early morning hours of 6 July. Informed that Japanese warships were getting ready to sail from the Shortlands, Halsey ordered Ainsworth's task group to intercept, reinforced by two destroyers to replace the Strong and the damaged destroyer Chevalier. Ainsworth, retiring from the Kula Gulf, was in Indispensable Strait when Halsey's orders reached him. He reversed course and entered Kula Gulf about midnight, a few minutes behind the Japanese destroyers. In the ensuing Battle of Kula Gulf, the veteran cruiser Helena was sunk. The Japanese lost the destroyers Niizuki and Nagatsuki, but put 850 soldiers ashore at Vila.⁴¹ This addition of 850 men enabled Sasaki to send part of another battalion from Kolombangara to Munda that same day.

Admiral Kusaka, who moved his headquarters from Rabaul to Buin "to alter the grave situation and raise the morale of all the forces," wanted still more troops for New Georgia.⁴² On 7 July he asked Imamura for 11,000 more soldiers. The general, who had just approved sending 4,000 men to New Georgia, now stated that he doubted that even Bougainville could be made secure. Although willing to consider sending another division to Bougainville, he refused to provide 11,000 more troops for New Georgia.

It was estimated, correctly, that about one platoon was trying to block the trail. General Sasaki, aware of the Allied activity east of him, had ordered part of the 11th Company, 229th Infantry, to reconnoiter the Barike area, clear fire lanes, and establish this trail block with felled trees and barbed wire.

Reaching this junction about 1330 after crossing a small creek on two felled tree trunks, the leading battalion was halted by machine gun fire. This fire came from rising ground dominating the trail junction, where Capt. Bunzo Kojima, commanding the *9th Company, 229th Infantry*, had established a camouflaged trail block. He employed one rifle platoon, reinforced by a machine gun section, some 90-mm. mortars, and elements of a 75-mm. mountain artillery battalion.

Reorganization

In the days following his assumption of command, General Griswold and his staff were deeply occupied with administrative as well as tactical matters. Reinforcements from the 25th and 37th

⁴¹ For a full account see Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*, pp. 160-75.

⁴² Southeast Area Naval Operations, II, Japanese Monogr No. 49 (OCMH), 32.

Divisions had to be received and assigned. The supply system was overhauled; medical services were improved.

General Griswold immediately designated Barabuni Island as supply dump for the 43d Division, Kokorana for the 37th. Ships from Guadalcanal would land equipment and supplies in these islands, whence landing craft would transport them through the barrier islands to Laiana or to other positions on the barrier islands.

Hester's move to Laiana was paying dividends. Although low, swampy ground had at first slowed construction of the trail from Laiana north to the Munda Trail, six hundred yards had been built by 17 July, and on 20 July the whole trail was opened to motor traffic. As a result, Hester reported, his regiments would no longer need to be supplied from the air. The 43d Division command post moved from Zanana to Laiana on 21 July. At the same time most of the 43d Division's service installations moved to Laiana. Two-lane roads were built within the dump areas, and additional trails out of Laiana, plus more trails to the various regiments, were also built. Bulldozer operators working inland received fire from enemy riflemen on occasion. After one driver was wounded, the engineers fashioned shields for the bulldozers with steel salvaged from wrecked enemy landing craft. A D-4 and a much heavier D-7 bulldozer that came in with A Company, 65th Engineer Battalion, on 23 July, speeded construction of a trail to the 161st Infantry and of lateral trails in the 37th Division's area. With the roads built it was possible to assemble supplies close behind the infantry regiments and to plan their systematic delivery in the future.

The XIV Corps and its assigned units also undertook the improvement of medical care. Several hours after he assumed command Griswold asked Harmon to send the 250-bed 17th Field Hospital from Guadalcanal to Rendova at once. Harmon approved. Because of physical frailty some medical officers had become casualties themselves, and the resulting shortage prevented careful supervision and handling of casualties. Griswold asked Harmon for fifteen medical officers physically able to stand the rigors of field service. To make sure that casualties being evacuated from New Georgia received proper medical attention during the trip to Guadalcanal, the corps surgeon arranged with naval authorities for a naval medical officer to travel on each LST carrying patients.

Finally, all units benefited by the 43d Division's experience in dealing with war neurosis. Rest camps, providing hot food, baths, clean clothes, and cots, were established on the barrier islands, and Colonel Hallam [XIV Corps Surgeon] tried to see to it that more accurate diagnoses were made so that men suffering from combat fatigue were separated from true neurotics and sent to the camps.

XIV Corps Offensive

The American Plan

Griswold's field order, issued on 22 July, directed his corps to attack vigorously to seize Munda airfield and Bibilo Hill from its present positions which ran from Ilangana northwest for about three thousand yards. (Map 10) The 37th Division was to make the corps' main effort. Beightler's division was to attack to its front, envelop the enemy's left (north) flank, seize Bibilo Hill, and drive the enemy into the sea. At the same time it would protect the corps' right flank and rear. The 43d Division was ordered to make its main effort on the right. Its objectives were Lambeti Plantation and the airfield. Liversedge's force, depleted by the abortive attack on Bairoko, was to continue patrolling and give timely information regarding any Japanese move to send overland reinforcements to Munda. The 9th Defense Battalion's Tank Platoon would assemble at Laiana under corps control. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 169th Infantry, at Rendova, constituted the corps reserve.⁴³

⁴³ Griswold issued his attack order as NGOF FO 1, 22 July 43, although Hester had issued NGOF FO 1 in June.

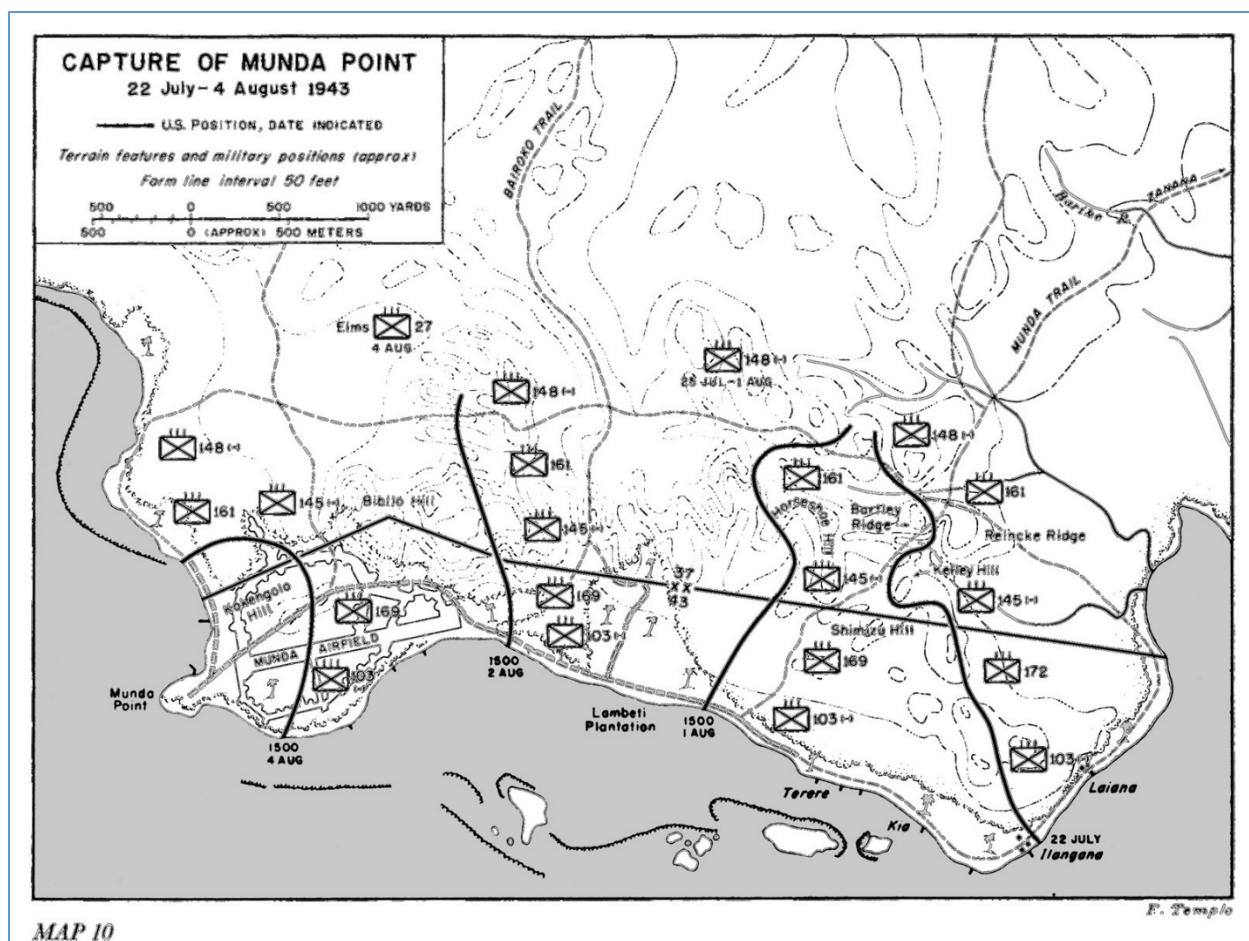


Figure 2. XIV Corps' advance on Munda.

All units were ordered to exert unceasing pressure on the enemy. Isolated points of resistance were not to be allowed to halt the advance, but were to be bypassed, contained, and reduced later. Griswold ordered maximum use of infantry heavy weapons to supplement artillery. Roads would be pushed forward with all possible speed.

D Day was set for 25 July. The thirty-minute naval bombardment was to start at 0610, the air bombing at 0635. The line of departure, running northwest from Ilangana, was practically identical with the American front lines except in the zone of the 161st Infantry where the existence of the Japanese strongpoint east of the line had been determined on 24 July.

The XIV Corps was thus attempting a frontal assault on a two-division front, with the hope of effecting an envelopment on the north. In the initial attack it would employ two three-battalion regiments (the 161st and the 172d) and three two-battalion regiments (the 103d, the 145th, and the 148th).

Enemy Positions and Plans

The 37th Division was less the 129th Regimental Combat Team and the 3d Battalions, 145th and 148th Infantry Regiments, and was reinforced by the 161st Regimental Combat Team (less its artillery) and a detachment of South Pacific Scouts.

The 43d Division was less nearly all its headquarters, whose officers were filling most of the posts in Occupation Force headquarters, and less two battalions of the 169th Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 103d Infantry.

On 22 July the Japanese front line ran inland in a northwesterly direction for some 3,200 yards. This line was manned by the entire *229th Infantry*, and at the month's end the *2d Battalion, 230th Infantry*, was also assigned to it. In support were various mountain artillery, antitank, antiaircraft, and automatic weapons units.⁴⁴ The positions were the same complex of camouflaged and mutually supporting pillboxes, trenches, and foxholes that had halted Hester in midmonth. The pillboxes started near the beach at Ilangana and ran over the hills in front of the 103d, 172d, 145th, and 161st Regiments. A particularly strong series lay on a tangled set of jungled hills: Shimizu Hill in front of the 172d Infantry, and Horseshoe Hill (so named from its configuration) in front of the 145th and 161st Regiments. Horseshoe Hill lay northwest of Kelley Hill and west of Reincke Ridge. East of Horseshoe Hill lay the Japanese pocket discovered by the 161st. The pocket lay on a north-south ridge that was joined to Horseshoe Hill by a rough saddle. The pillbox line terminated at about the northern boundary of the 161st Infantry. When the *2d Battalion, 230th Infantry*, was committed it did not occupy carefully prepared positions. From the end of the pillboxes the line ran west to the beach, and this north flank does not seem to have been strongly held.

XIV Corps headquarters still estimated that four enemy battalions faced it; three at Munda and one at Bairoko. This was a fairly accurate estimate of strength on the enemy line, but Sasaki had an ace up his sleeve—the *13th Infantry*. This regiment, which was not in full strength, was stationed on the American right flank about 4,900 yards west by north from Ilangana. Sasaki's plans to use his ace were similar to his earlier plans. On the same day that Griswold issued his field order, Sasaki directed Colonel Tomonari to attack the American right flank in the vicinity of Horseshoe Hill on 23 July, then drive east along the Munda Trail. But the Americans struck before Tomonari made his move.

Ilangana

The 103d Infantry, now commanded by Colonel Brown, attacked alongside the 172d...⁴⁵ The 3d Battalion, on the left, pushed forward against machine gun and mortar fire, but immediately hit the Japanese line and stopped. The battalion attempted to move around the pillboxes but found that this maneuver took its men into other machine gun fire lanes.

The 2d Battalion, 103d, in the center of the 43d's zone, did better. It moved forward two or three hundred yards against light opposition. By 1040 E Company's leading elements had advanced five hundred yards. The company kept moving until noon, when it had reached the beach near Terere. Here it set up a hasty defense position. But the companies on either flank had not been able to keep up, and the Japanese moved in behind E Company to cut the telephone line to battalion headquarters.

To exploit E Company's breakthrough, General Hester took the 3d Battalion, 169th Infantry, out of division reserve and ordered it to push through the same hole E Company had found. But the Japanese had obviously become aware of the gap, and as the 3d Battalion marched to the line of departure it was enfiladed by fire from the south part of Shimizu Hill and from the pillboxes to the south. It halted. Five Marine tanks were then ordered to push over Shimizu Hill but could not get up the steep slopes. When three of them developed vapor lock all were pulled back to Laiana. In late afternoon the E Company commander decided to abandon his exposed, solitary position, and E Company came safely back through the Japanese line to the 2d Battalion.

Hester's plan for 26 July called for the 172d to stay in place while the 103d Infantry attempted to advance the eight hundred yards from Ilangana to Terere.

⁴⁴ These included the *Antitank Battalion, 38th Division*; *2d Independent Antitank Battalion*; a detachment of the *2d Battalion, 90th Independent Mountain Artillery Regiment*; thirteen 7.7-mm. machine guns, and two 75-mm. antiaircraft units.

⁴⁵ Colonel Brown, formerly commander of the 2d Battalion, took over regimental command when Colonel Hundley replaced the 43d Division chief of staff on 22 July.

Strong combat patrols went out in the morning of 26 July to fix the location of the Japanese pillboxes as accurately as possible. After their return, the artillery began firing at 1115, one hour before the infantry was to attack. At 1145 the 103d's front was covered with smoke and under its cover the front-line companies withdrew a hundred yards. At noon the artillery put its fire on the Japanese positions directly in front. As the tanks were not quite ready at H Hour, 1215, the artillery kept firing for ten more minutes. It lifted fire one hundred yards at 1225, and the 103d started forward. The tanks led the advance in the center; behind them was the infantry. Attached to the 103d for the attack were 2d Lt. James F. Olds, Jr., the acting corps chemical officer, and six volunteers from the 118th Engineer Battalion. Each carried a flame thrower, a weapon which the 43d Division had brought to New Georgia but had not used up to now.⁴⁶ Griswold, whose headquarters had conducted flame thrower schools on Guadalcanal, was aware of the weapon's possibilities. That morning the six engineers had received one hour of training in the use of the M1A1 flame thrower.

The flame throwers went forward with the infantry, which halted about twenty yards in front of the pillbox line and covered it with small arms fire. Under cover of this fire the flame thrower operators, their faces camouflaged with dirt, crawled forward. Operating in teams of two and three, they sprayed flame over three barely visible pillboxes in front of the center of the 103d's line. Vegetation was instantly burned off. In sixty seconds the three pillboxes were knocked out and their four occupants were dead.⁴⁷

Operations of the infantry, tanks, flame throwers, and supporting heavy weapons and artillery met with almost complete success. The 103d Infantry encountered seventy-four pillboxes on a 600-yard front, but by midafternoon, spurred on by pressure from General Wing, it had reduced enemy resistance at Ilangana. From there it continued its advance through underbrush and vines and gained almost 800 yards. By 1700 the left flank rested on the coastal village of Kia. The 43d Division's line, formerly 1,700 yards long, was now much straighter by 300 yards.

Shimizu Hill

In the 172d Infantry's zone the 2d and 3d Battalions on the left and right attacked westward against Shimizu Hill. But by 1000 they had run into the enemy pillbox line and halted. Colonel Ross then requested tanks, got some from the corps reserve, and attacked again. By 1430 three tanks were disabled, and the attack stalled. A little ground had been gained on the regimental left.

Hester's plan for 26 July called for the 172d to stay in place while the 103d Infantry attempted to advance the eight hundred yards from Ilangana to Terere.

From 28 through 31 July, the 43d Division inched slowly forward, a few yards on the right flank and about five hundred yards along the coast. This was accomplished by "aggressive action and small unit maneuver, combined with constant artillery and mortar action [which] gradually forced the enemy back from his high ground defenses."⁴⁸ The 172d ground its way over Shimizu Hill, the last real ridge between it and Munda airfield, and in doing so it helped unhinge the main Japanese defense system in its zone....⁴⁹

⁴⁶ On 1 July Griswold radioed Guadalcanal to state his urgent need for more M1A1 flame throwers.

⁴⁷ Capt. James F. Olds, Jr., "Flamethrowers Front and Center," Chemical Warfare Bulletin, Vol. 30, No. 3 (June-July 1944), pp. 5-9. This account, while valuable, seems to have telescoped two situations and actions into one, for Olds asserts that the 103d was at Lambeti Plantation on 26 July. From the fact that three pillboxes had only four occupants, it would seem that this part of the Japanese line was lightly manned.

⁴⁸ 43d Div Rpt of Opns, Munda Campaign, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Unfortunately the records are too scanty to provide details showing just how the 172d took this position. During the attack 1st Lt. Robert S. Scott almost singlehandedly halted a Japanese counterattack and for his gallantry was awarded the Medal of Honor. WD GO 81, 14 Oct 44.

Major Zimmer's 1st Battalion, 169th Infantry, was brought over from Rendova on 29 July; the 3d Battalion, now commanded by Maj. Ignatius M. Ramsey, was taken out of division reserve and the 169th (less the 2d Battalion) was assigned a zone between the 172d and the 103d.⁵⁰ As the month ended the 169th (less its 2d Battalion in corps reserve) was in the process of extending to the northwest to pinch out the 172d.

Bartley Ridge

When I Company, 161st Infantry, had been unable to reduce the Japanese strongpoint on Bartley Ridge on 24 July, Colonel Dalton issued orders for its seizure on D Day.⁵¹ I Company was to contain the Japanese pocket by attacking to its front while the 1st Battalion and the rest of the 3d Battalion executed a double envelopment.⁵² The 1st Battalion was to move around the Japanese left (north) flank while the 3d Battalion went around the right, after which the two battalions would drive southward and northward for two hundred yards. Fifteen minutes of mortar fire would precede these moves. Beightler arranged for the 145th and 148th Regiments to support the 161st with heavy weapons fire. He also asked corps headquarters for tanks to help the 161st, but the 43d Division had been given the tanks for the D-Day attack.

From positions near the Laiana Trail eight 81-mm. mortars opened fire at 0745, 25 July, in support of Dalton's attack. Heavy weapons of the adjoining regiments attempted to deliver their supporting fires, but the denseness of the jungle prevented forward observers' controlling the fire. The unobserved fire began obstructing rather than helping the 161st, and that part of the plan was abandoned.

The 3d Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. David H. Buchanan, was unable to gain. Shortly after 0800, when the attack began, I Company reported that its attack against the ridge strongpoint had stalled. A knob projecting east from Bartley Ridge and the heavy undergrowth provided enough cover and concealment to let the infantrymen reach the base of the ridge, but uphill from the knob, where the growth was thinner, all movement was halted by fire from the crest. The 161st Infantry had made plans to use flame throwers, and an operator carrying his sixty-five pounds of equipment made two laborious climbs and silenced an enemy machine gun, but many other Japanese positions remained in action. The main body of the 3d Battalion, attempting to get around the south end of Bartley Ridge, was also halted.

The 1st Battalion was more successful. At 1035 its commander, Lt. Col. Slaftcho Katsarsky, radioed Dalton that he had found the north flank of the Japanese position on Bartley Ridge, and that he was moving his battalion around it. Shortly afterward Beightler, Dalton, and staff officers conferred and decided that the 3d Battalion should contain the strongpoint while the 1st Battalion pushed westward with orders to develop enemy positions but not to engage in full-scale combat. The 37th Division could not advance westward in force until Bartley Ridge had been cleared.

The 3d Battalion established itself in containing positions north, east, and south of Bartley Ridge. E Company was released from reserve and sent into line on high ground just north of Bartley to secure the right flank in the 161st's zone. The 1st Battalion advanced to a point about four hundred yards west of Bartley and halted on a small rise northeast of Horseshoe Hill. Tanks of the newly arrived 10th Marine Defense Battalion were to be committed to support the 37th Division the next day, and in the afternoon the tank commander made a personal reconnaissance of Colonel Buchanan's zone in preparation for the attack.

⁵⁰ Colonel Reincke was now regimental executive officer.

⁵¹ Bartley Ridge was named in memory of 2d Lt. Martin E. Bartley, an I Company platoon leader killed on 25 July.

⁵² The 2d Battalion was in division reserve along with the 37th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop.

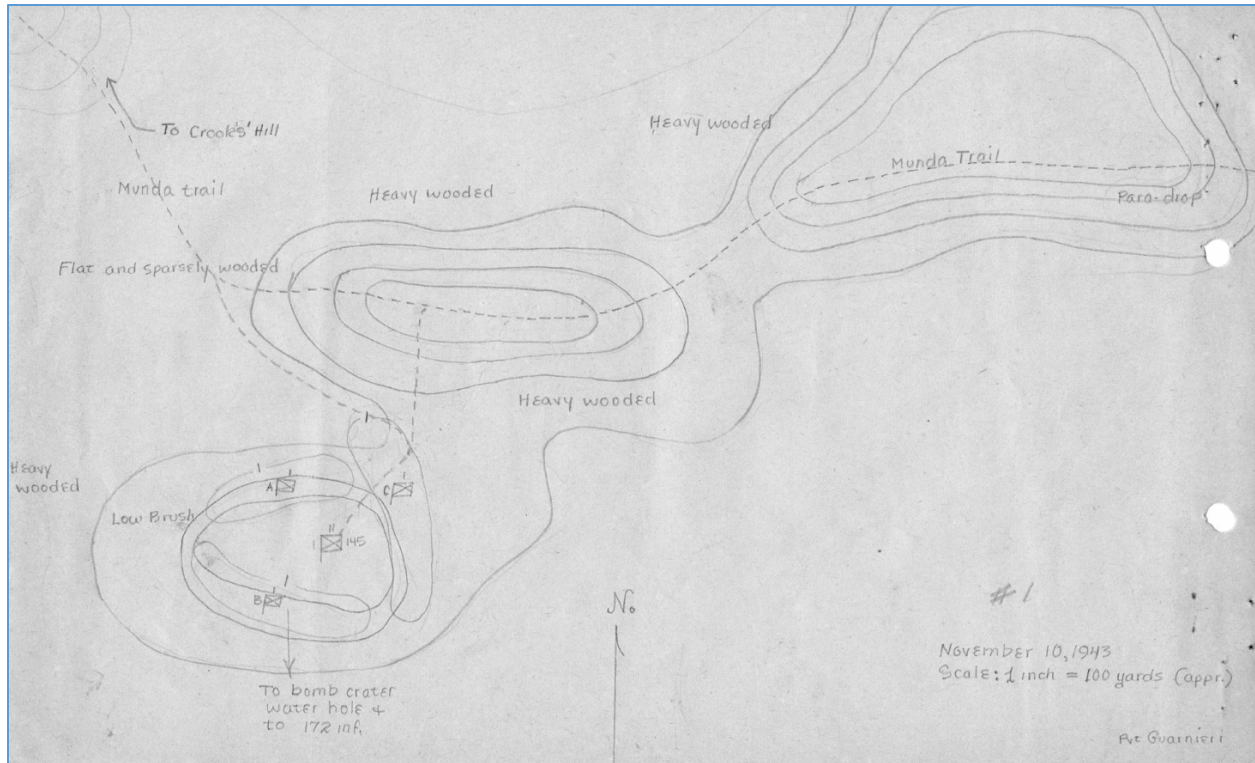


Figure 3. Terrain sketch of Bartley Ridge submitted in the 145th Infantry's After Action Report.

Six light Marine tanks were to lead out in the attack at 0900, 26 July, after preparatory fire by machine guns and 81-mm. mortars. L and K Companies, in column, would move behind the tanks, which were supported by infantrymen armed with .30-caliber M1 rifles, .30-caliber Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR's), and two flame throwers. Tank-infantry communication was indirect. The tank radios formed a net within the Tank Platoon, and a 161st radio car maintained radio contact between the Tank Platoon commander and Colonel Buchanan.

When the tanks, with their hatches closed, got off the approach trail that had been bulldozed by members of the 65th Engineer Battalion, Colonel Buchanan directed the infantrymen to lead them forward. It was 0925 before the attack got started. In two lines of three vehicles each, the tanks lumbered over the littered undergrowth, steep slopes, and felled logs toward the southeast slope of Bartley Ridge. The Japanese quickly responded with fire from antitank and 70-mm. battalion guns, machine guns, and mortars.

The attack went well at first. About a dozen pillboxes were reported knocked out by 1110, and Buchanan ordered his men to occupy them to keep the Japanese from moving in again at night. Unfortunately, the tanks had encountered exactly the sort of difficulties that might be expected in tangled terrain with communications uncertain. In their lurches and frequent changes of direction they injured some of the accompanying foot troops. Poor visibility caused them to get into untenable positions from which they had to be extricated with consequent delays to the attack. During the morning a Japanese soldier stole out of the tangled brush and planted a magnetic mine that disabled one tank. A second tank was halted by a ruptured fuel line. The remaining four withdrew at 1110 to reorganize.

The flame thrower operators, carrying their bulky, heavy fuel tanks on their backs, were not properly protected by the riflemen and were soon killed.

In the course of the day's fighting some fourteen pillboxes and a number of machine gun positions were knocked out, and the 3d Battalion advanced about two hundred yards up Bartley Ridge.⁵³

But it met such heavy fire from Bartley and Horseshoe Hill that its position clearly could not be held. Attempts to pull out the disabled tanks were unsuccessful. The battalion withdrew to its previous positions. The attack had disclosed the existence of so many more positions that Dalton received Beightler's permission to make a thorough reconnaissance before attacking again.

...patrols...examined the Japanese lines to procure data for a preparation by the corps artillery. In the course of the reconnaissance Colonels Dalton and Buchanan observed enemy pillboxes on the right flank of the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry, and recommended that the attack be delayed until 29 July.⁵⁴ General Beightler gave his assent. Dalton and Buchanan also decided to attack from the northwest instead of the southeast. Reconnaissance and pressure were to continue on the 28th.

On the morning of the 28th a ten man patrol from I Company, led by Lt. Walter Tymniak, set out in a southerly direction toward the top of Bartley Ridge. To their surprise and satisfaction, the Americans met no fire, got safely to the top, and found several abandoned pillboxes. They occupied them, and I Company followed to the crest and began infiltrating the pillboxes. Not all were vacant, but the task of the attackers was eased as each pillbox was taken, for its fire could then no longer be used with that of its neighbors to make crossfire or interlocking bands of fire. Because the Japanese appeared to be evacuating and the American front was intermingled with the enemy front, the artillery preparation was called off. The 3d Battalion continued its infiltration on 29 July. At the end of the day it was relieved by Maj. Francis P. Carberry's 2d Battalion and went into division reserve.

Bartley Ridge had contained forty-six log and coral pillboxes and thirty-two other lighter positions. First attacked by a company, it fell only after seven days' fighting by two battalions.

Horseshoe Hill

General Beightler ordered Holland to commit his 2d Battalion [145th Infantry], in order to reduce the Japanese positions on Horseshoe Hill that had fired on the 3d Battalion, 161st, during its 26 July attack against Bartley Ridge. Doubtless because troops of the 161st had not been able to get past the south end of Bartley, Colonel Parker's battalion was to march northward right around the 3d Battalion, 161st, push west around the north of the enemy positions on Bartley Ridge, then attack to the southwest. This maneuver would entail a march of about one and one-half miles to the assembly area.

Parker's battalion moved out in the early morning of 27 July. It reached its assembly area on the north flank of Bartley Ridge without incident. After a preparation of one hundred rounds by the division artillery, which cleared some of the foliage, the battalion advanced to the attack in column of companies. "Having to fight every foot of the way," it gained about three hundred yards before 1300, when E Company in the lead moved south off slopes of a ridge and started up a small knob projecting from Horseshoe Hill.⁵⁵ As the company ascended the hill it was struck by fire from pillboxes. Among the first men killed was Capt. Gardner B. Wing, E Company's commander, in whose honor the 145th christened the knob.

...patrols...examined the Japanese lines to procure data for a preparation by the corps artillery. In the course of the reconnaissance Colonels Dalton and Buchanan observed enemy pillboxes on the

⁵³ In the course of the day's action Capt. Paul K. Mellichamp, battalion executive officer, picked up a radio from a wounded operator and directed mortar fire. He was wounded, but continued to direct the fire until he collapsed. He died shortly afterward, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

⁵⁴ It is not clear whether these pillboxes were on Horseshoe Hill or were on the saddle connecting Bartley Ridge with Horseshoe Hill.

⁵⁵ 37th Div G-3 Jnl, 27 Jul 43.

right flank of the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry, and recommended that the attack be delayed until 29 July.⁵⁶ General Beightler gave his assent. Dalton and Buchanan also decided to attack from the northwest instead of the southeast. Reconnaissance and pressure were to continue on the 28th.

The 145th Infantry's zone was shifted farther north on 30 July as part of a general shift in boundaries that General Griswold was making in order to widen the 43d Division's front. This move placed the southern half of Bartley Ridge within the 145th's zone. Colonel Parker's 2d Battalion, 145th, had just completed its move around the 161st's north flank, thence southwest against Horseshoe Hill. On 30 July it was attached to the 161st for the completion of the reduction of Bartley Ridge and Horseshoe Hill.

Carberry's and Parker's battalions pushed their attacks on 30 July. In contrast with Carberry's battalion, which met little resistance, Parker's men engaged in sharp fighting in the west. The Japanese who had evacuated the position facing Carberry had apparently moved into positions facing Parker. With grenade, rifle, machine gun, mortar, and flame thrower the two battalions fought all day and part of the next, until by midafternoon of 31 July the Japanese rear guards on Bartley Ridge were either dead or in flight, and the 2d Battalion, 161st, had advanced west and was on a line with the 1st.

On Horseshoe Hill the Japanese resisted from their pillboxes and foxholes with equal skill and enthusiasm. The Americans used small arms, grenades, automatic weapons, mortars, flame throwers, and field artillery as they systematically reduced the enemy positions, almost pillbox by pillbox.⁵⁷ On 1 August Parker's battalion received orders to attack in late afternoon, obeyed, and took Horseshoe Hill without firing a shot or losing a man. The Japanese had gone.

Guarding the Right Flank

When Colonel Baxter moved his regiment forward on 25 July, it went around the north flank of the Japanese defense line and met no resistance. However, none of the Americans then knew that the major part of the enemy *13th Infantry* lay to the north of Baxter's right flank. Patrols, accompanied by Fiji scouts, went out and reported the presence of a few Japanese to the west, none to the south. Generals Griswold and Beightler had emphasized the importance of maintaining lateral contact and Beightler had expressly directed that the 148th was to maintain contact with the 161st, and that all units were to inform their neighbors and the next higher unit of their locations. The 148th, however, was not able to make contact on its left with the 161st Infantry.

Baxter's two-battalion regiment advanced regularly for the next three days. Colonel Radcliffe's 2d Battalion led on 26 and 27 July; on 28 July Colonel Hydaker's 1st Battalion bypassed the 2d and led the advance to a point somewhere east of Bibilo Hill.⁵⁸ Patrols went out regularly and at no time reported the presence of a sizable body of the enemy. On 27 July Baxter reported that he had established "contact with Whiskers." Colonel Dalton, the "guest artist" regimental commander of the attached 161st Infantry, sported a beard and was dubbed "Whiskers" and "Goatbeard" in the 37th Division's telephone code. But the 148th's front was almost a thousand yards west of Whiskers' 1st Battalion, and the contact must have been tenuous. Next day G Company was ordered to move to the left to close a gap between the two regiments, but the gap stayed open.

⁵⁶ It is not clear whether these pillboxes were on Horseshoe Hill or were on the saddle connecting Bartley Ridge with Horseshoe Hill.

⁵⁷ During these operations Pfc. Frank J. Petrarca, a medical aid man, so distinguished himself by gallant, selfless devotion to duty that he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. WD GO 86, 23 Dec 43.

⁵⁸ The total of daily yardage reported in the journals, if correct, would have placed the 148th west of Bibilo Hill on 28 July, but the 148th soldiers, like almost everyone else in the jungle, overestimated the distances they had traveled.

During the move troops of the 117th Engineer Battalion labored to push a supply trail behind the advancing battalions. The rate of march was in part geared to the construction of the supply trail. As Baxter told Radcliffe over the telephone on 27 July, "I am advancing behind you as fast as bulldozer goes."⁵⁹

Next day, however, there occurred a disturbing event. A platoon from A Company, 117th Engineer Battalion, was using a bulldozer to build the trail somewhere north of Horseshoe Hill when it was ambushed by the enemy. Three engineers were killed and two were wounded before elements of the Antitank Company and of the 1st Battalion rescued the platoon and extricated the bulldozer.

The situation became more serious on 28 July, the day on which Baxter's aggressive movement took him almost to Bibilo Hill. At this time the regiment was spread thinly about fifteen hundred yards beyond the 161st; its front lay some twelve hundred yards west of the regimental ration dump and eighteen hundred yards from the point on the supply line "which could be said to be adequately secured by other division units."⁶⁰ There was still no contact with the 161st, and in the afternoon a group of the *13th Infantry* fell upon the ration dump. From high ground commanding it the enemy fired with machine guns, rifles, and grenade discharges at men of the regimental Service Company. The Service Company soldiers took cover among ration and ammunition boxes and returned the fire. The dump, under command of Maj. Frank Hipp, 148th S-4, held out until relieved by two squads of the Antitank Company and one platoon from F Company. East of the dump, troops of the *13th Infantry* also forced the 148th's supply trucks to turn back. Baxter, stating "I now find my CP in the front line," asked Beightler to use divisional units to guard the trail up to the dump.⁶¹

All the 148th's troubles with the Japanese were in the rear areas. The westward push, which took the leading battalion as far as one of the Munda-Bairoko trails, had been practically unopposed. But early on the morning of 29 July General Beightler, unaware of the *13th's* position, telephoned Baxter to say that as the Japanese seemed to be moving from the southwest through the gap between the 148th and 161st Regiments, and around the 148th's right, Baxter was to close up his battalions and consolidate his positions. At 0710 Beightler told Baxter to withdraw his battalions to the east, to establish contact with the 161st, and to protect his supply route. Baxter, who had sent patrols out in all directions early in the morning, at 0800 ordered one company of the 2d Battalion to clear out the supply trail to the east. At 0941, with Japanese machine guns still dominating the supply trail, Beightler sent Baxter more orders similar to those of 0710, and also ordered forward a detachment of the 37th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop to help clear the east end of the supply trail. The telephone, so busy with conversations between Beightler and Baxter on 29 July, was then quiet for an hour.

So at 1055 Baxter ordered his regiment to turn around and pull back to the east. The 2d Battalion, 148th, was to use at least one company to establish contact with the 161st while the rest of the battalion withdrew toward the ration dump. The 1st Battalion would move back to the 2d Battalion's positions. At 1150 Baxter reported the 2d Battalion in contact with the 161st, and shortly afterward Beightler ordered Baxter to move the 1st Battalion farther east, putting it in position to deliver an attack the next morning against the rear of the Japanese holding up Dalton's regiment. The division commander again emphasized the necessity for maintaining firm contact with the 161st.⁶² At 1305, with the 148th moving east, Colonel Katsarsky reported that his 1st Battalion, 161st, had as yet no contact with the 148th. Beightler at once told Baxter that, as Japanese machine gunners were operating between the two regiments, the gap must be closed before dark. An hour later Baxter called Beightler to

⁵⁹ 148th Inf Jnl, 27 Jul 43.

⁶⁰ 37th Div Opn Rpt, p. 6.

⁶¹ 37th Div G-3 Jnl, 28 Jul 43.

⁶² As the Americans still did not know the *13th Infantry's* location, they thought the attack had originated from the southwest rather than from the north.

say that he was too far west to close with the 161st before dark. When Beightler ordered him to close up anyway, Baxter demurred. Asking his general to reconsider the order, he stated that he could almost, but not quite, close the gap. Beightler thereupon told Baxter to comply with his orders as far as was physically possible.

Rain and mud added to Baxter's troubles on 30 July. Still harried by enemy machine guns and mortars, the 2d Battalion pushed east and south toward the 161st as the 1st Battalion covered the left (north) flank. Elements of the 37th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, C Company, 117th Engineer Battalion, and the 3d Battalion, 161st Infantry, pushed north to give additional protection to the division's right (north) flank and to protect the east end of Baxter's supply route. Baxter attempted to cut a new trail directly into the 161st's lines, but Japanese rifle fire forced the bulldozer back. Some of the 148th's advance elements sideslipped to the south and got through to the 161st that day, but the main body was still cut off.⁶³ Some of the Japanese who were following the 148th attacked the 1st Battalion, 161st, but were halted. This action then settled down into a nocturnal fire fight.

On 31 July Beightler suggested that Baxter destroy heavy equipment and break his regiment into small groups to slip northward through the jungle around the enemy. The 148th blew up all the supplies it could not carry but it had to fight its way along the trail. It had over a hundred wounded men and could not infiltrate through the jungle without abandoning them.

Colonel Baxter's radio fairly crackled the next morning, 1 August, with orders from General Beightler: "Time is precious, you must move." "Get going." "Haste essential."⁶⁴ Thus urged on, Baxter ordered an assault by every man who could carry a rifle. He formed all his command—A, E, B, and G Companies— in a skirmish line with bayonets fixed, and assaulted by fire and movement at 0850. The attack succeeded. By 0930 the leading elements, ragged, weary, and muddy, reached Katsarsky's area. The 148th was given fresh water and hot food, then passed into division reserve. As the men struggled in after their ordeal, all available ambulances, trucks, and jeeps were rushed up to transport the 128 wounded men to the 37th Division's clearing station at Laiana.

The Japanese Withdraw

The Japanese positions facing the XIV Corps had been formidable, and the Americans had been held in place for long periods. But the Americans had wrought more destruction than they knew. The cumulative effect of continuous air and artillery bombardment and constant infantry action had done tremendous damage to Japanese installations and caused large numbers of casualties. By late July most of the Japanese emplacements near Munda were in shambles. The front lines were crumbling. Rifle companies, 160-170 men strong at the outset, were starkly reduced. Some had only 20 men left at the end of July. The *229th Infantry* numbered only 1,245 effectives. Major Hara, Captain Kojima, and many staff officers of the *229th* had been killed by artillery fire. Hospitals were not adequate to care for the wounded and sick. The constant shelling and bombing prevented men from sleeping and caused many nervous disorders.

To compensate for the diminution of his regiment's strength, Colonel Hirata ordered the soldiers of his *229th Infantry* to kill ten Americans for each Japanese killed, and to fight until death.

Higher headquarters, however, took a less romantic view of the situation. On 29 July a staff officer from the *8th Fleet* visited Sasaki's headquarters and ordered him to withdraw to a line extending from Munda Point northeast about 3,800 yards inland. The positions facing the XIV Corps, and Munda airfield itself, were to be abandoned. Sasaki and his subordinates thought that it would be better to

⁶³ F and H Companies, part of E Company, and the 2d Battalion Headquarters Company were the elements that got through to the 161st.

⁶⁴ 37th Div G-3 Jnl, 1 Aug 43.

withdraw even farther, but the views of the *8th Fleet* prevailed over those of the responsible men on the spot.

Bibilo Hill

On 1 August, most of the 145th Infantry were busy with patrolling and directing mortar fire on enemy held areas. The 25th Division had detached elements of its 27th Infantry to XIV Corps, who assumed the mission of protecting the Corps right flank.

The attack resumed at 0900 the next day. There was no enemy contact as the 145th pushed west from Horseshoe Hill until it reached the first of the Bibilo Hills just north of Munda Airfield. A Japanese dual-purpose gun fired on the 2nd Battalion, killing its S-2, a forward observer, and several others. The attack was pressed, but the companies withdrawn for the night in a hasty defensive position about 500 yards to the east.

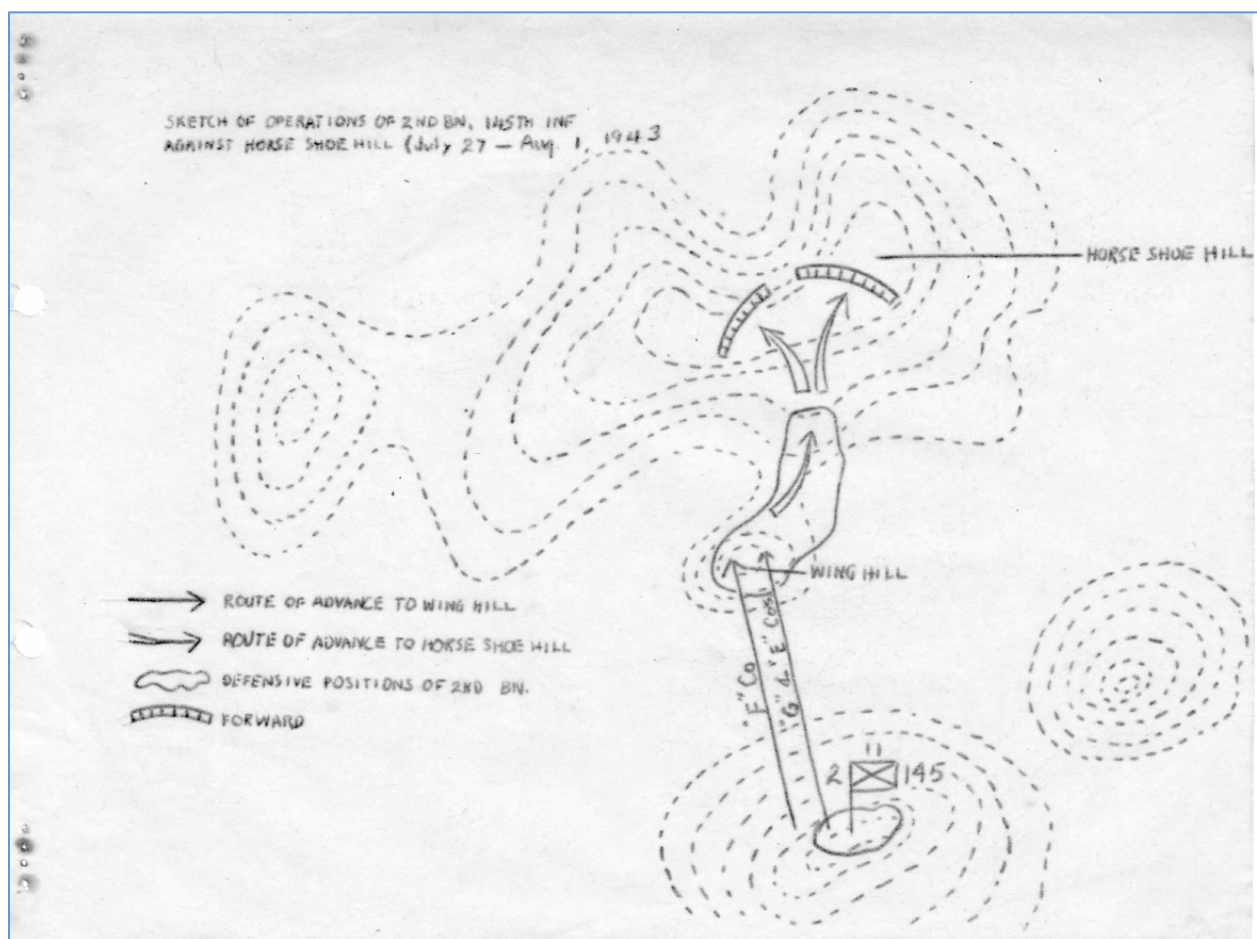


Figure 4. Terrain sketch of Bibilo Hill submitted in the 145th Infantry's After Action Report

Two companies spent the next day clearing this hill, reducing about five pillboxes and securing it so the 2nd Battalion headquarters could establish its command post there the next morning. From here attacks against the remaining hilltops were launched.

The Bibilo Hills (as referenced in 2-145 IN's After Action report) were a series of three or four hilltops with excellent observation overlooking Munda Airfield. The three peaks farthest west were dubbed "Left Hill", "Center Hill" and "Right Hill". Right Hill fell within the 169th Infantry's Area of

Operations, leaving Center Hill and Right Hill to the 145th. The fields of fire rendered them key terrain, and they had to be seized so 43 ID could secure their objective.

Attacks started on 4 August. One rifle company each was tasked to Center Hill and Right Hill. The assault on Right Hill was denied by Japanese fire from concealed pillboxes on the north slope. The assault on Center Hill was partially successful with heavy losses, halted at the first crest by enemy fire from a spur on the west side of the ridge. Early that afternoon a third company was deployed in the draw between Center and Right Hill to try and remedy the situation, but was unsuccessful.

All three companies withdrew a short distance for a mortar barrage to suppress or neutralize the enemy fire. The assault resumed at 1540. The battalion weapons company augmented the force on Center Hill and helped secure a portion of the spur than had disrupted the morning attack. The two companies on Right Hill successfully advanced over the top. But by 1810 the battalion ordered all companies into hasty defensive positions for the night.

The next day attacks resumed with a preparatory mortar barrage, and Right Hill was declared secure at 1100. The Japanese were withdrawing.⁶⁵

On 5 August, with Bibilo Hill cleared, the units of the 37th Division crossed the narrow strip of land between the hill and the water. This tactical success had one effect of great personal importance to the soldiers: many had their first bath in weeks.

Seizing the Airfield

In the 43d Division's area of responsibility, General Hodge had ordered an advance designed to bring his division up on line with the 145th Infantry.

The 103d Infantry began its attack at 1100. Meeting practically no opposition, they gained ground rapidly and by 1500 were nearing Lambeti Plantation. The 2d Battalion, 169th Infantry, then in process of pinching out the 172d, attacked northwest across the front of the 172d and established contact with the 145th Infantry. The 172d completed a limited advance before going into division reserve. The 3d Battalion, 169th, on the left of the 2d, attacked in its zone and at 1500 was still advancing. For the first time since it had landed on New Georgia, the 43d Division could announce that the going was easy.

All went well for the rest of the day. The 103d Infantry reached the outer taxiways of Munda airfield; the 169th pulled up just short of Bibilo Hill. The 37th Division's regiments plunged forward past Horseshoe Hill, which was free of Japanese, and gained almost seven hundred yards.

On 2, 3, 4, and 5 August the advance continued all across the corps' front. The 103d and 169th Infantry Regiments, which had gained the outer taxiways of the airfield on 1 August, kept going. The 3d Battalion, 172d, was committed on the 169th's right on 4 August. In the more open terrain around the airstrip the troops were able to use 60-mm. mortars effectively, and their advance was consequently speeded. Kokengolo Hill, the rise in the center of the airfield where a Methodist mission had once stood, held up the advance temporarily.

In the 43d Division's zone on 5 August, the infantry, with tank and mortar support, killed or drove the last Japanese from the tunnels, bunkers, and pillboxes of Kokengolo Hill. Here were found caves stocked with rice, bales of clothing and blankets, and occupation currency. Crossing the western part of the runway, with its craters, grass, and wrecked Japanese planes, the infantrymen secured it in early afternoon. General Wing telephoned General Hodge from Bibilo Hill: "Munda is yours at 1410 today."⁶⁶ Griswold radioed the good news to Admiral Halsey: ". . . Our ground forces today wrested

⁶⁵ (145th Infantry Regiment 1943)

⁶⁶ 43d Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Aug 43.

Munda from the Japs and present it to you . . . as the sole owner. . . ." Halsey responded with "a custody receipt for Munda Keep 'em dying."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Rad, CG NGOF to COMSOPAC, 5 Aug 43, in XIV Corps G-3 Jnl, 5 Aug 43; Rad, COMSOPAC to CG NGOF, 6 Aug 43, in XIV Corps G-3 Jnl, 7 Aug 43.

Jungle Warfare Techniques and Problems

Reducing Pillboxes

The first essential was a complete reconnaissance to develop the position, intention, and strength of the enemy. This was quite difficult in the jungle. "To one unskilled in jungle fighting, it is inconceivable that well trained reconnaissance patrols in sufficient numbers cannot develop the situation in front of the advancing forces."⁶⁸ Because they could not see far enough, because they could not always get close enough, and because Japanese fire discipline was sometimes so good that a given position would not fire until actually attacked, reconnaissance patrols could not always develop positions. The next step was a reconnaissance in force by a reinforced platoon. This often uncovered a portion of the enemy position but not all of it. Usually the complete extent of a center of resistance was determined only by the attack.

The attack itself consisted of three parts: artillery preparation, 81-mm. mortar fire, and assault.

The artillery preparation had a threefold effect. It improved visibility by clearing away brush and foliage. It destroyed or damaged enemy positions. And it killed, wounded, and demoralized enemy soldiers.

The 81-mm. mortars, using heavy shell that had a delay fuze, fired on observed positions and usually covered the area between the American infantry and the artillery's targets. They frequently drove the Japanese soldiers out of their pillboxes into the open where they became targets for rifle and machine gun fire. The 60-mm. mortars, though more mobile than the 81-mm.'s, threw too light a shell to be very effective in these attacks. Their shells usually burst in the trees, but the 81-mm. heavy shells penetrated the treetops and often the tops of the pillboxes themselves before exploding.

The assault consisted of a holding attack by a company or platoon delivering assault fire to cover a close-in single or double envelopment. BAR's, M1's, and grenades were used extensively, and flame throwers were employed whenever possible. Units of the 25th Division, which later drove northward from Munda to Zieta, encountered pillbox positions that were too shallow, and in country too dense, for artillery and mortars to be used without endangering the attacking infantry. Men of this division therefore advocated flame throwers, infantry cannon, and tanks for pillbox reduction.

Jungle Warfare Problems

Because the infantry units did not advance at the same rate, the front line became irregular and the supporting artillery was thus unable to capitalize on the advantages of firing at right angles to the axis of advance. All unit commanders were eager to employ artillery and mortar support to the utmost, but they frequently complained that neighboring units' supporting artillery and mortar fires were falling in their areas and endangering their troops. They had a tendency to forget that the enemy also used artillery and mortars and, when receiving American artillery fire, frequently lobbed 90-mm. mortar shells into the American front lines to convince the American infantrymen that they were being fired on by their own artillery. In most cases the complaints were probably caused by Japanese rather than American fire.

Because maps were inaccurate and reconnaissance was inhibited by poor visibility, it was extremely difficult to determine the exact location of friendly units. In the 37th Division's zone several artillery preparations were called off because of uncertainty about the position of the 148th Infantry. Flares and smoke pots, and sometimes flame throwers, were used to mark flanks, but usually could not

⁶⁸ 37th Div Rpt, G-3 Narrative, Jungle Tactics and Opns, p. 3.

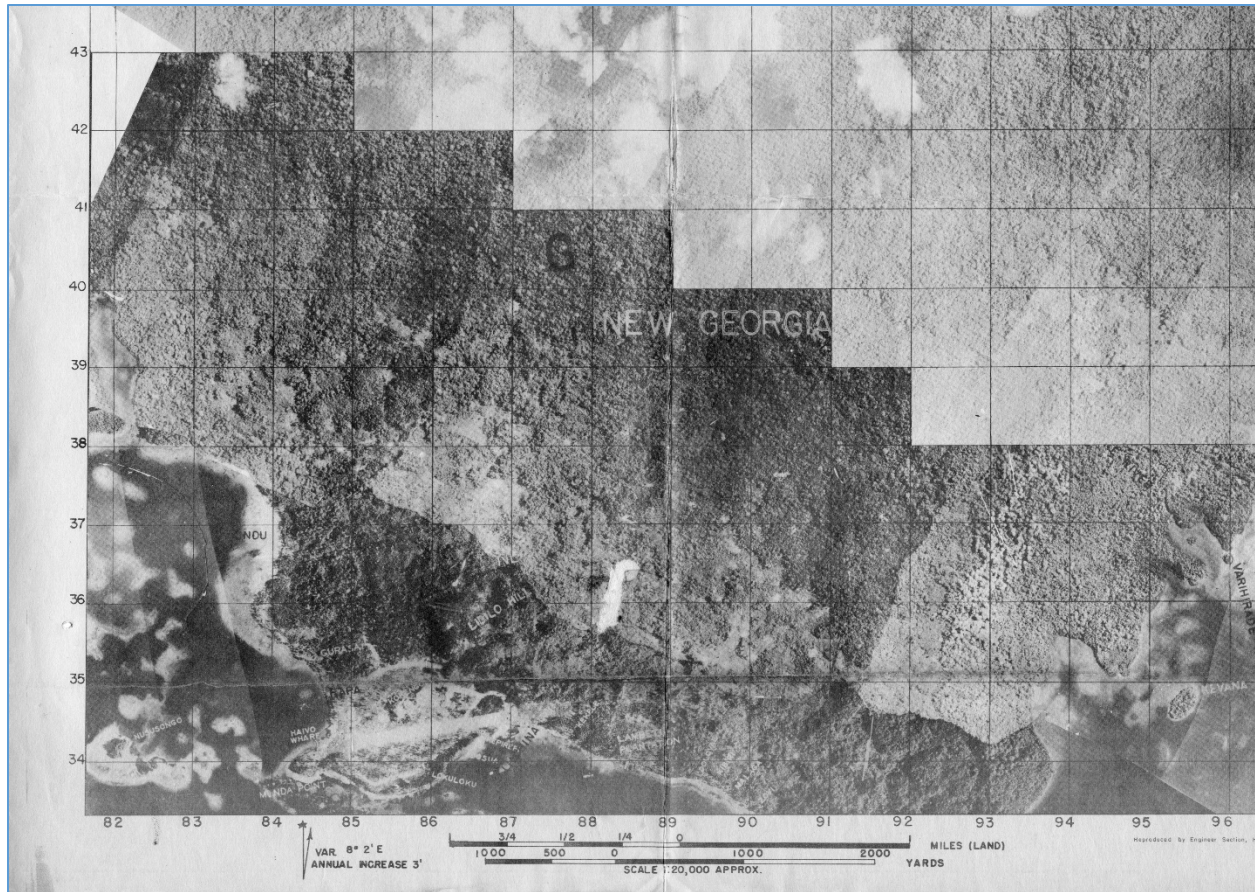


Figure 5. Photomap of the Munda Point Area of Operations.

be seen by anyone not in the immediate vicinity. Griswold had ordered the front line battalions to mark their flanks daily with white panels twenty-five feet long by six feet wide. These were to be

photographed from the air. Reconnaissance planes made daily photographic flights, but there were no clearings in the New Georgia jungle large enough to permit the panels to be spread out, and this effort failed. By plotting close-in defensive artillery fires, forward observers were able to provide some reliable information on the location of front lines. When the 37th Division rolled forward after 1 August, it estimated positions and distances on the basis of speedometer readings from locations that had been plotted by air photography and interpolated on maps.

The difficulties of scouting and patrolling naturally affected nearly every aspect of the operation. Because enemy positions could not be fixed in advance, the troops often attacked terrain rather than the enemy. This procedure resulted in slow advances and in a high expenditure of mortar ammunition on areas actually free of the enemy. And mortar ammunition supply was laborious; shells had to be hand-carried from trail-end to the mortar positions. Poor scouting caused battalions to advance on narrow fronts and thus be halted by small enemy positions. One regimental operations officer asserted that inadequate reconnaissance was due in part to the fact that "higher commanders" did not issue orders until the late afternoon preceding an attack. Thus battalions did not have time for full reconnaissance:

Many times, units were committed in an area which had not been reconnoitered. This fact resulted in commanders having to make decisions concerning a zone of advance in which he knew little or nothing about the enemy positions. Enemy

strong points encountered in this fashion often times resulted in hasty withdrawals which were costly both in men and weapons.⁶⁹

Flamethrowers

The flame thrower, receiving its most extensive use in the Pacific up to this time, was coming into its own as an offensive weapon. All regiments employed it against enemy positions, both in assault and in mopping up. The flame thrower did have several important disadvantages. The equipment was large and heavy, and required the operator to get very close to enemy positions, then expose his head and body in order to use his weapon. He needed to be protected by several riflemen. But even with its disadvantages, it was useful in destroying enemy positions.

Tanks

Tanks, too, were of great value. General Griswold felt that, despite the difficulties inherent in operations over hilly jungle, the actions of the Tank Platoons of the 9th and 10th Marine Defense Battalions had been successful. On 29 July, looking forward to fighting over easier terrain around Munda airfield, he asked General Harmon for more tanks. Corps headquarters, he also announced, was preparing to mount flame throwers on tanks.⁷⁰ The operation ended before flame throwing tanks could be used, but the idea was successfully carried out in later campaigns.

Marine Assessment of Attaching Tanks to Army Units

Light tanks from the 9th, 10th, and 11th Defense Battalions helped Army troops punch through the Japanese defenses barring the way to the principal objective, Munda Point airfield. The M3A1 Stuart light tanks and their crews defied jungle, mud, and suicidal counterattacks in spearheading a slow and deliberate attack. The tank gunners fired 37mm canister rounds to strip away the jungle concealing Japanese bunkers, followed up with high-explosive shells to penetrate the fortifications, and used machine guns to cut down the survivors as they fled. Captain Robert W. Blake, a tank commander who earned the Navy Cross in the central Solomons, noted that "death on the Munda Trail" was noisy, violent, and far from romantic. "I trip the seat lever;" he wrote, "and drop down behind the periscopic sight. I level the sight dot at the black slot and press the firing switch. Wham, the gun bucks, a wad of smoke billows through the trees. The concealing branches are left raw and broken." According to one analysis of the fighting, "A handful of Marine tanks, handicapped by difficult jungle, had spearheaded most of the successful attacks on New Georgia."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Rpt, Maj Carl H. Coleman, S-3 145th Inf, to G-3 37th Div, 1 Sep 43, sub: Informal Rpt on New Georgia Campaign.

⁷⁰ Rad, Griswold to Harmon, 29 Jul 43, in XIV Corps G-3 Jnl, 30 Jul 43. Part of the 754th Army Tank Battalion was alerted at Noumea for transfer to Guadalcanal to be equipped with flame throwers for employment in New Georgia but Munda airfield had fallen before it was moved.

The Tank Platoon of the 11th Marine Defense Battalion arrived in early August.

⁷¹ (Melson 1996, 13)

Army Medicine on New Georgia

The war against Japan was fought in an area that covers roughly one-third of the Earth's surface, from Burma to Hawaii and from Alaska to Australia. While fighting on mainland Asia involved Chinese, British, and American forces, the decisive struggles took place on the islands of the Pacific.

Distances are great: 7,750 miles of ocean separate San Francisco from Sydney, Australia; some 1,600 miles divide Fiji from Auckland, New Zealand; and more than 900 miles separate New Caledonia, then a major Allied base, from Guadalcanal. In 1942, outside Australia and New Zealand, port facilities were primitive at best. Unloading was slow; storage was difficult because of the damp climate and tropical heat; and wounded and sick evacuees endured long and difficult journeys. In this island world medical supplies like everything else moved only by sea or air...

Endemic Diseases

Some of the ills faced by Army men and women were familiar communicable diseases, under control in civilian life in the United States but newly dangerous under combat conditions. Others were exotics unfamiliar to most American doctors, spread by vectors little studied by entomologists. Among the commonest diseases were those spread by poor water supplies and inadequate waste disposal, especially the various forms of dysentery. Unwashed skin, high humidity, and contact with infected natives led to bacterial and fungal infections. Schistosomiasis— infection with a blood fluke commonly found in the tropics—could only be avoided by keeping troops, their clothing, equipment, and even their vehicles out of infected water, a difficult precaution to take in combat. Hookworm disease could result from contact with infected earth. None of these diseases were normally fatal, but all could put soldiers out of action as effectively as if they had been combat casualties.

Where climate and rainfall are constant, as on the northern coast of New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, *the Solomon Islands*, [emphasis ours] and the New Hebrides, malaria existed throughout the year. Pronounced wet and dry seasons, such as typify the southeast coast of New Guinea and the northwest coast of Guadalcanal, caused malaria to become seasonal, appearing twice a year between the extreme wet and dry months, usually the most feasible time for military operations.

To prevent epidemics, command responsibility was as important as the techniques of preventive medicine and suppressive therapy. But line officers were often slow to relearn the importance of malaria to military operations.⁷²

The Chain of Evacuation on New Georgia

Aidman. The aidman, although assigned to the battalion medical section, served with the line companies and gave first aid to the injured.

Aid Station. The battalion aid station, the first medical installation reached by a casualty because of its location near the front line, treated shock and provided minor surgery, dressing for wounds, and relief from pain. The battalion surgeon, aid station personnel, and company aidmen together formed

⁷² Whitehill, "Medical Activities in Middle Pacific," block 1, pp. 1–14, 55, 56, block 14, pp. 6–8, and block 18a, pp. 4–5, file 314.7, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA. See also Earl Baldwin McKinley, ed., *A Geography of Disease* (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University Press, 1935); George MacDonald, *The Epidemiology and Control of Malaria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 95–97; James Stevens Simmons, *Global Epidemiology: A Geography of Disease and Sanitation* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1944). For up-to-date information on the diseases cited, see Kurt J. Isselbacher et al., eds., *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*, 12th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1991).

one of the three battalion sections of the regimental medical detachment. A separate battalion, however, had its own medical detachment.

Collecting Company/Collecting Station. In World War II the division surgeon commanded the division's medical battalion. Each of the battalion's three collecting companies was designed to support one regiment or regimental combat team. A collecting company evacuated casualties from forward aid stations, and a collecting station, which the company ran, provided additional first aid, plus oxygen and whole blood, and formed a regimental holding unit for casualties until they could be taken to the rear. Sometimes a collecting station and a portable surgical hospital worked together, with the hospital stabilizing the seriously wounded for evacuation.

Clearing Company/Clearing Station. Also part of the medical battalion was the clearing company. The clearing station that it operated was, in effect, a small forward hospital, providing fairly complex treatment and informed prognosis, on which further disposition of the casualty was based. In the Pacific clearing companies often functioned as small field hospitals, because most battles were small and hospital units might be absent from the task force or remote from the fighting line. Here again, a portable surgical hospital might work nearby.

Portable Surgical Hospital. With a capacity of 25 beds, this small unit was developed in Australia and later adapted to provide skilled surgical care in jungle fighting during the Papuan campaign. Still later, it was attached to task forces to provide early frontline surgical care in amphibious operations. In theory, hospital equipment and supplies were to be carried on the backs of the thirty-three soldiers and four officers who formed the unit. The portable might be attached to a regiment, a division, or an army, depending on circumstances.⁷³

Field Hospital. Attached to a division or corps, the 380-bed (later 400-bed) field hospital was intended to be highly mobile and to concentrate on the early care of casualties. Located whenever possible within a few miles of the front line, the field hospital was a highly flexible unit that could be broken down into its component platoons, each of which, if strengthened with surgical teams, might operate as an independent small hospital.

New Georgia

...the marines and soldiers of the South Pacific Area, advancing against the enemy-held islands of the Solomons, fought a more wearing campaign with less adequate medical support. The loss of Guadalcanal moved the Japanese to strengthen their forces in the central and northern Solomons. The new objective for American forces was New Georgia, the largest island group in the archipelago. A threatening environment awaited America's fighting men, and strong Japanese units garrisoned the natural harbors as well as the airfields on Kolombangara, Vangunu, and New Georgia's Munda Point.

Colonel Maxwell, the USAFISPA chief surgeon, prepared for an advance against New Georgia with the assistance of Col. Franklin T. Hallam, MC, the XIV Corps surgeon. Maxwell had not yet adopted...the portable surgical hospital, and the 43d Infantry Division entered battle some 30–35 percent understrength in medical personnel, both officer and enlisted—a forbidding statistic, given the primitive tropical terrain where both soldiers and marines would have to fight. The medical evacuation plan relied on support by a single clearing company, which would act as the division hospital, and by two collecting companies. For the moment, the 17th Field Hospital remained on call in the Russells.⁷⁴

On the night of 29–30 June elements of the 43d Division, supported by the collecting companies of its 118th Medical Battalion, made simultaneous landings on Rendova, southern New Georgia, and Vangunu. Bitter fights in sodden jungles and flooded marshes yielded control of important anchorages

⁷³ The Portable Surgical Hospital was not in use on New Georgia during Munda Point.

⁷⁴ Memo, Lt Col H. S. Tubbs to CofS, USAFISPA, 6 Jun 43, sub: Planning New Georgia Operation, THU Note Cards, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

as staging areas for further action. The enemy garrison on Rendova scattered, and the clearing company and Collecting Company C set up there. But Japanese air attacks wreaked havoc on American supply dumps along the beach, destroying most of the clearing station's equipment. For a time only emergency treatment could be given, and wounded waited twenty-four hours or more for hospital care on Guadalcanal. Of all deaths by enemy action sustained during the campaign, 50 percent occurred in the first two weeks.

Leaving the clearing company to replace its equipment, the 43d Division's 172d and 169th Infantry, supported only by a few collecting platoons, crossed Blanche Channel to northwest New Georgia, aiming an assault at Munda airfield. The troops pushed their way through trackless terrain, alternately steep and swampy. Mud, heat, and unceasing rain slowed progress. All the dismal complications of diarrhea, dysentery, and skin infections harassed the men. Malaria, despite rigorous control measures, was a constant problem for units whose soldiers were already infected when they came ashore. Fatigue, danger, and sickness brought on stress reactions; tension was unrelenting, for the enemy skillfully infiltrated American lines at night. Even veterans were subject to strange delusions: "In their minds, the phosphorescence of rotten logs became Japanese signals. The smell of the jungle became poison gas. . . . The slithering of the many land crabs was interpreted as the sound of approaching Japanese."⁷⁵

In the darkness the troops fired their weapons and hurled grenades blindly. Almost 16 percent of casualties were later judged to have been caused by friendly fire—a high proportion, even for jungle fighting. Neuropsychiatric casualties were many; the 169th Infantry alone suffered 700 by 31 July. Contributing to a crisis in morale were hunger and the difficulty of getting the wounded to treatment. Since the absence of roads prohibited the use of vehicles, except jeeps on the wider trails, some regiments had to carry forward their own ammunition, supplies, and casualties. The clearing station on Rendova was quickly overwhelmed, exposing the inadequacy of medical support for the bruising battle.⁷⁶

Soon the theater command realized that the New Georgia front must be revitalized, new tactics developed, and a more efficient supply system established. At the urging of General Harmon, the USAFISPA commander, Admiral Halsey ordered the XIV Corps staff to New Georgia to take over supply, administration, and planning. On 11 July Maj. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold, the corps commander, arrived on Rendova. Shortly afterward, elements of the 25th Infantry and 37th Infantry Divisions were ordered in, and on 17 July Griswold took command of the expanded New Georgia forces. Medical support was likewise enlarged, with the newly arrived 25th Division supported by its 25th Medical Battalion and the 37th Division by its 112th Medical Battalion. On 28 July the 17th Field Hospital landed and opened on the islet of Kokorana, off Rendova. (A Navy malaria control unit had landed two weeks earlier, surveyed campsites, and oiled troop bivouac areas.)⁷⁷

Meanwhile, a new offensive began, employing infantry, tanks, flamethrowers, and artillery support. Fighting as difficult and bloody as any on Guadalcanal followed before Griswold's forces secured Munda airfield on 6 August. Mopping-up operations and seizure of the nearby islands of Vella

⁷⁵ Quotation from Miller, *CARTWHEEL*, pp. 108–09. See also ASF [Army Service Forces] Monthly Progress Rpt, 30 Nov 43, sec. 7, p. 8, THU Note Cards, Historians files, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

⁷⁶ 14Rpt, Surg, XIV Corps, to CSurg, USAFISPA, 31 Oct 43, sub: Medical Service, New Georgia Campaign, p. 32, Encl to 1st End, CSurg, USAFISPA, to SG, U.S. Army, 11 Nov 43, file 370 (Medical Service, New Georgia Campaign) SPA, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

⁷⁷ 112th Med Bn Annual Rpt, 1943, p. 4, THU Note Cards, Historians files; CSurg, USAFISPA, Annual Rpt, 1943, pp. 9–10, file 319.1–2. Both in HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA. See also "Navy Medical Department at War," 1:109, BMSA.

Lavella and Arundel took another six weeks. Between 23 July and 10 September the 112th Medical Battalion alone treated more than 3,000 cases, including almost 1,000 battle casualties.⁷⁸

The four-month campaign for the central Solomons was over, but at a heavy cost. American battle casualties totaled 1,094 dead and 3,873 wounded; added to the victims of accident, disease, and stress, more than 8,300 casualties were evacuated during July, August, and September. As the initial invasion force, the 43d Division suffered the most; its 172d Infantry counted 1,550 wounded or sick, 777 from a single battalion.

Limitations in Medical Support

Manpower was as short as leadership and supplies. The result was to hinder evacuation. Jungle warfare meant dispersion, with small units often operating alone, and in consequence, company aidmen—the first link in the medical chain—were too few. Replacements for losses in medical units were slow to arrive, and a lack of litter-bearers resulted in many casualties left lying where they fell, easy prey to enemy infiltrators, insects, leeches, and the jungle dampness. Surgeons sought to correct the situation by borrowing combat troops, which depleted the line units. Matters were no better when the battle wounded reached the rear areas, for hospitalization was inadequate in the beginning and, despite improvements, remained so throughout the campaign. During the first month of combat, a period of heavy casualties when no hospitals at all were available, the clearing station on Rendova provided beds equal to only 1.5 percent of the entire force. (By contrast, on Guadalcanal the Americal Division had been supported by three clearing companies, all reinforced, with a total of 800 beds—about 5 percent of division strength.) Nor did the available Navy and Marine units ashore and afloat provide adequate hospital facilities...

For wounded troops returning to the bases, “hurry up” once more gave way to “wait.” The road to treatment proved longer than the 200 miles of water to Guadalcanal might suggest. LSTs bore 87 percent of New Georgia’s casualties, averaging 100–200 or more per trip, but their management was far from ideal. Problems began with scheduling. Medical units ashore had to make their own arrangements with the ships’ commanders, an uncertain method at best; careful coordination was needed even to ensure that basic preparations were made—that the holds were clean and cots readied before the customary departure time of 1800. Frequently, the ships unloaded so late in the afternoon that little time was left to bring casualties aboard, make them comfortable, and exchange litters and blankets. Sailors joked that LST meant “Large Slow Target,”⁷⁹ and the voyages to Guadalcanal, lasting between twenty and twenty-four hours, lent credence to the name. For many of the wounded, taking into account delays on New Georgia and on shipboard, seventy-two or even eighty-four hours might elapse between initial injury and definitive treatment. Inevitably, wounds became infected, and gas gangrene sometimes set in.⁸⁰

Disease and Vector Control on New Georgia

The New Georgia disease picture was mixed but on the whole unsatisfactory. Anopheles mosquitoes were not abundant by Solomon Islands standards, and a Navy malaria control unit, landing in July, helped to prevent new cases of the disease from becoming a major problem. Practically, all malaria cases were recorded in soldiers previously infected on Guadalcanal.

⁷⁸ 112th Med Bn Annual Rpt, 1943, p. 4, THU Note Cards, Historians files, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

⁷⁹ Arrangements on LSTs improved after Colonel Hallam contacted Navy officers with whom he had worked before the campaign to see that more medical supplies and a second medical officer were added to each ship.

⁸⁰ Whitehill, “Medical Activities in Middle Pacific,” block 18g, pp. 2–8, file 314.7; Rpt, Surg, XIV Corps, to CSurg, USAFISPA, 31 Oct 43, pp. 5–6, Encl to 1st End, CSurg, USAFISPA, to SG, U.S. Army, 11 Nov 43, file 370 (Medical Service, New Georgia Campaign) SPA. Both in HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

Other diseases were clearly of local origin. Poor field sanitation produced serious outbreaks of diarrhea and dysentery, to which line commanders, soldiers, and the medics all contributed, because of poor discipline and inadequate supervision. Waste disposal was ineptly handled, and the absence of screens on messes, kitchens, and latrines allowed the fly population to increase; a limited water supply made washing of utensils difficult, and the troops' hands were seldom clean. Medical personnel treated patients with fluids, rest, and doses of sulfaguanidine. But prevention, not cure, ensures combat readiness, and by that standard performance was poor. Admissions reached 500 per 1,000 troops per year in August; 18 percent of hospital admissions were caused by diarrhea and dysentery, a substantial drain on the command..⁸¹

Combat Stress Control and Psychiatric Casualties

The major medical problem encountered at New Georgia, however, was the high incidence of stress-related ailments, all lumped under the general classification of war neuroses. Included were problems that ranged from exhaustion to psychosis. The 43d Division, though it comprised only 40 percent of the forces on the island, contributed almost 80 percent of the victims. Most cases occurred during the first month of combat, when hospitalization was severely limited, a 24-hour evacuation policy was in effect, medical personnel were 30–35 percent short of authorized levels, and no psychiatrist was in the area. Some casualties were “the picture of utter exhaustion”; others were agitated, trembling and starting at every sound, “crying, wringing their hands, mumbling incoherently,” and “trying to escape impending disaster.”⁸²

At first, these victims were simply shipped out. The 43d evacuated 1,950 of its 2,500 neuropsychiatric (NP) cases; a psychiatrist working at Fiji later remembered receiving several hundred such patients from New Georgia in a single day. Yet for many there was a simple cure. Removing NPs from the line and giving them three to four days of rest, a bath, and nourishing food enabled 75–80 percent to recover completely. Later to reach the combat zone, both the 37th and the 25th Divisions set up rest camps, salvaging...about 2,000 who might otherwise have been evacuated. Again, the need for forward-area psychiatrists was driven home. In response to such combat experience, and to “continued and repeated pressure from senior medical officers in the combat theaters,” the War Department established the position of division psychiatrist in November 1943..⁸³

⁸¹ ASF Monthly Progress Rpt, 30 Nov 43, sec. 7, p. 8–9, THU Note Cards, Historians files, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

⁸² Whitehill, “Medical Activities in Middle Pacific,” block 18g, p. 36, file 314.7, HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.

⁸³ 27Quotation from Lloyd J. Thompson, “Early Developments, Personnel, and Education and Training,” in Albert J. Glass, ed., *Overseas Theaters, Medical Department, United States Army in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1973) p. 196n9. On the division psychiatrist position, see WD Cir 290, 9 Nov 43, p. 2. See also Intervs, Slaughter, 23 Dec 43, and Maj Theodore Lidz, 26 Mar 45, file 000.71; Ltr, M. Ralph Kaufman to Col Earl Maxwell, 16 Dec 43, sub: Neuropsychiatric Experiences With the 17th Infantry Division, in OofSurg, USAFISPA, ETMD, 6 Jan 44, file 350.05; and Personal Opinion of Maj Harold J. Barker, MC, as to the New Georgia Campaign, 6 Sep 43, THU Note Cards, Historians files. All in HUMEDS, RG 112, NARA.