

MICHAEL G. WALLING

BLOODSTAINED SANDS

U.S. AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II



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DEDICATED TO
the men at the tip of the spear

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MICHAEL G. WALLING



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Front cover and title page: A view from inside an LCVP of the 16th RCT, 1st Infantry Division during its run in to Omaha Beach on D-Day. (NARA)

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Keep the Faith,
Mike Walling

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Before I began writing this book I thought I had a pretty good knowledge of U.S. amphibious operations in World War II. I'd read about them and talked with hundreds of Coast Guardsmen, soldiers, sailors, and Marines over the past 50 years or so. These were the men at the spear's tip, not just once but often multiple times, their odds of surviving growing smaller with each operation. However, I knew there were gaps in my knowledge, even of units I was familiar with, and finding out what lay in those gaps was amazing, funny, and, at times, heart wrenching.

Among my discoveries were Castner's Cutthroats in Alaska, technically the 1st Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon, which was dubbed the Alaska Scouts. They were trappers, hunters, fishermen, dogsledders, miners, prospectors, Aleuts, Eskimos, and American Indians. Being tough was the only thing they had in common.

Digging into material about the Aleutian campaign I found the incredible tale of the courageous crewmen of Patrol Wing Four.

The Naval Construction Battalions' Seabees are well known. Less so, the Army Engineering Special Brigades, which I'd also not heard of, even though these tough and resourceful men performed miracles throughout the European and Pacific theaters.

Beach Battalions came to light along with their indomitable courage under fire and finding out about the secretive Beach Jumpers, organized by Lieutenant Douglas Fairbanks Jr., the Hollywood actor turned naval officer, was fun.

Many of us have heard about the Underwater Demolition Teams, and pictured them rolling off rubber boats to reconnoiter a hostile sandy beach. However, finding teams paired with Engineering Special Brigade men in cold waters off the Normandy beaches, blowing gaps in obstacles while taking heavy fire, and later doing the same thing in the Philippines, Iwo Jima, and

Okinawa, among other less than tropical waters, was another knowledge gap filled.

Being an ex-Coast Guardsman I was familiar with the Coast Guard's significant but rarely recognized role in amphibious operations. It was the true extent of what these men did that surprised me. Coast Guard-manned assault transports, LSTs, LCIs, and landing craft crews took part in landings from North Africa through Okinawa, many in both theaters and through the worst assaults.

It is beyond my capability and the scope of any one book to tell the full story of every landing or assault. I've chosen to present some of the well-known ones such as Anzio, Normandy, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima, as well as some not so well known, many of which took place in the Southwest Pacific. For some, days have been covered, while for others, only the first few hours.

I tell the stories, when possible, from the viewpoint and using the words of the landing craft driver, LCI crewman or men in the first assault waves as the ramps dropped, soldiers and Marines under fire as well as pilots flying combat missions or long, often terrifying patrols rather than those of commanders watching from ships offshore. Each man received a pre-assault briefing about the invasion fleet and known enemy strength, something I have tried to do here so that the reader also knows what was facing them. All the quotes are original and some of them contain what is now considered offensive language. To change the wording would make these quotes historically inaccurate which would be a disservice both to the men and the reader.

Above all else my objective with this book is to help keep the often neglected memories of the amphibious forces alive.

BRIEFING

Amphibious Operation

A military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force to conduct landing force operations within the littorals.

Amphibious Assault

A type of amphibious operation that involves establishing a force on a hostile or potentially hostile shore.¹

Amphibious warfare and amphibious operations are not new concepts. In the *Iliad*, Homer recorded one of the first amphibious operations in history when the Greeks attacked Troy in the 12th century BC. He describes how, after ten years of war, the Greeks crossed the Aegean Sea, beached their ships near Troy, beat off counterattacks on their ships, and destroyed the city.

In 490 BC the powerful Persian ruler, Darius, launched a waterborne attack against the Greeks that culminated in the Battle of Marathon. The Persians turned their ships into ancient versions of landing ships, pre-dating modern landing ships by almost 2,500 years, when they used gangways to unload their horses from beached ships. Ultimately, Darius failed to conquer the Greeks, however, and he made his landing only to be defeated. A second landing also failed, and the Persians returned to Asia.

One of the most famous and successful amphibious operations was undertaken by William the Conqueror when he crossed the English Channel from Normandy in AD 1066. His boats, which were comparable in length to

the smaller landing boats used today, were driven up onto the beach by rowers and a “coxswain” who directed the boat with a large steering oar. Near Hastings, the scene of his landing, William defeated Harold, the English king, and founded a new line of rulers. This was the last successful invasion of England.

Conversely, on July 8, 1775 one of the most disastrous large-scale landing operations occurred when the Spanish sent 50 naval vessels and 240 transports to invade Morocco. The Spaniards only managed to land about a dozen soldiers per trip as a lack of powerboats meant that at least as many men again were needed to row the slow-moving boats through the surf and back to collect the next boatload of hapless soldiers. The initial landing in the Bay of Algiers met little resistance as the roughly 100,000 Moorish soldiers and Berber tribesmen withdrew, drawing the Spaniards into a trap. As soon as the Spanish troops were within musket range the slaughter began. The survivors were driven back to their boats amid carnage and confusion, with many of them being slaughtered as they attempted to retreat. Those who made it to the beach returned to their ships and the Spanish fleet withdrew.²

The first U.S. Continental Navy amphibious landing was made during the Revolution when, on March 3, 1776, sailors and Marines landed unopposed six miles from the port of Nassau in the British Bahamas, a landing which went on to the next day. Referred to as either the “Battle of Nassau” or the “Raid on Nassau,” the objective was to seize badly needed weapons and gun powder to support the American rebels. The Americans only stayed for two weeks before heading home.

During the Spanish–American War in 1898 the U.S. Navy landed troops in Cuba. With improved landing tactics and rapid ship-to-shore movements, 650 Marines successfully stormed ashore unopposed and captured the key target of Guantanamo Bay.³

In April 1915 the first “modern” amphibious assault was launched by a combined British and French task force at Gallipoli in Turkey during World War I. The assault force, composed of British and French naval squadrons, seaplane carriers, and one specially modified landing ship, attempted to put ashore some 78,000 soldiers. Heavy Turkish gunfire swept the assault waves as they came ashore onto beaches laced with barbed wire and sown with improvised mines constructed from torpedo warheads, forerunners of the types of obstacles used in World War II to thwart landings. The landings were not a success and the disastrous campaign resulted in a huge loss of life.

Over the millennia weapons have changed but the basic principles governing amphibious operations have not. However, it wasn't until 1838 that the Swiss-born French general Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini published *Précis de l'Art de Guerre (Summary of the Art of War)*.⁴ In it he listed five key points for any amphibious landing:

- 1) deceive the enemy as to the point of debarkation;
- 2) select a beach with hydrographic and terrain conditions favorable to the attacker;
- 3) employ naval guns to prepare the way for the troops;
- 4) then use land artillery at the earliest practicable moment;
- 5) strenuously push the invasion forward by seizing the high ground commanding the landing area, thus securing the beachhead from enemy guns, allowing a quick buildup of supplies ashore, and allowing the conflict to move from amphibious to land warfare.

Jomini's writings were based on his own experiences and observations from the land-centric warfare of the Napoleonic era. Then, as now, there were two primary types of amphibious landings: shore-to-shore and ship-to-shore. In shore-to-shore operations the attacking force is loaded directly onto the landing craft and off-loaded at their target. Ship-to-shore involves embarking the troops onto transports and then off-loading them into smaller landing craft. Many landings are a combination of these two types.

Whether an operation is of the shore-to-shore or ship-to-shore type, each one is broken down into five phases: 1) planning; 2) rehearsal; 3) embarkation; 4) movement; and 5) assault. The planning phase covers the period from when the initiating directive is issued to the end of the operation. The duration of this phase can be anything from a week to several years.

The purpose of the rehearsal phase is to test the adequacy of the plans and communication, the timing of detailed operations, and the combat readiness of the participating forces. Conducting rehearsals is not always feasible because sometimes there is not enough time to gather the task force before the scheduled assault. For example, in 1943 in the Southwest Pacific many of the units were located hundreds of miles apart and the landing ships were engaged in other operations.

Although valuable, in several instances rehearsals have proved costly in terms of men killed and landing craft lost. Before the Anzio landings soldiers drowned as they exited LSTs that had not pulled close enough to shore or fell from nets as they climbed down them into landing craft. Prior to Guadalcanal, irreplaceable landing craft were lost in collisions, had their bottoms ripped open on rock beaches or were smashed against the sides of the transports. In Operation *Tiger*, one rehearsal for the 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy, German E-boats got among the transports and landing craft, causing immense devastation and loss of life.

Phase three, embarkation, involves assigning and assembling the ships and troops that will compose the landing forces, including the necessary equipment and supplies. The fourth phase – the movement of the task force to the amphibious operation area – includes the departure of the ships from the loading points, the sea passage, and their arrival in their assigned positions for the attack. Finally, the assault phase begins when all of the assault elements of the main body arrive at their assigned positions and ends when the unloading is complete.

The men at the tip of the spear leading needed to know the “three Rs” of invasion:

- 1) the general plan of the operation;
- 2) the specific plan for their division, regiment, battalion, and company;
- 3) information about the enemy situation and the target.

Under the first “R,” the general plan of the operation, the men were apprised of the overall plan, preferred and alternate, of the attack, which involved two divisions in assault and one in reserve. They were given complete information on the support they would get from naval gunfire and aerial bombardment. They knew that the landing beaches and surrounding areas would be under air attack to “soften up” the target prior to D-Day. They knew, down to the last shell, how much naval gunfire would be dumped on the beaches. They saw aerial photographs taken a few days before D-Day.

The second “R”, relating to specific plans for their unit, was dealt with in exacting detail. Information that they were given included details of platoons, companies, and battalions that would land on either flank; the distance from the beach to the first phase line; the direction of attack after the landing; the types of communications available to their unit; code names of all officers; the meaning of pyrotechnic displays; and passwords and countersigns.

The third “R”, information about the enemy situation, included making sure the commanders had knowledge of the terrain, gained from a study of aerial photographs and relief maps; climatic conditions; the number and disposition of enemy troops; the type of defense, including the location of all pillboxes, blockhouses, and trenches observed in their zone of action; the probable location of minefields; the direction of expected counterattacks; the number of enemy tanks; and the enemy’s air capabilities.

Not only were maps, overlays, and aerial photographs used, but also charts detailing statistical information. Officers used the operations orders and annexes as a “textbook” and passed on every pertinent fact that their men might have to know.⁵

World War II Theaters of War

In the European, Mediterranean, and North African Theaters of Operations U.S. forces were involved in the six major Allied amphibious assaults that were mounted between November 1942 and August 1944: one in North Africa, three in the Mediterranean (Sicily, Salerno, and Anzio), and two in Europe (Normandy and southern France) with each operation coming months after the preceding one. All six were massive undertakings involving hundreds of ships and thousands of men. The North African, Mediterranean, and European Theaters were primarily land battles in which amphibious operations were essential for forcibly reentering German-occupied North Africa and Europe.

The Pacific Theater was divided into two commands. The first, the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), based in Australia, covered the Philippines, New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Dutch East Indies. The second, the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO), based at Pearl Harbor, covered the rest of the Pacific.

The PTO was a maritime theater requiring landings to secure island bases for further operations. PTO forces mounted ten major landings with numerous smaller ones launched to secure islands surrounding the primary targets. The primary objectives included the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, and the Caroline, Mariana, and Volcano Islands. Here, too, landings were often separated by several months and, until Okinawa, were not as large in terms of ships and men as their ETO (European Theater of Operations) counterparts.

Southwest Pacific amphibious operations were different. Often an invasion force consisted of a few landing ships and craft supported by destroyers and land-based aircraft. Sometimes only a few days elapsed between operations as the Allies moved up the New Guinea coast to the northern Solomon Islands and then to the Bismarck Archipelago before major assaults in the Philippines.

Landing Craft

As amphibious warfare evolved from 1921 through 1945, strange-looking ships such as the Landing Ship Dock (LSD) and Landing Ship Tank (LST – referred to as “Large Slow Target” by their crews)* came into being, as did a host of other landing craft — LCTs, LCIs, LCMs, LCPs, LCP(R)s, and LCVPs. To this floating mix were added amphibian vehicles with both propellers and wheels – DUWKs, Seeps, and Water Weasels. The Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT – tracked vehicles that could carry men across shallow coral reefs) and LVT(A) (armored LVTs fitted with either 37mm cannon-equipped turrets or an 81mm mortar) were used extensively in the Central Pacific and to a lesser extent in Europe.

Existing passenger ships were modified as assault transports (APAs) to handle large numbers of troops and landing craft and new ships were also built specifically for that purpose. In addition to the APAs, specially designed cargo ships (AKAs) were built to handle the massive amounts of equipment, heavy weapons, and other supplies needed to maintain the operations. To man these ships, craft, and vehicles, amphibious tractor and armored battalions were created by the Navy, Marines, and Army, and training schools were established.

Landing Operations

Responsibility for the smooth flow of men and equipment onto and off the beach was the job of Beach Parties, Engineering Special Brigades, and Beach

* LSTs evolved from the shallow-draft Lake Maraca Ibo tankers. The British Admiralty began planning the invasion of Europe while their troops were still being evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940. LCTs were an outgrowth of the Continental river barges. The British version was considerably longer than the American.

Battalions. These specialized units were composed of men from the Coast Guard, Navy, Army, and/or Marines. Amphibious operations in the different theaters shared the common goal of getting men and equipment ashore quickly but they differed in the numbers of landings and the logistics involved to accomplish this goal.

Before troops could be put ashore a thorough reconnaissance of the area had to be made. Charts in the Pacific were so poor that sometimes the charted position of an island was off by several miles and its orientation was wrong. Therefore, accurate mapping of the area was needed, which involved discreet aerial photography missions. Teams were also sent in covertly to chart underwater obstacles, ascertain the slope of the beach selected for an assault, record the type of sand, and determine whether the beach could support the weight of heavy traffic. In anticipation of amphibious attacks, the Germans and Japanese expended considerable effort and ingenuity on underwater defenses. A steel rail with one end sharpened to a point and the other embedded in a large block of concrete was a likely device to skewer a landing craft and would be a difficult item to blow up or move away. Mines were interspersed among the various obstacles in such profusion that an invader who timed his arrival for low tide would have a hard time clearing a lane on the beach before the tide had risen enough to complicate operations.

To carry out the critical mission of clearing these obstacles special groups came into being: the Navy Underwater Demolition Teams (initially known as Navy Construction Demolition Units or NCDUs) and, in the Pacific, the Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance Force.

Controlling the flow of men and material onto and off the beach was the responsibility of the Beachmaster and his supporting Beach Party. Here, again, all theaters shared common problems but established slightly different ways of handling them. To some extent during, and then subsequent to, the landings in the Solomon Islands in August 1942 and the North African landings in November 1942, men in the Naval Beach Battalions or Parties were normally assigned to one of four duty classifications: communications, hydrographics, boat repair, or medical. Often under fire from the enemy, these men dug their own slit trenches and foxholes on the beach, fighting alongside the Marines and soldiers to repel enemy attacks while still setting up the beach as a simulated port for the onslaught of supplies, equipment and men that would soon be landed in support of the initial assault troops.

Also part of the first groups into action during a beach assault were the medical personnel administering to assault troops cut down during the first waves and evacuating casualties to naval ships lying off the beaches.

Meanwhile, the Beachmaster and the men trained in hydrographic duties would be surveying the approaches and beach exits, locating and charting underwater obstacles, and determining the best passages for the succeeding waves of landing craft. Enemy gunfire and strafing runs were usually ignored in the early stages of a beach operation as there was no place to go. Navy underwater demolition teams and Army engineering personnel were called in to clear approach lanes and to blow beach and underwater obstacles. Boat repairmen fixed damaged landing craft, or craft that had broached when landing, to get them back into service.

In Europe, Naval Beach Battalions were created as the means of control. When a Beach Battalion went into action, it was organized along the lines of an Army Battalion – three companies, with each company divided into three platoons, the interlocking duties of which embraced every phase of the battalion's task. Company and Battalion Headquarters personnel brought the battalion, at full strength, to 450 officers and men.

Each platoon of a Beach Battalion was under the command of a Beachmaster and his assistant. Each platoon of a Beach Battalion was assigned hydrographic specialists, medical personnel, signalmen, radiomen, and boat repair experts. In a typical beach assault, beach battalion personnel went ashore in one or more of the first three or four assault waves, scattering their equipment over the beach so that not all of the men would be wounded or killed if hit by an enemy bomb or shell.

Beach communications were often instrumental in deciding the course of a battle, and so the communications elements of the Beach Battalion were rapidly established (normally landing with the first assault wave) to link the Beachmaster up with the fleet and the assault troops. Radios, signal lights, and signalmen using semaphore flags were put to immediate and effective use in establishing communications between the beach parties, landing craft, and transports.⁶

In the PTO smaller Shore Parties were established to perform the same functions as the Beach Battalions. The Shore Party was an integral part of a combat division and was organized around a Marine Corps platoon from a Pioneer (shore party company) or Army combat engineer company along with a communications team. In both services the Shore Party formed the

nucleus to which the various elements were assigned for an operation. The naval elements included an Underwater Demolition Team, a Naval Pontoon Unit, and a Boat Pool.

The Beach Party of the Shore Party team would land at the objective area and take charge of the beach. The Shore Party was considered to be an instrument of the assault and was relieved by a garrison beach party which unloaded equipment, men, and supplies from ships arriving after the assault.⁷ In the Southwest Pacific Area, the Seventh Amphibious Fleet established autonomous Beach Party units that moved from landing to landing.

Naval Gunfire and Tactical Air Support

Two key elements of any successful landing are naval gunfire support and tactical air support. Muzzle velocity and the great weight of projectiles mean that naval gunfire can hit hard; it can be delivered with great rapidity; and, subject to terrain which may shelter targets from its relatively flat trajectories, it makes immediately available the enormous firepower that is necessary for overcoming the initial handicaps of amphibious assault. On the other hand, its effectiveness is limited to the maximum range inland of the ships' batteries; steep terrain may mask targets; radio communications may fail where wire would hold up; and fire from an unstable, moving gun platform can produce large deviations at long ranges, despite the accuracy of modern fire control.

Ships' gunfire helps clear the beaches so that assault waves can land (it was no accident that, even on Iwo Jima, initial resistance to the landing was officially characterized as "light"). After troops are ashore, before artillery can come in, naval gunfire is the only means available for the delivery of continuous close support, if the powerful but necessarily discontinuous assistance of airstrikes is excluded.⁸

During World War II air support became an indispensable feature of any offensive. It had, and still has, two forms: strategic and tactical. These may also be called, respectively, indirect and direct, or distant and close.

Air support of assault landings – both strategic and tactical – may be provided by any combatant air agency within effective range. This support runs the gamut of operations-reconnaissance, both visual and photo, bombing of every kind, strafing, artillery observation and control, combat and antisubmarine patrols, and rescue and transportation services – in short, any

or all forms of aircraft activities may be included. Landings in the Western Mandate Islands, as well as the earlier seizures of the Gilberts and the Marshalls, provided classic examples of joint air support of joint overseas assault landings. In the landings in the Marianas Islands, no Allied land airdromes existed near enough to Guam and Saipan, hence carriers furnished the close air support.

When Italy was invaded, tactical air support of the landings was based on fields in Sicily that Allied forces had recently seized. When France was invaded, airdromes in southern England served as bases for Allied support aircraft.

Tactical air support of an assault landing presents one of the most complicated problems in coordination that modern warfare has produced.⁹ Men versed in coordinating this element are also among the first waves to hit the beaches as Forward Fire and Air Controllers.

Summary

The five phases of either a landing or assault have to be carefully choreographed or the operation fails at the cost of men lost and equipment destroyed. During World War II the U.S. raised the techniques of amphibious and assault landings almost to an art form. They conducted 168 amphibious landings and 68 amphibious assaults.¹⁰ Remarkably, none of them failed.

Each ship, landing craft, amphibious vehicle Beach Battalion and Beach Party, Engineering Special Brigade, ship's crew providing fire support, and aircraft crew flying reconnaissance or tactical air support played a part in helping the Allies win World War II.

CHAPTER 1

SOWING THE WIND

OCTOBER 1941–JULY 1942

Acting in alliance with the Entente powers during World War I, Japan seized German Central Pacific possessions in the Mariana (except the U.S. territory of Guam), Caroline, and Marshall island groups by October 1914. After the war Japan was granted a mandate to govern these islands in the Treaty of Versailles and at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which was further ratified under a Class C mandate by the Covenant of the League of Nations.* Although not a member of the League the U.S. signed a convention with Japan recognizing the League's mandate in February 1922. Part of the terms of the mandate was that the islands were not to be fortified. However, fortified or not, control of these islands shifted the strategic balance of power in the Pacific away from the U.S. to Japan.

Japan's potential threat to U.S. interests in the Pacific was recognized by Marine Corps Major Earl H. Ellis in 1913. Ellis understood the need to defend existing bases in Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines as well as acquiring bases

* There were four distinct Mandates in the Pacific. Japan administered the Carolines, Marshalls and Marianas (except Guam), all north of the equator; Australia, the former German part of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, with adjoining islands, all south of the equator; New Zealand, the western islands of the Samoan group; and the British Empire, the rich phosphate island of Nauru. With the exception of Samoa, which is in the south central Pacific, the Mandates comprised a large bloc in the west central part of the Pacific, east and southeast of the Philippines. Their land area is greater than that of England, Scotland and Wales. Source: Blakeslee, George H., *The Mandates of the Pacific*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS The Magazine, September 1922 Issue.

on Japanese-held islands. On July 23, 1921 he submitted his ideas in Operations Plan 712 "Advance Base Operations in Micronesia" (FMFRP-12-46) which foretold the course of the war in the Pacific and that Japan would strike the first blow with a great deal of success. Ellis listed Japan's objectives which included the Philippines, Guam, Midway, Wake, and Hawaii. He also detailed the action plan necessary for Japan's defeat which involved seizing the Marshall and Caroline Islands and that the attack on Japan would be made from bases in the Bonin and Mariana Islands. He knew that the job of acquiring new bases would mean attacking the enemy-held territory by amphibious assault, and he went so far as to designate the size and type of units that would be necessary, the kind of landing craft they should use, the best time of day to effect the landing, and other details needed to ensure the success of the plan:

Japan is a World Power, and her army and navy will doubtless be up to date as to training and materiel. Considering our consistent policy of non-aggression, she will probably initiate the war; which will indicate that, in her own mind, she believes that, considering her natural defensive position, she has sufficient military strength to defeat our fleet.

To effect [an amphibious landing] in the face of enemy resistance requires careful training and preparation, to say the least; and this along Marine lines. It is not enough that the troops be skilled infantry men or artillery men of high morale; they must be skilled water men and jungle men who know it can be done—Marines with Marine training.*¹

Between 1922 and 1925 four amphibious operations exercises were held: three exclusively Navy-Marine operations in 1922-24 and the last one in 1925 which was a joint Army and Navy exercise. All of the exercises suffered from the same problems: lack of order among the landing party; superficial naval bombardment; and poor judgment in the stowage of supplies and

* Ellis died on May 12, 1923 while visiting the Japanese-held island of Palau in the Caroline Islands. The cause of his death remains unclear although several theories have been advanced in the years since his death. One theory is his death was alcohol related compounded by severe depression. Another theory is that the Japanese poisoned his whiskey. Before his body was cremated U.S. Navy Chief Pharmacist Mate Lawrence Zembsch examined the body, but due to a nervous breakdown on his way back to Yokohama, Japan and soon after being killed by falling rubble in the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake, no report was filed. Ellis's maps and papers were confiscated by Japanese authorities and never found after the war.

equipment aboard the transport used. However, the greatest handicap was the lack of adequate landing craft. The next amphibious exercise would not be until 1935.

The development of modern amphibious landing concepts began with the establishment of the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) on December 18, 1933 with Marines from the 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. The purpose of the FMF was to prepare units for the execution of amphibious missions. The Marine Corps developed a progressive system beginning with basic individual training, followed by the training of units from the squad through to brigade, culminating in joint annual amphibious training in conjunction with the fleet. Since the FMF was organized as a component of the fleet, its training was a matter of direct concern to the Navy.

In July of 1934 the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet approved a plan of training for the Fleet Marine Force, which was to begin in the Caribbean in 1935. It called for annual fleet landing exercises, known as Fleet Exercises (FLEXs), to develop coordination and teamwork while simulating the conditions of war.²

After a hiatus of ten years, major amphibious exercises began again in the winter of 1935. The genesis of these renewed exercises was the publication of the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* in January 1934. The title changed to *Manual for Naval Operations* on August 1, 1934, and with a few changes it became the bible for amphibious operations.*

Although the *Manual for Naval Operations* laid out the theory for amphibious operations, the theory could only be proven through actual operation, hence the need for exercises. Problems that became apparent included issues with fire support, adequate numbers of suitable transport, close air support, the screening of the transports, antisubmarine tactics, ship-to-shore movement, and beach reconnaissance groups. Ship-to-shore movement alone presented two major problems: the need for the speedy debarkation of the assaulting troops and their equipment into the landing boats and the difficulty in controlling and guiding these craft to their assigned beaches. These problems were exacerbated by the lack of suitable landing craft.

* Thornton, Gary J. E., Commander, USCG, *THE U.S. COAST GUARD AND ARMY AMPHIBIOUS DEVELOPMENT*, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 23, 1987. The Navy accepted it as official doctrine in 1938 under the title of Fleet Training Publication 167, and in 1941 the War Department put the Navy text between Army covers and issued it as Field Manual 314.

While the Navy and Marines refined amphibious operations, Germany was rearming and Japan began expanding its military operations. In 1933 Japan withdrew from the League of Nations and initiated harbor improvements, airfield construction, and the establishment of fuel dumps, bases, and fortifications in its territories including those mandated islands acquired at the end of World War I. According to the Japanese Decisive Battle Plan, the islands would serve as buffers for the homeland and were expendable.*

The first overt provocation against the U.S. came on Sunday, December 12, 1937. In July Japan had launched an invasion of China from bases in Manchuria and by December had reached Nanking on the Yangtze River. The USS *Panay* and three Standard Oil tankers, *Mei Ping*, *Mei An*, and *Mei Hsia* were anchored near Hoshien, 27 miles north of Nanking. *Panay* displayed a large American flag horizontally across the upper deck awnings, and a 6' x 11' Stars and Stripes displayed from the gaff.

On board *Panay*, the crew, four U.S. Embassy staff members, four U.S. nationals, and four foreign nationals, including one of Universal News's premiere cameramen, Norman Alley, Eric Mayell of Fox Movietone, James Marshall of *Colliers*, photographer Norman Soong of the *New York Times*, United Press's Weldon James, G.M. McDonald of the *London Times*, and two Italian writers, Sandro Sandri and Luigi Barzini, Jr. were at their midday meal when the roar of high-powered aircraft engines, falling bombs, and ripping machine-gun fire shattered the day.

At about 1340, three Japanese B4Y1 Type 96 bi-plane bombers commenced an attack. At least one direct hit was observed, but most bombs missed. Two dive-bombers attacked next, strafing their targets to suppress flak.

* The Japanese Navy's Decisive Battle Doctrine (*Kantai Kessen*) was the counterpart to the American Plan Orange. The plan assumed that Japan would quickly seize control of most of the Philippines, both to neutralize the Asiatic Fleet before it could attack Japanese communications and to provoke the Americans into a hasty counterattack. It was assumed that this would take the form of a counteroffensive by the U.S. Navy across the Mandates, with the goal of relieving Manila and blockading Japan. The American Fleet would be met by the Japanese Fleet somewhere in the western Pacific for a decisive battle on the model of the battle of Tsushima in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. Source: Budge, Ken G., *The Pacific War Online Encyclopedia*, 2012–2013, http://pwencycl.kgbudge.com/D/e/Decisive_Battle_Doctrine.htm

Panay was hit by two bombs, which disabled her forward 3in gun and wounded Lieutenant Commander Hughes, the commanding officer. The crew fought back with their two .30-caliber Lewis machine guns, but, designed for use against shore and water targets, they could not elevate enough to deliver effective antiaircraft fire. Explosions ripped apart the decks, throwing men into the water. The planes then bombed the three Standard Oil tankers, which were soon engulfed in flames. On board *Mei Ping* members of *Panay*'s crew who were visiting the tanker fought a losing battle against the fires and had to abandon ship. Finally, nine Nakajima A4N Type 95 bi-plane fighters dropped 18 bombs on *Panay* and also machine-gunned the launches carrying the wounded on their way to shore at nearby Hanshan Island.

Norman Alley and Eric Mayell filmed part of the attack and, after reaching shore, the sinking of the ship in the middle of the river. Navy Coxswain Edgar C. Hulsebus, Storekeeper First Class Charles L. Ensminger, Standard Oil Tanker Captain Carl H. Carlson and Italian reporter Sandro Sandri were killed. Forty-three sailors and five civilians were wounded in the attack.

Two days later in Tokyo, the American Ambassador Joseph C. Grew lodged a formal protest about the USS *Panay* "Incident". Although the Japanese government accepted responsibility for the attack, they stated it had been unintentional. In Shanghai a court of inquiry was presented with incontrovertible evidence that senior Japanese officers had ordered the attack. Ambassador Grew, remembering the public's reaction when the USS *Maine* was blown up in Havana Harbor, expected a declaration of war against Japan. However, although there was outrage and a demand for retribution America was a paper tiger and could do nothing to avenge this outrage.³

The Navy did take note of Japan's increasing aggression, which affected both the U.S. and Britain. Later in December Captain Royal E. Ingersoll, the Director of the Navy War Plans Division, was sent to London to informally discuss conditions of U.S.-British naval co-operation in the event both nations were involved in a war against Japan and Germany.

The *Panay* attack made it imperative that the Army and Navy reexamine plans for a U.S. two-ocean war against the Axis powers – Germany, Italy, and Japan. A joint board of Army and Navy planners worked for over a year and in April 1939 they issued a report concluding:

1. Germany and Italy would take overt action in the Western Hemisphere only if Great Britain and France remained neutral or were defeated.

2. Japan would continue to expand into China and Southeast Asia at the expense of Great Britain and the United States, by peaceful means if possible but by force if necessary.
3. The three Axis powers would act together whenever the international situation seemed favorable. If other countries, including the United States, reacted promptly and vigorously to such action then a general war might well follow.⁴

The British Royal Navy was responsible for security in the Atlantic. No mention was made of the need for amphibious operations in Europe and the Mediterranean. North Africa was not a consideration at that time, even though Italy occupied part of Morocco and had conquered the Ethiopian Empire in 1936 which put the Axis power in a position to threaten maritime trade through the Red Sea.

The planners concluded that early in the war Japan would seize all U.S. possessions west of 180 degrees (i.e. the Philippines, Guam, and Wake). They also pointed out that the attacks might begin with an effort “to damage major fleet units without warning,” or a surprise attempt “to block the fleet in Pearl Harbor.” They stated that American forces would have to fight their way back across the Pacific using a series of amphibious operations using one of four routes:

1. Aleutians;
2. Pearl Harbor–Midway–Luzon (Philippines);
3. Marshalls–Carolines–Marianas–Yap–Peleliu; or
4. Samoa–New Guinea–Mindanao.

The favored routes were Pearl Harbor–Midway–Luzon and the Marshalls–Carolines–Marianas–Yap–Peleliu with the understanding that a combination of the two would most probably have to be used. Forces in Hawaii, Alaska, and Panama were to be reinforced, but not those in the Philippines on the assumption that their loss was a certainty.⁵

Japan’s continued conquest of eastern China and Germany’s more openly aggressive stance in Europe raised the question of U.S. policy in the event of concerted aggression by all three Axis powers. As options were being examined, events overtook the planners.

On September 1, 1939, the German Army (Heer) and Air Force (Luftwaffe)* attacked Poland. Two days later France and Britain declared war on Germany, but other than a brief, inconclusive French incursion into Germany's Saar region, they were of no help in defending their ally. By September 6 German forces had occupied Warsaw and the Polish government had surrendered. Exacerbating the already tense situation was the Soviet Union's invasion of eastern Poland on September 17.

From October until May 1940, France and Britain built up forces along Germany's western border in anticipation of invasion. Nothing happened until April 9, 1940 when Germany attacked Denmark and Norway. Four weeks later, on May 10, German forces breached its borders with Belgium and the Netherlands. Within 96 hours German armor broke through French defenses in the Ardennes Forest and quickly overran the mixed British and French forces. By June 4, the last British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk and France surrendered on June 17. Italy declared war on Britain and France on June 10, essentially after the major fighting in Europe was over.

By the end of June Germany occupied two thirds of France. The other third was under the leadership of Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain with its capital in Vichy in southern France. The Vichy French retained administrative control of France's overseas colonies, including Vietnam, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Senegal. Vichy French control of Morocco and Algeria, coupled with the Italian bases in Libya, effectively sealed off the Mediterranean Sea from Gibraltar to the Egyptian border.

In just ten months all U.S. war plans focusing primarily on operations in the Pacific with Britain controlling actions in the Atlantic became obsolete. U.S. Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), recognized U.S. security largely depended on Britain's survival. He asserted: "if Britain wins decisively against Germany we could win everywhere; but that if she loses the problems confronting us would be very great; and while we might not *lose everywhere*, we might, possibly, not *win anywhere*."⁶

Admiral Stark also questioned British assurances that Germany and Italy could be defeated by blockade and bombardment prior to landing troops in safe harbors, the same tactics used to defeat Napoleon 130 years earlier.

* The *Wehrmacht* (Defense Force) consisted of the *Heer* (Army), the *Kriegsmarine* (Navy) and the *Luftwaffe* (Air Force). Therefore, the individual branches will not be referred to as the *Wehrmacht* in this work. The *Schutzstaffel* (SS) units were separate from the *Wehrmacht* and will be identified as such.

He believed the way to certain victory was “by military success on shore,” and for that, bases close to the European continent would be required. “I believe that the United States, in addition to sending naval assistance, would also need to send large air and land forces to Europe or Africa, or both, and to participate strongly in this land offensive.”⁷

A secret conference between American, British, and Canadian military staffs (ABC-1) was held in Washington from January 29 to March 27, 1941. Seven key offensive policies were agreed upon at this meeting:

1. To maintain an economic blockade of the Axis by sea, land, and air, and by commodity control through diplomatic and financial means.
2. To conduct a sustained air offensive to destroy Axis military power.
3. To effect “early elimination” of Italy as an Axis partner.
4. To conduct raids and minor offensives.
5. To support neutrals and underground groups in resisting the Axis.
6. To build up the necessary forces for the eventual offensive against Germany.
7. To capture positions from which to launch that offensive.⁸

These policies laid out the “Europe First” strategy in all joint operations stating “the Atlantic and European area is considered to be the decisive theater” and that accordingly it would be where the chief American effort would be exerted, although the “great importance” of the Mediterranean and North African areas was noted.

If Japan launched operations in the Pacific the U.S. would “employ the United States Pacific Fleet offensively in the manner best calculated to weaken Japanese economic power ... by diverting Japanese strength away from Malaysia.”⁹

The “Europe First” strategy was further reinforced when Germany invaded Russia on June 22, 1941, and quickly overran a large part of western Russia, laying siege to Leningrad (modern-day St. Petersburg) and Stalingrad (modern-day Volgograd), and coming within sight of Moscow. This further complicated the already major problem of supplying arms and other materials to Britain. Some of these supplies were now diverted to Russia in an effort to prevent her collapse.

The only way to send large land forces into Europe, West Africa, and Italy was by amphibious assault. U.S. forces now faced having to secure bases on

Japanese-occupied islands, as well as positions in North Africa, Italy, and German-occupied France.

While strategic and geopolitical discussions were being held U.S. forces continued to undertake amphibious exercises. Shortages in landing equipment, and insufficient landing craft, competent boat crews, and transports hampered realistic training. Another sticking point was the lack of joint Army, Navy, and Marine amphibious training. To correct this situation, the 1st Joint Training Force was created in June 1941. It consisted of the 1st Marine Division and the Army 1st Division and subsequently developed into the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. On the west coast, similarly, the 2d Joint Training Force was created in September, consisting of the Army 3d Division and the 2d Marine Division; this later became the Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet. Both Forces were under Marine command.

Fleet Exercise 7 (FLEX-7) in August 1941 was the first large-scale Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet exercise. It took place off the New River in North Carolina. The Navy made a large contribution, supplying three battleships, nine cruisers, five destroyers, two aircraft carriers and a three-ship destroyer transport group. For the first time the Army and Marines attempted to operate under simulated combat conditions. In addition, new types of landing were being evaluated. However, it wasn't the Navy or Marines who eventually came up with a solution to landing problems, but rather a remarkable businessman named Andrew Jackson Higgins. Higgins's 36ft craft featured a tunnel stern to protect the propeller and a special "spoonbill" bow that enabled it to beach on low banks or beaches and retract easily. It became known as the Landing Craft Personnel (LCP) and later, when it was fitted with a bow ramp, it became the famous drop-ramp Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel (LCVP).

As well as landing craft, assault troops needed an amphibious tractor to move supplies over the beach. Once again it was a private businessman who came up with the necessary vehicle. Donald Roebling's "Alligator" was a tracked vehicle that derived its propulsion afloat from flanges fixed to the tracks. Designated as Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT), it was initially armed with only .50 cal. machine guns. However, as the war progressed versions would be fitted with 37mm turrets, mortars, and rockets.

For FLEX-7, the 1st Marine Division embarked on Navy transports and the Army 1st Division embarked on civilian-manned Army transports.

Complications arose when the civilian crews operating the Army transports refused to run without lights to simulate night combat conditions. Then, during the launching and recovery of landing craft, the civilians refused to man the hoisting gear after regular working hours unless guaranteed double wages for overtime. At this time, the ships' civilian cooks refused to prepare meals for soldiers returning late from exercises. Three Navy ships, *Hunter Liggett*, *Leonard Wood*, and *Joseph T. Dickman* were manned by Coast Guard crews. The Navy, lacking sufficient personnel to man them, with the exception of the medical and supply departments, turned to the Coast Guard for additional manpower.*

In addition, the Navy assigned 600 Coast Guard Surfmen and Motor Machinist Mates from Coast Guard Life Saving stations to duties in landing craft attached to 22 other transports and some supply ships operating with the transports. Maneuvering small boats on and off beaches through heavy surf was not something the Navy practiced and Coast Guard Surfmen were called upon to teach this skill to the growing number of landing craft crews. Men who up to then had put out through storm-whipped breakers to save others now turned to the task of learning how to land soldiers and Marines and soldiers on bullet-swept beaches.

The Coast Guard also played a prominent new role during this exercise by providing Beachmasters who were responsible for the transit of all men and supplies from the line of departure to the water's edge. Lieutenant Commander Walter C. Capron was the Beachmaster for the 1st Marine Division and Lieutenant Commander Dwight H. Dexter served as Beachmaster for the Army 1st Division.^{10, 11}

The five-week exercise failed to meet expectations. Troop transports proved to have not only inadequate gear but also inadequate facilities of all kinds. Although the landings were executed in daylight, with a calm sea, men burdened with heavy packs sank as they scrambled out of the boats. Reportedly, a Marine captain was "so mad that he was almost weeping" because the Navy sent his ammunition boats ashore in the first wave without protection. Tanks plunged off ramps into deepening holes in the surf-covered sand. One observer

* Earlier in 1941, ten 250ft long *Lake* class cutters were loaned to Britain as part of the Lend-Lease Program. Rear Admiral Wache, Coast Guard Commandant, offered to have the crews man the recently acquired transports. Several hundred officers and men from these cutters were immediately available for this assignment. With the new Coast Guard/Navy agreement establishing full time Coast Guard amphibious responsibilities, the temporary detailing of Coast Guard personnel to landing craft training aboard transports was ended.

remarked: "One tank ... disappeared into a hole and was completely submerged. The driver climbed out and stood disconsolately on the turret looking for all the world like pictures you see of Jesus walking on the water."¹²

Other problems emerged. Shore organization was chaotic; responsibilities for unloading and other beach operations had not been defined, and as a result both Army and Marine combat troops had to serve as stevedores. Boxes of ammunition and rations, handed from the boats to men standing in the surf, were usually saturated. Cardboard cartons of C rations, stacked on the beach, disintegrated, the cans of vegetable hash mingled with the cans of meat stew in a tall silver pyramid that glistened in the sunlight. Once on shore, equipment rusted because essential lubricants had been stowed deep in the ships' holds.¹³

Despite all the problems, some positives did come out of the exercise. FLEX-7 led to better shore party organization and training and the Higgins 36ft landing craft with the bow ramp, along with the 50ft Higgins-designed tank lighters, proved superior to all other designs.

Amphibious operation plans and training progressed against the background of heightening tensions between the U.S., Germany, and Japan. Since 1939 the primary U.S. focus had been assisting Britain. To that end President Franklin D. Roosevelt took a series of unprecedented steps to ensure Britain's survival and to thwart German actions in the western hemisphere. These steps included establishing in 1939 a Neutrality Zone in the North Atlantic to dissuade German naval attacks on shipping in the area; accepting the role of protector of Greenland after Denmark was overrun in 1940; and the March 1941 Lend-Lease Act, which was the principal means of providing U.S. military aid to foreign nations during World War II – it authorized the president to transfer arms or any other defense materials for which Congress appropriated money to "the government of any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States."

More provocatively on the part of the U.S., in May the Navy increased its presence in the North Atlantic by agreeing to protect Iceland from the threat of German invasion. The 4,000-man USMC 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) was sent to Iceland, relieving the British Army occupying force, thus freeing the British troops for combat.

Concurrently, President Roosevelt ordered the Navy to take the steps necessary to maintain communications between the U.S. and Iceland. To accomplish this, the Navy established a base north of Reykjavik in Hvalfjörður

(Whale Bay). This base, along with the one in Argentia, Newfoundland, and the use of the British Naval base in Lisahally, Northern Ireland, would enable the Navy to escort convoys through the mid-Atlantic if necessary.

In great secrecy, and surrounded by warships, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt met for the first time in Argentia, Newfoundland, on August 9, 1941. For over three days the two leaders and their staffs discussed plans for the prosecution of the war. Out of this meeting came a joint statement of principles called the Atlantic Charter. It endorsed the rights of all people to choose their own leaders, regain lands lost to them through force, trade freely with one another, have access to raw materials on equal terms, improve the lot of backward countries, disarm aggressors, freedom from want, freedom from fear, and “such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance.”¹⁴ This last phrase was directed at Hitler’s U-boat campaign and served as justification for the U.S. to take part in the battle.

The text of the Charter and photos of the meeting weren’t released until the two leaders were safely home in their respective countries. Interestingly, at the time, the Charter didn’t exist as a formal document. When a reporter asked President Roosevelt about it, the President is said to have replied: “There isn’t any copy ... so far as I know. I haven’t got one. The British haven’t got one. The nearest thing you will get is the [message of the radio] operator on the [U.S. Navy cruiser] *Augusta* or the [Royal Navy battleship] *Prince of Wales*.”^{* 15}

After returning from Argentia, President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order directing U.S. warships to act as convoy escorts for merchant ships sailing west of Iceland. Also, U.S. warships were not to show lights at night and to be ready for combat at any time. On September 1 the U.S. Navy began escorting convoys across the Atlantic to Britain, coordinating its efforts with British and Canadian forces.

The increasing cooperation between the U.S. and British navies was put to the test on September 4. At 0840 the U.S. Navy destroyer *Greer*, carrying mail and passengers to Argentia, was signaled by a British plane that a U-boat (later identified as U-625) had crash-dived some ten miles ahead. Forty minutes later *Greer*’s soundman picked up the contact and *Greer* began to trail the U-boat. The plane, running low on fuel, dropped four depth charges at 1032 and returned to base, while *Greer* continued to dog the U-boat.

* A formal document was later drawn up and signed by 14 nations, including the Soviet Union, in September.

At 1248, the U-boat turned and fired a torpedo at her pursuer. Ringing up flank speed, the destroyer turned hard left as her crew watched the torpedo pass 100 yards astern. Then, charging in, *Greer* laid a pattern of eight depth charges, and less than two minutes later a second torpedo passed 300 yards to port. *Greer* lost sound contact during the maneuvers, and began to quarter the area in search of the U-boat. When the encounter ended two hours later, *Greer* had dropped 19 depth charges and U-625 had fired two torpedoes. Although no damage was done to either ship, the shots blew away the last vestiges of U.S. neutrality in the North Atlantic.

When news of this attack against an American ship on the high seas reached the United States, President Roosevelt declared the German attack to be an act of piracy. He further stated: "in the waters which we deem necessary for our defense, American naval vessels and American planes will no longer wait until Axis submarines lurking under the water, or Axis raiders on the surface of the sea, strike their deadly blow first."¹⁶

From then on U.S. warships were to shoot on sight at any German warships they encountered. The United States's undeclared war in the Atlantic moved to a new, deadlier phase.

The first U.S. amphibious operation and first face-to-face skirmish between U.S. and Nazi-led ground forces occurred on September 12 in Greenland. Acting on a tip from a dog-team patrol, Commander "Iceberg" Smith sent the Coast Guard cutters *Northland* and *North Star* to investigate a ship that had reportedly landed a party in a fjord.

Commander Carl C. von Paulsen, captain of *Northland*, found the vessel in McKenzie Bay and sent a boarding team over to inspect her. She was the Norwegian sealer *Buskoe*. The boarding team found 27 men who claimed to be on a fishing and hunting expedition. Looking further, the boarding team found not only *Buskoe's* normal radio, but also a portable receiver and transmitter, proof she was servicing radio stations. Questioning turned up the information that a group with radio equipment had been dropped off earlier, several hundred miles up the coast.

Placing a Prize Crew onboard *Buskoe*, the two Coast Guard cutters got underway to search for the base. A day later, *Northland* anchored in Mygybukta, about five miles from where the radio site was believed to be. In darkness, Lieutenant Leroy McCluskey and his armed landing party from *Northland*

rowed four miles to a desolate gravel beach. After negotiating the last mile over icy terrain, they reached their goal, a small wooden building.

With weapons loaded, Lieutenant McCluskey kicked down the door. Inside were three very surprised Nazis, their radio gear, confidential codes, and building plans for future radio stations. *Northland's* men had found the enemy; now the question was what to do with them. Since the U.S. was not at war with Germany or its allies the three men couldn't be considered prisoners of war. However, utilizing a subtle point of international law, the Americans took them into custody as illegal immigrants.

Despite President Roosevelt's statement that U.S. forces would not wait for U-boats to strike, first blood went to the U-boats. In October, five U.S. destroyers, *Kearny*, *Plunkett*, *Decatur*, *Livermore*, and *Greer* were escorting the westbound 49-ship convoy ON-24 when they were diverted to help British escorts defend the fully loaded 52-ship eastbound convoy SC-48. A 13-boat wolf pack had torpedoed two ships on October 14 and was still stalking the convoy. The Americans arrived the next day. During the night of October 16, the U-boats struck again. Shortly after midnight of October 17, U-568 fired a torpedo into *Kearny's* starboard side, killing 11 men and injuring 22. Surviving crewmembers stopped the flooding, regained power, and *Kearny* limped on to Iceland.

Two weeks later, on October 31, U.S. destroyers *Reuben James*, *Niblack*, *Benson*, and *Hilary P. Jones* were escorting the 43-ship eastbound convoy HX-156. At 0539, *Reuben James* was hunting down a U-boat contact when U-552 fired a torpedo into the destroyer's magazines. The explosion broke *Reuben James* in two. In the flaming hell of those few moments, there wasn't time for her crew to disarm her depth charges. As the *Reuben James* sank, these exploded among the survivors, disemboweling many of them. Only 44 of the 159-man crew lived through that night.¹⁷

After the *Panay* attack in 1937, Japan did not attack the remaining U.S. Navy and Marine forces in China. Japan did continue its Chinese conquest and occupied French Indochina following the fall of France in 1940. These moves prompted President Roosevelt to freeze all Japanese assets in the United States and ban the export of scrap metal and oil. Scrap metal, and

particularly oil, were necessary materials for the Japanese military machine. Negotiations failed to get Japan the materials it wanted and on November 22 Ambassador Kurusu received the last of a series of communiqués from his superiors in Japan setting deadlines for successful negotiations. He was informed that after November 29 things were “automatically going to happen.”¹⁸

The tentative day of attack was set for a Sunday, December 7 (the anniversary of Pearl Harbor). Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, the strike force commander, received orders from Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto on December 2 confirming the chosen date. Taking a northern route to avoid normal shipping lanes his carriers arrived at the launching point right on schedule. At midnight of December 6–7, the Japanese Combined Fleet Operation Order No. 1 informed its readers that a state of war existed with the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands.

At 0630 on December 7, USS *Ward* (DD-139) depth charged and sank an unidentified submarine in restricted waters near the entrance to Pearl Harbor. *Ward's* radio report to the 14th Naval District was not clear and because of numerous previous false reports nobody took it seriously.

At 0702, two Army operators at the Opana Mobile Radar Station, near Kahuku Point on the northern tip of Oahu, Privates Joseph L. Lockwood and George E. Elliott, detected approximately 50 aircraft about 132 miles away and fast approaching from the northwest. They reported the contacts to First Lieutenant Kermit A. Tyler. Tyler, a fighter pilot assigned to the 78th Pursuit Squadron at Wheeler Field, was working the 0400 to 0800 shift as Duty Officer at the Fort Shafter radar information center. He was new to the job, only having had a walk-through the previous Wednesday, and had never spent a full day there.

Tyler believed it was a flight of U.S. B-17 bombers due in from the mainland. One of the operators then said the U.S. planes would be approaching from the northeast, not the northwest. Tyler then told the operators: “Don’t worry about it,” and did not pass the information on to his superiors.¹⁹

It was normal Sunday routine for the Pearl Harbor Naval Base, Hickam Air Field and the Marine Air Base at Ewa. Admiral Husband E. Kimmel and General Walter Short concluded there was no reason to believe an attack was imminent. Aircraft were parked wingtip to wingtip on airfields with empty gas tanks and no ammunition in their guns to prevent

sabotage. On board the ships no "Ready Service" ammunition was readily available and the magazines were locked. Watertight doors on the lower decks were open, destroying the ships' watertight integrity. There were also no torpedo nets protecting the fleet anchorage. Many officers and crewmen were on Liberty. Anti-aircraft guns on shore were not manned and the ammunition boxes were locked.

At 0735, the first Japanese assault wave, with 51 "Val" dive-bombers, 40 "Kate" torpedo bombers, 50 high-level bombers, and 43 "Zero" fighters commenced the attack. The first attack wave targeted airfields and battleships.

Sixty-three minutes later the second wave of 171 aircraft consisting of 81 "Vals," 54 "Kates," and 36 "Zeros" hit other ships and shipyard facilities. Lasting until 0945, the attacks sank five battleships and damaged eight others. Three light cruisers, three destroyers and three smaller vessels were lost along with 188 aircraft. The Japanese lost 27 planes out of 355 and five midget submarines which attempted to penetrate the inner harbor and launch torpedoes.

The Japanese also missed the base fuel tanks and did not attack the submarine base. More importantly, the three U.S. Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers, *Lexington*, *Enterprise*, and *Saratoga*, were not in port.

The Navy and Marine Corps counted 2,117 killed or died of wounds, and 779 others wounded in action. There was a total of 696 Army battle casualties, 228 Army men dead or died of wounds, 110 seriously wounded, and 358 slightly wounded. The "bombs" which fell on Honolulu and other civilian parts of the island were Navy 5in antiaircraft shells which had failed to detonate in the air. Explosions in Honolulu started three major fires, and at least 57 civilians were killed and nearly as many seriously injured.²⁰ Among the dead were 104 men aboard the battleship USS *Arizona*, who died after a bomb exploded in the forward magazine. A day after the attack, the U.S. and Britain declared war on Japan.

Japanese attacks across the Pacific continued unchecked through December and into 1942: December 8, Wake Island; December 10, the Philippines and Guam; December 11, Burma; December 16, British Borneo; December 18, Hong Kong; January 11, 1942, the Dutch East Indies and Dutch Borneo; February 2, Java in the Dutch East Indies; February 8–9, Singapore; March 7, Salamaua and Lae on New Guinea; and March 23, the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

The isolated Marine, Army, and civilian defenders on Wake held out until December 23 before surrendering. Of the 449 Marines based there, 49 were killed and 32 wounded. The 68-man Navy contingent lost five killed and three wounded. Of the 1,146 civilians on the island, 70 died and another 12 were wounded. Five defenders were taken and executed on board *Nitta Maru*.²¹

On January 29, Convoy William Sail 12X (Task Force 14.2), which included the Coast Guard-manned transport USS *Wakefield* along with USS *West Point*, and three British transports – the *Duchess of Bedford*, *Empress of Japan*, and *Empire Star* – had delivered supplies and approximately 6,000 British troops and RAF ground personnel to Singapore. The convoy had sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia on November 10, 1941 before stopping at Bombay.

The next morning at about 0935, while the convoy was tied alongside docks at Kepple Harbor awaiting the arrival of British evacuees, seven Japanese bombers were sighted over the city and were immediately attacked by British “Buffalo” fighters.

While the fighters were trying to stop the seven enemy bombers, a 30-strong bomber force was reported heading for the transports. Bombs straddled *West Point* and *Wakefield*. *Wakefield* took a bomb hit that exploded in the sick bay, killing five men and wounding about 15. A small tanker fueling alongside *Wakefield* also took a direct hit and sank. *West Point* sent fire aid parties to help in the treatment of the injured crewmen on *Wakefield*. Despite the attack, all troops and gear were put ashore. Fortunately the bombers missed the other transports during the attack.

In less than two hours after *Wakefield* was hit 401 British women and children were taken on board. *West Point* embarked 1,276 evacuees made up of naval officers and their families, civilians, a 16-man RAF contingent and 225 naval ratings. Escorted by HMS *Durban* the two American transports cleared Singapore bound for Batavia, where more refugees waited to be rescued.

The attack gave a foretaste of things to come. British General Arthur Ernest Percival surrendered all defending forces of Singapore on Black Friday, February 15 to Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita. The British general had far more land forces, but he lacked the all-important element of air power.

Eventually, most of the prisoners were marched and transported to Thailand to construct the “Death Railway,” which included the bridges over the Kwae Noi River – made famous by the film *Bridge over the River Kwai*.

The decisive Battle of the Java Sea, which commenced on February 27, pitted the combined American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) naval force, under Dutch Rear Admiral Karel W. F. M. Doorman against Rear Admiral Takeo Takagi’s Imperial Japanese fleet. The ABDA Eastern Strike Force, as it was known, consisted of two heavy cruisers – HMS *Exeter* and USS *Houston* – three light cruisers, Doorman’s flagship HNLMS *De Ruyter*, HNLMS *Java*, HMAS *Perth*, and nine destroyers – HMS *Electra*, HMS *Encounter*, HMS *Jupiter*, HNLMS *Kortenaer*, HNLMS *Witte de With*, USS *Alden*, USS *John D. Edwards*, USS *John D. Ford*, and USS *Paul Jones*. They faced a Japanese fleet of two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, 14 destroyers, and ten transports.

When it was over two of ABDA’s light cruisers and three destroyers had been sunk, the heavy cruiser *Exeter* damaged, and 2,300 sailors killed including Rear Admiral Doorman. Only the cruisers HMAS *Perth* and USS *Houston* remained undamaged. Japanese losses were one destroyer damaged and 36 sailors killed. Both *Perth* and *Houston* were sunk in a night action shortly after midnight of March 1. Of the 1,061 aboard *Houston*, 368 survived, including 24 of the 74-man Marine detachment, only to be captured by the Japanese and interned in prison camps.* *Perth*’s toll was 353 killed: 342 Royal Australian Navy, five Royal Navy, three Royal Australian Air Force, three civilian canteen workers, and the ship’s mascot – a black cat called Red Lead. Destroying the ABDA force removed the last Allied naval force threat to the Japanese conquest of the Southwest Pacific.

At first, the Japanese advance through the South and Southwest Pacific had been shielded by their movement into the Central Pacific, where they won initial successes with the occupation of Tarawa and Makin in the Gilbert Islands on December 9, 1941. This had been followed by Japanese penetration of the Bismarck Archipelago, of which Rabaul on New Britain was the hub.

By March, 1942 Japan controlled Malaya, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, had invaded Borneo and the Celebes, taken Amboina, and landed in Sumatra. The Japanese established large bases at Rabaul and Kavieng in Papua New Guinea, and Kolombangara in the Solomon

* 106 died during their internment: 105 naval and 1 RAAF, including 38 killed by Allied attacks on Japanese “hell ships.” The surviving 218 were repatriated after the war.

Islands. On February 19, 1942, they bombed Darwin, Australia, into rubble, and the next day began landing on Timor, the island closest to Australia's northwest coast.

On April 9, 1942, U.S. forces on Bataan surrendered unconditionally to the Japanese and on April 10 the Bataan Death March began. 76,000 Allied POWs, including 12,000 Americans, were forced to walk 60 miles under a blazing sun without food or water toward a new POW camp. As a result, over 5,000 American died.* It was May 6 when General Jonathan M. Wainwright unconditionally surrendered all U.S. and Filipino forces in the Philippines. The last U.S. troops holding out on Mindanao surrendered on May 12.

As one bloody month of defeat flowed into the next, the Allies were losing the war. In Russia not only were the Germans within sight of Moscow, but Murmansk, the only year-round ice-free port, was bombed almost into oblivion by German aircraft staging from bases in Finland only 40 miles away. On June 13, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps had pushed British forces back to El Alamein in Egypt. German officers were sending messages making reservations at Cairo hotels, three hours and 160 miles to the east.

Further east in the China-Burma-India Theater, two Chinese armies under the American General Joseph Stillwell were smashed and the overland supply route (the 'Burma Road') from India to China through Burma was closed.

Every night fires from torpedoed ships lit up the east coast of the United States as U-boats prowled almost unmolested offshore. For the seaman and sailors in Atlantic and Arctic convoys it wasn't a question of if you'd be torpedoed, but when. On the west coast of the United States the first Japanese attack on the U.S. mainland came when a submarine shelled an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California, on May 2.

On the Eastern Front in Russia the Soviet armies were being hard pressed to hold their positions. Soviet Premier Josef Stalin demanded the U.S. and Britain immediately open a second front in Europe, forcing Germany to move forces westward.

* Among the prisoners who died in the POW camp was Coast Guard Lieutenant James E. Crotty, the only Coast Guard POW in World War II. For the full story see: *Lt. Thomas James Eugene Crotty: Mine Specialist, Demolitions Expert, Naval Officer, Artilleryman, Marine and Coast Guardsman in the Battle for Corregidor* by William H. Thiesen, Historian, Coast Guard Atlantic Area, <https://www.uscg.mil/history/people/CrottyThomasEbio.pdf>

Meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov in May 1942, President Roosevelt, concerned that the Russians might make a separate peace with Germany, promised Molotov that he “expected” to launch a second front that year.* Churchill and his chiefs of staff were convinced that an invasion of Northern France was not practical at that time. Due to insufficient troops and inadequate landing craft, they believed such a move would fail.

Meanwhile, the Japanese made their next move to isolate Australia – the occupation of Port Moresby on the southwest coast of Papua New Guinea. Their relentless advance had brought them, by May 1942, to a point within 200 air miles of Port Moresby, the main Allied outpost in New Guinea. The possession of this port was vital to both combatants. A heavily escorted invasion force left the Japanese base at Rabaul on May 4 only to run into U.S. Admiral Jack Fletcher’s carrier task force.

On May 5 and 6, opposing carrier groups sought each other, and in the morning of May 7 Japanese carrier-based planes sank the U.S. destroyer *Sims* and fleet oiler *Neosho*. Fletcher’s planes sank the light carrier *Shōhō* and a cruiser. The next day Japanese aircraft damaged the U.S. carrier *Lexington*, which was eventually scuttled, and damaged the carrier *Yorktown*, while U.S. planes so crippled the large Japanese carrier *Shōkaku* that it had to retire from action. So many Japanese planes were lost that the Port Moresby invasion force, without adequate air cover and harassed by Allied land-based bombers, turned back to Rabaul. For the first time since Pearl Harbor, Japanese plans were blocked.

In the Battle of the Coral Sea the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) was beaten in the first aircraft carrier battle in history. U.S. losses included the carrier *Lexington* sunk, the carrier *Yorktown* damaged, one destroyer and one oiler sunk, 69 aircraft destroyed, and 656 men killed. Japan lost a light carrier, one destroyer, three small warships, and 92 aircraft. One fleet carrier, one destroyer,

* There are discussions regarding what Roosevelt promised to do. The official transcript reads: “The President then put to General Marshall the query whether the U.S. was preparing a second front. ‘Yes,’ replied the General. The President then authorized Mr. Molotov to inform Mr. Stalin that we expect the formation of a second front this year.” Molotov’s summary to Stalin quoted FDR as saying, “This is our hope. This is our wish.” Sources: i) Rzheshesky, Oleg, *War and Diplomacy: The Making of the Grand Alliance*, Taylor & Breach, Abingdon, 1996, pages 179–180, 185–187, 204–206, 219; and ii) *August 1942: Winston Churchill and the Raid on Dieppe. “The People Who Planned It Should Be Shot”*, Churchill Center, *Finest Hour* 154, Spring 2012, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/73-finest-hour-154/1679-august-1942-winston-churchill-and-the-raid-on-dieppe>

two smaller warships, and one transport were damaged, and 966 men were killed. Tactically the Japanese had won, but the strategic victory belonged to the U.S. Although the U.S. lost a carrier, a fleet oiler, and a destroyer, Japan's planned invasion of Port Moresby was stopped.

The turning point in the War in the Pacific occurred on June 3–7 at the Battle of Midway, an island 3,000 miles northwest of Hawaii. After initial heavy aircraft losses, U.S. torpedo planes and dive-bombers from the carriers *Enterprise*, *Hornet*, and *Yorktown* destroyed four Japanese carriers, and a cruiser, and damaged another cruiser and two destroyers. The U.S. lost *Yorktown*, one destroyer, 150 land- and carrier-based aircraft, and 307 men.

Three U.S. airmen, Ensign Wesley Osmus, a pilot from *Yorktown*, Ensign Frank O'Flaherty, a pilot from *Enterprise* and Aviation Machinist's Mate B. F. (or B. P.) Bruno Gaido, the radioman-gunner of O'Flaherty's SBD, were captured by the Japanese during the battle. All three were interrogated, and then killed by being tied to water-filled kerosene cans and thrown overboard to drown.²²

IJN losses were four fleet carriers, one cruiser, 292 aircraft, and 3,057 men. Five other ships suffered damage. The battle turned back the Japanese invasion force bound for Midway. It also broke the back of Japanese carrier air power and killed the cream of Japanese carrier aircraft pilots.²³

Through the grim, early days of 1942 Allied planners worked to turn the tide. Command structures in each theater – the Pacific, North Africa/Mediterranean, and China–Burma–India – were established. Competing Navy and Army interests posed a problem in the Pacific. Therefore, on March 30 the U.S. Joint Chiefs established the two Pacific areas – the Pacific Ocean Areas and Southwest Pacific Area – set their geographical limits, named the commanders, and assigned missions.

Admiral Chester Nimitz would command Pacific Ocean Areas and General Douglas MacArthur the Southwest Pacific Area. Nimitz's command encompassed Hawaii, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, the Mandated Islands, and Japan, except for a broad band of ocean off the coast of Central and South America. MacArthur was responsible for Australia, the Philippines, New Guinea, the Solomons, the Bismarck Archipelago, and all of the Netherlands Indies except Sumatra.²⁴ In the China–Burma–India Theater U.S. Army Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell assumed the position of chief of staff to Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek.

It wasn't until September 12 that Allied Forces Headquarters, which planned and directed ground, air, and naval operations and military government activities in the North African and Mediterranean theaters, was established. The Commander-in-Chief, Allied (Expeditionary) Force was General Dwight D. Eisenhower. His Deputy Commander-in-Chief, British General Harold Alexander, was responsible for the detailed planning and preparation, and the actual conduct, of combat operations.

The United States and Britain examined the feasibility of a cross-channel attack into France during the summer of 1942, primarily to take pressure off the Soviet Union. Codenamed *Sledgehammer*, the operation was to open with a 15-day air attack, the strategic purpose of which would be to divert the German Air Force from the east. The immediate tactical objectives were to establish control of the air over the English Channel and at least 60 miles inland between Dunkirk and Abbeville, and to inflict the maximum damage on German military installations and lines of communication.

The British chiefs of staff were steadfastly opposed to *Sledgehammer* as they considered it an operation that had no reasonable chance of success. Since it would mainly involve British troops under British command their opposition was decisive.²⁵ Throughout the discussions, apart from a listing of the barge requirements and a notation that both the Americans and British would have to construct special craft, very little attention was given to the critical problem of landing craft. In July the decision was made to abandon *Sledgehammer* and undertake the invasion of North Africa as the major effort in the Atlantic in 1942.

Despite the decision to invade North Africa, on August 19, Operation *Rutter* (later renamed *Jubilee*) commenced – a raid on Dieppe in France. The two chief purposes of the Dieppe raid were to test German defensive strength and tactics on a strategically important shoreline and to gain experience in combined operations techniques for large forces. Prime Minister Winston Churchill called it “an indispensable preliminary to full-scale operations.”²⁶

Approximately 5,000 Canadians, 1,000 British troops, 15 Free French commandos, and 50 U.S. Rangers along with 237 ships and landing craft, constituted the assault force. Seventy-four squadrons of aircraft, of which 66 were fighter squadrons, from the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, Free Polish Air Force, and the U. S. Army Air Force supported the operation. The force landed under British command at six beaches in the vicinity of Dieppe on the German-held Channel coast of France.

The attack was conducted in two phases. Commando units and elements of two Canadian regiments on board LCAs landed at 0450, without gunfire or air support, at four points on the flanks of the main Dieppe assault. They had been ordered to destroy two coastal defense batteries (of 12 6in howitzers each) and to support the main effort. Only the British No. 4 Commando, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lord Lovat managed to gain the surprise it sought, destroy the battery assigned to it, and quickly re-embark.

The main landing at Dieppe was preceded by limited destroyer and mortar gunboat bombardment and covered by a smoke screen. A total of 29 British and Canadian tanks in LCTs with accompanying engineers and infantry in LCAs formed the assault waves. Two tanks drowned as they went off the landing craft. The remaining 27, poorly suited for fighting through Dieppe's narrow streets, many of which were lined with reinforced and heavily fortified houses, suffered heavy casualties.

At 1100, under heavy fire, the withdrawal from the beaches began. It was completed by 1400. Tanks that had survived the battle were abandoned by their crews.

Out of the 6,086 men who made it ashore in this "indispensable" raid, 3,367 Canadians, 275 British commandos, and one U.S. Ranger were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The Royal Navy lost the destroyer HMS *Berkeley* sunk, and 33 landing craft, suffering 550 dead and wounded. The RAF lost over 100 aircraft to the Luftwaffe's 48. The German army casualties were 311 dead and 280 wounded.

The positive results were a few prisoners taken, enemy forces and installations destroyed, and the collection of valuable intelligence about enemy coastal defenses.²⁷ Allied losses were viewed as a necessary evil. Winston Churchill remarked that, "My impression of 'Jubilee' is that the results fully justified the heavy cost" and that it "was a Canadian contribution of the greatest significance to final victory."²⁸ However, no other major raid was mounted in the three months leading up to the invasion of North Africa (Operation *Torch*) in November.

In the Pacific, although their invasion of Port Moresby, New Guinea, was blocked by Australian and New Zealand forces in May, the Japanese established a major base at Rabaul on New Britain Island and, further south, the bases on the Solomons and New Guinea. From Lae and Salamaua on the northern

coast of New Guinea they threatened the main Australian base at Port Moresby, the key to MacArthur's defense of Australia. In June they began to construct airfields on Tulagi and Guadalcanal at the southeastern tip of the Solomons. These posed an even more grave threat to the Allied positions in New Caledonia and the Fijis.

General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, and Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, issued a joint directive on July 2, 1942, calling for an offensive to be mounted at once with the ultimate object of seizing the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area. The directive laid down three major phases or tasks:

Task One was the seizure of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi, and adjacent positions;

Task Two, the conquest of the remainder of the Solomons and of the northwest coast of New Guinea;

Task Three, the final assault on Rabaul and the surrounding area.

The Navy chose Guadalcanal and Tulagi as the first U.S. amphibious offensive operation. D-Day was set for August 7.²⁹

The die was cast and reconquest was about to begin.

CHAPTER 2

FIRST STRIKE

GUADALCANAL, TULAGI, GAVUTU, AND FLORIDA SOUTH SOLOMON ISLANDS, AUGUST 1942–FEBRUARY 1943

Although the Japanese forces were turned back in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942, and defeated at Midway in June, they continued to expand their control in the Pacific by occupying the Attu and Kiska islands off Alaska as well as moving down the New Guinea coast toward Port Moresby in the South Pacific. Striking south from Rabaul, they also moved to Bougainville in the British Solomon Islands.

In April U.S. planners decided to halt the Japanese advance by attacking their bases in the southern Solomon Islands. Their objectives were the large island of Guadalcanal and the small islands of Tulagi and Gavutu, just off Florida Island, where the former British governmental headquarters provided modern buildings and equipment. The Japanese reportedly stationed 1,850 men in the Tulagi area and 5,275 on Guadalcanal, just 20 miles south across Sealark Channel to the south.

The need for quick action was reinforced when Australian coast watchers* reported that the seaplane base on Tulagi was being augmented with an airfield

* The Coast Watcher organization was originated by the Australian Navy in 1919 to provide protection along Australia's long coast line. By September 1939, there were about 800 coast watchers. The coast watchers' code name "Ferdinand" was chosen after the children's storybook character Ferdinand the Bull as a reminder that their purpose was not to fight and draw attention to themselves, but rather to quietly observe. Source: Feldt, Eric A., *The Coast Watchers*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1946

on Guadalcanal. The Japanese had already established airfields for land-based planes at Rabaul, Kieta on Bougainville, and now on Guadalcanal, along with seaplane bases at Gavutu, Gizo, Rekata Bay, Kieta, Buka Passage, and Tulagi. Aircraft from these bases bombed Darwin on Australia's northeast coast, interdicted Allied convoys bound for Australia, and, if left unchecked, would give the Japanese control over the entire region. As such, preparations for the invasion were accelerated, and D-Day was set for August 7.

Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, USN, was commander of all the United Nations land, sea, and air forces in SWPA with the exception of New Zealand's land defense forces. As there were not sufficient U.S. Army ground forces in the area to mount the invasion, the Marines were given the assignment.

Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, USMC, was to lead the occupation forces as commander of the 1st Marine Division, the first echelon of which reached New Zealand on June 14, 1942. The operation, codenamed *Watchtower*,* was composed of three major task forces. Task Force Negat, commanded by Vice Admiral Jack Fletcher, USN, would supply aircraft carrier support for the attack. Amphibious Force Task Force Tare, under command of Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, was to make the principal attack, transporting and landing the Marines and defending the transport convoys from surface attack. The third and final task force, Mike, with Rear Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, RN, commanding, would provide aerial scouting and advance bombing of the operations area.

The invasion force, composed of 80 ships, proceeded to Koro Island in the Fijis where rehearsal exercises were held from July 28 through July 31. Only a third of the Marines who were supposed to take part in the rehearsal for an amphibious landing had the opportunity to debark or get any shore-side training. On the positive side, gunfire support ships and the air support aircraft carried out the pre-landing shelling and bombings as planned and learned from the practice drills.

John Colby, one of the landing craft coxswains on board USS *Hunter Liggett* (AP-27) under Commander Louis W. Perkins, USCG, remembers one of the key obstacles they came across when rehearsing the landings: "The coral reefs were tearing up propellers and bottoms of the boats. I went to Commander Dexter [USCG] and recommended we stop before we ran out of boats for the real landings."

* Because of the almost ad hoc nature of the operation it acquired the nickname "Operation Shoestring".

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The rehearsals would go on, however, Commander C. B. Hunt, USCG, commanding officer of USS *Albena* (AK-26) recalled:

Off Onslow Beach in the early days I acted as a spare parts supply ship, doling out engines and propellers to replace those that were burned or beaten up. How well the others had been trained I do not know, but we all certainly heard from the Boss [Rear Admiral Turner] after the first rehearsal in the Fijis. Kelly sounded off in no uncertain terms and no one was spared. We hoisted the boats in and did it again. Times were cut about fifty percent, but still it was not good enough. The third time we all thought that we did a real bang-up job, but not so, according to the Boss. And he was right. After a conference aboard his ship that night we went out to sea, came in and did it again in about one third of the time of our first try and with ten times the precision.

It was planned that 19,546 Marines organized into eight groups would debark over a five-hour period. The first at 0740 would be the 1st Battalion, 2d Marine Division (Combat Team C) landing on the south coast of Florida Island at Haleta and Halavo. The 1st Raider Battalion,* commanded by Colonel Merritt A. "Red Mike" Edson, followed by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marine Division, was to land on Tulagi's south coast at 0800 and was to seize the northwest section of the island.

Marines of the 5th Division (less the 2d Battalion) (Combat Group A) were to land at 0910 on Red Beach, about halfway between Lunga and Koli points on the north coast of Guadalcanal (codenamed "Cactus"), and seize the beachhead. Combat Group B, landing in the same place 50 minutes later, was to pass through the right of Group A and seize a grassy knoll four miles south of Lunga Point. Last, at 1200, the 1st Marine Parachute Battalion (Combat Team B) was to land on the east coast of Gavutu Island at H+4 hours, seize that island, and press on to adjacent Tanambogo (Tulagi and adjacent islands were codenamed "Ringbolt").

The Support Group, with its command post afloat in *Hunter Liggett*, was to go ashore at Red Beach, Guadalcanal, arrange artillery support for the attack, and coordinate anti-aircraft and close-in ground defense of the beachhead area.

* The first two elite Marine Raider battalions were established in 1942. Their composition was modeled after the British Commandos and the Chinese Communist Eighth Route Army guerrilla organization and tactics.

Division Reserve Group was to be prepared to land Combat Team B on Gavutu Island and attach Combat Team C to the Tulagi Group.

The 3d Marine Defense Battalion was to land detachments on Red Beach, Tulagi, and Gavutu on receipt of orders. Sufficient men were to be left on board the transports to ensure expeditious unloading of all ships, working on a 24-hour basis while shore party commanders were to coordinate traffic in the beach areas. This included calling on troop commanders in their immediate vicinity for assistance in handling supplies from landing beaches to dumps.

Invasion – the 1st Day

Coast Guard Signalman Ray Evans recalls:

At 0133 on August 7, the dark shore line of Guadalcanal could be plainly seen under the thin crescent of the waning moon. A little later Savo Island was visible. An hour and a half later, the two squadrons separated, Squadron YOKE passing north of Savo Island toward Tulagi and Squadron X-Ray passing east to south of Savo Island along the north shore of Guadalcanal.

There was no challenge and the fleet's arrival was apparently undetected. At 0530 the first planes took off from the carriers. The fifteen transports of Squadron X-Ray steamed along the silent Guadalcanal shore in two columns of seven and eight ships, arranged in the initial debarkation order. At 0613 the bombardment of the coast was begun by the [cruiser] *Quincy* and dive-bombers shortly afterward began attacking enemy shore positions.

In the predawn darkness the flash of gun turrets was like lightning flashes followed by the rushing sound of a train passing and the heart-stopping concussion of their impact on the beaches and inland. We see the explosions on shore, and I remember thinking what sort of hell that must be to be on the receiving end.¹

At 0547 the transports halted 9,000 yards [four and a half nautical miles] off Red Beach. Boats were hoisted out and the debarkation began. Cruisers and destroyers, which were not giving fire support for the landings, formed a double arc about them to protect against enemy planes and submarines.

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Tulagi

The bombardment of the Tulagi area began almost at the same time as that of Red Beach on Guadalcanal. Going into action at 0614, U.S. fighters and dive-bombers started fires, destroyed eighteen enemy planes on the water, strafed the beaches, and pounded every building that might be hiding the enemy.

At 0637 the ships arrived in the Tulagi transport area. They were half an hour behind schedule so the landing force was immediately ordered ashore. H-hour was scheduled at 0800 and remained unchanged so that none of the transports stood idle before their troops were landed. Even the preliminary landing force for Haleta, and the one for Halavo some distance away, both of which were in the USS *President Jackson* (AP-37), made the first landing on time.

Company B, 2d Marines, under the command of Captain E. J. Crane, landed at 0740 near the village of Haleta on a Florida Island promontory overlooking the island fortress of Tulagi. Heavily armed Japanese defenders resisted fiercely. Well entrenched and cut off from escape, they fought to the death.

Louis T. Birch, Boatswain's Mate, Second Class, USCG, on board the fast attack transport USS *McKean* (ADP-5), remembers the landing:

I was detailed as engineer of one of four landing boats that we carried on our ship. All boat crews were given instructions and maps showing the exact place that our boats were to land. The place chosen for us was directly in front of a graveyard. The landings were supposed to be made on the side of the island where it was shown as unfit for landings in order to help us surprise the enemy.

The boats to be used in this landing from my ship were thirty-six foot Higgins boats, powered by Gray Diesel motors, having three-eighth-inch armor plate in bow and stern and armed with two thirty-caliber machine guns. Most of the landing boats had a four-man crew – coxswain, engineer, and two machine gunners.

About 0715, the four ships in our division proceeded to a position about two and a half miles from the beach at the point we were supposed to land. Boats were loaded at the rail at 0730 and we hit the line of departure at H-hour, around 0830.

Five-inch shells were flying over our heads all the way in, and range of fire was raised a little as we got closer. When we were about five hundred yards from the beach, Jap machine guns opened fire at us. Then the Marine