

PETERSON, A. H.

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41

AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS  
(7 to 20 August, 1942)

Staff Presentation

DECLASSIFIED IAW DOD MEMO OF 3 MAY 1972, SUBJ:  
DECLASSIFICATION OF WWII RECORDS

Naval War College  
Newport, R.I.  
1 April 1944

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AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS  
(7 to 20 August, 1942.)

This mighty amphibious operation, the first of anything near its size in our nation's history, was pushed to a successful conclusion in the face of tremendous odds. Not the least of these odds was the extremely short time available for planning, training, and organizing the forces.

The report of this action is divided into five phases. The first phase deals with the departure from the United States, the planning and loading, the rehearsal in the FIJI ISLANDS and operations up to H-hour. The second phase covers the period from H-hour on 7 August, 1942, until the withdrawal of naval units from GUADALCANAL on the 9th of August. The third phase extends from the 9th until the 20th of August, when the First American Aircraft arrived on the field of GUADALCANAL. The fourth phase covers reinforcement of the initial force, during which the naval battle of the EASTERN SOLOMONS was fought, and limited offensive operations conducted by the Marines, later reinforced by Army units. In the last phase are the offensive operations and the final withdrawal of the Marines from GUADALCANAL. We shall endeavor to cover the amphibious operations of the first and second phases, and to touch briefly on the third phase. That will take us through the first two weeks of our occupation of GUADALCANAL.

The directive for the Lone Wolf Plan as this operation was called was received by General Vandegrift in May, 1942. At that time he was in command of the First Division at NEW RIVER, NORTH



CAROLINA. The Lone Wolf Plan directed the First Marine Division to proceed to NEW ZEALAND to establish an advance amphibian training base, with the prospect of offensive operations to take place about the first of January, 1943.

ON SLIDE B-44-1291, LEFT      ON SLIDE B43-794 RIGHT

The Division headquarters and certain Division Units, including the 5th Marines, arrived in NEW ZEALAND on the 14th of June. On the 26th of June, while the Second Echelon of the First Division was still at sea, General Vandegrift was informed of immediate plans for offensive operations in the South Pacific. The Division was to be reinforced by the Second Marines, a regiment of the Second Marine Division, at that time somewhere in the South Pacific. He was also to receive reinforcements of the first Raider Battalion and the Third Defense Battalion. The tentative area of operations was selected as the TULAGI-GUADALCANAL area, and at this time D-Day was tentatively fixed for the first of August. That was exactly three weeks after the scheduled arrival of the Second Echelon from the UNITED STATES.

On the 9th of July, the Commander-in-Chief of the UNITED STATES Pacific Fleet, issued a Directive in the form of a letter of instructions to the Commander South Pacific Force. This letter stated: "There are indications that the enemy will attempt to extend to the South and Southeast the control he now holds on most of NEW GUINEA-NEW BRITAIN-SOLOMON area....The strength of the striking force which the enemy can bring to bear has been greatly decreased by his losses during the battles of CORAL SEA and MIDWAY, and in any event it has been



found feasible for the United Powers with the means now available to undertake to recapture the bases in the TULAGI area."

ON SLIDE B43-2105 LEFT

ON SLIDE B43-2130 RIGHT

OFF SLIDE B44-1291 LEFT

OFF SLIDE B43-794 RIGHT

At this time, certain forces not attached to the South Pacific Force were made available to Admiral Ghormley as shown on the right slide. These included three task forces, each with one aircraft carrier, cruisers, destroyers and tankers. One new battleship, the NORTH CAROLINA, was also included. In addition, certain cruisers and destroyers from the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC Force and a large number of miscellaneous ships were made available to Admiral Ghormley.

The left slide blocks out the peculiar command relationship. Note that Vice Admiral Fletcher had command of the Expeditionary Force. Rear Admiral Turner had the Amphibious Force with which we are directly concerned today.

Admiral Ghormley issued his Operation Plan 1-42 on the 16th of July. He placed the Expeditionary Force under command of Vice Admiral Fletcher in the SARATOGA. In this task organization he gave command of carrier air, to Rear Admiral Noyes in the WASP; command of the Amphibious Force to Rear Admiral Turner in the MC CAWLEY; and command of aircraft South Pacific to Rear Admiral McCain in the CURTIS.

PAUSE

In this Operation Plan Admiral Ghormley stated the task for the South Pacific Force as: "This force will successively seize, occupy and defend (1) TULAGI and adjacent positions, (2)



the SANTA CRUZ Islands; for the purpose of denying those areas to JAPAN, and in preparation for further offensive operations." He divided the operations into three phases; (1) a rehearsal of the TULAGI-GUADALCANAL operation in the FIJI ISLANDS; (2) the seizure and the occupation of the TULAGI-GUADALCANAL area on D-Day; and (3) the capture and occupation of NDENI in the SANTA CRUZ Islands. This last phase was never attempted.

REPEAT LEFT SLIDE

ON SLIDE B44-1424, TASK FORCE 62

OFF SLIDE B43-2130

Here is shown the brief organization of Task Force 61.2 or 62.

PAUSE

The task given to the Expeditionary Force for Phase 2 was: "On D-Day capture and occupy TULAGI and adjacent positions, including an adjoining position on GUADALCANAL suitable for the construction of landing fields. Initiate construction of landing fields without delay. Defend seized areas until relieved by forces to be designated later. Call on Task Force 63 for special aircraft missions."

OFF SLIDE B43-2105 LEFT

OFF SLIDE B44-1424 RIGHT

General Vandegrift stated:-

"The complicated logistical factors were appreciated by all concerned, but were dismissed from consideration in view of the urgency and high national importance of the projected undertaking. It was obvious from the beginning of the planning stage that the number of ships available for the operation would be insufficient to meet the requirements of combat loading



and that some of the units must be left behind. All excess equipment and supplies were eliminated and even normal supplies were radically reduced. Sea bags, extra clothing, bedding and company property were stored in WELLINGTON and bulk supplies such as rations, fuel, etc., were reduced from a normal 90-day level to a 60-day basis, and only 10 units of fire were embarked, 3 in each AP with a unit thereon, and 7 in the supporting AKs."

General Vandegrift reported that there was no time for deliberate planning. In many instances, irrevocable decisions had to be made before essential features of the naval operations could be ascertained. The success of the operations depended largely upon surprise, and all preparations were surrounded by the utmost secrecy. Many preliminary measures were carried out under the guise of preparations for a period of amphibious training. The movement from the UNITED STATES had not been planned with a view to immediate operations. APs such as the WAKEFIELD, which had little cargo capacity, had been used, and this resulted in the troops being separated from their supplies and equipment. All of this necessitated the unloading and re-combat loading of these vessels in NEW ZEALAND.

ON SLIDE B44-895 LEFT

ON SLIDE B44-1291 RIGHT

Remember this was the first really large scale amphibious operation in our country's history. There were mistakes; there were bound to be in such a hurried operation.. I may stress some of the errors but that will not detract from the phenomenal success that was achieved in the face of possible catastrophe. By stressing those errors we hope to avert them in future operations.



The attack force sortied from WELLINGTON on the 22nd of July, 25 days after the receipt of the plan. A rendezvous was effected with the support force and other units on the 26th. At this time the Third Defense Battalion joined the convoy; and heavy cruisers and destroyers were added to strengthen the attack force. On the 28th of July rehearsals were held at KORO in the FIJI ISLANDS. These rehearsals were not complete rehearsals. They consisted only of landing the troops into landing craft and starting for the beach. But the Naval Fire Support Group did fire at this time at shore targets, and the Aerial Bombardment Group did bomb shore targets on the island. During this period the necessary staff visits between the naval and landing force commanders took place and further details for the execution of the attack were decided. The entire force took departure from KORO ISLAND area on the night of August 1st, and arrived in the area of expected operations during the night of 6th-7th August. The Attack Force, under Rear Admiral Turner approached TULAGI from the South and West.

REPEAT LEFT SLIDE

OFF SLIDE B44-1291 RIGHT

ON SLIDE B43-776 RIGHT

That organization is shown on the slide. The preparation and approach had been so well concealed that the movement was a complete surprise. This fact was a notable achievement when you take into consideration a force of this size, in an area in which the Japanese should have had comparatively good intelligence. The approach was undetected, although General Vandegrift stated that even a cursory observation could have detected



the convoys. And, further, later on we located five radars which had been in commission on TULAGI and GUADALCANAL.

REPEAT LEFT SLIDE

OFF SLIDE B43-776 RIGHT

ON SLIDE B43-796 RIGHT

The approach formation is shown on this slide. Columns of squadrons, 6 miles between squadrons, speed 12 knots. The sea was smooth, the sky overcast and visibility was about 2,000 yards.

OFF SLIDE B44-895 LEFT

OFF SLIDE B43-796 RIGHT

ON SLIDE B43-795 LEFT

ON SLIDE B43-776 RIGHT

As indicated on the slide of Task Organization, the landing force was divided into two transport groups (Transport Group, X-ray and Transport Group YOKE). At some distance from SAVO ISLAND the two groups separated; Group X-ray rounded the western end of GUADALCANAL and proceeded directly to its designated transport area, called X-RAY; Group YOKE continued northward around SAVO ISLAND to a position south of TULAGI ISLAND designated as Area YOKE. The routes and the transport areas are shown on the screen.

OFF SLIDE B44-795

REPEAT RIGHT SLIDE

ON SLIDE B 43-777

Between 0610 and 0613, that is, 20 minutes before sunrise on 7 August, the fire support groups, which consisted of cruisers, destroyers and mine sweepers of the escort, opened fire on a prearranged schedule. This schedule called for fires in designated areas. There were no particular targets mentioned. The ships' gunfire was coordinated with bombing and strafing



by carrier planes, which arrived a few minutes after the ships opened fire. On GUADALCANAL, oil fires were started. In the vicinity of TULAGI one small ship loaded with gasoline was hit and blown up, and 18 Japanese sea planes were destroyed on the water. The ships' gunfire and the bombing were continued sporadically until H-hour. The landing at TULAGI was fixed for 0720 and called H-hour. The landing on GUADALCANAL was fixed for 0910 and called ZERO hour. The times fixed for these landings were dependent upon the time it took to sweep the shallow areas for mines. At the opening of the fire it was reported that no enemy reaction was detected on GUADALCANAL. The transport Group X-RAY proceeded to its transport area, and at 0650 started hoisting out landing craft immediately.

As the air support plan tied in with the gunfire plan, I will read some details from Annex C of the 1st Marine Division Operations Order 7-42 of 20 July,

ON SLIDE B43-2105 LEFT

ON SLIDE B44-895 RIGHT

OFF SLIDE B43-777 LEFT

OFF SLIDE B43-776 RIGHT

The following support will be provided by aircraft:

(a) Beginning daylight D-Day attack hostile aircraft and anti-aircraft installations in TULAGI-GUADALCANAL.

(b) One liaison plane over GUADALCANAL area beginning H-30 minutes D-Day to sunset and during daylight hours each day thereafter for air - ground liaison with the forces in that area.

(c) One liaison plane over TULAGI-GAVUTU area beginning H-hour D-Day to sunset and during daylight hours each day



thereafter for air - ground liaison with the forces in that area.

(d) Nine (9) VF planes and nine (9) VSB over GUADALCANAL and nine (9) VSB planes over TULAGI area on call 1st Marine Division beginning H-Hour D-Day for support missions and during daylight thereafter.

(e) One artillery spotting plane over GUADALCANAL from H-Hour D-Day during daylight.

(f) Maintain fighter protection over the landing and transport areas beginning daylight D-Day and during daylight thereafter.

(g) Missions to assist in neutralization of hostile forces off TULAGI by bombing northeast side of TULAGI from SASAPI to southeast end of island from H-10 to H-Hour.

(h) Bombing or attack missions assist in the neutralization of hostile forces on GAVUTU.

In a letter written to the Commandant of the Corps, General Vandegrift gave his opinion of the support given by the fire support groups and carrier groups as follows:

"The attack was preceded by an intensive bombardment by the Navy of forward slopes --- Reverse slopes were taken over by dive bombers. Ships' guns did excellent work. Naval support was excellent. Reaction on call instantaneous and accurate. Preliminary bombardment was wonderful and left nothing to be desired."

In his final report, however, General Vandergrift stated that neither bombers nor ships' guns affected troops in dugouts,



or caves, nor eliminated small arms fire on TULAGI, GAVUTU, and TANAMBAGO. It is regretted that greater use was not made of the cruiser, destroyer gunfire available for this specific purpose.

The WASP, SARATOGA and ENTERPRISE task forces arrived in a launching position 84 miles bearing 240° from TULAGI during the night. The night was bright off shore, with heavy clouds inshore, wind 19 knots from 130. At 0530 commenced launching planes in accordance with Commander Air Force Operation Plan. No lights were used. The early flights were given specified targets and areas of responsibility prior to taking off. The first flight arrived in the TULAGI-GAVUTU area at daybreak and are believed to have destroyed all enemy seaplanes in the area either on the water or on the beaches. Local command of the air had been achieved at least temporarily by the presence of three squadrons of 3 carriers SARATOGA, WASP and ENTERPRISE.

The task of supporting the landing of an amphibious Corps against opposition required thorough and precise planning, coordination and execution. The control of air operations of 3 carriers by pre-arranged schedules was effective not only in furnishing the support required, but it also permitted keeping one carrier ready to launch at all times, and incident there-to one deck ready to receive airplanes most of the time. It provided a high degree of mutual support by both aircraft and surface screens, and at the same time, by economy in fighter defense in the carrier area, permitted greater fighter strength in the transport area.



Both before and on D-Day, Army B-17 bombers from the Southwest Pacific command, and both B-17s and Navy Patrol planes from the South Pacific command were employed in scouting and search operations. Sea planes operated from tenders at SANTA CRUZ and MALAITA. They pushed the area of search to the North of the SOLOMONS and heavy bombing attacks were made on Japanese bases which included RABAU.

OFF SLIDE B43-2105 LEFT

OFF SLIDE B44-895 RIGHT

ON SLIDE B43-779 RIGHT

The slide shows task organization of the landing force, the First Marine Division.

Upon receipt of the initial order for the TULAGI-GUADALCANAL movement, immediate steps were taken to collect all available information concerning the terrain, beaches, climate, attitude of the natives, disposition and numbers of the enemy. Existing Army and Navy monographs were consulted. The divisional intelligence officer was sent to AUCKLAND, MELBOURNE and PORT MORESBY. He then contacted residents, former government officials and merchant marine officers who were familiar with that area. Some of these people contacted were commissioned, or made Petty Officers in the Australian armed forces and performed magnificent service throughout the operations. General Vandegrift reported that these men rendered valuable aid in correcting existing maps, interpreting aerial photographs and generally evaluating any enemy information received. Throughout Phase I, aerial reconnaissance was conducted, and on the 17th of July two Marine officers flew in a B-17 from PORT



MORESBY and made visual as well as photographic reconnaissance of the area.

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A coast watching system had been established by the British and this also rendered invaluable service, especially the one on GUADALCANAL. They made three broadcasts daily but, due to the hasty arrangements made before the departure of the expedition, a satisfactory interception of the code was not accomplished after the expedition left NEW ZEALAND. Prior to that time, detailed information concerning aircraft and ship movements, estimates of the enemy strength, new installations and construction, were reported three times daily, and were received.

Two studies were developed--one on the GUADALCANAL area and one on the TULAGI area, and they kept track after the 27th of June of all enemy dispositions and movements. After leaving the FIJI ISLANDS, overlays were distributed to all units concerned, showing insofar as possible, exact location of enemy forces, all gun positions, air fields, seaplane ramps and other installations. Those that were absolutely known to exist were placed on the over-lays in RED, and those that were unconfirmed but had been reported were placed on in GREEN.

On the 8th of July, the British Resident Commissioner on GUADALCANAL reported:

"Airdrome site has been cleared at LUNGA. Anti-aircraft guns installed at KUKUM and TAIVU, eleven and 20 miles east of LUNGA, respectively. Stores were being sent by vehicle from



LUNGA and from TENARU. Small detachments had been established at CAPE ESPERANCE."

On 27th July, it was estimated that the Japanese had approximately 5,000 men on GUADALCANAL, consisting of an infantry regiment over 2,000 men, an engineer battalion of 520 men, an anti-aircraft battalion of 625 men, two construction forces about 700 men, labor units 900 men, and an advanced aviation unit of 85 men. Their armament was estimated to be 99 machine guns, 19 heavy machine guns, 12 anti-aircraft, 6-37mm Anti-Tanks, and 6-7mm infantry guns. The TULAGI area estimate was made from information reported by reliable native sources. They stated that there were 1500 troops and quantities of supplies in the TULAGI-GAVUTU-TANAMBOGO area.

The Intelligence estimate contained five enemy capabilities:

1. ORANGE can execute a defense of the North Coast of GUADALCANAL by moving mobile forces to supplement established beach defenses, then withdrawing inland, utilizing previously prepared positions on favorable terrain for continued defensive measures or counter-attack.
2. ORANGE can execute a vigorous defense of his installations in the KUKUM-LUNGA POINT-TENARU area, by reinforcements and consolidation of position, and supported by land and naval forces and aircraft from ORANGE bases to the Northwest, and land nearby forces from the TULAGI area.
3. ORANGE can withdraw to the Central mountain ridge, and wage guerilla warfare, staging surprise raids in force, and



harassing BLUE forces, pending the arrival of reinforcements.

4. ORANGE can withdraw to TULAGI, upon a show of force by BLUE, and reinforce the forces in that area.

5. ORANGE can withdraw to the Northwest.

It stated further:

"ORANGE will probably expedite construction of facilities for land-based aircraft on GUADALCANAL. Utilizing aircraft based there, supplemented by aircraft from land and sea bases to the Northwest and combined with all naval and land forces available, ORANGE will probably execute a vigorous defense against a BLUE attempt to secure control of the TULAGI-GUADALCANAL area. It is estimated ORANGE will execute a defense in a manner similar to that which has gained him continued past successes, combining excellent physical condition of personnel, individual adeptness in jungle warfare, high morale, and cunning leadership. However, neither ORANGE troops nor their leaders have yet experienced determined, well armed, aggressive and disciplined opposition."

ON SLIDE B44-1294 LEFT

ON SLIDE B43-798 RIGHT

Now let us examine the operations on TULAGI. H-Hour for the TULAGI operations was fixed at 0720. BLUE beach was an area 500 yards wide on the southeastern end of TULAGI in the vicinity of the Radio Station. Indicated in color on the right slide. General Vandegrift stated: "We picked an unpromising beach, one in which the guides said if we didn't mind losing the boats we could get over the coral reef. It turned out the coral was rotten and we didn't lose a single boat, and by going



on the coral reef we achieved surprise on the Japanese. Not a single man was a casualty until after the beach had been gained."

Lieutenant Colonel Edson, who commanded that force, stated that the naval gunfire and aerial bombing was in progress when the first wave landed. That means the Japanese had taken cover, as no fire was received by the first company. He said that after <sup>the</sup> initial confusion, the Japs recovered and fought stoutly. The defending force was estimated as one Battalion of Marines plus a battery of Anti-Aircraft. The Japanese had organized TULAGI extremely well. Their trenches and shelters were skillfully emplaced under buildings and hedges, and all the dirt that had been excavated had been very carefully removed, so that the detection of any field works was extremely difficult. There were no mortars or heavy machine guns located on TULAGI. Edson said that the majority of the fighting took place around 50 to 60 yards from the beach. He said the Marines fire was extremely accurate, but the volume was very small. The Japanese were still holding this part of the island when sunset fell on the 7th. Two tanks were landed, which would have been of considerable value to the attacking forces, but unfortunately they got bogged down in a swamp and their services were lost. Colonel Edson stated that after a night of small scale counter-attacks by the Japanese, including banzai and a lot of noise, they resumed the defensive at daylight, using snipers and prepared defensive positions. These were all reduced by the afternoon of the 9th. The dead on



TULAGI -- dead Japanese -- numbered nearly 1,000.

ON SLIDE B 43-799 LEFT

ON SLIDE B43-842 RIGHT

OFF SLIDE B44-1294 LEFT

OFF SLIDE B43-798 RIGHT

Zero Hour for GUADALCANAL was fixed for 0910 and after preliminary bombardment the first wave landed, two minutes behind schedule. At 0942 the HUNTER LIGGETT stood in and anchored 2,000 yards off RED Beach.

PAUSE

Repeat LEFT Slide ON SLIDE B43-797 RIGHT  
OFF SLIDE B43-842 RIGHT

The remainder of the ships in Transport Group X-RAY also moved shore-ward and anchored, where debarkation of troops and unloading continued.

PAUSE

Repeat LEFT Slide ON SLIDE B44-121 RIGHT  
OFF SLIDE B43-797 RIGHT

The landing on GUADALCANAL was made by Combat Group A (less 1 Bn) on RED Beach on a front of 1600 yards with 2 combat teams abreast. Its right flank rested on the shore line, and it was to seize the line of the TENARU River. A second Combat Group landed 50 minutes later, passed through the right, and, in conjunction with the group on the beach, seized a grassy knoll 4 miles south of LUNGA point and the air field. These operations were carried out against little or no resistance, although sniper fire developed during the day. By nightfall of the 7th, approximately 10,000 men had been landed in the GUADALCANAL Area, supplied with 3 units of fire.

ON SLIDE B44-1295  
OFF SLIDE B43-799

ON SLIDE B44-1294 RIGHT  
OFF SLIDE B44-121 RIGHT



Continuing the operations of D-Day, on the Florida Group, the First Parachute Battalion landed on the east coast of GAVUTU at H plus 4 hours. They were to seize that island and then seize TANAMBOGO. The Commander (Major Williams) was seriously wounded on landing, and this particular operation was a very hard nut to crack. Our losses in the capture of GAVUTU were serious, and although the Parachute Battalion was immediately reinforced, the attempt to land on TANAMBOGO a couple hundred yards northwest of GAVUTU on the 7th was repulsed with heavy losses. Additional naval gunfire and dive bombing were called for. The preparatory bombing and shell fire had caused little or no apparent personnel loss among the defenders because of caves, shelters and trenches which provided excellent protection. The Japanese were able to direct a concentration of rifle and machine gunfire on the few landing spaces that were available to our forces.

The Japanese made extensive use of natural caves, and they replaced casualties at nearby guns from personnel held in reserve in caves. It was found necessary by our troops to release the firing mechanisms of all the grenades, until it was dangerous to withdraw before releasing - because the Japs began tossing them back. And some of their dugouts were constructed so with a shield in front that our forces couldn't throw a grenade into the cave or into the dugout. The Marines had to resort to improvised flame throwers and dynamite, and a good many of the Japanese were surprised in that way. There were two 3" naval guns on GAVUTU. The military bombardment



had knocked out one of those guns and the Marines tried to take the other one for use against TANAMBOGO. As they went up the hill they were suffering pretty heavy casualties, and a Jap rushed down to a dugout underneath and finally set off the ammunition storage. He blew the whole top of the hill up and the six of our men closest to the gun.

Our forces gained a foothold on TANAMBOGO during the night of the 8th and this island was in our hands the next afternoon, the 9th. It is interesting to note that of the reported 1,000 Japanese on those two islands, 955 were buried; 20 were taken prisoners; 16 of these prisoners were civilian laborers, and the remaining were wounded soldiers.

ON SLIDE B44-1293  
OFF SLIDE B44-1295

REPEAT RIGHT SLIDE

A composite report made by the Boat Group Commanders who landed on GAVUTU states:

"It was observed that the enemy had not been driven from the beach at GAVUTU by the shelling and the bombing preceding the landing. Furthermore, TANAMBOGO withstood two days of intermittent bombing and strafing, and was not taken until a DD closed in to point blank range and shelled it for several minutes. This fire was necessary to insure the capture of TANAMBOGO without further heavy casualties." At this time let us point out the regrettable fact that more destroyer gunfire was not used initially. Many lives might have been saved had TANAMBOGO been properly reduced by naval gunfire. A costly lesson was learned and we have made good use of naval gunfire



since in the SOLOMONS, the ALEUTIANS, the MEDITERRANEAN and the islands of the CENTRAL PACIFIC.

The report by the Boat Group Commanders also stated that the landing craft had nine miles to run to the beach in choppy water, that the men landed were drenched, cramped and some sea-sick, and that the equipment and ammunition had suffered heavily from salt spray.

The operations on FLORIDA ISLAND proceeded as planned and HALAVO fell to one battalion without resistance. MAKAMBO was also occupied after the capture of TANAMBOGO on the 10th. About 6,100 were landed in the TULAGI-FLORIDA area supplied with 5 units of fire.

Let us now take a look at some of the phases of planning.

OFF SLIDE B44-1293 LEFT; ON SLIDE B43-834 RIGHT  
OFF SLIDE B44-1294 RIGHT

This extract from the Boat Assignment Tables shows where the various boats of the First Wave for 3 boat groups came from. The majority of the boats came from the vessels which were carrying the reserve regiment. Also note allocation for taking the tanks off the BELLATRIX. Practically every ship sent tank lighters to the BELLATRIX. In General Vandergrift's report he stated that he had formed a boat pool of 5 additional boats which accompanied the assault troops in. In case any boats had mechanical faults, or were knocked out, that he would have sufficient boats to get the desired men in and also to take care of any salvage.

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                                 ON SLIDE    B44-895



The second day of the operations, the Commander of the South Pacific Force (Vice Admiral Ghormley) approved the recommendation of Commander Task Force 61, (Rear Admiral Fletcher) to withdraw in order to save the carriers from fatal damage. Rear Admiral Fletcher explained:- "fighter strength had been reduced from 99 to 78, fuel was running low, and there were a large number of enemy torpedo and bombing planes in the vicinity."

In an endorsement on the preliminary reports of the operations to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, by the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, the latter stated:

"The simultaneous departure of all carrier task forces on the night of 8 - 9 August was most unfortunate, because it left the unloading of the APs and AKs without air cover. This, no doubt, was an important if not a deciding factor in the decision to withdraw the APs and AKs before they had completed unloading of all their important war materials and food supplies. Was it practical to fuel one Carrier Task Group at a time, leaving two available for the support of the operations?"

This remark is most interesting when we examine the events which took place after the transports arrived in the combat area. The vessels arrived and started unloading about 0650 on the 7th and departed the afternoon of the 9th. The Plan called for complete unloading in 72 hours. They remained in the area about 57 hours, and during this period less than one-half of the time was employed unloading: that is, only about 28 hours were actually employed to discharge a part of



the cargo.

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The ships left the area with varying degrees of the supplies still in their holds; for example, the HAYWOOD, which was combat loaded, had discharged 90% of her load, while on the other hand the BETELGEUSE, an AK, which undoubtedly carried a greater load of necessities, left the area when only 50% unloaded and carrying some of the 90 MM AA guns. Let us see what problems confronted the transports and supply ships, and what obstacles they encountered in the area. The log of one of the transports states:

- "0650 Arrived in transport area X-Ray, started immediately hoisting out landing boats.
- 0912 First wave landed.
- 0942 Stood in and anchored 2,000 yards off RED Beach in 28 fathoms. Debarkation continued.
- 1100 Coast watcher reported 18 Jap bombers had left Rabaul.
- 1320 18 bombers approached from N.W. in line formation at 12,000 feet. Screening vessels opened fire. Shortly thereafter all vessels of transport group opened fire. 2 or 3 planes shot down and rest apparently jettisoned their bombs. Debarkation and unloading resumed.
- 1455 Another warning received and 6 planes from direction of TULAGI were sighted.

The Transport Group Commander commented:

"Not withstanding the foregoing interruptions, supplies were piling up on the beach faster than could be moved, and by dark there were about 100 loaded boats at the beach and



50 more lying off waiting. It finally became necessary to discontinue unloading for the remainder of the night. In view of subsequent events this delay was of serious import."

It is evident that there was no shortage of boats and lighters for unloading. The log continued,

"August 8th -

0930 Resumed unloading.

1032 Enemy planes approaching reported. All vessels of the Transport Group were ordered to get under way and Form AA Cruising Disposition.

1157 20 or more twin-motored torpedo bombers approached from N.E. Screening vessels opened fire and the formation started to break up. Some passed over the transports, some ahead, and one astern. These were caught in effective AA fire and were being shot down in all directions. One plane crash-dived on deck of GEORGE F. ELLIOTT and the vessel burst into flame, heavy amidships - she hauled out of formation and part of her crew were seen going over her sides. HULL came alongside to help fight fire. (Later the HULL attempted to tow the ELLIOTT to the vicinity of RED Beach but was unsuccessful.)

The fire gained headway in the ELLIOTT, which was finally abandoned. The HULL fired 4 torpedoes at close range without effect. That vessel was still afloat and on fire when the transports returned from the area the following day."

The effect of the Cruiser engagement that night on the transports was limited to lighting the vessels with flares, and, the loss of sleep and rest by the crews by remaining at battle stations and getting under way. After the action subsided the transports returned to the beach area and resumed unloading.

At 1510, 9 August, Escort and convoy got under way. Some



naval personnel and many boats were left behind. The departure was hurried, so little unloading had been accomplished.

ON SLIDE B44-1292 RIGHT

A Transport Group Commander reported that the labor section of the shore party was unable to cope with the rapidity and quantity of supplies and equipment delivered at the Beach. He ascribes this to poor staff work, and a total lack of conception of the number of labor troops required to unload boats and move material off the beach, the failure to extend the beach limits earlier in the operations, and to some extent to the lack of control and direction over troops on and in the vicinity of the beach.

OFF SLIDE B49-1292 RIGHT

A more recent report concerning the reinforcement in early September of GUADALCANAL by the 7th Marines, which was the missing regiment of the 1st Division, elicits the highest praise of the Transport Group Commander. The force ashore had been hungry for some time and ammunition was running low. They were ready and anxious to receive anything that came in there. They needed every thing and they were eager to get it. The supply convoys during this period of time in the SOLOMONS were really erratic. General Vandergrift recommends: "That the initial convoy carry only 30 days supply, 10 units of fire, and 50 days of ration, and that only one-half of this be landed immediately so that the Transports and Cargo Ships can leave the area immediately. The remainder of the supplies, food and ammunition to arrive by small groups later. He states



that in this way the ships would be less of an aviation target, and smaller quantities of supplies would permit proper and more rapid dispersal of the items unloaded. He brought out most forcibly in his report that: had the Japanese attempted to bomb our supplies on the beaches on the 7th and 8th and 9th, instead of hitting at the ships and the airfield, they would probably have caused the failure of the expedition.

ON SLIDE B43-799 LEFT; ON SLIDE B44-117 RIGHT

To return to the operations. The situation on GUADALCANAL on the 8th to the 9th was as indicated on the right. During daylight the 8th, the advance to the west toward LUNGA POINT was resumed. The thick jungle, the lack of accurate maps, and excess caution due to snipers, and green troops, made progress exasperatingly slow. The LUNGA RIVER was crossed and no opposition with the exception of snipers was encountered until the advance elements reached KUKUM BONA off the left edge of the right slide about 1500. This resistance was overcome, the enemy being killed or fled into the jungles.

REPEAT LEFT SLIDE; ON SLIDE B44-118 RIGHT

OFF SLIDE B44-117 RIGHT

The situation on the 9th and 10th was as shown on this slide. Vast quantities of enemy equipment, stores, and personal effects had been abandoned, and evidence indicated that the garrison had left hurriedly toward KUKUM. We have no reason which accounts for this precipitous flight without serious opposition. The enemy defenses on the island were centered in the LUNGA POINT area. There were found A.A.



batteries, M.G. emplacements, a semipermanent camp, machine shops, radio station, ice plant, power stations, nearly completed hangars, blast pens, as well as 3,600 feet of practically completed runway. During this period the enemy reaction was immediately violent. Upon the withdrawal of friendly aircraft and surface ships he dominated LUNGA SOUND by submarines and surface vessels, and he lost no time in shelling our new installations and launching systematic assaults by air on the shore positions. This condition continued for some time. Our losses had been light and the more seriously wounded from the FULAGI-TANAMBOGO-GAVUTU area were evacuated fortunately when the transports withdrew. The Marines sent out patrols from our new positions but our contacts were extremely few. However, on the 12th a patrol of 4 officers and 25 men were wiped out with the exception of 2 men; one of them incidentally was an Indian who escaped through the jungle, and the other man wounded got in the water and swam away. This patrol, which was finally attempting to cross the MATANAKAU River, was stopped. As days went on, it was

REPEAT LEFT SLIDE OFF SLIDE B44-118 RIGHT

reported that a series of prepared defensive positions had been organized on the west bank dominating the only river crossing. We killed 65 men, and the rest of them that could, fled to the hills. Prior to this time the location of a Japanese radio station which was operating had been reported about 35 miles east of LUNGA.

A patrol was sent out on the 14th. No contacts were made



until the 19th, when a Japanese patrol of ... was encountered proceeding boldly and carelessly along the beach. This patrol was enveloped and all but two of them were destroyed. But the intelligence we gained from this patrol was extremely valuable. The patrol was well fed, clean shaven, and well equipped, and they carried the star insignia of the Army instead of the naval anchor which the original defense force had. This indicated to us that the Japanese had landed reenforcements, and would continue to land reenforcements, and our time was short before they would counter-attack.

The following day, the 20th, the fighter and scout-bomber squadron arrived on the field. This event marked the end of Phase three and General Vandegrift reported the arrival of friendly aircraft was the turning point of the operation.

REPEAT LEFT SLIDE      ON-SLIDE B44-119      RIGHT

The situation in the defensive position on the 20th was as shown on the slide. You can see our forces have pulled their lines in, nothing but a few patrols going out here and there. Incidentally, the night the aviators arrived on GUADALCANAL, their reception was the battle of the so-called TENARU, more properly called the battle of the ILU River. The reception given the aviators was the first Japanese counter-attack in force on the night of the 20th and the 21st in the vicinity of the mouth of the TENARU River. Writing of the engagement, a remark from one of General Vandergrift's letters to the Commandant of the Marine Corps is extremely interesting.



"The battalion put in a block to prevent their retreating. Pollock sent tanks and infantry down the line on them, it was slaughter. Those they did not shoot they ran over. The rear of the tanks looked like meat grinders. The story is going around that the tank would hit a coconut tree, thus knocking out a sniper or snipers, and the riflemen would shoot them when they hit the ground. Over 700 of the enemy were killed and counted. Quite a few drowned as they attempted to swim away."

OFF SLIDE B43-799 LEFT; OFF SLIDE 44-119 RIGHT

On the 28th of July, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet issued Operation Order 39-42 for the reinforcement of GUADALCANAL. The Task Organization included two task units, Task Unit 26.1, Marine Air Group 23, and Task Unit 26.2, the LONG ISLAND, the WILLIAM WARD BURROWS and the ALDEN.

The planes were loaded and the pilots embarked in the LONG ISLAND on 2nd August. This group had trans-shipped what equipment they had in the LONG ISLAND, and some enlisted personnel of both the fighter and scout bomber squadrons, to the AVD McFARLAND. The LONG ISLAND and the McFARLAND sailed at the same time. On the 20th all planes were launched from the LONG ISLAND and arrived at GUADALCANAL. McFARLAND arrived the next day with extremely limited personnel and equipment. The BURROWS arrived on the 29th. For 11 days the scout bomber squadron operated 12 planes with 15 pilots, 12 rear gunners and 47 men who had trans-shipped to the McFARLAND. The



authorized complement of this squadron is 18 planes, 40 pilots and 284 men. There were 18 fighters and 21 pilots attached to the fighter squadron. Originally there were no spares, but shot-up and wrecked planes soon furnished a supply. When these squadrons arrived on GUADALCANAL, part of a Navy Cub unit which had come in, did the servicing. Fueling was done from individual cans, hung on cocoanut trees, and all the gas had to be strained. The difficulty of getting the planes to and from the concealment point, and into the air caused the abandonment of wide dispersal, as it took from one and one half to two hours to get a squadron into the air when they dispersed. The scheme eventually adopted was to leave the planes on the field and accept the risk of Japanese bombing. However, the planes were separated, so that no two would be destroyed by the same bomb.

The executive officer of Marine Air Group 23, stated that the situation on GUADALCANAL was precarious, that control of channels of supply was always in dispute, and the Japs were more often in control of them than our own Navy. Under these circumstances there was a reluctance to build up the force on GUADALCANAL because of the possibility that we would not be able to meet the supply requirements. During this time you may recall, the Japs were nightly building up their forces both in personnel and material. The hardships of these first few squadrons were great. In addition to the numerous missions during daylight for the limited number of planes, and the overworked pilots and crews, they were bombed daily and their



nights were subjected to both bombings and shellings by ships. During the first few weeks the fighter pilots were reported to have averaged from 60 to 75 hours a week and the bomber pilots 100 to 110 hours a week. Due to the heavy duty and poor repair facilities, engines were constantly damaged and shifted from one plane to another. Seldom were more than six fighters and five TBFs available for the attack. The aviators reported that the coast watchers performed great work, and due principally to them our pilots held an advantage. The Japanese shelling and bombing of the field also destroyed some planes and quantities of gear and supplies added to the already acute shortage. During the first few weeks some Navy squadrons worked from Henderson Field. VF5 from the SARATOGA and the VT8 from the HORNET were there the longest. Early in September some Army units arrived, as well as additional Marine squadrons which had been ferried in from the nearby bases. As late as October 13th Lt. Larson, who commanded the torpedo squadron, stated, if the Japs had followed up their attack, they could have taken GUADALCANAL; for we didn't have a single aircraft to stop them. Captain Gardner, who was Chief of Staff, to Commander Air, South Pacific, stated: "One lesson learned is that you are not licked until you admit you are licked yourself. Further there were at least three occasions when the chances of holding GUADALCANAL were not worth 5 cents, but the Marines did not figure that way and we still have it."

In conclusion, too much cannot be said in praise of those of the land, sea, and air forces of the United Nations, who



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fought this battle at great odds, and at times when their only hope of success lay in their own determination that they would not be defeated.



Amphibiour Operations in the SOLOMON ISLANDS

TITLE OF THE PRESENTATION

Given by.....

Date 1 April 1944.....

LEFT SCREEN (FACING STAGE)

RIGHT SCREEN (FACING STAGE)

Box No.	FILE No.	TITLE OF SLIDE	Box No.	FILE No.	TITLE OF SLIDE
1	B44-1291	Combat and Support Area	2	43-794	SOLOMON ISLANDS
3	43-2105	Naval Command Org.	4	43-2130	Approtionment of Forces
"	"	REPEAT	5	44-1424	Task Force 62
		BLANK			BLANK
6	44-895	Occupation of GUADALCANAL	1	44-1291	Combat and Support Area
"	"	REPEAT	7	43-776	Task Force 62
"	"	REPEAT	8	43-796	Attack Force Approach
9	43-795	GUADALCANAL and Courses	7	43-776	Task Force 62
10	43-777	Annex BAKER	"	"	REPEAT
3	43-2105	Naval Command Organ	6	44-895	Occupation GUADALCANAL
		BLANK	11	43-779	First Marine Division
		BLANK			BLANK
12	44-1294	Landings <sup>in</sup> /TULAGI Area	13	43-798	GAVUTU and TULAGI
14	43-799	GUADALCANAL & FLORIDA IS.	15	43-842	Attack on GUADALCANAL
"	"	REPEAT	16	43-797	Debarkation Position
"	"	REPEAT	17	44-121	Landing and Scheme of Maneuver.
18	44-1295	GAVUTU & TANAMBOGO IS.	12	44-1294	Landings <sup>the</sup> in/TULAGI Area.
19	44-1293	TANAMBOGO after Bomb- ardment	"	"	REPEAT
		BLANK	20	43-834	Boat allocation
		BLANK	6	44-895	Occupation of GUADALCA NAL
		BLANK			BLANK
		BLANK	21	44-1292	Congestion on Beach Red



