

NO SUMMER PICNIC

devoid of people, but the life and wares of humans was left. Guadalcanal was empty again. The Japanese had pulled out, leaving everything. Machine guns, rifles, steam rollers, cement mixers, gasoline, chopsticks, food, beer, trucks and even a working ice plant, which was made to pump out ice (some 560,000 pounds of it) were left in place.

At this point in time, all remaining Japanese troops on Guadalcanal had retreated to the mountainous terrain deeper inland.

As time passed, the Marines just began to set up "house under the coconuts," with newly arrived Seabees. The CB—Construction Battalion—though known as the famous Fighting Seabees—contributed to the war effort in their own hardworking way. Not really trained with weapons such as machine guns, they fought with their own branch of tools: piledrivers, steam rollers, shovels and earthmovers. These machines and tools cleared and ate away the verdant jungle which the Japanese veterans could very easily use to their advantage. Remarkably, they cleared and finished the runway and airfield in ten days. But, in those first 10 days and nights, the time was extremely rough, as the U.S. Marines were without air cover. "Where's our Air Force?" was the big question.

Off the coast, the behemoth naval carriers of the United States, with allied cruisers, destroyers, and transport



"Japan is firmly determined to fight a hundred years war to crush the United States."

Colonel Hideo Ohira, Japanese Army Press Section news, August 1942

complement kept patrolling and unloading materials and men. On the first day of landing, some Japanese bombers attacked the ships. One bomber scored a direct hit on the destroyer *Mugford*. A suicide pilot slammed into the transport *George F. Elliot* and sank it. Fortunately, the U.S. was alerted beforehand by Australian coast-watchers from nearby isles and further losses were averted. These people became friends who would distinguish themselves over the entire course of the war. Before the month of August terminated, the famous and disastrous sea-battle of Savo Island and the Ichiki nightmarish land-fighting took place.

As news had emanated to Tokyo of the reported landings—which were by no means a light and small operation as was first believed by them—Tokyo ordered sending of troops and any nearby naval contingents.

Admiral Mikawa, commanding a cruiser force, proceeded from Rabaul to the southern Solomons to make a direct attack on the menacing allied navy. With undue haste, and under the cover of perfect “terrible and nebulous” weather conditions, Mikawa’s armada moved into Allied lines, closing without being detected.

At 1:38 in the morning of August 9, unspotted by allied patrols, the Japanese Navy “knocked the hell out of the unsuspecting ships.” This was the Battle of Savo Island which lasted about an hour and a half. It was known as the Five Sitting Ducks to the U.S. participants. It could have been worse if Mikawa had gone after the transports, which were some 18 nautical miles away. But, he didn’t, because it is said he was unsure how close he was at sea to U.S. aircraft carriers which in the morning, could have sent their airplanes pursuing Mikawa.

The Japanese were able to punish the “sitting duck” to a chance episode in history thousands of miles away.

LEFT ON THEIR OWN

“This afternoon Admiral Ernest J. King, commander-in-chief of the United States fleet, announced that American forces have now landed on the Solomon islands, where heavy fighting is still raging. Adm King emphasized that this action in the Solomon islands is our first real offensive that we have launched; the first one in this war and that considerable losses must therefore be expected. And, now for more details on the Solomon Islands to CBS Washington, Eric Severaid reporting:”

“We have lost at least one cruiser sunk, two cruisers, two destroyers, and one transport have been damaged. These are serious losses, but this is an important operation. And, these losses are only a small fraction of those the Japanese certainly have suffered. Contrary to Japanese claims, we made the first attack and not they. The Japanese were surprised. Adm. King says planned landings were accomplished. He does not say that all the landings were accomplished....There are no details about casualties among the men. This is the first time we have taken away any territory from the Japanese.”

CBS news *The World Today*
August 10, 1942, reporter Quincy Howe and Eric Severaid

In the United States, chance had it that politics took precedence over national safety, and it was reported in numerous U.S. newspapers that the Japanese code called JN-25 had been penetrated by U.S. intelligence. This source of information grossly violated the law, but they did it anyway and printed the story for all to read. Those in Japan did read it and believed the story. They changed their JN-25 code. As of late August, the American cryptographers still had a devil of a time trying to break the new code, and when Admiral Mikawa conducted his advance, he had the advantage. An Australian patrol plane had actually spotted the enemy group bearing down the Slot, but using old fashioned observation mistook the ships as just a bunch of “probable seaplane tenders.”

In the daylight, it was counted that Mikawa’s bold forces of the Imperial Navy had left the heavy American cruisers *Quincy*, *Astoria*, *Vincennes*, and the Australian’s *Canberra* sinking wretchedly in the waters. A U.S. destroyer *Talbot* was also sunk to the bottom. More than a thousand men died with seven hundred wounded. More would have survived had it not been that the waters off Guadalcanal—later dubbed Ironbottom Sound—were infested with man-eating sharks. The engagement only cost the Japanese 58 dead and 53 wounded.

The skipper of the *Chicago* later committed suicide, he was so psychologically hurt by the disastrous allied battle. Not one of Mikawa’s forces was lost. [Oddly enough, the name of the American newspaper that leaked we were reading JN-25 was the *Chicago Tribune*.] It was a chastening start for the United States, but we weren’t going to fold over.

In view of a follow-up, two things happened immediately. The U.S. submarine *S-22* sank a Japanese cruiser *Kako* off New Ireland. And, the commanders of Allied vessels Admirals Turner and Fletcher turned their force

JUNGLE SURVIVAL

of ships out to sea and away from the position of sitting-ducks.

Primarily because the Japanese possessed an impregnable land base, with naval and army air forces nearby—Rabaul—Fletcher ordered his carriers, and with it the escort vessels, to the open seas, away from the advantage of the hunters. By the afternoon of the ninth, both Turner and Fletcher had sailed. [ed. note: carriers in 1942 were precious gold to the U.S. for they were few—two were already resting at the bottom of the sea! Little would anyone realize it, but in September another one, the *Wasp*, would go, too—torpedoed by an I-class submarine].

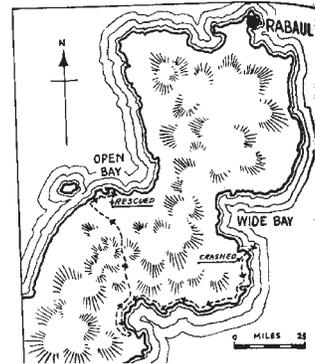
The Marines on Guadalcanal Island were left to hang on, with only 30 days of food and, of course, the first 10 were minus any umbrella of U.S. air cover.

A few days after the invasion, a captured Japanese sailor told the Marines of a number of Japanese soldiers who were on the verge of surrender. Lieut. Col. Frank Geotge, division intelligence officer, led a recon patrol of 25 men to locate this pocket of seemingly unhappy troops “willing” to surrender. They hopped a small boat and landed on a seemingly abandoned sandy beach.

It was a trap, and they were cut down on the sands. Except for two survivors, the rest of the patrol was killed, including the Japanese sailor.

In mid-August, after the battle of Savo Island, Japanese land reinforcements landed on the island. As an extra tidbit of history, it was in August that the first B-17 was to score a hit on an enemy vessel. Although all through Spring and Summer several attacks had been made, it was not until August 25 that an Axis ship was sunk, a *Mutsuki* destroyer. Within a short while, all B-17 units would be relegated to the ETO where their area of dominance was greater.

The strong veteran Ichiki Detachment, heaven’s gift



Chances for survival in the torrid jungles—with its scorpions, spiders, flies, snakes and ticks—required vigilance. The Marines on Guadalcanal were a cocky bunch. They had a saying on Guadalcanal, “We have done so much, with so little, for so long, that we now can do anything, with nothing, forever.”



8446 MILES AWAY FROM NEW YORK

A great factor that favored the Americans was the loyalty of the native Solomon islanders. From the viewpoint of victory, they provided a strategic aid. Time after time, not once was a position betrayed to the Japanese. This was the complete opposite of what traitorous Buddhist monks did in Burma.

to the Imperial Japanese garrison of Guadalcanal, was sent in. The Japanese plan, however, was nixed. They had planned to make a surprise attack inland while their unit was preparing to go on the offensive. It was discovered by a native scout leading a tiny patrol. It would be Sergeant-Major Jacob Vouzu, a native scout with bronze hair, who would be captured by the Japanese, lashed and tortured, left to die, yet on his own, little by little, bit off the ropes with his teeth and struggled and dragged himself off to the Marines to warn them.

When the Japanese mounted their attack, the Marines were ready. In the annals of bravery, no story of the history of the Marine Corps in Guadalcanal can be complete without mentioning the determination and loyalty to a cause as exemplified by Sgt-Major Vouzu.

After a further series of ferocious night battles, the Ichiki suicidal veterans were halted and literally wiped out. This was the battle of the Tenaru River. In the following weeks, more Japanese troops came down between Solomon Islands, "the Slot," and tried to wrest the isle from the clutching Americans. The Marines were aware of them. Many days went by, and the fighting and who was winning was a precarious line. But, even though in the course of the campaign, they were pitted against the XXXVIII Division, veterans of Hong Kong, Java, and Sumatra, the defending leathernecks would not be expelled, and they hung on.

As Gen. Alexander Vandegrift in Guadalcanal succinctly stated, "I have never heard, or read, of this kind of fighting. These people refuse to surrender. The wounded will wait until the Marines come up to examine them...and then blow themselves and the other fellow to pieces with a hand grenade. In the night, they would fanatically



Dateline: Aug. 22, 1942. After the Battle of the Tenaru. Principle forces of Yamamoto have had it. The Marines held on. Tide had washed over some of the bodies of Ichiki's troops. At this exact moment, Sgt-Maj Vouzu was in a field hospital recovering, along many Marine casualties.

HIDEOUS WAR

scream and scream and charge with automatic weapons and bayonets.”

It was September 18, 1942, that Marine reinforcement arrived, including the arrival of sorely needed food supplies—the supply line was reopened. With the help of an artillery battalion the troops totaling some 23,000 men finally began a limited campaign to drive out the Japanese from the island of Guadalcanal; however, by the same token the Japanese reinforced their Army—by a series of mighty troop-bringing trips, via the Tokyo Express. It proved no easy thing, and was very bloody for both sides.



Radio Tokyo
News Item

Tokyo described the Marine invasion as “one of summer insects, which have dropped into the fire by

themselves, to die a thousand deaths.”

Breakfast could never be prepared on time, for even though it seemed such an easy task, it was not. Japanese snipers were never far away, and glowing fires put somebody under the limelight. Often times snipers picked off the cooks, and Marines only were able to eat their meals until well after daylight...Australian sheep tongue.