

# Leathernecks Illustrated



**A Pictorial History of the Battle for Guadalcanal**

by Colonel Donald L. Dickson, U.S.M.C. (Ret.)

"There is no question that Japan's doom was sealed with the closing of the struggle for Guadalcanal" . . . Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, creator of the Tokyo Express.

*Leathernecks Illustrated* is dedicated to the many thousands of Army, Navy and Air Force personnel who contributed to the success in the many faceted operation of the entire Guadalcanal campaign . . . and particularly to the Marines who were the "guinea pigs" in a campaign of fighting, the nature of which had never before been encountered by United States soldiers.

The Guadalcanal story is a unique one . . . a story of mud and heat and malaria and jungle rot . . . of daily aerial and naval bombardment . . . a story of courage in the tradition of the United States Marine Corps.

There is no way to tell this story better than by a Marine Corps soldier himself . . . one who was there in person.

Avalon Hill's search for this man took us to the offices of *Leatherneck Magazine*, just over the hill from the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.

Colonel Donald Lester Dickson was our man. As editor and publisher of this Marine Corps magazine, the Colonel was a veritable fund of knowledge regarding the Marine Corps . . . hanging on the walls of his office were splendid oils and water colors depicting many battle scenes from out of the past.

These masterpieces of military art were from the hand of Colonel Dickson, himself, whose own personal sketches, water colors and combat photos are reproduced on the following pages as a pictorial commentary of the actual campaign.

### GUADALCANAL, 1942:

"I'm not interested in drawing Marines who are spick and span and smartly dressed. I don't want to gloss over life out there. It's dirty and hot and rugged and that's the way I want to draw it" . . . commented Major Dickson to his 1st Lt. after several months of the campaign had gone by.

And those are the pictures Major Dickson did draw. From the very first day he landed, 7 August 1942 with the initial assault, to his departure 4 months later, he sketched men in all moods of combat life. Many of these drawings and paintings made on Guadalcanal appeared in *Life Magazine* and other publications.

### "STONY CRAIG"

National exposure of his renderings was nothing new to Major Dickson. Prior to

World War II, his "Stony Craig" had become a familiar and widely read internationally syndicated adventure strip.

Since 1928 his artwork and illustrations have appeared on covers and in numerous magazines such as *House Beautiful*, *Naval Institute Proceedings*, *World Book*, *Combat Artists of World War II*, plus many other military periodicals. Portraits hang in galleries at Pearl Harbor, Quantico, Beaufort S. Carolina to mention a few.

He also saw his share of combat action . . . participating in landings on the Marshalls, Saipan and Tinian. It is through the alert eyes of this military artist and tactician that we feel best presents the true situation as it actually happened on Guadalcanal.

Colonel Dickson's personal observations interspersed with his own sketches, water colors and photos, now follow for the edification of the true military game aficionado.



First photo of 5th Marines moving into Guadalcanal from Red Beach 0940, 7 August



## THE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN—by Colonel Donald L. Dickson

It was still dark. Ships of Transdiv Xray and Yoke separated silently near Savo Island. Seemingly without signal they changed course toward the beaches of Tulagi and Guadalcanal. The time was 0400, 7 August 1942.

My notes made at the time recorded the sequence of events that morning.

"Up at 0400 and on deck. Sliding along Guadalcanal nearly opposite Kukum. No sign of life ashore yet. Boats ready, men ready. A cruiser shoots her planes, a land battery lets go and all hell breaks loose. Getting lighter but the blasts from cruiser and destroyer guns light up the sky with yellow flashes. We watch the shells grow white hot as they near the shore in salvos. The most really *awe* ful sight I've ever witnessed."

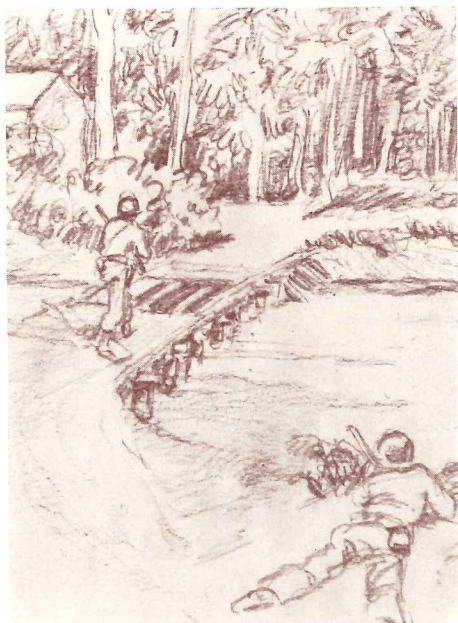
It was more than awful to the suddenly awakened Japanese of the 8th Base Force ashore. They were on the receiving end and hadn't expected to be. Thanks to the bad weather of the previous few days we had achieved complete tactical surprise. Fires, particularly those from oil storage dumps, roared skyward in vivid orange flame. Coconut palms crashed or were quickly defoliated. Then with the quick tropic dawn came the SBD's and F4F's of the fleet carriers, working over targets of opportunity. The Marines waiting to go over the side were impressed by the air and naval gunfire support. They had reason to be. There were witness to the work of the most powerful amphibious attack force ever assembled to that time.

Amphibious Task Force Commander, Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, issued the time honored order, "Land the landing force," and the eager men of Major General A. A. Vandegrift's First Marine Division headed for the black sand of "Red Beach" on Guadalcanal.

Every Higgins boat streamed the Stars and Stripes astern. Every Marine gripped his weapon and tensed for the expected fight at the water's edge.

There was no fight.

The Japs had fled. It was 0930 and the first Marines were ashore.



Gold plated Point . . . Lunga Bridge

The landing was in waves by the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the Fifth Marine Regiment abreast, followed by the First Marine Regiment in column of battalions. The scheme of maneuver was to attack inland for a short distance, change direction and attack what was then called "Grassy Knoll." It was thought to be about two miles away. Our knowledge of Guadalcanal that day was sketchy at best because it had been

hastily gathered in the three weeks available after receipt of the warning order. "Grassy Knoll," properly called "Mt. Austen," was four miles away and wasn't captured for months. Our left flank was secured at the beach by 3/5.



Marine's best friend

At two in the afternoon we had our first response from the enemy in the form of an attack by 19 twin-engined bombers. Most of them were quickly shot down.

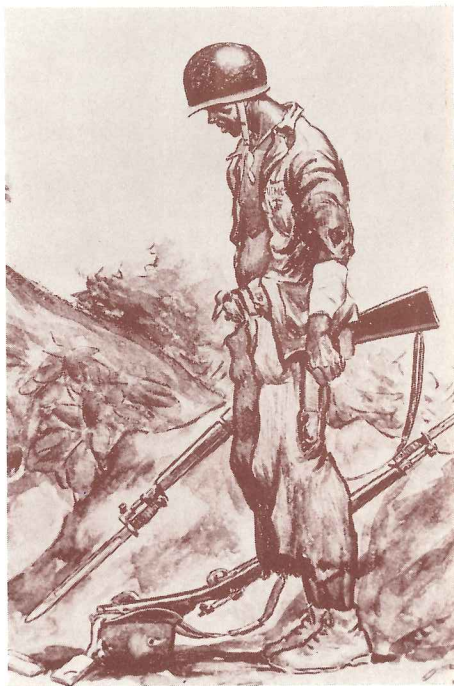
Two days found General Vandegrift's Marines establishing a loose perimeter to defend the prize of Guadalcanal—its nearly completed airfield. In enemy hands, Guadalcanal-based planes could cut our supply

lines to Australia. In our hands, it could prevent further Japanese expansion southward. The Marines named it "Henderson Field" after Major Lofton Henderson, a Marine flyer killed in the Battle of Midway.

On the night of 8 August it rained. Rain or not, Marines ashore stood quietly watching while a great sea battle flashed and roared near Savo Island. Vibration from exploding ships and muzzle blasts shook the ground. We who were watching had no idea of what was happening, and perhaps it was just as well. Our morale would not have been helped watching four of our cruisers sunk. It was the worst defeat in battle suffered by the Navy.

The next day our transports left.

We were on our own.



Poor old Joe . . . its been a long day

Order began to come to the coconut groves of Guadalcanal. We heard the first news of our buddies of the Raider and Parachute Battalions and 2/5 at Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo, 20 miles across

Sealark Channel. They had been in a real fight from the landing. Now the islands were secured at a cost of 248 casualties. The defending Japanese had lost 1420, killed, wounded and captured.



We on Guadalcanal began to lose some too. Sniper fire was beginning to pick up. Patrols ran into machine gun positions and an intelligence patrol of four officers and 25 enlisted Marines, under Colonel Frank Goettge, was ambushed and destroyed.

But Japanese response was just beginning. With monotonous regularity they bombed and strafed our positions. Their destroyers and submarines began to shell us with impunity for we had nothing of sufficient range to answer them. The air field was ready but we had no planes yet.

My notes at this point read, "If we only had one little Piper Cub plane for spotting!"

We needed a great deal more than a plane for spotting. We had started for Guadalcanal as light as possible. The word was "If you can't shoot it or eat it, don't take it." We carried 10 instead of 15 days of fire for all units, and rations for 60 days. However, in their haste to withdraw after the Savo disaster, our transports and supply ships had unloaded only part of their cargo. We ate Jap food. It wasn't good



Marine chow. It was rice and dried fish, but when you are reduced to two meals a day it was better than nothing.

The tactical situation at this time was that we were loosely holding the beach line between the Tenaru River on our east and the Matanikau River on our west, with the lines curving inland along the banks of these rivers for about 1500 yards. We had very little in defense of the inland area except scattered special units.

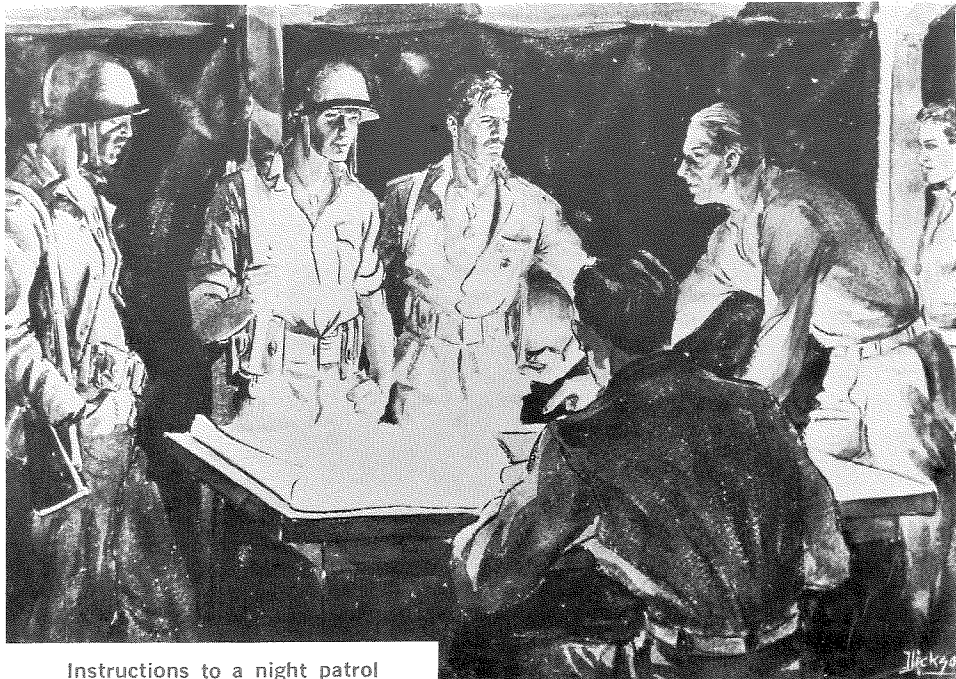
As the Japs began to reinforce, somewhat unwillingly, as we discovered later, they underestimated our strength and our ability to fight. They likened the Marines to "summer insects that had dropped into the fire."

My notes on 17 August: "Heard Jap

broadcast on captured radio which stated we have been wiped out. Rode Jap bike for exercise this morning."

On 18 August, three companies of the Fifth Marines attacked toward Kokumbona. In what was later to be identified as the First Matanikau, they destroyed a Japanese camp, killing 62. Our own casualties numbered 16.

There was action to the east also. Captain Charles Brush and his men from the First Marines were patrolling toward Koli Point when they encountered a detachment of Japanese Special Naval Landing Force sailors. Brush's patrol killed 31 of them and returned with eight of his own casualties. The Japanese were a rear echelon and we would hear from the remainder of the detachment shortly.



Instructions to a night patrol



Too many, too close, too long

The really important happening to Marines on Guadalcanal that afternoon of 20 August, was the arrival of Dick Mangrum's SBDs of Squadron 232 and of John Smith's F4F Wildcats of 223. From my notes: "The men's faces looked as though they had been given \$666 and a ninety-day furlough."

At 2030 on 25 August all hands were wide awake and listening to the heavy rifle

and machine gun fire in the First Marine's area.

Colonel Ichiki and his battalion had moved inland from the site of Brush's fire fight with the SNLF and rashly ordered a frontal attack against the line held along the Tenaru by the First Marines. It was suicidal, as Ichiki soon discovered. His men were cut to pieces. The remainder tried to turn our left by wading through the surf at the mouth of the river. Canister from anti-tank guns tore into them. Bayonets were used on the few who got through. Colonel Cates sent a battalion across the river and around Ichiki's left. As the jaws of the nutcracker closed, Ichiki, himself, fled, leaving 800 dead. He was so mortified he burned his regimental colors and committed hara-kiri.



Dead enemy at daylight after Tenaru



After this display of Japanese courage and tenacity in the face of odds, we had to admit that the individual fighting man was good—but we knew we were better.

I wrote, "The Jap is a tough fighter. We are not in for an easy time of it."

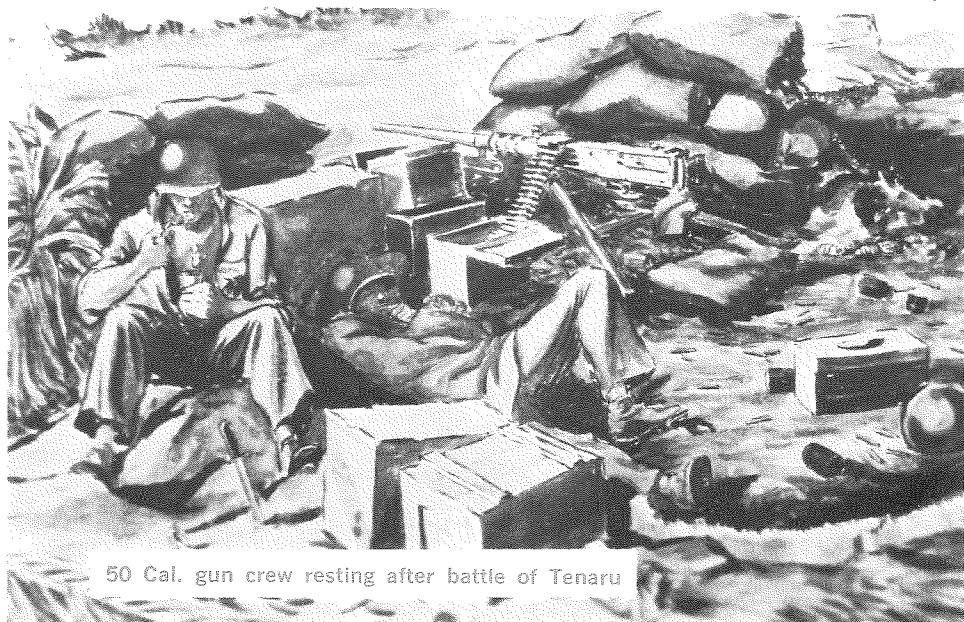
Troops of General Kawaguchi's 35th Infantry Brigade were loaded aboard ship for transportation to Guadalcanal, or "KA," as the Japanese code-named the island. This first sizeable attempt to retake Guadalcanal resulted in the naval Battle of the Eastern Solomons, and in a new method of reinforcing Japanese troops on the island.

Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, IJN formed what he called "Rat Runs"—fast destroyers, deck-loaded with troops, which were to race in to Guadalcanal, quickly unload, and rake our positions with 5 inch naval gunfire before turning homeward at flank speed. Our people promptly named this operation

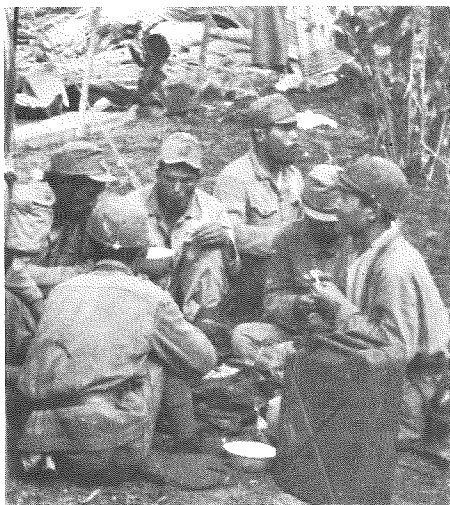
the "Tokyo Express." It didn't do too well on its first run because Mangrum's SBDs pounced on it. Only one of four destroyers withdrew unhurt.

Besides the "Tokyo Express," our people had their own generally accepted code names for Jap activities. The Faisi-based float planes which harassed us night after night was called "Washing Machine Charlie." His companion who dropped flares was known as "Louie the Louse." The submarines which surfaced and shelled us at will were all called "Oscar." Our prisoners were mostly construction workers of the 8th Base Force and were familiarly called "Termites." Sealark Channel became "Iron Bottom Sound" from the number of ships sunk in it.

Kawaguchi finally landed his troops at Taivu Point, site of the unfortunate Colonel Ichiki's jump-off. Without reconnoitering the ground, his plan called for sending a



50 Cal. gun crew resting after battle of Tenaru



First group of captured enemy; called  
"Termites" by the Marines

position, so he spared no efforts in digging in and putting it in the best shape he could.

On 11 September, Admiral Turner flew in to Guadalcanal with bad news.

COMSOPAC forecast a major enemy attack within the next three weeks, but could no longer support Guadalcanal.

We were on our own again!

The next night, supported by naval gunfire and under the eerie light of flares, 3000 screaming Japanese stormed Edson's Ridge. It was a grinding see-saw battle of grenades, bayonets and full automatic fire. Time after time the Japs fell back, regrouped and came on again in full fury. There were localized successes and failures. Our artillery, pre-registered, were called upon for fire closer and closer to our own lines. Just before dawn Kawaguchi ordered a final withdrawal. He had lost over 1200 men. We counted 263 casualties, 49 of them killed.

battalion of the 124th Infantry plus the two remaining battalions of Colonel Ichiki's regiment, 3000 men in all, deep around our southern flank and attacking toward Henderson Field. This required cutting a long, circuitous trail through the jungle. Another battalion of the 124th would simultaneously strike due west across the Tenaru. Two reinforced battalions, under Colonel Oka, would cross the Matanikau on our west flank, attack toward Lunga Point and hit Henderson Field from the northwest. The main effort was to be supported by naval gunfire and air.

The attack was ordered for the night of 12-13 September.

On 19 September, Colonel Merritt (Red Mike) Edson and his tired First Raider Battalion, and the equally tired First Parachute Battalion, occupied an unnamed ridge south of Henderson Field. Although assigned as a rest area, Edson believed the next enemy attack would come through this



Raider's Ridge, where Edson's Raiders  
destroyed a Japanese Battalion

Both flank attacks had failed as well, but Kawaguchi's survivors had greater troubles ahead. The worn out men of the main attack force had to cut a trail through the jungle to the west and eight days after the battle, starved and disorganized, they stumbled into their base camp near Cape Esperance.

At long last, on 18 September, the Division's Seventh Marine Regiment arrived from Samoa. The First Marine Division was actually a full division again.

Five days later, the Seventh was in action at the Second Matanikau, a confused operation against Colonel Oka's 4000 troops.



5th Marines on their way to Matanikau

The plan called for the Raiders to follow the right bank of the Matanikau south to "Jap Bridge" where they were to cross and close with the enemy to the north, 2/5 was to attack across the sand bar at the mouth of the Matanikau. Colonel Lewis (Chesty) Puller's 1/7 was to land from boats at Point Cruz and attack from the west. There

would be artillery and air support. It didn't work. Communications became fouled up and the operation was canceled.

The Third Matanikau was planned. Although we didn't know it at the time, Lieutenant General Maruyama was planning the same operation, but in reverse. We got there first and this time we produced results. The Japs lost 700 KIA to our total casualty list of 200.

There was word of an impending Jap landing and we halted the operation and withdrew to tightened defensive lines.

In an effort to disrupt the next Jap plan for the recapture of Guadalcanal, Admiral Scott, with his cruisers and destroyers, tangled with the enemy fleet in the Battle of Cape Esperance. It was a wild, gun for gun, torpedo for torpedo, affair on 12 October. It did not, however, prevent the Tokyo Express from unloading two aircraft tenders and six destroyer loads of troops at Tassafaronga.

We were getting some help too. On 13 October, grimy Marines cheered the arrival of the Army's fresh 164th Regiment. We now had 23,000 men on Guadalcanal plus another 4,500 holding Tulagi.

Our happiness was short lived.

At 0140, on 14 October, the Japanese battleships Kongo and Haruna, together with a cruiser and seven destroyers, arrived in Iron Bottom Sound. Their mission was to reduce our positions, particularly Henderson Field, to rubble. In two runs past the island they fired one of the heaviest concentrations of WWII. Included in the rain of explosives were 900 rounds of high capacity 14-inch shells. The duration of this shelling varies with different accounts. My own notes say two runs of an hour each. But I was so "shook up" at the time, I could be wrong. Regardless of the length of time, no Soldier, Sailor or Marine who lived through it will ever forget "The Night the Battleships Shelled."



First photo of Marines under fire . . . at Matanikau

The enemy should have been happy with the results. On Henderson Field that evening there had been 39 aircraft. At dawn only 5 were operational. We lost 41 killed that night and 60 wounded.

The next night the 8-inch guns of cruisers Chokai and Kinagasa shelled us again while 2000 fresh Japanese landed at Tassafaronga.

On 15 October the heavy cruisers Maya and Miyako threw 1500 8-inch shells at us. Fifteen of our repaired F4F Wildcats were wrecked and half of the remaining 27 were in need of patching. But that next day Joe Bauer's Fighting 212 roared in, gassed up and took to the skies. Bauer himself shot down four Japs before he landed.



Here it comes!



We didn't need a crystal ball to tell us something big was cooking.

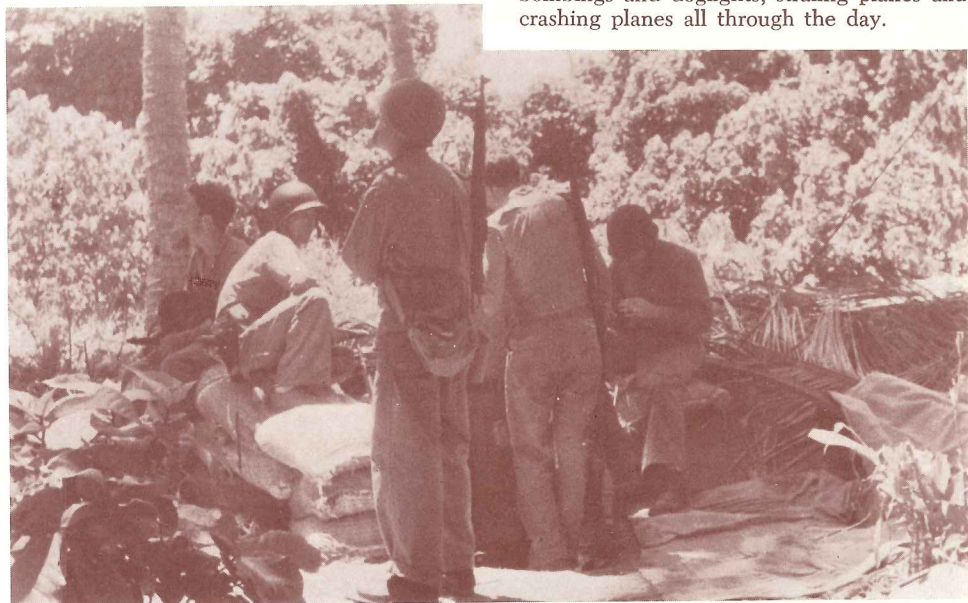
General Maruyama had another plan. It wasn't very original. He would send his Second, Sendai Division around to the south of Henderson Field. The Second would cut a trail as it went which would be called the "Maruyama Road." Over the "Road" in single file would go the 7000 men of his main attack force. Kawaguchi would command the right, General Nasu, the left. The 16th Infantry Battalion was in reserve. There would be a distracting operation at the Matanikau. Colonel Oka would ford the Matanikau one and a half miles upstream, go east, then turn north to isolate our positions in the area. A reinforced battalion of the 228th Infantry was prepared to land to the east of our perimeter. Under Admiral Yamamoto, himself, battleships and cruisers would support the attack with naval gunfire.

The attack was timed for 1700 on 24 October.

Preceded by something new, a heavy artillery preparation, which was promptly nick-named "Pistol Pete," the main Japanese attack jumped off in a pouring rain. Again timing and coordination were lacking. Oka never really got into the fight. Faulty intelligence and poor communications played their part in the debacle. Maruyama was thoroughly defeated. He lost 2000 men killed in action, again U. S. losses of 86 KIA and 119 wounded.

And he failed to take Henderson Field.

The next day was known as "Dugout Sunday." Early in the morning the sirens accounced "Condition Red" and according to my notes we didn't come off it for the rest of the day. There seemed to be a sky full of planes—ours and theirs. There were bombings and dogfights, strafing planes and crashing planes all through the day.



Waiting until the bomb bays open before entering dugout . . . CP of 5th Marines

Guadalcanal had become a symbol to both sides, and each paid for that symbol in the stand off naval Battle of Santa Cruz on 25 October.

The Jap hadn't given up yet. He had another big try in mind. In the meantime the small but grueling engagements between individual opponents and small units continued day and night.

The next major Japanese effort was set for 12 November.

It was to be an amphibious assault. Supported by naval gunfire from the battleships Hiei and Kirishima, the cruiser Nagara and 14 destroyers, the Japs intended to land 14,000 troops on our beach. Eleven transports, accompanied by 12 destroyers, would get the landing force to the line of departure.

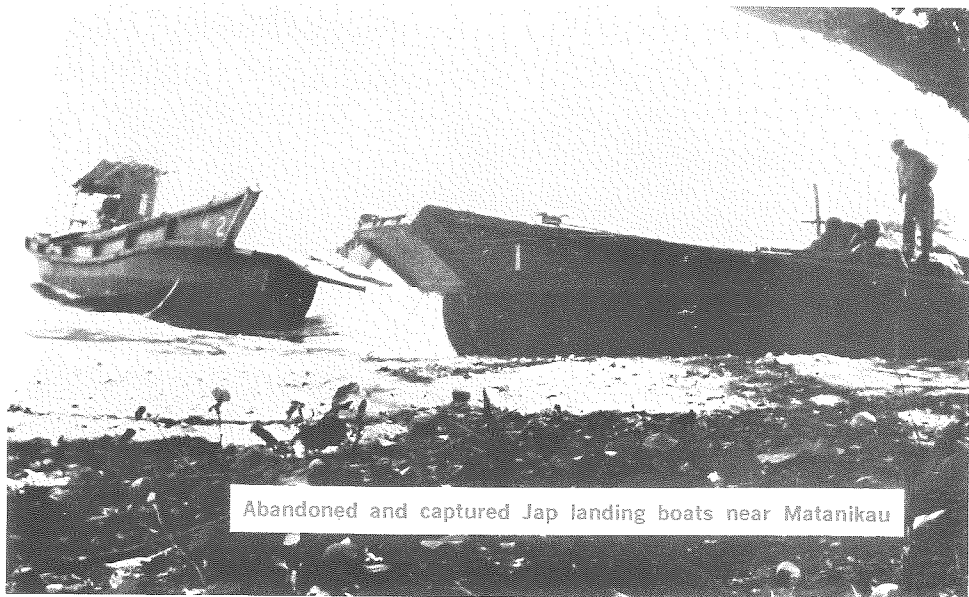
Cruisers Maya and Suzuya were assigned the task of preliminary softening and bombarded Henderson Field with 8-inch shells. But something went wrong with the opera-

tion from then on. The rest of the bombardment fleet ran afoul of our task forces under Callaghan and Scott and were much too occupied to carry out their assigned mission.

The troops for the landing in the biggest Tokyo Express of all — 11 transports — started for Guadalcanal. Our planes met them a long way out, and in a "milk run" operation, worked them over. It was a continuous effort, with planes returning to Henderson Field to gas and rearm and then off again to the transports. The Jap destroyers finally left the transports to their fate as one after another took hits. Six transports were sunk, one crippled, but four, although badly damaged, got through and beached themselves.

My notes say, "Fliers say you could walk on floating Jap bodies from here to Russell Islands."

It was the last major Japanese attempt to recapture Guadalcanal.



Abandoned and captured Jap landing boats near Matanikau

Although in mid-November there were still 30,000 enemy troops on the island, many of them were ineffective due to wounds, malnutrition, malaria and disorganization.

The First Marine Division was worn out too.

On 7 December, General Vandegrift turned over command of U. S. forces on the island to Major General Alexander Patch, of the Army, and the first elements of the First Marine Division embarked for rest areas in Australia.

Patch had five infantry regiments to work with — the 164th, the 182nd (less one battalion) the 132nd, the 142nd, the Second Marines and the Eighth Marines.

There was much hard fighting ahead for these troops. Mount Austen proved, in particular, a tough nut to crack.

On 18 January, the remaining Japanese forces received orders to withdraw from Guadalcanal.

In a well-managed operation they took off 11,000 war-worn soldiers of whom 600 later died. They left on the island approximately 21,000 dead, either killed in action or died of wounds. They lost also more than 800 planes and 2362 irreplaceable pilots and crewmen.

In the six months of the campaign, six naval battles had been fought and 65 ships were sunk.

Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, creator of the "Tokyo Express", has said, "There is no question that Japan's doom was sealed with the closing of the struggle for Guadalcanal."

DONALD L. DICKSON



Major General A. A. Vandegrift and staff of 1st Marine Division, September 1942



The last hundred yards