

THE MARINE CORPS' RECORD FOR 14 MONTHS OF WAR



BY LIEUT. GEN. THOMAS HOLCOMB,
Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps

On the fighting front, we began this war with two strikes against us. Consider our dispositions on that "day that will live in infamy."

There were Marines in China and Guam, comparatively small detachments, isolated in the midst of the enemy. Part of the Fourth Regiment recently had been transferred to the Philippines, and they at least had the chance to go down fighting. But go down they did, casualties or prisoners; as did the base defense battalion and air squadron whose defense of Wake Island made history, and the Marine guards on the capital ships of the Asiatic Squadron who fought in the Java Sea.

These were among the best men we had, officers and enlisted personnel alike. We could use those irreplaceable men today. For the Marine Corps is a very small organization as compared to other armed forces engaged in this struggle.

Other Marines fell, too, in the inferno at Pearl Harbor, at Dutch Harbor, Alaska, on the fire-swept reaches of the Coral Sea and Midway Island, and in the air above them. But Pearl Harbor and Dutch Harbor held. The Coral Sea and Midway were clean-cut victories. Marines had fought at Wake and Bataan with credit to themselves and honor to their Corps.

To their comrades fell the signal honor of furnishing the troops for the first genuinely successful American offensive against the Axis. This occurred on August 7, eight months to the hour after the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, when Marine units landed simultaneously on four of the southern Solomon Islands under cover of ships' guns and planes of the Pacific Fleet.

The smaller islands fell after a short, sharp struggle. On much larger Guadalcanal, site of the all-important airfield, the situation was reversed. The landing was effected with comparative ease. Much valuable equipment was captured, and strategic defense positions established around the airfield. But owing to the size of the island (about that of Connecticut) and the rugged, jungle-choked terrain, the enemy were able to rally and to bring up reinforcements by sea. The struggle that developed has brought out some of the most savage and bitter fighting ever seen in any war.

Bear in mind that we attacked the Japanese on their own ground. For years they have been trained in jungle fighting. For months they have actually practiced it, developed their own tactics and technique. There was no military precedent to draw upon, for never in its history has the United States faced an enemy like the Japanese. They combine cunning, savagery and treachery with stubbornness and a high degree of training. In addition, they possess a peculiar, less-than-human fatalism which causes them to press on in the face of frightful losses—seven to one in the air on the average, and even higher in some of the ground actions.

In short, Guadalcanal became a sort of testing laboratory. The men who fought there learned the hard way. It cost many lives to learn how to cope with jungle infiltration tactics and to master the technique of night fighting which the Japanese had developed to a high degree, but Marines and soldiers sent against the Japs from now on will go fully prepared to cope with the enemy's tricks, and with a few of their own devising to spring on him.

The accomplishments of the Marine Corps on the home front have been more material, if less spectacular.

Six years ago, the entire Corps numbered some 16,000 men, fewer in number than the New York City police department. On the day of Pearl Harbor our enrollment was approaching 65,000. Today we have more than 200,000 officers and men.

Our long-established training posts began to groan under the strain. Two huge new reservations were founded: Camp LeJeune at New River, N. C., in the East and Camp Pendleton near San Diego, Calif., in the West.

Within the past few months, 50,000 acres have been added to the reservation at Quantico, Va., center of officer training and home of many advanced specialty schools. Several new special training centers have been set up, notably for the Marine Air Force, training of which is handled by the Navy. Two new glider schools have been opened within the year, either independently or in connection with naval aviation.

An amphibious attacking force includes artillery, tanks, armored cars, engineers, communications, motor transport, and chemical warfare groups, in addition to aviation and infantry, carrying automatic weapons, mortars and grenades. Each such element requires special training prior to maneuvers with the unified assault force. Schools for such training, dealing with specialized modern arms, have multiplied rapidly, notably the Paramarine, camouflage and glider schools.

Thus, the Corps has been multiplied in size and hardened in the crucible of battle. We know the enemy now, and we have stopped the best that he could send against us. To us was granted the honor of playing an important part in turning the tide of war in the Pacific. Now we have the men, the knowledge and the experience to carry through, successfully, to however bitter an end, this war that we never wanted.—Adapted from "United States News."

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