

60 Years Ago

WAKE ISLAND

The Corps Raised Its Name To Honor and Fame

Story by R. R. Keene



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Life so far had been pretty good to Frank Gross. Just shy of 21, his khaki shirt already sported the duel chevrons of a Marine corporal. He and his fellow 392 leathernecks of the 1st Defense Battalion had been getting three squares a day, time off, beer at the sloop chute and mail from home. Frank's sister wrote of worrying over him with the world seemingly determined to plunge itself into war. Frank responded: "The war is in Europe. The further I get out in the Pacific, the further I get away from war."

Gross had noted, however, that events had taken an upturned tempo with the arrival of the new commanding officer, Major James P. S. Devereux. Building up the island's fortifications took more time from gun drills on the .50-caliber machine gun the corporal helped crew.

James O. King, a 20-year-old private first class assigned as a communicator to Devereux's command post, let it be known that the new CO was a quiet, by the book Marine, a combat veteran of the "Banana Wars" in Nicaragua and a captain of horse Marines in China.

It was about that time that the battalion went to a seven-day workweek. It was dig, dig, dig, push, push, push, work, work and work some more improving defenses and fortifications. Scuttlebutt had it that the new "skipper" knew something was going to happen.

PFC Jack Davis ventured, "Something is coming down. We aren't out here diggin' foxholes in the sand for nothing."

Eighteen-year-old Private Ewing E. "E. E." Laporte speculated with his fellow privates that it could be that the Japanese were coming. Sergeant Ray L. Coulson admonished them, saying if that happened, the American fleet would arrive in a few days and "just tear that Japanese fleet up." He piled on more work, and the "snuffy" chatter ceased.

Still, with the exception of Devereux, not many on Wake Island felt the urgency of impending war. Wake is a V-shaped Pacific atoll 1,000 to 2,000 miles from any place of any recognition or importance. Midway, Wake and Guam are the stepping stones across the Pacific from Hawaii. Wake, however, is a small stone. Its 2.5 square miles, barely discernible above the sea, had never been inhabited



Maj James P. S. Devereux, veteran of the Banana Wars and China, was the senior Marine officer on Wake. A calm, scrupulously polite, unflappable and thoughtful Marine, he held the Wake defenses together longer than anyone expected.

until after a British schooner landed at the island in 1796. Smaller than New York City's Central Park, Wake is separated from Peale Island by a small channel at the north end. An even smaller channel at the south separates Wake from Wilkes Island. It wasn't then or now much to write home about.

Young Marines shrugged as they dug and wondered, "What would the Japanese want with this place?" Devereux knew, and he pushed them to be ready.

So did Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy's Fourth Fleet of three cruisers, six destroyers, at least two submarines, two assault-transports and two transports berthing the Special Naval Landing Force or "Imperial Marines" churning at a steady speed from the Marshall Islands toward Wake.

Kajioka understood the capture of Wake and Guam would prevent the Americans from launching air attacks on the Japanese-held Marshall and Gilbert islands, block American supplies to the Philippines and provide a base for reconnaissance for the invasion of Midway. Kajioka glanced at the ship's clock. It was nearly noon, 8 Dec. 1941, in that quadrant of the Pacific. There could be no turning



COURTESY OF JACK E. DAVIS

Stateside, before the war, Pvt Jack E. Davis posed near a coastal artillery piece. He soon found himself operating a searchlight with Btry G on Wilkes Island and facing an invading Japanese force.

back. The rear admiral knew as he prepared to invade Wake that 2,004 miles east, across the International Dateline, the naval forces of ADM Isoroku Yamamoto had, a few hours earlier, attacked the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor.

North of Wake at 12,000 feet, 36 twin-engine Japanese bombers had made the long 720-mile flight from their Marshall Island base at Roi. The group leader of Air Attack Force Number 1, Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla noted a squall at about 2,000 feet directly above Wake. It would add to his element of surprise. He ordered his group into a gliding approach.

There had been disturbing and confusing rumors circulated all morning among those occupying the island—stories of garbled messages from Hickam Field, Oahu, Hawaii, indicating Oahu had been bombed.

Jack Davis, normally at his searchlight with Battery G on Wilkes Island, had drawn duty in the officers' mess. He watched Devereux come in and announce to the officers that he had received a message from the Army at Hickam Field saying it was no drill. Devereux ordered Field Music Alvin J. Waronker to "sound General Quarters." Waronker blew "Fire Call," but everyone got the idea.

Ammunition cases were broken open, Springfield '03 rifles came out of their racks, 782 gear and World War I "skimmer" style helmets were donned, and everyone reported to their section chiefs. Pvt Laporte, after a shaky start during which he donned Frank Gross' shirt with corporal chevrons, was on a truck headed to Peale Island when someone said

Pearl Harbor was bombed. He and the rest had a good laugh.

Frank Gross called it "lollygagging," a term that comes and goes in the lexicon of the Corps. Marines are warned against lollygagging, but when they are not working, lollygagging and beating their gums is what they do. So it was with Gross and the Marines around him waiting at their guns. Gross talked corporal to corporal with Frank Gutherie, who manned one of the 5-inch guns. "Gutherie, what do you think this is?"

"Oh, just a big Pacific maneuver," he answered.

It was at the midday meal over stew that Gross sought a more learned opinion from Second Lieutenant Robert M. Hanna, when he noticed several planes drop through the clouds. They speculated the planes to be inbound American B-17 Flying Fortress bombers. They watched them fly directly over head about 1,000 feet up and felt like they could almost reach up and touch them. A moment later the planes were over the airport and let loose with bombs. That's when everyone knew the war had started.

The klaxon horn sounded and scared everyone more than the bombs. Marines threw down their stew and coffee and scrambled for their weapons.

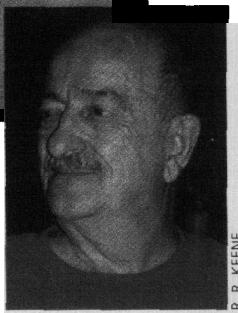
Frederick Knight, one of Dan Teters' civilians working under Navy contract, heard someone holler, "Here come our planes." He and his fellow workers ran

into the street and were met by bullets from strafing Japanese bombers. Knight ducked behind a tree. Behind him were many of his cohorts, dead and dying in the street.

Marine Fighting Squadron 211 with its 12 new Grumman F4F Wildcat fighters had arrived at Wake's airfield only four days earlier. Revetments were still being built, and the VMF-211 commander, Maj Paul A. Putnam, had ordered pilots and mechanics to disperse the parked aircraft as widely as possible. He'd sent up four planes to patrol the island; however, they missed the incoming Japanese.

First Lieutenant William W. Lewis, an experienced antiaircraft artilleryman who commanded Btry E at Peacock Point on Wake, saw the Japanese planes. His battery opened up with 3-inch antiaircraft guns and .50-cal. machine guns. It was nowhere near enough.

The results of the Japanese attack were devastating. Using 100-pound bombs and 20 mm cannon, the air strike turned seven F4F fighters into junk with propellers. The island's main aviation gas



PFC Jack E. Davis

tank took a direct hit, exploded and set everything ablaze, including the squadron's tentage, tools and spare parts. The squadron's air-ground radio installation was obliterated. VMF-211 suffered nearly 60-percent casualties; twenty-three aviation personnel were dead or would soon die of wounds, and three pilots were also killed.

Camp Two on Wake and the adjacent Pan American Airways area, hotel and seaplane facilities on Wilkes Island had fared a little better. Several structures were burning; the passenger seaplane Philippine Clipper had sustained several bullet holes. Ten of PanAm's employees had been killed. All told, there were 84 dead or dying on Wake.

The garrison of Marines, nearly 1,200 civilians, 69 sailors and a handful of soldiers cleared the debris, reinforced their defenses, buried their dead and radioed Hawaii for reinforcements.

Across the Pacific it was a similar story. The sailors of the Seventh Fleet in Pearl Harbor looked for survivors in the hulls of sunken or capsized warships. American forces in the Philippines were

under air attack. In North China approximately 430 U.S. Marines faced 240,000 Japanese forces that were impatiently demanding their surrender.

It was obvious to Devereux and U.S. Navy Commander Winfield S. Cunningham, the senior officer on Wake, that the Americans on the island were under siege and would have to go it alone, at least for the foreseeable future.

RADM Kajioka was pleased. He had taken a calculated risk in not asking for carrier support. The air strike from Roi had been a total success and executed without a single loss. He would still have to be cautious. His Special Naval Landing Force was a mere 450. He would call on the planes again to further soften Wake's defenses and then he would savage the island with naval gunfire before committing Imperial Marines.

Putnam's aviation Marines worked feverishly to ready the five fighter aircraft left them. At dawn four were airborne. At 1100 the Japanese bombers

returned. Although disciplined, the bomber pilots did not show a lot of originality; the hour, altitude and pattern did not vary. The Marine air combat patrol flanked them, opened fire and sent one bomber careening down in flames. As the air struggle moved closer to Wake, the Marine fighters broke contact, and the Marine antiaircraft batteries opened up.

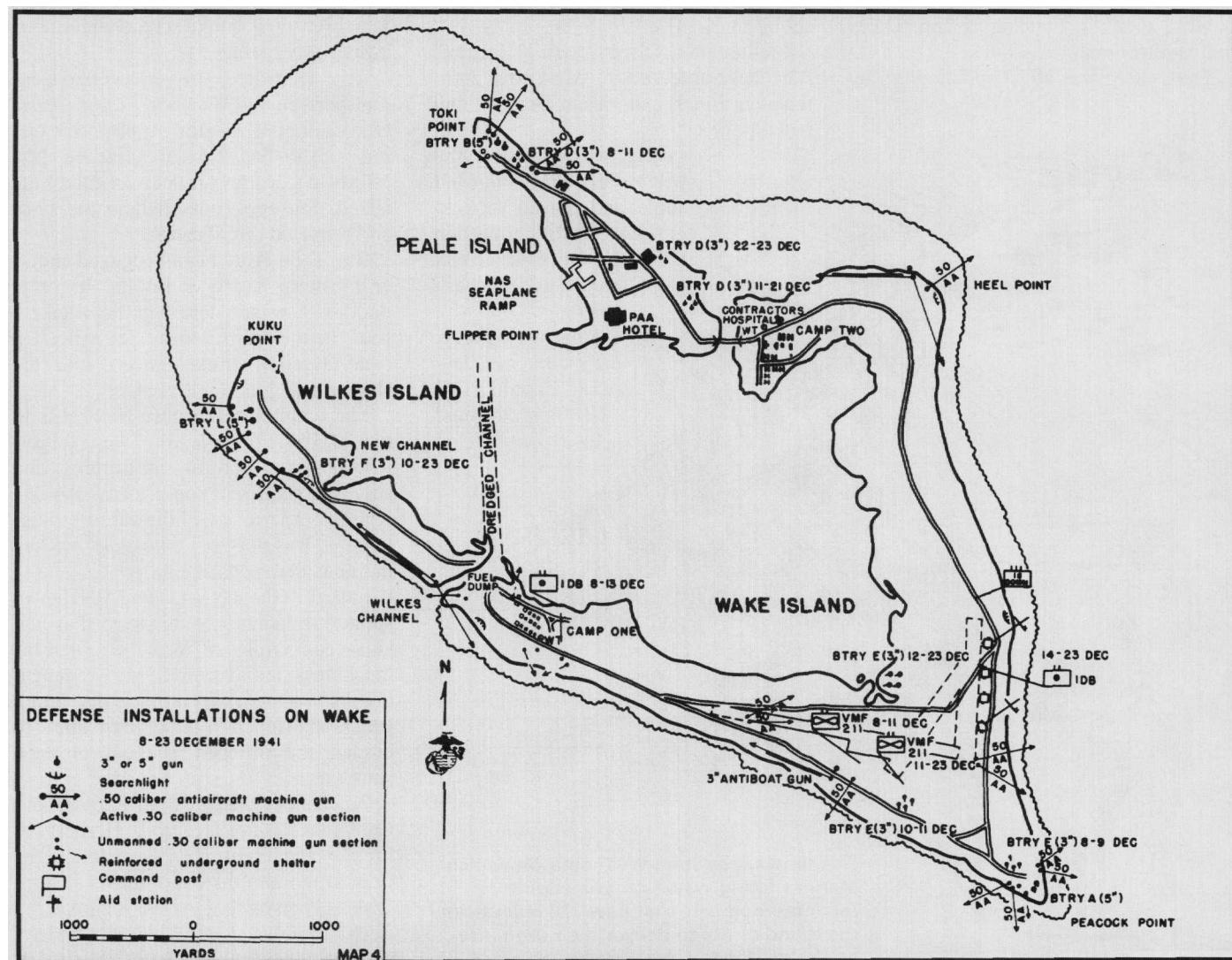
Five bombers were belching smoke over Peale Island; one burst into flames and exploded. Over the next two days VMF-211—or what was left of it—would shoot down at least two more planes and score damaging hits on numerous others that disappeared over the horizon in a trail of smoke.

The Japanese bombers, however, were not to be deterred. The second raid hit hard on Camp Two and the naval air station. They destroyed the hospital, the Navy's radio station, and the civilian and naval barracks, killing 55 civilians and four Marines.



Pvt Ewing E.
Laporte

R. R. KEENE



In Devereux's command bunker, J. O. King noted the relative calm amid the chaos. He credited it to his skipper.

"Devereux was very cool," King said to those who took time to listen. "Bombs were coming down the strip. Major Devereux was standing in the doorway. We all could hear them getting closer and closer. Finally, I figured the next one was going to hit us. Devereux stepped in and it was very, very close. As soon as they passed, he stepped out again watching what they [the bombers] were doing."

Devereux was calm because he had to be and because he still had communications with Pearl Harbor and reason to believe that help might yet be coming.

At Pearl Harbor, Marines of the 4th Defense Bn loaded the seaplane tender USS *Tangier* (AV-8) with the accoutrements of war, clamored aboard and rendezvoused with the fast carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), whose flight deck was packed with Navy war birds and those of VMF-221. With them were three cruisers, nine destroyers and a tanker, all part of the relief effort. All were steaming at flank speed under the command of RADM Frank J. Fletcher, a competent but cautious man.

Thus, there was still hope among the

leathernecks hunkered down on Wake during 11 Dec.

Five miles out in his flagship cruiser, *Yubari*, RADM Kajioka could barely make out Wake Island in the morning overcast. Rough seas made it difficult for his infantry forces to board their landing vessels. Nonetheless, the rear admiral reasoned the rough seas would screen his approach.

Cautiously, the fleet edged its way toward Wake. At 8,000 yards off Peacock Point, *Yubari* with her fleet in trace commenced a broadside run parallel to the south shore of Wake.

Devereux was very cognizant of it all. In the predawn hours of the 11th, leatherneck lookouts had spotted the outlines of ships, and the garrison went to General Quarters. Knowing that he was outgunned, Devereux gave strict orders for his batteries to hold their fire.

As *Yubari* maneuvered closer, the 5-inch guns of Btry B on Peacock Point tracked her course. RADM Kajioka gave the order to commence firing. The 6-inch guns of *Yubari* and her fellow cruisers *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu* let loose a broadside that slammed into Camp One, setting diesel oil tanks afire.

Lieutenants Clarence A. "Barney" Barninger and John A. McAlister commanded 5-inch batteries at Peacock and Kuku points.

King was working the switchboard in the command bunker and relayed McAlister's requests for permission to fire. Each time Devereux would ask, "What's the range?"

King would relay the range, and Devereux would say, "Tell them to hold their fire." King

could hear McAlister swear. It went that way until McAlister reported the Japanese ships to be only 4,500 yards away, and he added, "Hell, I can shoot 'em with a rifle." Devereux asked once more: "What's the range?" King relayed the range to Devereux, who said, "Tell them to commence firing. Fire at will."

A minute later the first salvos went, and McAllister said, "We got the son of a b----!"

Indeed they had. After a slight adjustment Barninger's battery sent two shells amidships into *Yubari* at the waterline. Two more shells caught her slightly aft. RADM Kajioka was astonished. He watched in disbelief as another shell exploded on one of his destroyers attempting to lay a smoke screen for the flagship. *Yubari*, with a much-shaken RADM Kajioka, retired over the horizon.

The other ships of the fleet continued to fire. The Marines responded. Btry L on Wilkes Island, with the help of civilians who had volunteered as ammunition handlers, fired and caused a violent explosion in the destroyer *Hayate*. She broke in two and sank. The *Oite* was next and took a direct hit from Btry L's guns. She threw up a smoke screen and limped away badly listing.

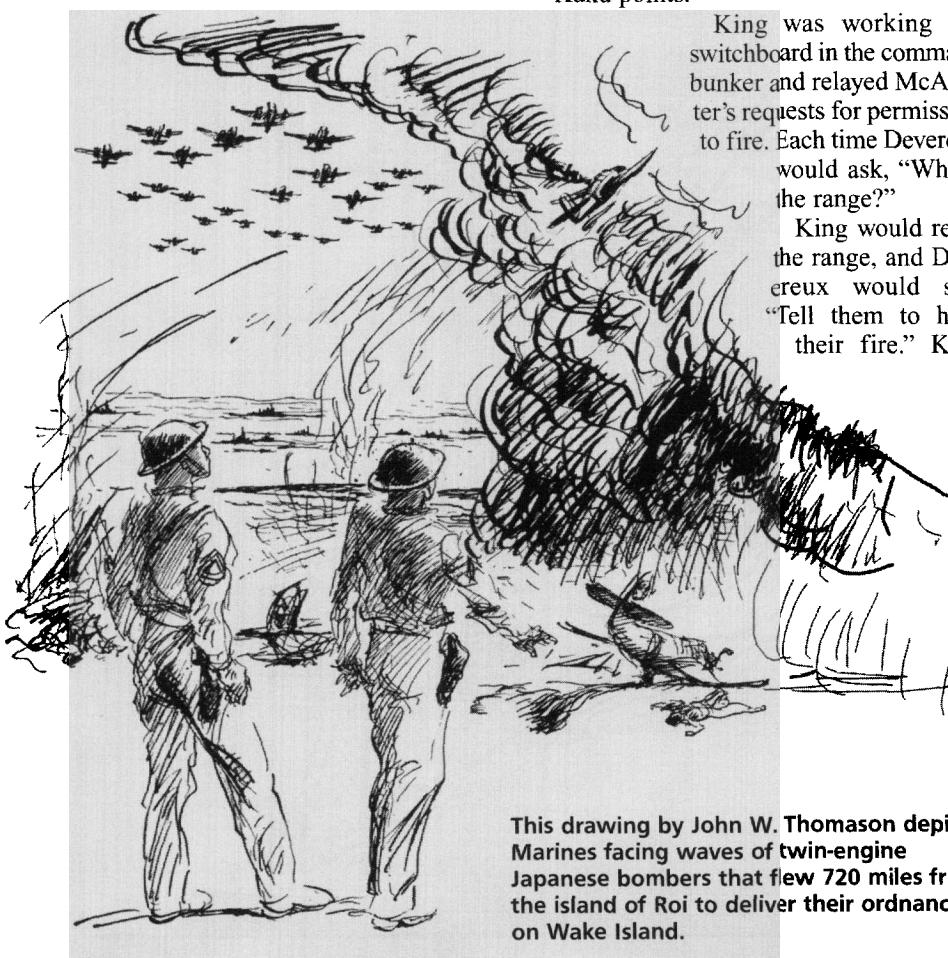
Btry L shifted fire to the Japanese transports *Kongo Maru* and *Konryu Maru*. One shell hit the leading transport, causing both to flee. Next they turned their efforts to a cruiser off the west end of the island. She took one shell in the stern and retreated out of range.

Btry B on Peale Island engaged another Japanese destroyer flotilla. It was a duel that saw the destroyer *Yayoi* take a shell in the stern and be set afire. Up went another smoke screen, and the ships made good their escape.

The invincible Japanese Navy was in retreat. Plans for a landing were forgotten. Damage control on burning and smoking ships was top priority. RADM Kajioka ordered a withdrawal to Kwajalein. He was not yet in the clear. He had not considered Marine air.

Earlier in the day, Lt David D. Kliewer spotted a Japanese submarine that had surfaced 25 miles off Wake. He fired his machine guns and dropped his 100-pound bombs at such a low altitude that bomb fragments ripped holes in his plane. He circled and watched as the submarine sank.

Wildcats piloted by Maj Putnam and Captains Henry T. Elrod, Herbert C. Freuler and Frank C. Tharin found the fleet little more than an hour's sail from Wake. Thanks to RADM Kajioka the fleet had no air cover. They did, however, have powerful batteries of antiaircraft



This drawing by John W. Thomason depicts Marines facing waves of twin-engine Japanese bombers that flew 720 miles from the island of Roi to deliver their ordnance on Wake Island.

"Cat and Mouse Over Wake." Aviation Art by Marc Stewart. This painting portrays a VMF-211 Wildcat stalking a Japanese bomber over Wake Island.



guns that barked a steady stream of fire. Elrod and Tharin bombed and strafed the two cruisers. *Tenryu*'s torpedo battery was damaged, and *Tatsuta*'s superstructure took a pounding. Freuler let go a 100-pound bomb on the *Kongo Maru* and watched her go ablaze.

Shuttling between Wake and the fleet, the pilots flew 10 sorties, dropped 20 bombs and fired 20,000 rounds of .50-cal. ammunition. The destroyer *Kisaragi*, suffering from an earlier hit, just blew up. In the process another destroyer suffered heavy damage.

Although hounded and pounded, the Japanese were not about to stay away. Their planes came again and again.

RADM Kajioka requested more forces to ensure the success of the next assault on Wake. He got what he needed: more destroyers, auxiliary ships, transports, four heavy cruisers and the fleet carriers *Soryu* and *Hiryu* with their planes. In the transports were more than 1,000 men of the Special Naval Landing Force with a naval force of 500 in reserve. On 21 Dec., RADM Kajioka sailed for Wake.

The bombing of the island took its toll. One by one, the planes of VMF-211 were used up. By 23 Dec. they were all gone. The remaining men of the squadron reported to serve as infantry.

In the interim, Wake's senior officer, CDR Cunningham, still hoping for American ships to appear on the horizon, prudently shredded radio codes into an oil drum and burned them with aviation gas.

Approximately 515 miles away on 22 Dec., the relief force paused to refuel.

The Marines spotted the Japanese assault force at 0215, 23 Dec. At 0250 Wake radioed: "Enemy apparently landing." At approximately the same time the naval relief force was 425 miles from Wake.

On Wake, Jack Davis, wanting to find out what was going on, left his position and went down to the 3-inch gun next to his 60-inch searchlight. Capt Wesley McC. Platt gently pulled Davis aside, telling him to return to his searchlight and keep careful watch on the water.

"If you even think you see a glint," said Platt, "turn on the light. Be sure you stay under cover, because as soon as you light it, it will be shot out." That's exactly what happened. Davis saw a glint, flicked the light, ducked, and the light was shot out. That's also when he first saw the Japanese in landing craft headed

toward shore. He scooted down to the 3-inch gun where the crew loaded high-explosive rounds with time fuses set at zero. A ball of muzzle blast rolled into the darkness and expanded when it exploded on a landing craft. Another ball of fire shot out, and one more landing craft took a direct hit.

The Marines greeted Japanese Patrol Craft 33, an old destroyer-transport, with 3-inch guns. Her powder magazine blew, sending roaring flames into the morning darkness. The firing was courtesy of Gunner Clarence B. McKinstry's

mastery of the .50-cal. machine gun on Wilkes Island and 2d Lt Hanna, whose crew manning the 3-inch guns on Wake sighted in on the two destroyer-transports that were disembarking men.

A company of 100 Japanese landed on Wilkes Island and overran a gun position of Capt Platt's 70-man Btry F. Sgt Coulson and a dozen Marines fixed bayonets and counterattacked. They drove the surprised Japanese toward a line held by Lt McAlister who, with 24 Marines, counterattacked into the enemy flank, causing the Japanese to panic. The 37 Marines complete-



PFC James O. King

R. R. KEENE

ly gutted the Japanese company, killing 94 and capturing two wounded.

The fighting was down to one on one. One Japanese charged up with a fixed-bayonet. Cpl Alvie Reed attacked with his bayoneted rifle. The two stabbed each other. Platoon Sergeant Edwin "Peep-sight" Hassig aimed his '03 rifle and shot the Japanese between the eyes.

Jack Davis and his fellow Marine started taking fire from behind a huge coral formation. Davis tossed a grenade over the top, and the rifle fire stopped. As the Marines started to move on, they took rifle fire from the same position. Although the grenade had killed several of the enemy, others were playing possum. The Marines responded with more grenades. In addition, PFC Bill Halstead jumped up on a rock, fired his rifle and finished them, almost. One of them shot and killed Halstead.

On the main island of Wake other Japanese troops went ashore. With no infantry in reserve, the 1st Defense Bn and members of VMF-211 were bolstered by Dan Teters' civilian construction crew, who had cared for the wounded, repaired damage, salvaged planes and mined the runway. Now they would all have to fight where they stood. Maj Putnam and Capt Elrod formed a horseshoe of rifle-

men around a 3-inch gun. "This is as far as we go," said Putman, and they met the onrushing flood of Japanese bayonets, rifles, grenades and machine guns.

The Japanese were getting uncomfortably close to Devereux's command post. J. O. King was taken off the switchboard and sent to help reinforce the perimeter. The first enemy he saw came walking up the road carrying a Japanese flag. King raised his rifle and took a shot. He heard two other rifles go off simultaneously. A quick examination of the body revealed only two holes. King, who never really liked the idea of killing anybody, took credit for the miss.

Meanwhile, Devereux's executive officer, Maj George H. Potter Jr., and 40 men fought from a defense line that crossed the airstrip. With them was E. E. Laporte, whose .50-cal. antiaircraft gun had seen no action up at the north end of Peale Island. It had been frustrating. They had "the hell bombed out of them," according to Laporte, but had to sit there and watch a lot of tracers in the distance on Wake. Laporte and the rest of the Marines from Peale joined Potter and dug in.

One hour into the battle, the Japanese had their 1,000 infantry ashore. At 0450 CDR Cunningham sent a message:

"Enemy on island. Issue in doubt."

Admiral William S. Pye, who was temporarily in command of the Pacific Fleet, did not want to risk losing the relief force with *Saratoga*. At 0811 Hawaii time, he ordered Fletcher to turn back to Midway. Officers pleaded with Fletcher to disregard the orders and make a run for Wake. Fletcher complied with his senior's command and ordered his ships about.

In the frantic situation on Wake, Devereux asked Cunningham if he knew of any friendly forces near at hand. The answer, of course, was no. Devereux looked at the civilians helping the Marines around him. After initial morale problems with the contract workers, the civilians had volunteered to do whatever they could. Led by Sgt Walter Bowsher, they volunteered to man a 5-inch gun. Most, however, didn't know a thing about combat and couldn't be expected to fight to the last man.

Communications had become the defenders' Achilles heel. Although initially swamped with reports to Devereux's command post, it hadn't taken much to put the "double E eight" phones out. Japanese coming ashore were cutting every wire they stumbled across.

Devereux had lost communications with nearly all of his batteries, and by his best estimates his garrison was down to approximately 200 who could still fight.

Although neither officer wanted to speak the word "surrender," Cunningham authorized Devereux to make arrangements. The Japanese were ashore in force and would not hesitate to make it a massacre.

The first indication of surrender was when J. O. King saw Sgt Donald R. Malleck come out of the command post with Maj Devereux. King's attention went immediately to the white flag tied to the swab handle carried by Malleck. Maj Devereux then said, "Lay down your arms and surrender."

The command to surrender scared King, but he understood. He looked at his skipper and remembers thinking respectfully, "There's nothing wrong with Devereux."

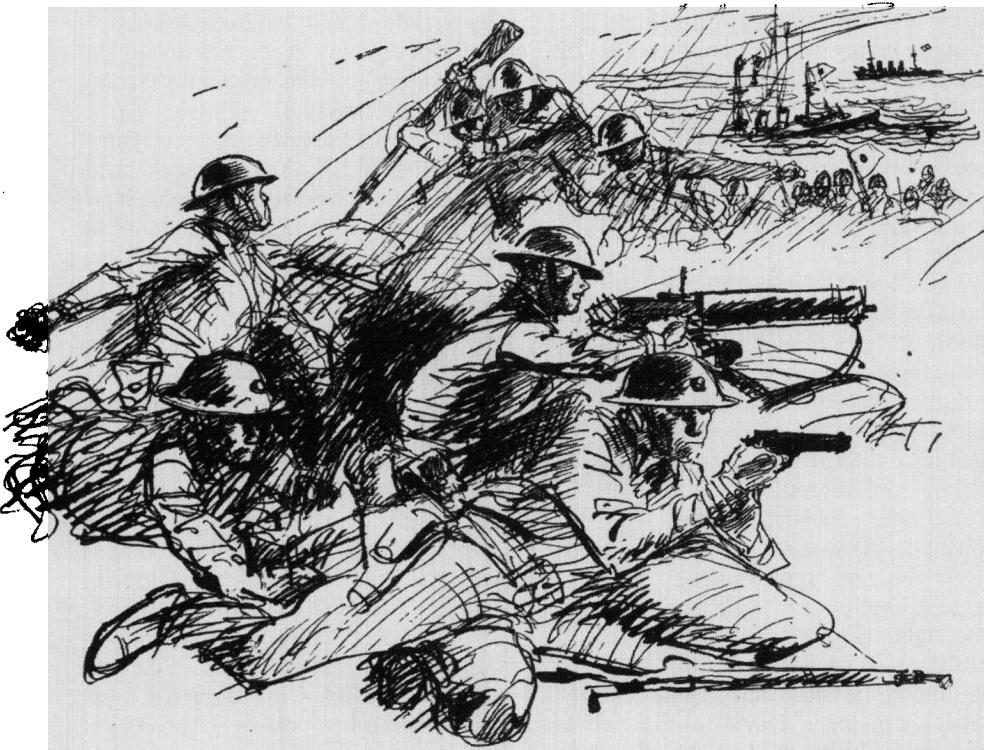
Frank Gross was at one of the few positions still in contact with Devereux. When the word came down to surrender, he and his fellow Marines were so dumbfounded they called back twice to confirm it. It didn't make sense because, they reasoned, Marines were taught never to surrender. They also had been taught that Japanese never take prisoners of war.

Finally, Gross told one of the men to get an undershirt and put it on a stick.



Cpl Franklin D. Gross

R. R. KEENE



"Enemy on island. Issue in doubt." was the last message from the garrison at Wake under attack by Japanese Marines. Thomason depicted the fighting in this drawing.

Down the way they heard a rifle shot. When they looked up there were a dozen or so Japanese approaching. Gross, who had never seen a Japanese soldier close up, noticed their split-toed shoes and thought, "That's something I've never seen before."

The Japanese herded them into the brush, stripped them down and tied their hands with telephone wire. As the Marines huddled together, they noticed a machine gun aimed at them. Remembering that Japanese never took prisoners, everyone expected to be shot. They were not.

On Wilkes Island Capt Platt reorganized his men and was getting ready to cross the channel and fight on when they spotted Maj Devereux, CDR Cunningham and Sgt Malleck under a white flag. Jack Davis had his rifle sights on a Japanese soldier next to Devereux.

Devereux yelled, "Cutie," a nickname used by only those senior to Platt. "Cutie, surrender your arms!"

"Throw down your arms," Platt repeated to his men. Davis took the bolt from his '03 rifle and threw it in the ocean. He then smashed his Springfield against the rocks.

Platt, a very good officer, looked at Davis and remembered it was the lad's 21st birthday. "You having a good birthday, Marine?"

Davis bravely replied, "Yes, sir! I sure appreciate all these guys coming over from Japan, the skyrockets and the fireworks. Thanks a lot, guys."

Only when the Marines boarded *Nitta Maru* did it dawn on them that a relief fleet was not coming. There was, however, never a doubt in their minds that America was going to win this one and that if they lived, they eventually would be rescued.

Epilogue:

The defense of Wake goes down in history as testimony to the valor and professionalism of the Marine garrison and its officers.

During the course of the siege, they shot down 21 enemy aircraft, with three more "possibles," and damaged 51 others.

They sank four warships and damaged eight others.

Not counting the lost submarine, the Japanese suffered more than 850 killed or missing.

Japanese CDR Mistake Kumara later wrote: "Considering the power accumulated for the invasion and the meager forces of the defenders, it was the most humiliating defeat the Japanese Navy ever suffered."

Although minor in scale, the Battle of



Japanese RADM Shigematsu Sakaibara (center) commanded Wake Island until American forces regained it in 1945. He was later hanged for war crimes.

Wake upset the timetable for the Japanese campaign of conquest in the Pacific. It also allowed forces on Midway Island to prepare for an assault and achieve victory.

By providing a small victory, the garrison on Wake bolstered the morale of the nation and the resolve of the American people.

According to Wake Island survivor Lt Arthur A. Poindexter, the action on Wake achieved a number of World War II "firsts":

- First enemy surface ships sunk by American forces
- First enemy vessel sunk by American aircraft
- First Japanese fleet submarine destroyed by American forces
- First and only amphibious operation in the Pacific to be stopped by coastal guns
- First Medal of Honor awarded to a Marine aviator: Capt Elrod was posthumously cited for gallantry as a fighter pilot and for ground combat, when he was killed on 23 Dec. 1941.
- First Presidential Unit Citation awarded by the personal direction of President

Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was also the only one ever signed by him.

There were 46 Marines, three sailors and 34 civilians killed in action in the defense of Wake.

Eight members of 1st Defense Bn, two members of VMF-211, three sailors and 100 civilians were killed or died while in captivity. The two VMF-211 Marines and three sailors were beheaded by the Japanese while they were embarked in *Nitta Maru*.

Wake Island was regained on 4 Sept. 1945. It was discovered that on 7 Oct. 1943, the Japanese lined up nearly 100 civilian prisoners and machine-gunned them on the beach at Wake. For this atrocity the island commander, RADM Shigematsu Sakaibara, was hanged as a war criminal.

Defenders of Wake still alive as of this writing are 98 members of 1st Defense Bn, seven men from VMF-211, 16 sailors and two soldiers. The number of surviving civilians is unknown. The Wake Island Survivors Association has not heard from approximately 50 of the defenders since the war ended.

