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MARINE DEFENSE BATTALIONS, OCTOBER 1939 - DECEMBER 1942:
THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE EARLY PHASES OF WORLD WAR II

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Stephen Ronald Maynard, B.A, M.A.

Denton, Texas

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This thesis explores the activities of the U. S. Marine defense battalions from October 1939 to December 1942. More specifically, it explains why Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) decided to continue the defense battalions as separate entities when, by mid-1943, it needed additional men to replace its combat losses and to create new divisions. In this process HQMC disbanded other special units, such as the raider battalions, parachute battalions, barrage balloon squadrons, and the glider squadrons. It retained, however, the defense battalions because of their versatility and utility as demonstrated during the various operations they conducted in Iceland and the Central and South Pacific. In these locations defense battalions performed as: (a) island garrisons, (b) antiaircraft artillery units, and (c) landing forces. Their success in carrying out these missions led to their retention as separate entities throughout World War II.

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INTRODUCTION

By mid-1943, the Navy's demand for new divisions to spearhead its thrust across the Central Pacific forced Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) to re-evaluate its personnel distribution and brought about the reorganization of many of the Marine Corps' special units. For instance, in response to the battle casualties of 1943, General Thomas J. Holcomb ordered the barrage balloon squadrons and the glider squadrons used as replacements. Later, in 1944, the pending activation of the 5th and 6th Marine Divisions again forced HQMC to re-examine its allocation of personnel. Under General Alexander A. Vandegrift, the four raider battalions in the Pacific were reorganized as the 4th Marines; and the parachute battalions along with the secret beach jumpers, a stateside raider battalion, and the raider training personnel in the United States went to the 5th Marine Division. In addition, HQMC even sent Marines recovering from malaria and elephantiasis to the 5th Marine Division.¹

¹Alexander A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Aspery, Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. A. Vandegrift (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1964), 241-242; Allen R. Millett, In Many a Strife: General Gerald C. Thomas and the U. S. Marine Corps 1917-1956 (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 234-235.

The Marine defense battalions, totaling nearly 20,000 men, were not, however, disbanded or reassigned in spite of this critical need for men. They were not affected because they had previously demonstrated a versatility that made them more valuable as separate units rather than serving as replacements. The defense battalions had clearly demonstrated their various uses in operations between December 1941 and December 1942. In essence, they had become too valuable to the Navy and the Marine Corps to be integrated into the new divisions.

This study will argue that if the mission of the Marine defense battalions during World War II had not been changed, they would have been disbanded. If the changes had not occurred, the defense battalions would have suffered the same fate as the Marine raider battalions, parachute battalions, glider squadrons, and barrage balloon squadrons, all of which were phased out by the middle of 1944. The defense battalions, on the other hand, remained active through the end of the war. In addition, because they were able to adapt to changing strategic considerations and carry out successfully their new missions as prescribed by Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), the defense battalions made important contributions to the Pacific war effort, particularly during the crucial first year of World War II.

The original mission for the defense battalions, as envisioned by HQMC, was to defend American-held islands

south and west of Hawaii. These islands included Wake, Midway, Johnston, Samoa, and others. To carry out this mission, each had the following assets: old naval guns, antiaircraft weapons, machine guns, searchlights, and other necessary equipment. The original complement for each defense battalion consisted of 800-900 officers and men. They were to provide delaying action against surface bombardment and air raids by Japanese forces until the arrival of main battle units of the United States Navy.

The serious damage suffered by the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, necessitated changes in the original mission of the defense battalions. In response to the Pearl Harbor disaster, HQMC formulated new missions for the defense battalions. Henceforth, these units assumed two additional functions. First, in the South Pacific, the defense battalions were to be used for the occupation of islands from which Allied aircraft could strike Japanese-occupied installations; and, secondly, in the South and Southwest Pacific, they were to provide antiaircraft defense and artillery support for major sea-borne landings by large Marine and Army forces. In time, HQMC by necessity had to modify the organization and equipment allocated to the defense battalions in order for them to carry out the new missions. Each was expanded to 1,200-1,500 officers and men, and their weaponry was upgraded and modernized in caliber and mobility. At the same time, the defense

battalions continued to perform their original mission by expanding fortifications on American island bastions in the Central Pacific. Thanks to the Marine defense battalions, Allied planners for the rest of the war gained flexible and strategically mobile forces able to protect vital areas and other units from sea and air attack; and reinforced or as reinforcements, the defense battalions provided landing forces and antiaircraft defense for Allied operations.

In determining how the Marine defense battalions changed to meet this redefined goal, I shall investigate their operations and demonstrate how they evolved from static to mobile units. As indicated in Chapter I, the prelude for this evolution came from the operations of a Marine defense battalion on Iceland. This deployment exposed the Marine Corps to the requirements for modern warfare for the first time and created at HQMC a concern for the antiaircraft protection of its landing forces.

Subsequent chapters continue to examine the evolving doctrine, mission, and organization of defense battalions. In the Central Pacific the Marines developed a strategy of using the islands as fortresses able not only to defend themselves against raids, but to repel full-scale naval assaults. Chapter II will show the problems and delays defense battalions encountered in the Pacific as they attempted to garrison the Navy's islands. These delays led to the difficulties the 1st Defense Battalion encountered at

Wake Island. Chapter III examines the 1st Defense Battalion's performance at Wake and confirms the inadequacy of the garrison, as then constituted, to resist surface and air assaults by hostile forces. The loss of Wake thus led to the island bases in the Central Pacific being transformed into fortified bastions. Chapter IV investigates the changes that took place between the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Midway, where occurred the final stage of defense battalion development in the Central Pacific.

After the Battle of Midway, the concept of the fortified island base became increasingly less important to American strategy. The changing nature of Allied operations from defensive to offensive undertakings and the rising dominance of the United States Navy made Japanese attacks on Allied islands unlikely. As a result, HQMC looked for alternative ways to use the defense battalions. This changed the theory of their employment from static to mobile operations.

Chapter V describes how defense battalions in the South Pacific began with the same doctrine and training as those in the Central Pacific, but found a different situation from the one in the Central Pacific. In the South Pacific, therefore, the use of defense battalions developed a different doctrine. The size of the islands there required that defense battalions be employed as part of an combined arms team, an integrated landing force combining infantry,

artillery, and support units with the antiaircraft and coastal defense capabilities. In many cases the islands in the South Pacific were larger, and little or no American naval presence existed there. Thus, the Marine Corps found that adequate protection of the South Pacific islands required more than one defense battalion per island. In addition, infantry units larger than companies were also needed to garrison these islands.

Chapter VI depicts the Marine Corps's response to the need for a larger command structure in the South Pacific. The Marine Corps organized brigades to exercise command on these islands. Defense battalions thus became part of a combined arms team. As part of this development, the Marine Corps replaced the defense battalions' immobile naval guns with the more flexible 155-millimeter gun. Thus, as the war progressed, the South Pacific's combined arms teams replaced the Central Pacific's fortress concept. Chapter VII indicates how the employment of these combined arms teams contributed to the occupation of strategically important islands in the South Pacific.

Defense battalions have been overlooked by most historians, including the writers of the official histories of the war, because their small size meant limited participation in the battles. Strategic operations, such as those carried out by Marine defense battalions, have been virtually relegated to footnotes, despite the fact that in

the early days of the war the occupation of strategically important islands secured the lines of communication between the United States and its allies and provided bases for Allied attacks on Japanese-held island groups. Later, they also participated in campaigns against Japan, but only as support units.

The official histories, however, are the first place to look for information on the defense battalions. The Marine Corps's five-volume History of Marine Corps Operations in World War II provides basic information about campaigns in which each defense battalion participated. These volumes, however, do not detail the actions of the defense battalions and contain few entries on any one battalion. Monographs published by the Marine Corps, in preparation for writing the official histories, provide more data on individual battles, and each includes a detailed bibliography of documents and secondary sources available at the time of their publication. These monographs often include more detailed accounts of defense battalion actions and the reports written after the action.

Another source is the Army's U.S. Army in World War II, also known as the "green books." The Army divided its histories into theaters and special studies. For the study of the war in the Pacific, there are several books of value. Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparation, both volumes of Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, and Global

Logistics and Strategy: 1940-1943 are particularly valuable for providing background and the "big picture." The Framework of Hemisphere Defense is helpful for early joint Army-Marine Corps planning. The eight-volume The War in the Pacific describes the Army's actions in that theater.

Although these volumes obviously focus on the Army, due to the joint nature of the war in the Pacific, they include a great deal of information about Marine units.

A number of memoirs are also available for the Pacific War. Shortly after the war both the Marine commander and the naval commander at Wake Island published their memoirs, which help fill in for missing documents and provide researchers with a detailed account of the siege of Wake. Recently, John F. Kinney, one of VMF-211's pilots, published a memoir of his military service, including an account of the siege of Wake. Other memoirs include those of General A.A. Vandegrift, commander of the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal and later Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Colonel F.F. Parry, who served on Wallis Island.

A second source for first-hand accounts is oral history interviews. The Marine Corps has seventeen interviews with Marines who were directly involved in the defense battalion program. The University of North Texas Archives has four interviews with Marines from defense battalions, and three of these deal with the Japanese attack on Wake Island. The oral history interviews provide researchers with information

not available in the written records. They describe the relationships within the unit and between the unit and higher commands. This information is helpful in examining the reasons that defense battalions were created and how they were used.

Secondary sources for the Pacific War are extensive and readily available. There is not, however, a detailed study of defense battalion operations. The focus is mainly on infantry or aircraft operations and generally neglects operations of other arms except where they directly impact on the fighting. The Marine Corps has published brief histories of its currently active divisions as well as infantry and artillery regiments, and these provide useful, if brief, outlines of the unit's history. Charles Updegraph's U.S. Marine Corps Special Units in World War II includes information on defense battalion activities; and William Langer's The Undeclared War places the occupation of Iceland in the larger context of foreign policy rather than in a military one. The British view is represented by Donald Bittner's The Lions and the White Falcon: Britain and Iceland in the World War II Era. For the Pacific, David Woodbury's Builders for Battle: How the Pacific Naval Air Bases Were Constructed covers the civilian involvement on the Central Pacific islands. Gordon W. Prange's books, Miracle at Midway and At Dawn We Slept, describe the attacks on Midway and Pearl Harbor. The importance of intelligence

is underlined in John Prados's Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II.

The most important sources are the unit records. Although Marine Corps records for the early part of the war are sparse, records for the later years became more numerous. Unit reports, the monthly reports of a unit's activities, are useful. Units involved in combat operations submitted "Special Action Reports," and these give a detailed account of the unit's involvement. Written annually, unit histories provide a fairly detailed picture. A final document is the "war diary," a journal maintained by each unit's operations officer to record routine activities.

To meet changes and challenges, units evolve and transform during wartime or are disbanded. Marine defense battalions changed their missions and their equipment to meet strategic and tactical changes in the Allied situation during World War II. In doing so they offer an example of how this change occurs.

CHAPTER I

Atlantic Interlude, 7 July 1941 - 25 March 1942:

The 5th Defense Battalion in Iceland

The deployment of Marine Corps's units to Iceland provided the first example of a defense battalion used as an integral part of a landing force. This use of the 5th Defense Battalion diverged from the standard practice of using defense battalions to garrison small, outlying islands in the Pacific. As part of a landing force, the 5th Defense Battalion was subject to tactical control by a larger command, and its operations were integrated with those of other units in the command.¹

In Iceland the 5th Defense Battalion's antiaircraft operations were combined with those of the British garrison. During its deployment there, the battalion left its 5-inch artillery group in the United States. The deletion of these weapons was indicative of a further modification of standard practice in the use of defense battalions for island defense

¹The Marine Corps organized the 5th Defense Battalion at Parris Island to replace the 4th Defense Battalion, which went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The 4th Defense Battalion split its personnel to form the 5th Defense Battalion, which then built back up to full strength by adding recruits. The Commanding General, Parris Island, formally activated the 5th Defense Battalion on 1 December 1940. See Charles L. Updegraph, Jr., U.S. Marine Corps Special Units Of World War II (Washington, D. C.: History And Museums Division, HQMC, 1972), 76.

and demonstrated not only the defense battalion's structural flexibility, but also the impact of the strategic and tactical needs of the landing force on the defense battalion's structure.

Although the Marines in Iceland were never involved in combat, their deployment remains unique for several reasons. It was the first time American ground troops were sent into a combat zone during World War II, and it was the only deployment of a Marine combat unit in the European Theater of Operations. Iceland was, moreover, the last time Marines were administratively assigned to the War Department. Finally, this was the first time that American units served under foreign officers during World War II.²

In the spring of 1940 the Germans attacked Denmark. After the Germans overran the country the Icelandic Parliament, until that time a part of Denmark, severed its ties to the Danish monarchy. Nearly a year later, because of its importance in the shipping of lend-lease materials, Roosevelt considered occupying Iceland. Roosevelt had Iceland declared a part of the Western Hemisphere to justify his action.

²The brigade Operation Order stated that coordination would use "the method of mutual cooperation"; however, the integration of the brigade into the British scheme of maneuver subordinated U.S. forces to the control of the British commander. See 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional), "Brigade Operation Order 1-41, 4 July 1941" (Archives Section, Marine Corps Historical Center (AS, MCHC), 2.

In March 1941, during staff talks between the United States and Great Britain, the Americans agreed to assume responsibility for the defense of Iceland should it become involved in the war. While the two staffs met, Hitler issued a declaration that included Iceland as an area where German submarines would sink neutral ships on sight, and after his declaration, German U-boat activity increased in Icelandic waters.³

The escalation of German U-boat activity raised American fears that the Germans planned an invasion of Iceland. Such an attack, if successful, threatened the supply line between the United States and Great Britain. Iceland's location along the convoy and air-ferry route from the United States to the British Isles made it important to the survival of the United Kingdom. In the meantime Allied aircraft based on Iceland provided anti-submarine patrols far out into the Atlantic, protecting convoys to Great Britain.⁴

In May 1941 the British, in desperate need of their units tied up in Iceland, asked President Franklin D.

³William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, The Undeclared War (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), 452-453, 522-524; Mark S. Watson, Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1950), 487-488.

⁴Langer and Gleason, Undeclared War, 522-524; Watson, Prewar Plans and Preparations, 487-488; James A. Donovan, Outpost in the North Atlantic: Marines in the Defense of Iceland (Washington, D.C.: MCHC, 1992), 1.

Roosevelt to dispatch American troops to the island. Roosevelt agreed to provide an American garrison on the condition that the Icelandic government issue an invitation to the United States government. The Icelandic parliament then extended an invitation, following which President Roosevelt ordered the dispatch of an occupation force.⁵

Roosevelt first turned to the Army to provide an Icelandic garrison, but its small force of regulars scattered among ranks filled with draftees and reservists could not field an expeditionary force. Thus, in June 1941 the Marine Corps received orders to organize a brigade for overseas service. Brigadier General John Marston assumed command of the brigade, designated the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional), on 10 June 1941 at Charleston, South Carolina.⁶

⁵Donovan, Outpost in the North Atlantic, 3-4; Frank O. Hough, Verle E. Ludwig and Henry I. Shaw, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal (Washington, D.C: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, HQMC), 37; A. A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Aspery, Once a Marine: The Memoirs of General A.A. Vandegrift, Commandant of the U.S. Marines in World War II (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 95; Watson, Prewar Plans and Preparations, 487-488. A contrary view is found in Donald F. Bittner, The Lion and the White Falcon: Britain and Iceland in the World War II Era (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), 128. Bittner claims Roosevelt suggested to Lord Halifax, the British ambassador, that the United States take over the protection of Iceland.

⁶Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 37; Vandegrift, Once a Marine, 95; Watson, Prewar Plans and Preparations: 487-488.

With the situation in Europe deteriorating, HQMC had previously prepared several plans for occupying the Azores in the Atlantic or Martinique in the Caribbean. As a result, the 6th Marines (Reinforced) were at sea under orders to join the 1st Marine Division, then at New River, North Carolina. However, HQMC diverted the 6th Marines from assignment to the 1st Marine Division and directed the regiment to report to the 1st Marine Brigade at Charleston instead.⁷ [See figure 1]

On 7 June 1941 HQMC ordered Colonel Lloyd L. Leech, the commanding officer of the 5th Defense Battalion, to report to Washington to receive orders to prepare his battalion for duty with the 1st Marine Brigade. The following day Leech ordered the battalion to return from its training at Hilton Head, South Carolina, to the Marine Barracks at Parris Island. He later modified that order, leaving the battalion's 5-inch seacoast artillery group at Hilton Head after learning it would not accompany the battalion to Iceland. The 5-inch seacoast artillery group, which consisted of three firing batteries with four 5-inch guns each, was considered unnecessary for the deployment. The 5-inch guns, once set in place, would have been tied to a

⁷David N. Buckner, A Brief History of the 10th Marines (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1981), 50; William K. Jones, A Brief History of the 6th Marines (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1987), 34-35.

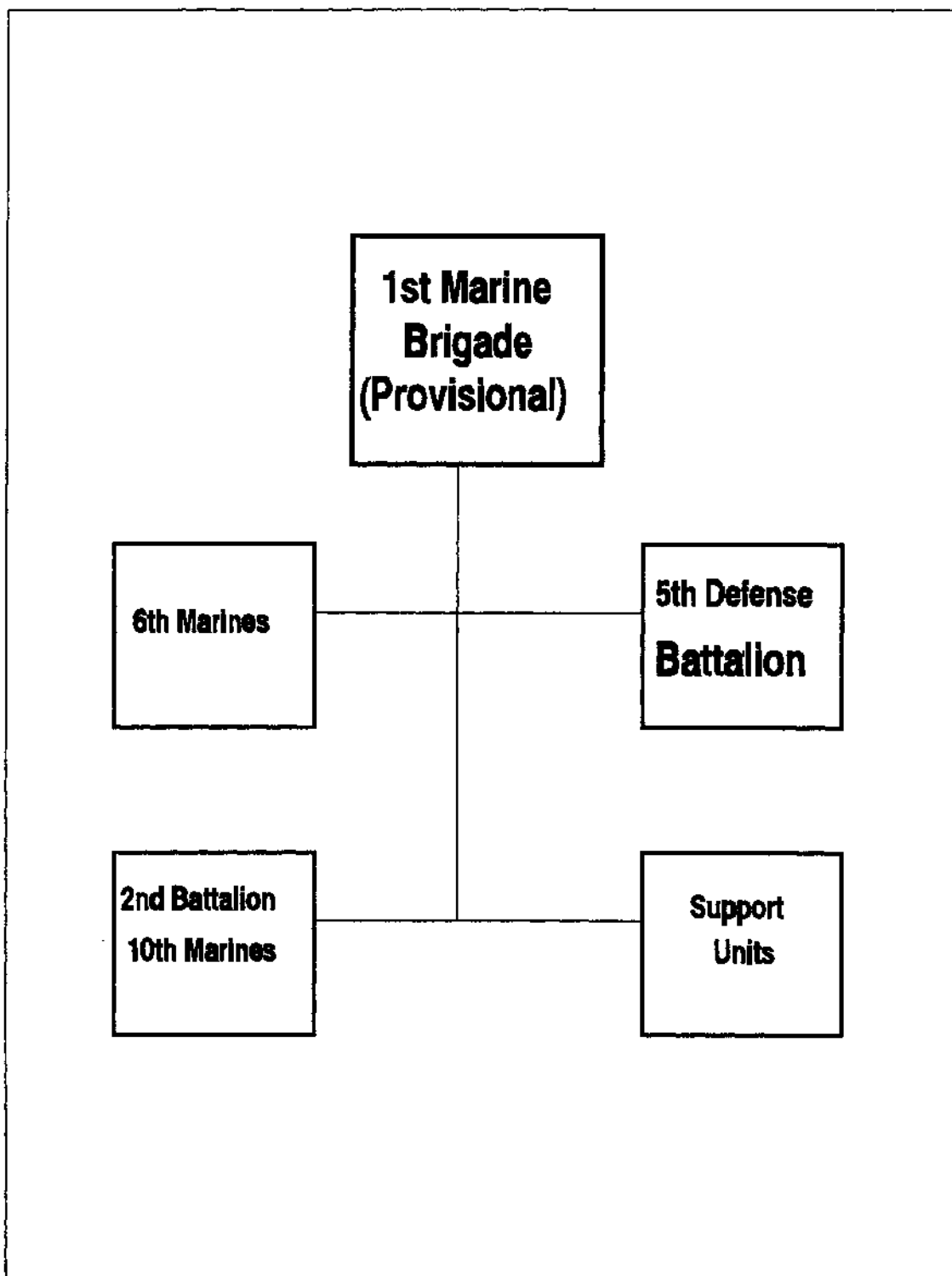


Figure 1 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) 15 June 1941. All figures unless otherwise noted are drawn by S. Maynard.

fixed position, reducing their flexibility and the Marine force's freedom to maneuver. Further, the British had nine batteries of coastal artillery emplaced on the island, reducing the need for Marine-manned coastal guns. American and British naval dominance in the Atlantic reduced the need for additional shore-based coastal batteries as well. On the other hand, HQMC recognized the German air threat to Iceland and thus included the 5th Defense Battalion's antiaircraft artillery groups. At the same time, HQMC saw no need for the seacoast artillery group, and this recognition resulted in a modification of the 5th Defense Battalion's original structure. [Figure 2]⁸

The battalion returned to Parris Island on 8 June 1941 and began moving personnel and equipment to Charleston, South Carolina, which served as the point of embarkation for Marine units stationed at Parris Island and provided an assembly point to receive Marines and equipment in preparation for the deployment to Iceland. At Parris Island, between 11-14 June, the battalion received an additional one hundred Marines from the 5-inch seacoast artillery group and from the Marine base at Quantico, Virginia, including a radio direction finding (RDF) section.

⁸5th Defense Battalion, "Report of Activities 7 June to 31 July 1941," dated 20 August 1941 (AS, MCHC), 2; 5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events: Period 7 - 14 June 1941," n.p.; 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional), "Brigade Operation Order 1-41, 4 July 1941" (AS, MCHC), 2; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 38.

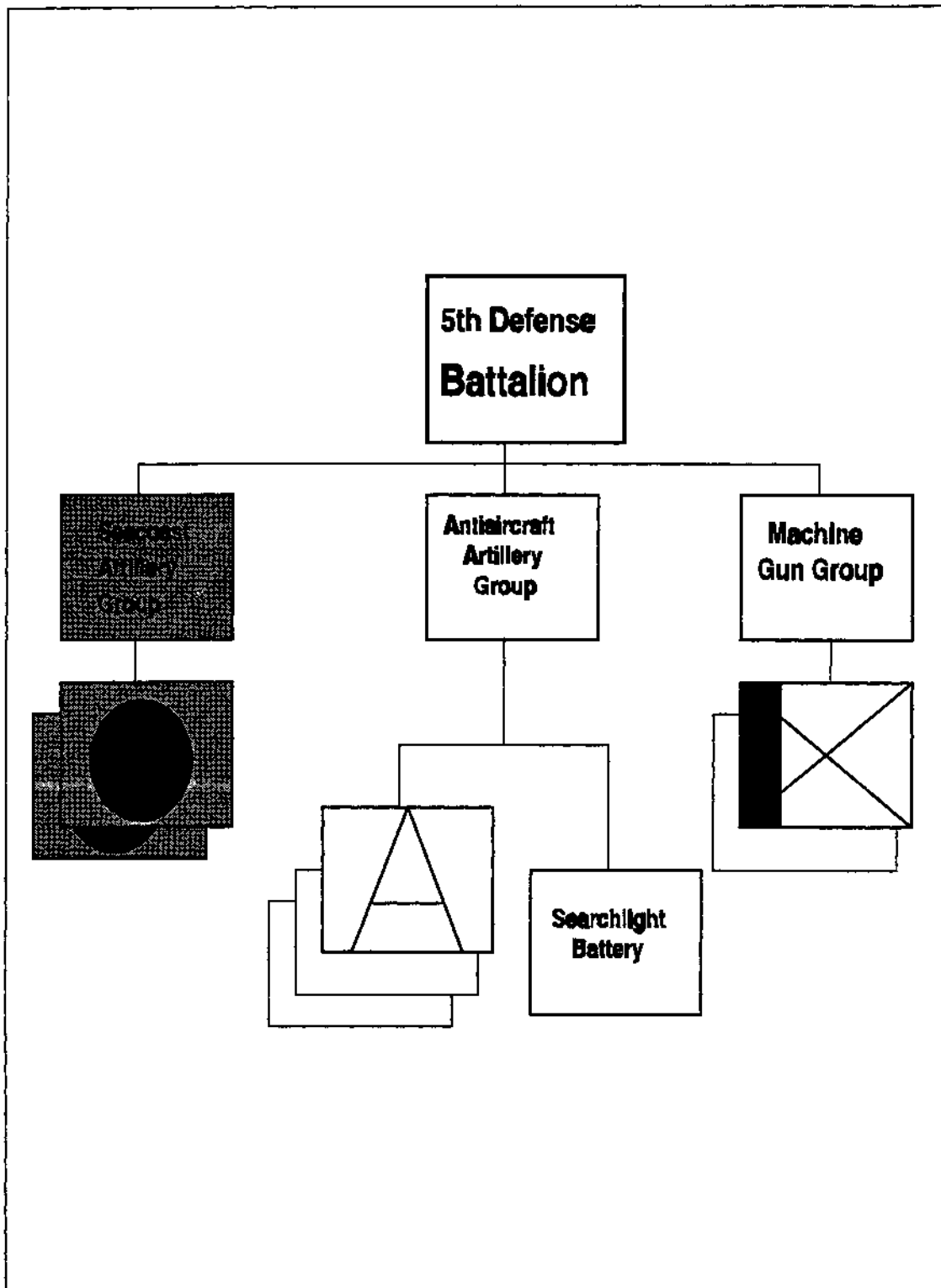


Figure 2 5th Defense Battalion, June 1941. Seacoast artillery group did not deploy to Iceland.

The 6th Marines arrived on 15 June 1941, bringing the 1st Marine Brigade to full strength.

Seven days later the 1st Marine Brigade, of which the 5th Defense Battalion was a part, left Charleston for Newfoundland, continuing on to Iceland on 1 July 1941. After embarkation on the Orizaba, the 5th Defense Battalion assumed responsibility for the ship's gunnery division. The Marines organized three watches to man the ship's 5-inch battery, 3-inch antiaircraft battery, and .50-caliber batteries during the ship's Atlantic transit. The battalion also provided machine gun details for the Hamul and Arcturus.⁹

They arrived in Reykjavik on 7 July 1941. Dock space was limited in Reykjavik, forcing the Marines to land much of their equipment on a nearby beach. Based on the potential German threat, the 1st Marine Brigade gave the 5th Defense Battalion priority for use of the limited dock space to speed the unloading of the battalion's heavy antiaircraft weapons. As unloading progressed the brigade staff established liaison with the British garrison.¹⁰

⁹5th Defense Battalion, "Report of Activities During Period 7 June to 31 July 1941," 2, 5-6; 5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events: Period 15 June - 12 July 1941," n.p.; Buckner, History of the 10th Marines: 50; Jones, History of the 6th Marines, 36-37; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 39-40.

¹⁰Donovan, Outpost in the North Atlantic, 9,11; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 40-42; Jones, History of the 6th Marines, 41.

Once the brigade completed unloading, the commander of the British garrison, Major General H.O. Curtis, gave it two missions. First, he ordered groups of the 5th Defense Battalion to provide antiaircraft protection for the city of Reykjavik, the harbor, and the airfield. Second, he ordered the 6th Marines to act as a mobile reserve.¹¹

In Iceland, the battalion's intermediate level headquarters, Group Headquarters, demonstrated a new capability. The Group's commanding officers began reconnoitering firing positions for their batteries and platoons, freeing the battery officers and the battalion commander for other duties. Battery officers then oversaw the unloading and assembly of weapons and equipment, while the battalion commander was free to concentrate on the overall planning for the battalion's operations. Reconnaissance of firing positions by the Group commanders began on 12 July 1941 and continued through the 17th. Leech examined the gun positions on 14 July and again on the 20th, by which time all 3-inch batteries and the majority of machine gun sections had been temporarily emplaced. On 23 July the last machine guns were established around the waterfront. The 5th Defense Battalion's 3-inch group and

¹¹Donovan, Outpost in the North Atlantic, 9,11; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 40-42; Jones, History of the 6th Marines, 41.

machine gun group were integrated into the British air defense plan.¹²

The battalion also brought with it three Signal Corps Radars (SCR) 268 to provide fire control at night for the 3-inch batteries. This was the first use of this highly-classified equipment by Marines outside the United States. The Marine Corps issued three SCR 268 radars to each defense battalion, one for each 3-inch battery.¹³

The Marine batteries were either widely scattered or, as in the case of the machine gun group, dispersed in small detachments. This dispersal required the laying of extensive communications wire for command and control, and it also limited the opportunities for battalion-level training, since the battalion's units were widely separated and nearly out of touch with everyone but the battalion headquarters. The distance and difficult communication between units and the bad weather made it difficult for the battalion to establish a system for training the batteries. Routine battery-level instruction and gun watches, however, continued. The occasional overflight of the island by German reconnaissance planes provided the only break in the monotony of routine battery training, but the British

¹²5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events, Period 6 July - 9 August 1941," n.p.

¹³Brigadier General Samuel G. Taxis, Interview by Benis M. Frank, 1981, transcript, Oral History Collection, MCHC, 150; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 42.

command did not permit the Marines to engage any aircraft during these alerts.¹⁴

These occasional alerts, as well as extensive work with the British, provided excellent educational opportunities for the battalion. The British and American commands integrated several of their operations, including intelligence and gun control functions. On arrival in Iceland, the battalion formed an intelligence section (B-2) to analyze the various intelligence summaries received from higher headquarters. Initially, the 1st Marine Brigade, the British Iceland (C) Force, and the Royal Air Force provided intelligence reports to the battalion. Later, the Army's Icelandic Base Command added its intelligence information. The battalion also provided Marines from its 3-inch group to operate a combined gun operations room (GOR) with the British. The GOR controlled the operations of all the antiaircraft guns in Iceland. Marines from the battalion

¹⁴When questioned about this, Lieutenant General Franklin G. Good, Jr., claimed that the poor communications between the various services prevented the battalion from engaging the German aircraft. Good served as the battalion's executive officer during the deployment to Iceland. See Lieutenant General Franklin G. Good, Jr., Interview by Benis M. Frank and Thomas E. Donnelly, 1970, transcript, Oral History Collection, MCHC, 93-94; 5th Defense Battalion, "Report on the Activities of the Fifth Defense Battalion in Iceland during the Period 1-31 August, 1941," (AS, MCHC), 2; 5th Defense Battalion, "Report on the Activities of the Fifth Defense Battalion in Iceland during the Period 1 September to 30 November, 1941," (AS, MCHC), 7; 5th Defense Battalion, "Report on the Activities of the Fifth Defense Battalion in Iceland during the Period 1 December, 1941 to 28 February, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 6.

served in the GOR from 5 November until the battalion left Iceland.¹⁵

In August 1941 the first echelon of the U.S. Army garrison arrived, and one month later, Major General Charles H. Bonesteel established the Icelandic Base Command. Following his arrival, and for the only time during the war, Marines served under the administration of the War Department. Although the arrival of Bonesteel encouraged the Marines' hopes that they would soon be relieved, the Army proved capable of only a slow and incremental build-up in Iceland.¹⁶

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Navy increased pressure on the Army to relieve the 1st Marine Brigade. On 31 January 1942 the first elements of the brigade began redeployment to the United States. The U.S. Army's 61st Coast Artillery Regiment relieved the 5th Defense Battalion in early March, and on 25 March 1942 the battalion arrived in New York. There the brigade was deactivated, and the battalion returned to Parris Island.

¹⁵5th Defense Battalion, "Report of Activities for the period 1 September, 1941 to 30 November, 1941" (AS, MCHC), 13-14; 5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events period 7 June, 1941 to 7 March 1942" (AS, MCHC) n.p.; Donovan Outpost in the North Atlantic, 11-12; Donnelly, "Good Interview," 93-94; Jones History of the 6th Marines, 42.

¹⁶Donovan, Outpost in the North Atlantic, 15-18; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 45; Jones, History of the 6th Marines, 43; Charles L. Updegraph, Jr., Special Marine Corps Units of World War II, (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1977), 63.

After arriving in Parris Island, the battalion split, providing personnel for two battalions, the original 5th Defense Battalion and a new 11th Defense Battalion.¹⁷

When organized on 1 December 1940, the 5th Defense Battalion had consisted of a combined headquarters and service battery, a 5-inch seacoast artillery group, a 3-inch antiaircraft artillery group, and a machine gun group. The use of group headquarters between the battalion headquarters and the battery in the battalion structure gave Marine planners greater flexibility in organizing the battalions for specific tasks. This allowed HQMC to separate the battalion from its 5-inch seacoast artillery group, and still leave both as functional units.

HQMC had originally designed defense battalions and their components to operate either independently or as part of a larger force. The garrison situation in the Pacific, however, led to changes in the defense battalions's organization, variations that allowed for more flexibility. In the Pacific each island received a garrison adapted to its size and strategic importance. Nevertheless, the defense battalion's performance in Iceland vindicated its structure, for the 5th Defense Battalion demonstrated the value of such an organization as a landing force while still

¹⁷5th Defense Battalion, "Report of Activities," 5-6; Frank, "Good Interview," 97; Donovan, Outpost in the North Atlantic, 31; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 46; Jones, History of the 6th Marines, 46.

having the capability to operate over larger areas and as part of integrated air defense systems.

The Iceland deployment showed that defense battalions could be integrated into larger landing forces with no loss to their effectiveness. This presaged the use of defense battalions in the South Pacific between December 1941 and December 1942. The 5th Defense Battalion tracked hostile aircraft, although not allowed to engage them, and demonstrated a potential to protect areas and units from air attack. This capability would prove important after the Japanese demonstrated the effectiveness of carrier-based air power at Pearl Harbor.

The threat from enemy air attacks required that ground units have a dedicated antiaircraft artillery unit. HQMC chose to use defense battalions to supply antiaircraft defenses for its ground units rather than create new units to carry out the job. This mission for defense battalions came in addition to defending the Navy's Pacific islands. Later, as the war progressed, antiaircraft defense would supplant guarding islands as the defense battalion's primary mission.

CHAPTER II

Building Picketts in the Central Pacific March 1940 - December 1941: Adaptations to Meet Changing Requirements

As war with Japan seemed imminent, the U. S. Navy planned to use the Marine defense battalions to man atoll garrisons in the Central Pacific to form a picket line for the defense of Pearl Harbor, home port of the Pacific Fleet. The atolls occupied by defense battalions possessed two values: they were located between Japan and Pearl Harbor, and they boasted of enough land mass to support Navy patrol planes. Each atoll was large enough to support an emergency landing field, a Marine garrison, and naval support facilities. Consequently, between March 1940 and December 1941, HQMC made available for duty on these atolls the 3rd Defense Battalion (Midway), 1st Defense Battalion (Johnston, Palmyra, and Wake), and the 6th Defense Battalion (Midway). The 4th Defense Battalion, which was destined for Wake, did not leave Oahu during this period because of the Pearl Harbor disaster and the fall of Wake on 23 December 1941.

The Central Pacific placed distinct burdens on the Marine garrisons there, and the small size of the atolls forced the defense battalions to make changes in their standard tables of organization to meet each island's

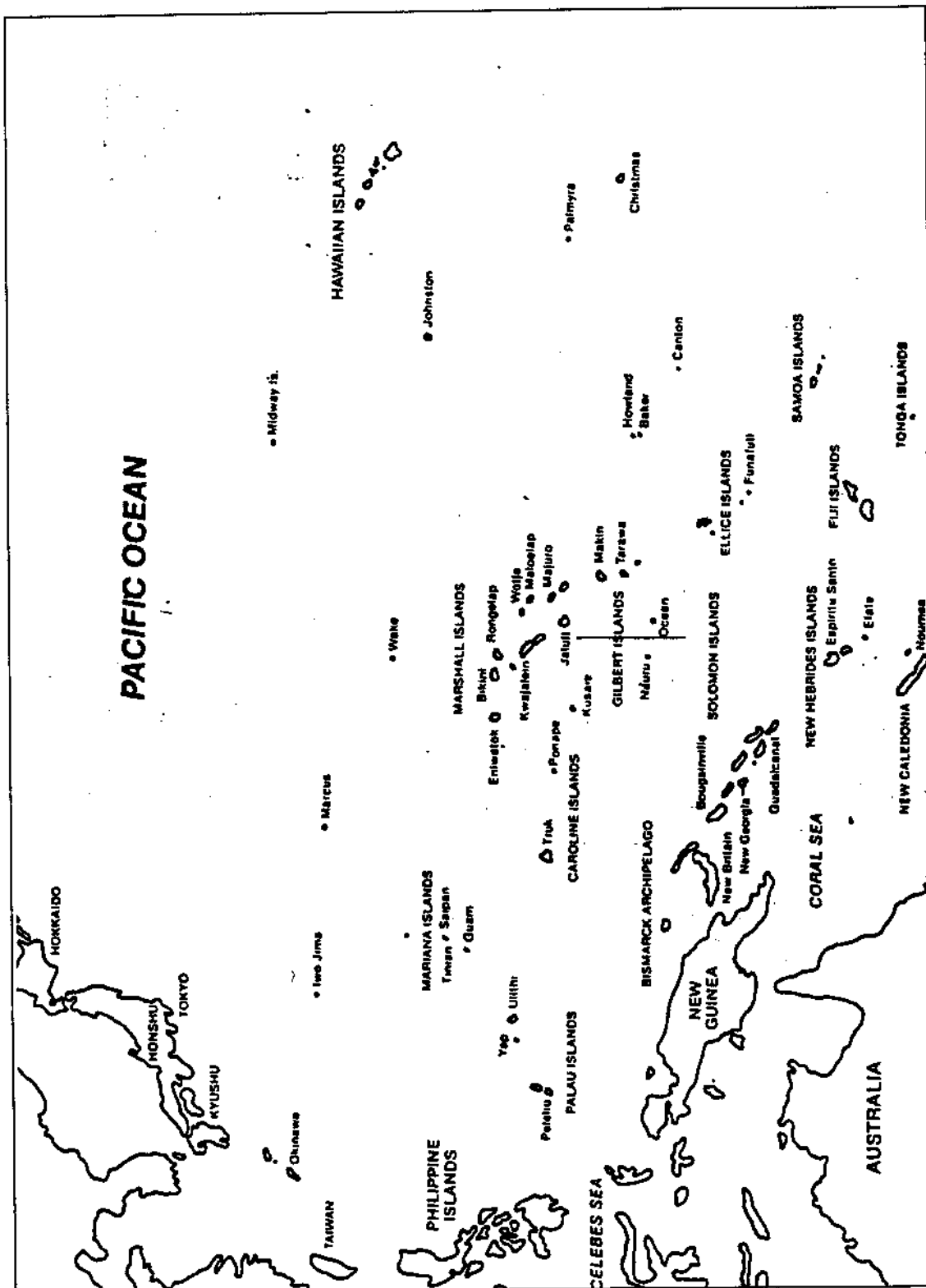
peculiar features.¹ Defense battalions deployed to small Pacific atolls thus adapted their organizations to meet the unique tactical needs of their surroundings by creating detachments of various sizes.

The Navy-controlled islands in the Pacific were the object of large construction appropriations in 1939. Before the arrival of the Marine garrisons, the Navy slowly began to build facilities on these islands to support its plans for possible war with Japan. This activity brought a large number of civilian contractors, and each contractor reduced by one the number of Marines or sailors who later occupied the islands. Both civilian and military personnel competed for each atoll's limited resources, including freshwater consumption and living space. Thus, civilian contractors limited the size of the garrison occupying the island. [See figure 3] Since Marines built all the defensive works, the reduced size of the garrisons obviously slowed construction of defensive emplacements. In addition, the Marines lacked heavy construction equipment, further slowing progress on defensive works.²

To deal with the lack of space and recreational facilities, defense battalions used detachments to man the

¹By December 1941 HQMC had created a standard table of organization for defense battalions. See Updegraph, Marine Corps Special Units in World War II, 65.

²Bureau of Yards and Docks, "NOy-4173, Serial YD," (AS, MCHC, n.d.), n.p.



Map 1. Map of the Pacific area from an unknown source.

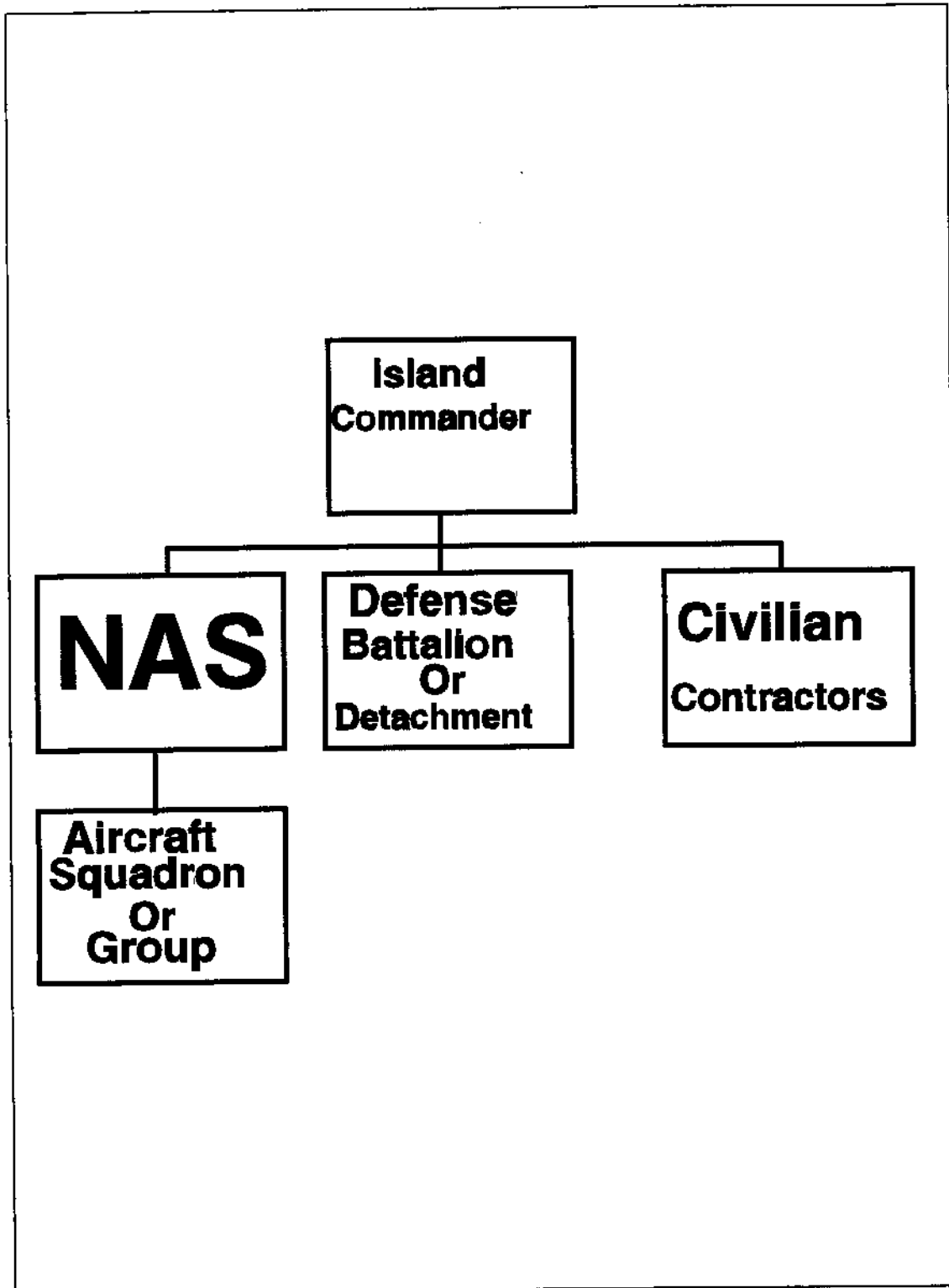


Figure 3 Command relationships on the Pacific Islands, December 1941.

island garrisons. A battalion's detachment deployed to the island assigned to the battalion, and then another detachment relieved the first one after a few months. Meanwhile, the bulk of the battalion remained in Hawaii for additional training.

The structure of the defense battalions included a larger number of field grade officers, mostly majors, than did other battalions. A defense battalion had up to five majors in various positions throughout the command structure, and these officers were available to command the detachments created by the battalions. They brought valuable experience to the establishment of island defenses. The defense battalions, in spite of the number of field grade officers, still reflected an economy of manpower. The Marine 3-inch battery, for example, required two officers and sixty-four men, while the Army allowed four officers and 140 men for the same organization.³

As the number of defense battalions in the 14th Naval District increased, the District Marine Officer⁴ made plans

³James P. S. Devereux, The Story of Wake Island (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1947), 37.

⁴ As senior Marine officer, Colonel Harry K. Pickett, commanding officer of the 3rd Defense Battalion, assumed the additional duty of District Marine Officer with the arrival in February 1941 of additional defense battalions. In the 14th Naval District this included defense battalions in Pearl Harbor and the Marine barracks in the District. The commanding officers of the naval air stations (NAS) where defense battalions were stationed exercised operational control over the battalion at that station, while the

to rotate entire battalions between atoll garrisons. These additional battalions arrived, however, only days before the war started, and at that time strategic needs elsewhere reduced the number of battalions available to the 14th Naval District.⁵

The first island to receive a garrison was Midway, which was close to Pearl Harbor. If the Japanese were to occupy Midway, they would have had the ability to keep constant watch on American naval activity at Pearl Harbor as well as establish an air and naval base on the island. For the initial garrison HQMC chose the 3rd Defense Battalion, the first defense battalion to be activated by the Marine Corps. The 3rd Defense Battalion left Charleston for Pearl Harbor on 5 March 1940 and arrived on 7 May.⁶ The battalion then reported to the Commandant 14th Naval District for operations, who ordered it to garrison Midway. Colonel Harry K. Pickett⁷, the 3rd Defense Battalion's

District Marine Officer continued to exercise administrative and training command over the battalions, which included rotating the battalions between the islands and Hawaii.

⁵Devereux, Story of Wake, 38-39.

⁶Headquarters Marine Corps authorized the travel of dependents on the same transport that the battalion was using. Brigadier General Samuel P. Taxis Interviewed by Benis M. Frank transcript, (Oral History Collection, MCHC, 1981), 62-64.

⁷Pickett had surveyed the Pacific island for the Marine Corps and submitted a report recommending anti-aircraft artillery garrisons for those in the 14th Naval District.

commanding officer, had recommended to Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch, Commandant of the 14th Naval District, that an advance party from the 3rd Defense Battalion occupy Midway because the island lacked resources to support simultaneously a full defense battalion and the large number of civilian construction workers on the island.⁸

In May 1940 the 14th Naval District ordered Captain Samuel P. Taxis, executive officer of the 3rd Defense Battalion's seacoast artillery group, to take a survey party to Midway. Pickett ordered the advance party to survey the island, recommend gun positions, and begin building camp facilities for the battalion. The survey party remained at Midway for two months.⁹

The positioning of the battalion's guns depended on accurate survey information without which they could not be aligned. Control of the guns, using a central control point, required that all batteries and guns be aligned on the same north-south grid; otherwise, they would fire in different directions. During the survey, however, Taxis could not locate the U. S. Engineer Department (USED) survey marker, and he learned that the civilian surveyor on the

⁸Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 65; Heinl, Marines at Midway, 4.

⁹Frank, "Taxis Interview," 52, 67-68; Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Marines At Midway (Washington, DC: Historical Section Division of Public Information, HQMC, 1948), 4; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 65.

island also could not locate it. Taxis and the civilian surveyor used as an alternative an offset from the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey marker, Midway's lone lighthouse. Using the alternative marker for his survey, Taxis found that the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey deviated from true north. He completed his survey in early July.¹⁰

On 9 July 1940, a second survey party under Captain Kenneth W. Benner of the battalion's 3-inch group relieved Taxis's party, which returned to Pearl Harbor. The second survey party focused on locations for the placement of the 3-inch group's antiaircraft guns on Midway. Completion of the two surveys allowed detailed planning of the battalion's gun placement, and the survey parties also provided recommendations for the placement of the battalion's other weapons and communications lines.¹¹

The Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion to increase the size of the Midway detachment in September 1940. The battalion complied by adding Marines to the Midway garrison. Meanwhile, the remainder of the battalion stayed in Hawaii training and awaited rotation to Midway. This procedure allowed the battalion to rotate Marines from

¹⁰Frank, "Taxis Interview," 67-68, 75-78.

¹¹Ibid., 75-78; Heinl, Marines at Midway, 5.

the island outpost to Hawaii where they could rest and relax.¹²

The detachment of the 3rd Defense Battalion arrived at Midway on 29 September. Under Major Harold C. Roberts, the detachment began emplacing the heavy weapons and fire control systems and digging underground ammunition magazines. The Naval District also ordered the Marines to unload ships that arrived at the island. The detachment remained until February of 1941, when CinCPac, anticipating an order from the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), instructed the remainder of the 3rd Defense Battalion to join the detachment at Midway.¹³

The 14th Naval District administered the Navy's plans to build naval air stations in the outlying islands and exercised operational control of the defense battalions that CinCPac ordered to defend these islands, the mission for which HQMC had organized the units. In January 1941, the CNO stepped up the garrison program for the Pacific islands, and he directed the rest of the 3rd Defense Battalion in Pearl Harbor to move to Midway. The CNO also ordered the 1st Defense Battalion divided between Johnston and Palmyra Islands and had the 6th Defense Battalion moved to Pearl Harbor as a relief for the battalions deployed earlier. In

¹²Heinl, Marines at Midway, 5.

¹³Frank, "Taxis Interview," 74; Heinl, Marines at Midway, 5-7.

February, CinCPac requested that the CNO's orders be modified, reducing the size of the Midway garrison until the civilian contractors had finished their work and began leaving the island, thus freeing living space for the garrison. That same month, based on CinCPac's recommendation, the CNO directed reduced garrisons for the occupation of Johnston and Palmyra Islands.¹⁴

As the number and activities of the defense battalions in the 14th Naval District grew, they created a need, previously unforeseen by higher headquarters, to coordinate their activities. Pickett requested that HQMC leave him in Hawaii with authority over all the defense battalions. HQMC approved the request, so Pickett remained in Hawaii to coordinate the activities of the arriving defense battalions. His staff then formed the basis for the Marine Garrison Forces, 14th Naval District, which controlled the defense battalions and the anti-aircraft training facilities in Hawaii throughout the war.¹⁵

¹⁴Chief of Naval Operations, "Establishment of Permanent Defenses of Midway, Johnston and Palmyra Islands, 17 January 1941," (AS, MCHC), 1-2; Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, "Establishment of Permanent Defenses of Midway, Johnston and Palmyra Islands, 11 February, 1941," (AS, MCHC), 1-4; OPNAV, "Naval Dispatch 192145CR439, 19 February 1941," no title, (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Devereux, Story of Wake, 24.

¹⁵Harry K. Pickett to A.A. Vandegrift, 6 February 1941, (AS, MCHC), n.p.

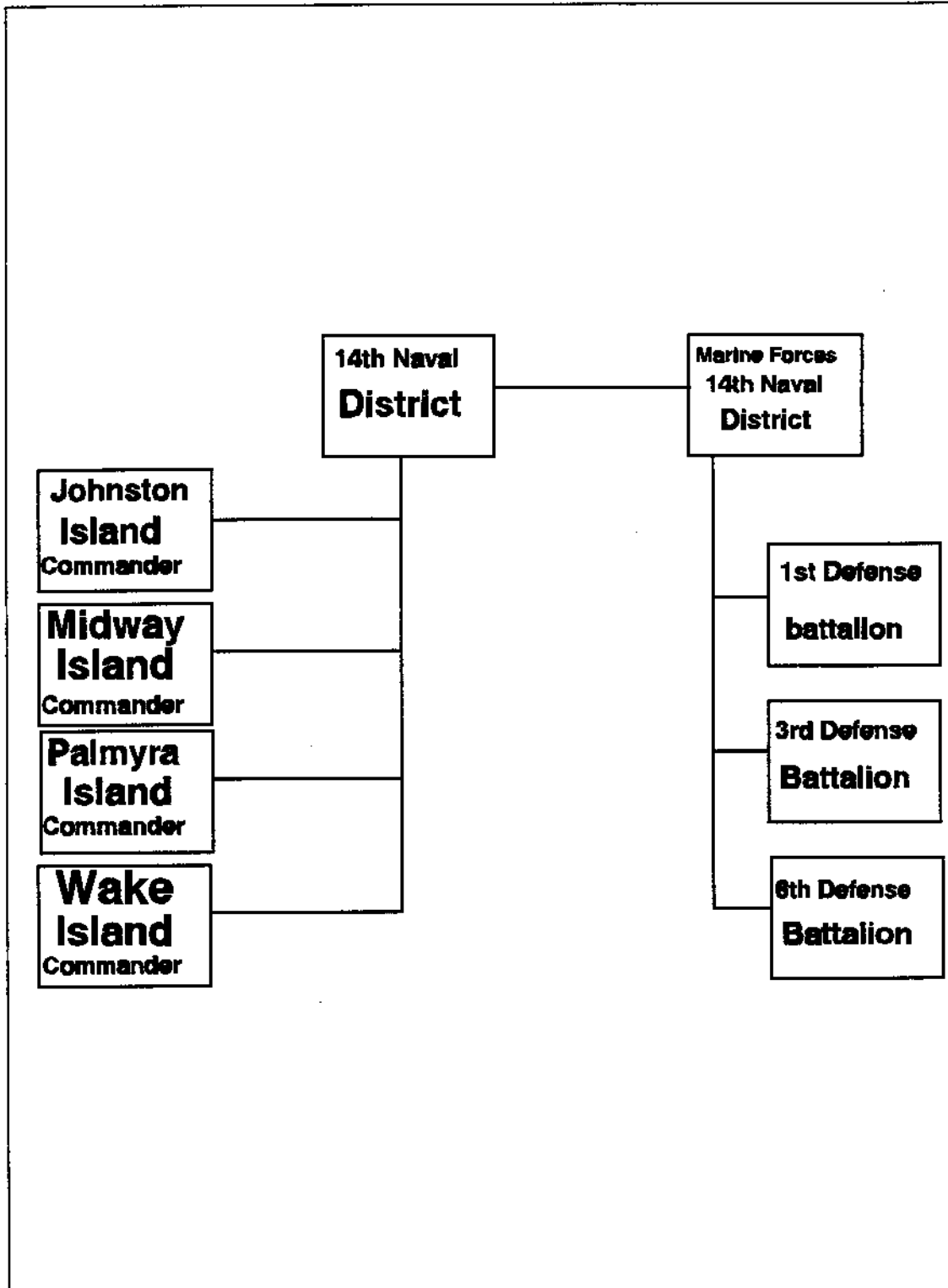


Figure 4 Command relationship in the 14th Naval District, November 1941.

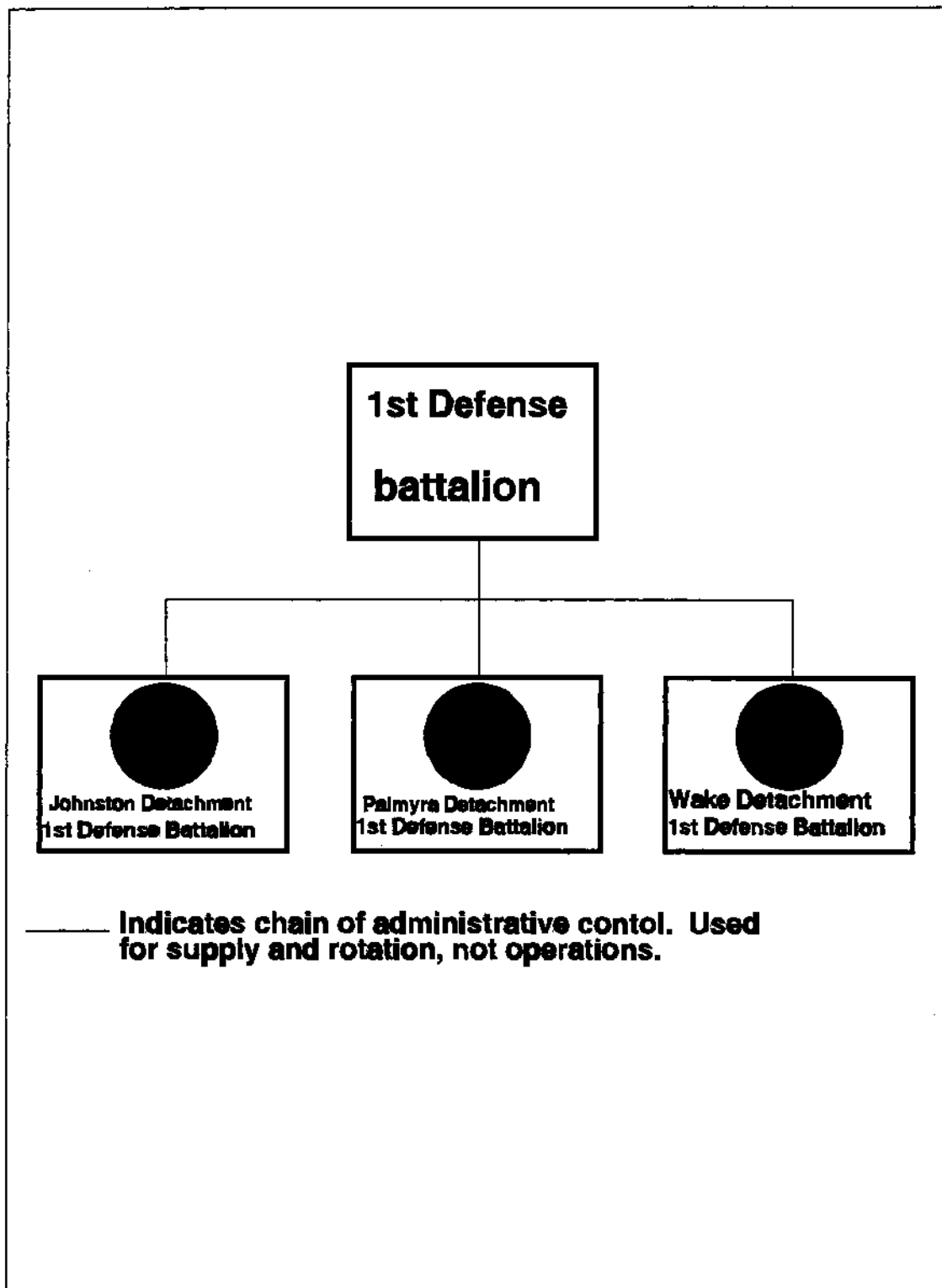


Figure 5 Detachments of the 1st Defense Battalion, 7 December 1941.

To defend Johnston and Palmyra Islands, CinCPac ordered the 1st Defense Battalion to Hawaii. In February 1941, the 1st Defense Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bertram A. Bone, arrived from San Diego. Once at Pearl Harbor, the battalion began readying detachments to garrison Johnston and Palmyra. In dividing the battalion between the two islands, CinCPac sent most of the men to Palmyra, the larger of the two islands. As a result of CinCPac's request to reduce the size of the initial garrisons, however, most of the 1st Defense Battalion remained at Pearl Harbor.¹⁶

The reduced garrison detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion for Johnston arrived on 3 March 1941. It initially consisted of six Marines and two sailors with two 5-inch guns, half the number of 5-inch guns initially planned for the defense of the island. This early garrison amounted to less than the full complement for one gun, but the number of civilian contractors constrained the size of the garrison. The island had last been surveyed in 1939, but unlike Midway no preliminary survey took place before the arrival of the Johnston detachment. The Palmyra

¹⁶Chief of Naval Operations, "Establishment of Permanent Defenses of Midway, Johnston and Palmyra Islands, 17 January 1941," (AS, MCHC), 1-2; Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, "A4-3/kk/0246 EG/N41, 11 February 1941," (AS, MCHC), 1-4; Major General Commandant, "Marine Corps Personnel in 14th Naval District, 12 September 1941," (AS, MCHC), 1-3.

detachment, traveling on board the same ship, assisted the Johnston detachment with the basic installation of the two 5-inch guns and with the establishment of a base camp. The Palmyra detachment, consisting of three officers and forty-five enlisted men, then proceeded to its destination in mid-March 1941.¹⁷

In response to CinCPac's orders, Lieutenant Colonel Bertram A. Bone and a detachment from the 1st Defense Battalion arrived on Midway to begin the relief of Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Pepper's 3rd Defense Battalion, which had been there for nearly a year. The detachment from the 1st Defense Battalion then remained on Midway for two months, until the 6th Defense Battalion arrived in July 1941. During the 3rd Defense Battalion's time at Midway, it installed three batteries of 5-inch naval guns for seacoast defense as well as three batteries of 3-inch Army guns for anti-aircraft defense. The Marines also built communications lines and beach defenses. Thus, the 3rd Defense Battalion and the detachment of the 1st Defense Battalion had established Midway's land-based defensive network by the time the 6th Defense Battalion arrived.¹⁸

¹⁷OpNav, "Naval Dispatch, 192145CR439, 19 February 1941," (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 66.

¹⁸Frank, "Taxis Interview," 71-72.

The 1st Defense Battalion increased the size of the Palmyra and Johnston detachments by slowly adding Marines from Pearl Harbor. Meanwhile, the battalion periodically rotated personnel between the outlying detachments and Pearl Harbor. As work ended on some of the naval construction projects, room on Johnston and Palmyra Islands became available for additional Marines, enabling the battalion to increase steadily the size of each garrison in both personnel and equipment.¹⁹

Wake was the last island to receive a garrison. Early plans called for Wake to receive the 6th Defense Battalion for its defense, but the District Marine Officer changed the plans. The 3rd Defense Battalion, on Midway for nearly a year, for morale and training reasons needed to be relieved. Seeing this situation develop, Pickett ordered the 6th Defense Battalion to relieve the 3rd Defense Battalion, which had occupied Midway since January 1941. This relief, although necessary, delayed the occupation of Wake by a defense battalion and added to the burden of the 1st Defense Battalion because the 14th Naval District ordered it to provide a temporary detachment for the island. The 4th Defense Battalion was to relieve the 1st Defense Battalion's

¹⁹Bryghte D. Godbold, Interview by Ronald E. Marcello, transcript, Oral History Collection, University of North Texas Archives, 1972, OH 123, 2-3; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 66.

detachment, but by the time it arrived and unloaded, the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.²⁰

On 23 June 1941, the District Marine Officer ordered the 1st Defense battalion to organize a detachment for the occupation of Wake Island. The battalion received four batteries of 3-inch guns, three batteries of 5-inch guns, machine guns, a SCR 268 fire control radar, and a SCR 270B search radar. The 1st Defense Battalion organized the Wake Detachment under Major Lewis L. Hohn. Consisting of six officers and 173 enlisted men, the Wake Detachment arrived there aboard the Castor on 19 August 1941 and occupied the abandoned construction workers' tent camp on Wilkes Island²¹, designated Camp 1, while the civilian workers occupied permanent facilities on Peale Island, designated Camp 2. Wake Island provided little opportunity for diversion. The detachment's task, installing a battalion's complement of weapons, left little time for recreation. With the establishment of a seven-day work week both to install the weapons as quickly as possible and to limit the idle hours available, there was no time for an erosion of morale.²²

²⁰Devereux, Story of Wake, 24.

²¹Wake Island actually consists of three islands: Wake, Wilkes, and Peale. Wake refers to the atoll as a whole.

²²Devereux, Story of Wake, 24; James C. Venable, Interview by Ronald E. Marcello, transcript, Oral History Collection, University of North Texas Archives, 1971, OH 73,

Construction proceeded slowly, however, because the civilian contractors worked exclusively on facilities for the naval air station. The Marines thus received only what support could be spared from Navy projects. Using hand tools, the detachment worked on defensive works. Because the Navy focused on the construction of facilities to support the offensive potential of the island, Marine construction, including revetments for aircraft near the airstrip, received low priority in the building plan.²³

Construction equipment was not the only thing in short supply at Wake. Only one of Wake's 3-inch batteries had its entire complement of fire control equipment. The Marines installed communication lines between the Peale Island battery and the other manned battery on Wilkes Island to provide height information that the Wilkes battery lacked. The Marines did not provide communications to the unmanned third 3-inch battery.²⁴

The 6th Defense Battalion, Colonel Raphael Griffin commanding, arrived at Pearl Harbor on 22 July 1941.

4, 5; Marcello, "Godbold Interview," OH 73, 3; Heintz, Defense of Wake, 3-4, 10; David O. Woodbury, Builders for Battle: How The Pacific Naval Air Bases Were Constructed, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company Inc, 1946), 258.

²³Marcello, "Venable Interview," OH 73, 6, 8; Heintz, Defense of Wake, 5-6.

²⁴Devereux, Story of Wake, 37; Marcello, "Godbold Interview," OH 73, 6; Marcello, "Venable Interview," OH 123, 7-8.

Colonel Harold D. Shannon²⁵, the battalion executive officer, then preceded the rest of the battalion to Midway on 11 August and began preparation for the arrival of the 6th Defense Battalion, which relieved the 3rd Defense Battalion and the 1st Defense Battalion's detachment on 11 September. The relieved units returned to Hawaii.²⁶

The executive officer of the 1st Defense Battalion, Major James P. S. Devereux, arrived at Wake on 15 October 1941 and relieved Hohn. At the same time Devereux assumed the duties of island commander. Shortly afterward nine officers and two hundred enlisted men joined the Wake Detachment. Because the defense of the naval air station was the reason for occupying Wake, all activities on the island were subordinate to the air station. The Navy thus provided a naval aviator to command the island, and Devereux relinquished command to Commander Winfield S. Cunningham, the newly arrived naval air station commander, on 28 November 1941. In addition to naval personnel to operate the air station, Cunningham brought the ground echelon of Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF 211). [See NOTE] Meanwhile, the 4th Defense Battalion arrived in Hawaii on 1 December 1941 and spent the following week unloading equipment, which was completed on the 6th of December. The Naval District had

²⁵Shannon replaced Griffin shortly after the battalion arrived on Midway. See Heinl, Marines at Midway, 8 fn 31.

²⁶Ibid., 8.

intended for the battalion to replace the 1st Defense Battalion Detachment on Wake Island, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor disrupted this plan.²⁷

Midway, the most important island in Hawaii's "shield," suffered from overcrowding. The civilian contractors, the naval personnel for the naval air station, and the Marine garrison packed Midway's limited land mass. To reduce the overcrowding, CinCPac requested permission from the CNO to reduce Midway's garrison temporarily, but the CNO refused. Conversely, the CNO ordered that two batteries of 7-inch guns and an additional battery of 3-inch guns be sent to the island. These additional guns arrived in November 1941, nearly doubling the 6th Defense Battalion's seacoast group and increasing the size of the 6th Defense Battalion's 3-inch group by a third. Also, in November, the advance echelon of Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 231 (VMSB 231) joined the 6th Defense Battalion on Midway.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., 6, 8, 10; Devereux, Story of Wake, 24; Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet "280622," n.d., (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Sherrod, History of Marine Corps Aviation, 35-36.

NOTE: The Navy designates aircraft squadrons by using codes for the type of squadron. The first letter is the type Fixed-wing (V); the second letter (M) in Marine designations stands for Marine; Navy squadrons use only two letters. The final letter or letters is the type-squadron. F was Fighter, S was Scout, SB was Scout-Bomber, and O was Observation. Early on dive bombers were also designated by an O. Thus, a VMF was a fixed-wing, Marine, fighter squadron.

²⁸Heinl, Marines at Midway, 8-9, 16, 45.

As mentioned previously naval construction on the islands added to the Marines' problems by bringing large numbers of civilian contractors to the Pacific. Each contractor reduced the living space and freshwater available on the island, limiting the number of Marines for the garrison. Contractors worked predominantly on naval projects: barracks (which they then occupied), machine shop facilities, airfields (both for land-based and sea-based aircraft), leaving a reduced number of Marines to build the island's defensive works.²⁹

The defense battalions responded to the limited living space and lack of freshwater by creating detachments for the occupation of the islands. The detachments built defensive works, installed communications lines, and emplaced the battalions' guns. The parent battalions rotated Marines between their outlying detachments and Pearl Harbor, reducing the amount of time each Marine spent on the isolated atolls. The detachments varied in size from the first eight-man garrison on Johnston Island to the nearly 450-man garrison for Wake Island.³⁰

In Hawaii, the Marine Corps made available to CinCPac three defense battalions and the 2nd Artillery Group, minus its Battery C, totaling 2,495 Marines and sailors. Later,

²⁹Devereux, Story of Wake, 25-27.

³⁰OpNav, "Naval Dispatch 192145CR439, 19 February 1941," n.p.; Heinl, Defense of Wake, 3-4.

Pickett assigned the 2nd Artillery group to the 1st Defense Battalion. In the United States, HQMC made available an additional 189 Marines and sailors of the 5th Artillery Group and the 2nd Artillery Group's Battery C. Through a gradual expansion of the Marine Forces 14th Naval District, by 1 December 1941 there were 1,586 Marines and sailors deployed on the various islands: 844 on Midway, the remainder scattered among Wake, Palmyra, and Johnston. From this pool of available manpower, the District Marine Officer at Pearl Harbor added Marines to the outlying garrisons.³¹

The 14th Naval District assigned each battalion a specific island or group of islands to defend. The same battalion structure allowed the use of detachments in rotation, which provided the Marines in the battalion a familiarity with their potential island battle station. The small size of the detachment reduced the strain on island resources, while at the same time providing a work force for the defensive emplacements. Meanwhile, the bulk of the battalion maintained its combat effectiveness and could be deployed separately if necessary.

Thus, the Navy began to use Marine defense battalions for garrison work in 1940, two years after it began building bases on the Pacific Islands and less than a year before the

³¹14th Naval District, "Status of Defense Battalions, Fleet Marine Force, Assigned to Fourteenth Naval District, 1 December 1941," (AS,MCHC), sheet #1.

Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The first battalion to arrive was the 3rd Defense Battalion, which arrived at Pearl Harbor Hawaii in March 1940. Other battalions soon joined it, and by the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the 14th Naval District controlled four defense battalions. These battalions adapted to the challenging circumstances in the Pacific by modifying their structure to meet the distinctive problems of the Pacific Islands, including limited living space on the islands, scarce freshwater, and a lack of recreation facilities.

The limitations placed on the defense battalions by the situation in the Pacific prevented them from quickly establishing their defenses. Midway received the first full defense battalion in February 1941, nearly three years after the Navy began improving the islands. CinCPac did not furnish a garrison for Wake, the most exposed island, until October 1941, and even then it was less than a quarter of the projected strength. Lack of equipment also slowed the development of the island bases. The defense battalions adapted to these challenges by dispatching detachments and using available equipment to create hasty defenses. By December the Marines were preparing defenses, with varying success, from Palmyra to Midway.

CHAPTER III

The Central Pacific, December 1941:

The Japanese Interrupt the Navy's Building Program

United States naval planners hoped to protect Pearl Harbor by using four islands west of Hawaii as a picket line: Midway, Wake, Johnston, and Palmyra. For that purpose these islands received Marine defense battalions or detachments. Of the four islands only Midway had a complete defense battalion when the war started. By the outbreak of war half the planned Marine garrison had reached Wake, and because of the presence of civilian contractors, Johnston and Palmyra had reduced garrisons. On every island civilian contractors, who were working on naval facilities, reduced the available resources, thus preventing a full complement of Marines from being stationed there. The Navy's timetable planned on having the naval air stations operational by December 1942, which would prove to be a year too late. At the time of the Japanese attack on 7 December 1941, the 14th Naval District's defense battalions were still in the Hawaiian area and unprepared for war. After the attack, the small detachments manning unfinished fortifications on the

island picket line presented the Japanese with a golden opportunity.¹

The 14th Naval District at the Pearl Harbor Naval Yard coordinated the defense of the area's islands, while the Marine Barracks provided the command hub for the area's defense battalions. New battalions came through Pearl Harbor before being sent out to the island garrisons. For example, after training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the 4th Defense Battalion arrived at Pearl Harbor on 1 December 1941, the last battalion to do so before the war started.² Unloading its equipment took five days. In the days following unloading, the Marines waited for transport to Wake. During the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, response by Marines of the 4th Defense Battalion was limited as a result of its equipment being stored and inaccessible. Although the 4th Defense Battalion arrived at Pearl Harbor too late to relieve the 1st Defense Battalion detachment at Wake, it eventually provided the nucleus of the task force that attempted to relieve the island. [See figure 6]

¹The 14th Naval District included four defense battalions: the 1st Defense Battalion with detachments at Pearl Harbor, Johnston, Palmyra, and Wake Atolls; the 3rd Defense Battalion at Pearl Harbor; the 4th Defense Battalion, recently arrived at Pearl Harbor; and the 6th Defense Battalion on Midway.

²HQMC ordered the battalion to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to complete its training and provide defense for the base there. HQMC moved the battalion from Cuba to Pearl Harbor.

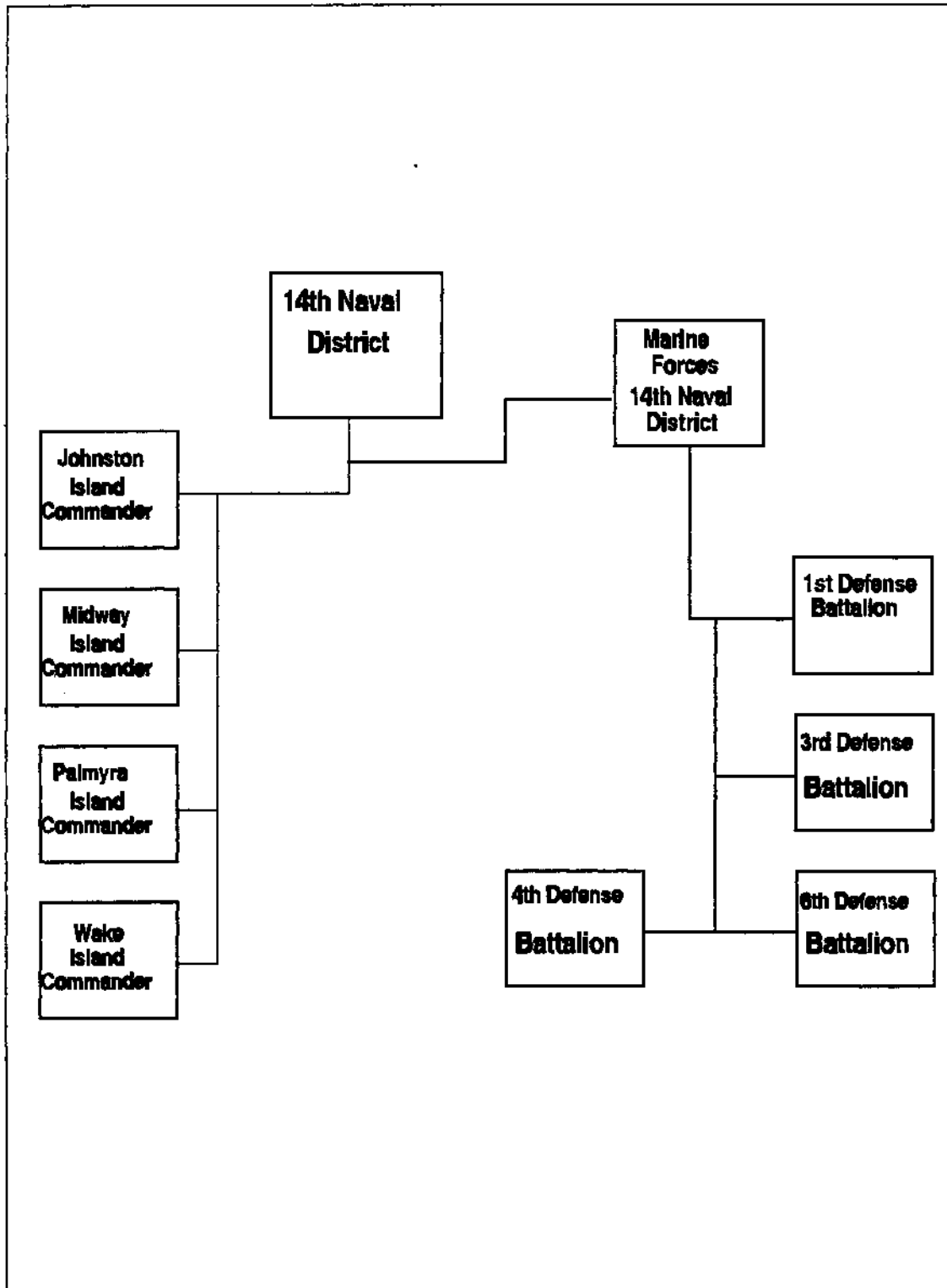


Figure 6 Command relationships in the 14th Naval District, 7 December 1941.

On the morning of 7 December 1941, flights of Japanese aircraft, at first believed to be the end of an Army exercise -- the Rising Sun insignia, however, soon put that idea to rest -- attacked the American military installations on Hawaii. The 3rd Defense Battalion awoke to the sound of the battalion's duty bugler playing "Assembly," which brought the battalion area to life. First Lieutenant James S. O'Halloran, the battalion duty officer, organized the recently awakened Marines into sections manning the battalion's small arms and machine guns.³

The arrival at the battalion command post of First Lieutenant Harry F. Noyes, Jr., of the battalion's 3-inch group allowed O'Halloran to begin setting up antiaircraft guns. Up to that time he was required to stay at the command post until relieved by a senior officer, and with Noyes's arrival he had a trained officer from the battalion's 3-inch group to place in charge of setting up antiaircraft guns. He ordered Noyes to organize the battalion's guns and fire control equipment on the parade ground of the Marine Barracks. Marines rushed about, issuing equipment, dispensing ammunition, and manning light weapons.⁴

³Major General George H. Cloud, Interview by Thomas E. Donnelly, transcript Oral History Collection, MCHC, 1970, 49-51; Cressman Infamous Day, 24-25.

⁴Cressman Infamous Day, 24-25.

O'Halloran also began to organize the Marines of the 1st Defense Battalion remaining in Pearl Harbor into two sections. One section issued rifles and ammunition from battalion stores to anyone who wanted one. The second section set up machine guns near the Marine Barracks. On their own initiative, other 1st Defense Battalion Marines organized a firefighting unit to prevent falling shrapnel from starting fires.⁵

The Japanese attack caught the 3rd Defense Battalion's senior officers off base. Due to traffic on their way to Pearl Harbor, Major Harold C. Roberts, the acting battalion commander of the 3rd Defense Battalion, and his subordinate, Major Kenneth W. Benner, arrived after the attack, but he then took command of the Marines' activities. Roberts found seven .50-caliber and six .30-caliber machine guns firing, with one enemy aircraft claimed, and the 3-inch group setting up two batteries on the parade ground -- three 3-inch guns at its west end and four 3-inch guns at its east end. After taking command, Roberts ordered the battalion sergeant major to take an armed convoy and retrieve ammunition from the ammunition dump. He then ordered Benner to assume command of the battalion's antiaircraft guns and have them ready to fire when the ammunition arrived. A fire control detail under a lieutenant was organized to watch for

⁵Cressman, Infamous Day, 26; Millet, Semper Fidelis, 354.

approaching aircraft and give signals indicating their direction. Rifle squads of eight to ten Marines, under an officer or noncommissioned officer, provided security for the guns.⁶

By mid-morning, the Marines received, via the Army's Information Service, warning of incoming aircraft. This information went to an antiaircraft artillery director, a device that controlled the 3-inch guns set up on the parade ground. All antiaircraft guns on the island now came under the command of the Hawaiian Coast Artillery Brigade, including the guns of the Marine defense battalions. The Army later ordered the Marine seacoast guns positioned in areas not covered by Army coastal emplacements.⁷

In the aftermath of the attack, the Marine defense battalions performed those activities that the Army lacked the resources to do itself -- clearing Hickam Field, providing a reaction force, and supplementing Army coastal and air defenses. The 3rd Defense Battalion used its bulldozers to help clear the runways at nearby Hickam Field and formed a reaction force to oppose any landings that might occur. Later that afternoon, a battery of 3-inch guns

⁶The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Pepper, was on Johnston Island, while the two next senior officers lived off base. See Cressman, Infamous Day, 24-25, 26.

⁷Frank, "Taxis Interview," 85-88.

from the 3rd Defense Battalion moved to Hickam Field to provide protection for the airfield.⁸

The Marines of the defense battalions assigned to Pearl Harbor could have used the unmanned Army weapons, but poor coordination and lack of planning prevented the Marines from doing so during the attack. Lack of joint planning also created confusion as the Marines attempted to take defensive action without a practiced and detailed plan. Thus, by default, the Navy Yard became the site of Marine defensive preparations. Marine actions during the attack can be attributed to individual Marines rather than the coordinated efforts of their units.⁹

Following the attack, Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, acted quickly to reinforce the islands of the Hawaiian picket line. The 4th Defense Battalion organized a task force for the relief of Wake Island.¹⁰ Meanwhile,

⁸Ibid., 86-87; Cressman, Infamous Day, 30.

⁹A joint plan existed. It placed the Marines under the command of the Army's Hawaiian Coast Artillery Brigade. To function the plan required a warning before any attack, but no emergency plan existed for attacks that occurred without warning. The Commandant, 14th Naval District, ordered the District Marine Officer to coordinate antiaircraft artillery defenses with the Army. See 14th Naval District, "Operation Plan Number 1-41, 27 February, 1941" in United States Congress, Hearings Before The Joint Committee On The Investigation Of The Pearl Harbor Attack (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), Part 15, 1459-1460; see also Part 15, 1436.

¹⁰The relief force will be discussed as part of the actions at Wake Island.

Japanese submarines shelled Johnston, Midway, and Palmyra. The attacks caused only limited damage, but the inability of the defenders to detect or sink the enemy ships demonstrated how unprepared the islands, even Midway, were to defend themselves. Following those attacks, Pickett recommended that reinforcements that could be spared from units in Pearl Harbor be sent to augment the garrisons at Johnston, Midway, and Palmyra, and he then ordered the defense battalions at Pearl Harbor to provide detachments for these islands.¹¹

Pickett next advised the Commandant, 14th Naval District, that the outlying island garrisons be further reinforced, and he then sent a memorandum to the 1st Defense Battalion requesting specific recommendations. The 1st Defense Battalion responded with a six-page summary. Pickett also ordered the headquarters of the 1st Defense Battalion to Palmyra Island. Then he split the 1st Defense

¹¹Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum for Commandant 14th Naval District, 17 December 1941" (Recommending Outlying Garrisons be Increased) (AS, MCHC), 1-2 ; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 1-41, 23 December 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 2-41, 23 December 1941" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; 4th Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 31-41: Movement, December 18, 1941" (AS, MCHC) 1; 4th Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 32-41: Movement, December 18, 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1; 4th Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 33-41: Movement, December 18, 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1.

Battalion, reinforced by units of the 3rd and 4th Defense Battalions, between Palmyra and Johnston.¹²

Palmyra received the majority of these reinforcements, since it had a much larger land mass, than did Johnston, and it was also closer to Pearl Harbor, making it a more likely target for Japanese attack. An additional thirteen officers, including Bone, the battalion commander, and 310 men joined Palmyra's garrison, while Johnston's reinforcements consisted of ten officers and 210 men. Midway also received attention from the 14th Naval District. On 18 December the 4th Defense Battalion formed a second detachment for duty at Midway. This increased the strength there to thirty-four officers and 919 men.¹³

¹²Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum for Commandant 14th Naval District, 17 December 1941," 1-2; 1st Defense Battalion, "Memorandum to the District Marine Officer, 11 December 1941 Reinforcing of Palmyra Island" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; 1st Defense Battalion, "Memorandum for the Commanding Officer, Marine Forces, 14th Naval District 18 December 1941 Armaments And Personnel For Johnston And Palmyra Islands" (AS, MCHC), 1-6.

¹³Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum for Commandant 14th Naval District (Recommending Outlying Garrisons be Increased)," 1-2; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operations Order Number 1-41, 24 December 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1. This includes movement rosters with ship assignments and destination (Only the Operation Order is page-numbered), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operations Order Number 2-41, 24 December 1941" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum for Commandant 14th Naval District Personnel, Ammunition, Material, etc., for Johnston," (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum for Commandant 14th Naval District Personnel, Ammunition, Material, etc., for Palmyra," (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum for Chief of Staff, 14th Naval

On 1 December 1941, the Wake detachment had a complement of fifteen officers and four hundred enlisted men, or approximately half the strength of the garrison planned for the island. Twelve F4F-3 aircraft of VMF-211 joined the detachment on 4 December, adding eleven officers and fifty-one enlisted men to the garrison. Other military personnel on the island -- six soldiers manning communication equipment to support the B-17 bombers passing through Wake on their way to the Philippines; and eleven naval officers and sixty-four sailors to run the naval air station -- were unarmed. The largest number of Americans on the island was the nearly twelve hundred civilian contractors working on the naval air station. [See figure 7]¹⁴

Twelve 3-inch guns and six 5-inch guns made up the garrison's primary armament, but the lack of fire control equipment limited their effectiveness, thus weakening the

District Personnel, Ammunition, Material, etc., for Midway" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum For Commanding officer, 31 December 1941" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; 4th Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 31-41: Movement, 18 December 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1.

¹⁴For a comparison between the Wake detachment and the 4th Defense Battalion, see Commandant 14th Naval District, "Status of Defense Battalions, Fleet Marine Force, Assigned to Fourteenth Naval District, 1 December 1941," 1; Devereux cites fifteen officers and 364 enlisted men, including a naval doctor and corpsmen as the strength of the detachment. See Devereux, Story of Wake, 35; John F. Kinney with James M. McCaffrey, Wake Island Pilot: A World War II Memoir (Washington: Brassey's, 1995), 49; Heinl, Defense Of Wake, 8-9.

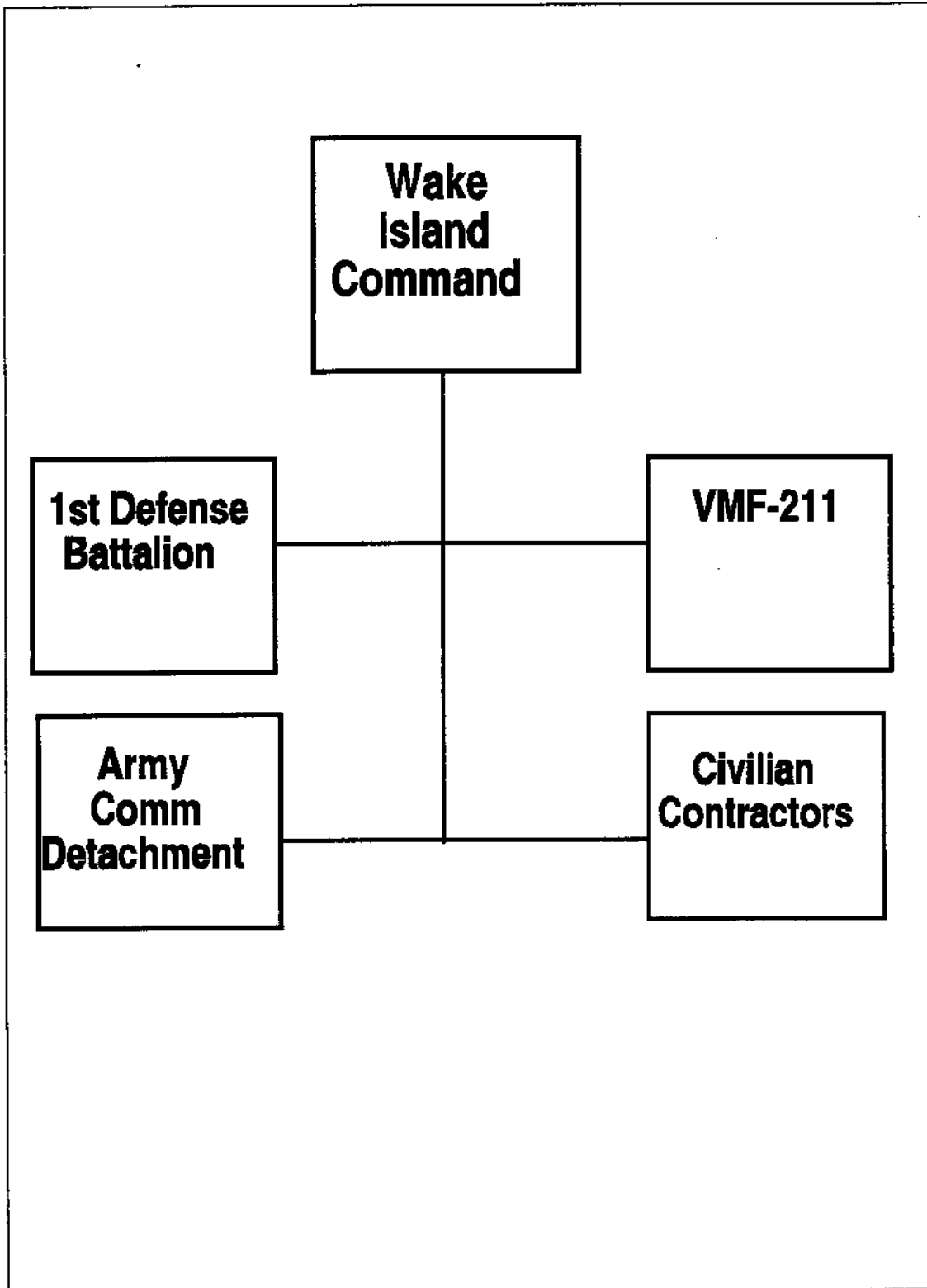


Figure 7 Wake Island command, December 1941.

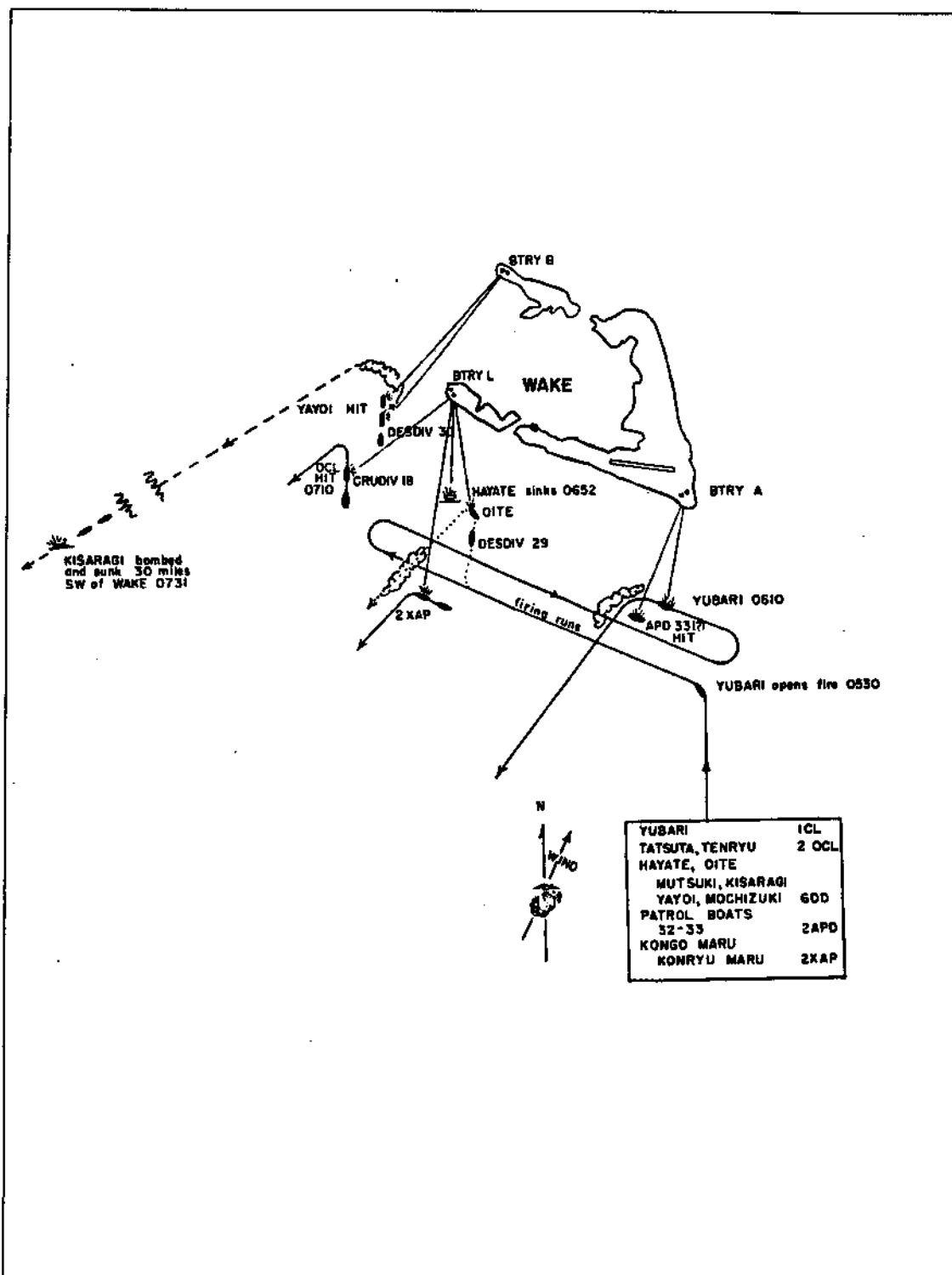
island's overall defense. Meanwhile, radars destined for Wake sat on the dock at Pearl Harbor and never arrived at Wake, reducing warning time and further limiting the effectiveness of the defense. VMF-211 established three daily patrols (dawn, noon, and dusk) of four aircraft in an attempt to give warning of attack. Shortly after his arrival, Major Paul Putnam, commanding officer of VMF-211, unsuccessfully attempted to have revetments built for the protection of his aircraft.¹⁵

Wake received word of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at 6:50 AM on Monday, 8 December 1941 (Wake time), and Japanese bombers attacked the island just before noon the same day. The Marines responded with antiaircraft fire that had little visible effect on the enemy aircraft.¹⁶ The returning air patrol attempted to engage the Japanese bombers, but failed. The raid destroyed seven of the squadron's eight grounded aircraft and took out much of Camp Two.¹⁷

¹⁵Kinney, Wake Island Pilot, 51-53.

¹⁶Devereux and others reported that, to avoid Wake's antiaircraft fire, later raids took place at much higher altitudes, which reduced the enemy planes' accuracy. This seems to indicate that the antiaircraft guns on 7 December must have had some effect on Japanese planes. See Devereux, The Story of Wake Island, 67-68.

¹⁷District Marine Officer, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum to: Commandant Fourteenth Naval District, 10 December, 1941" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Heinl, Defense of Wake, 15.



Map 2. The First Japanese attack on Wake Island, 11 December 1941. From Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Defense of Wake.

The initial Japanese attack force consisted of two cruisers and six destroyers, plus transports, submarines, and land-based aircraft from the Marshall Islands. The Marine defenders sank two destroyers and one transport and damaged both cruisers. The coastal guns of the defense detachment accounted for one sinking, while the fighter squadron received credit for the other. It is unclear whether air attack or coastal guns sank the transport, but it was likely a combination of the two that sank it. VMF-211, however, received credit for damage to one of the cruisers. The accuracy of the coastal guns and the losses they inflicted, along with the damage done by the fighters, caused the Japanese to withdraw on 10 December.¹⁸

Lessons drawn from their first attempt enabled the Japanese to land successfully at Wake on 23 December. No naval gunfire supported the landing force. Ships supporting the landing avoided closing within range of the seacoast batteries, instead remaining out at sea to provide anti-aircraft defense and prevent any American relief force from landing. Sailors of the Special Naval Landing Force

¹⁸T. H. Moorer, "Interrogation of Captain Tadashi Koyama, IJN," in United States Strategic Bombing Survey [Pacific], Naval Analysis Division, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, n.d.), 370-371. The diary of a Japanese sailor reported that losses equaled 471 killed and sixteen wounded, one aircraft was lost (seven men), and four were killed and sixteen wounded from aerial bombing of the transports. See CinCPac, The Japanese Attack Upon Wake, December 19, 1941, 17 September, 1942 (AS, MCHC), 1.

landed before dawn by beaching their transports on Wake.¹⁹ During the battle the Japanese Navy lost only the two beached transports, but the Special Naval Landing Force lost 180 killed and 80 wounded.²⁰

In the meantime CinCPac responded to the plight of Wake by creating a task force for its relief. The 14th Naval District designated the 4th Defense Battalion as the nucleus of the landing force. Six days after the attack, on 13 December, the battalion published orders to board ship. Although the small detachment numbered only nine officers and 174 men, it carried with it vital supplies for Wake. These included two height-finders, one range-finder, and one director for the 3-inch guns -- replacements for those lost in the battle. The radars that had not been sent earlier were also included with these supplies. Confusion at Pearl Harbor, however, delayed the sailing of the task force until

¹⁹The Japanese formed the battalion-sized Special Naval Landing Forces (SNLF) in the late 1920s. The Japanese Navy had previously used ships's crews for landing operations, but the inefficiency of this method led to the creation of the Special Naval Landing Forces or Rikusetai. Initially, not as well-trained as the Japanese Army, they demonstrated improving skills and were tenacious in defense. These units were formed at one of four Japanese naval bases: Sasebo, Kure, Maizuru, and Yokosuka. See United States, War Department, Handbook On Japanese Military Forces (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1944, reprint), 76-79.

²⁰Moorer, "Interrogation of Captain Tadashi Koyama, IJN," 371-373; CinCPac, "The Japanese Attack Upon Wake," 2.

15 December, when it received sealed orders to be opened "[u]pon clearing PEARL HARBOR."²¹

On 15 and 16 December, Task Force 14, under Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, sailed out of Pearl Harbor for Wake. One carrier, the Saratoga with VMF-221 aboard, the 4th Defense Battalion detachment aboard the seaplane tender Tangier, three heavy cruisers, nine destroyers, and the fleet oiler Neches made up the relief force. CinCPac also assigned VMF-221 to replace the battle losses of VMF-211 on Wake. The task force carried radars that would provide long-range warning and prevent the loss of the new aircraft in a single raid as had occurred earlier in the battle.

[See figure 8]²²

The projected unloading at Wake Island caused planners of the 4th Defense Battalion detachment their major concern because the reef circling the island forced ships to debark the troops and equipment into boats and then ferry them ashore. Since the relief force was most vulnerable to Japanese attack during unloading, the planners decided to

²¹4th Defense Battalion, "Operations Order Number 25-41: Movement, 13 December, 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1; Robert D. Heinl, Jr, "We're Headed For Wake," Marine Corps Gazette (June 1946), 35. Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 114-115.

²²The reason for this omission is that the aircraft were not assigned to the 14th Naval District, but to the Pacific Fleet. 4th Defense Battalion, "Operations Order Number 25-41: Movement, 13 December, 1941" (AS, MCHC), 1; Heinl, "We're Headed for Wake," 36-38; Sherrod, History of Marine Corps Aviation, 39, 43-44, 46.

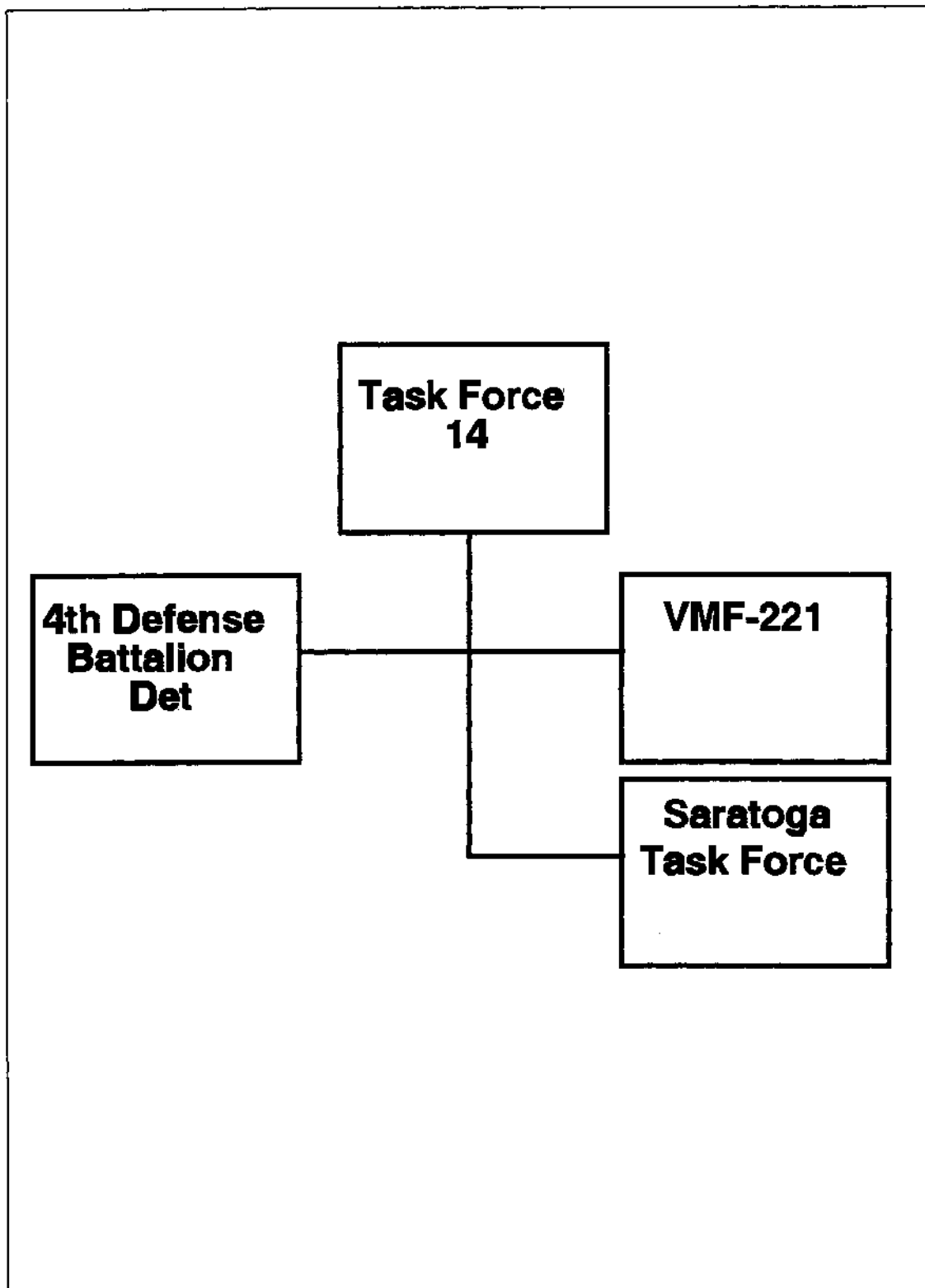


Figure 8 The Wake relief force, 14 December 1941.

beach the Tangier if an attack occurred, for the reinforcement of Wake took priority over the ship's survival.²³ After the relief force sailed, Admiral Chester Nimitz replaced Admiral Husband Kimmel as CinCPac, and in spite of all the planning, Nimitz decided to call off the Wake relief operation because of the Japanese Navy's local superiority, and because the Enterprise was one of the Pacific Fleet's few remaining aircraft carriers. On 19 December CinCPac ordered the task force to return to Pearl Harbor, thus ending the relief attempt.²⁴

The Japanese attack on Wake and its later siege demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of defense battalions. Although it was undermanned and ill-equipped, Wake proved a difficult target for the Japanese because of the firepower available to the Marine detachment. The defense battalions, moreover, had a high ratio of heavy weapons to manpower. After the loss of Wake on 23 December

²³The beaching of their transports allowed the Japanese to avoid the fire of the Marine seacoast batteries and land nearly all of their force intact. The beaching reduced the time the ships were exposed to fire from the shore batteries, thus reducing casualties. See CinCPac, "The Japanese Attack on Wake," 2.

²⁴There is a difference in the dates given for the retirement of Task Force 14. Heinl, in "We're Headed For Wake," claims it was 20 December (East Longitude). Hough, in Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, does not give a date but indicates that Task Force 14 was still heading for Wake on 22 December. No explanation is given for this discrepancy. See Heinl, "We're Headed For Wake," 38; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 130-131.

1941, Midway became the most exposed American outpost in the Pacific. As a result CinCPac diverted the Wake relief force to Midway.

The action at Wake showed naval planners that, if properly equipped and manned, defense battalions could provide a strong defense for naval bases. The slow build-up of the islands, however, had left the Marine garrisons undermanned and poorly prepared. Further, the lack of revetments had allowed the loss of seven of Wake's twelve aircraft in the first raid. The close coordination between air and ground units proved significant to the defense of Wake and to future operations in the Pacific.

Shortage of infantry proved Wake's most serious deficiency. The Marines could man the guns and prevent more Japanese sailors from coming ashore, or they could pick up rifles and engage the Japanese already ashore, which would have allowed more Japanese to land. In either case the defense force lacked the resources to provide a combined defense. This deficiency led to the inclusion of infantry and tanks for the reinforcements sent to Johnston, Midway, and Palmyra. In all subsequent landings and garrisons, infantry and supporting weapons would be included.

The Japanese conquest of Wake necessitated the diversion of resources from other missions. One carrier division (two aircraft carriers) of the Japanese Combined Fleet was employed to support the final assault on Wake.

This stretched the limited Japanese naval forces beyond their ability to respond. American raids in the first six months of the war further stretched Japanese resources, and attempts to support these widespread commitments would bring down Japan in the end.

The performance of the defense battalions during December 1941 ensured their survival, at least until the fleet was rebuilt. Defense battalions now stepped into the void left by the destruction of the Pacific Fleet, since they were the sole means of protecting the islands from marauding Japanese ships. From December 1941 and throughout the war, defense battalions would participate in all but two of the Marine campaigns. They evolved beyond the performance of island garrison duty and provided landing forces and supporting artillery for Marine infantry divisions. Their performance at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere in December 1941, coupled with the loss of the heavy units of the Pacific Fleet, resulted in new assignments and functions for these versatile units.

The slow build up, reduced garrisons, and lack of equipment effectively tied the Marines' hands at Wake. Even so, they were able to repel the first attempt by the Japanese to take the island. After the first Japanese attack, the garrison expected the fleet to sortie to their defense. The Navy's inability to do this gave notice that the garrisons were on their own. When later isolated by

major units of the Japanese fleet, lack of American naval support doomed Wake. Without the fleet's support the islands would have to prepare to repel large scale assaults, not just raids, as originally planned.

CHAPTER IV

The Central Pacific, January - December 1942:

The 14th Naval District Responds

The damage done to the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor delayed the Navy from implementing its plans for a projected war. If war did come, plans had called for the Navy to attack across the Central Pacific, to capture outlying Japanese islands and to destroy the Japanese fleet, and finally to blockade mainland Japan into surrender. Japanese naval superiority following the destruction of much of the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, however, prevented the United States from conducting offensive operations larger than raids.

During the first year of the war, since the Navy was unable to maintain control of the seas (control of an area in which military operations take place), the tactical needs of the fleet created a new mission for the Marine defense battalions. This new mission came in addition to their providing coast and antiaircraft defense for the Navy's island bases. Now the Navy planned to use the defense battalions to protect landing forces from counterattacks by the Japanese ships and aircraft. Between November 1942 and mid-1944, defense battalions provided the largest caliber ground artillery available to Marine units fighting the

Japanese, a mission which some historians have persisted in ignoring despite the importance of its contributions.¹

After the war began, Marine Corps's plans for immediate expansion included six defense battalions in addition to the existing battalions, while long-range plans called for a total of twenty-six battalions. In February 1942, the Division of Plans and Policies at HQMC addressed the issue of these additional defense battalions. Brigadier General A. H. Turnage, head of the Division, recommended that Hawaii be used as an organizational center for defense battalions. He hoped to take advantage of the trained manpower concentrated in the Hawaiian area where four of the existing, trained defense battalions were being used for the defense of Hawaii. These units represented the largest reservoir of experienced defense battalion Marines available. Their high concentration there allowed Marines to gain experience in an operational theater by being assigned to island defense battalions before being deployed.

¹Henry I Shaw, Jr., Bernard C. Natly, and Edwin C. Turnbladh claim that Saipan was the first Pacific battle in which the Marines were supported by heavier weapons than the Marine division's organic 105-millimeter howitzers. This is not correct. In November 1942, Marine 155-millimeter guns landed at Guadalcanal and were used in the subsequent campaigns. For their claim see Henry I. Shaw, Jr., Bernard C. Natly, and Edwin C. Turnbladh, Central Pacific Drive: History Of U. S. Marine Corps Operations In World War II (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division HQMC, 1966), 241-242. For information on the Marine 155-millimeter guns, see Hough, Pearl Harbor To Guadalcanal, 342.

Junior officers and recruits from the United States replaced Marines serving in the Hawaiian area defense battalions. HQMC assigned the Marines returning from the outlying islands to newly activated defense battalions, thus providing them with a core of experienced personnel. In Hawaii, experienced Marines formed the nucleus of the 10th Defense Battalion, which had recently arrived from San Diego, California.²

Early in 1942, two types of defense battalions emerged, static and mobile. Static battalions used 5-inch naval guns removed from decommissioned ships and placed these mounts in permanent or semi-permanent positions. The static battalions garrisoned the Navy's vital island bases at Midway, Johnston, and Palmyra. As the Japanese threat to Pearl Harbor receded, the defense battalions at Palmyra and Johnston returned to Hawaii, where the Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, established training areas to convert formerly static defense battalions into mobile battalions and later into antiaircraft artillery battalions.³

²Division of Plans and Policies, "Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, 21 February 1942" (AS, MCHC), 2; Major F. B. Loomis, Jr., to Captain L. C. Reinberg, 6 February, 1942 (AS, MCHC), 1.

³The reduced threat from Japanese attack is indicated by the replacement of the 1st Defense Battalion on Palmyra after 30 April 1943 by a scout-bomber detachment. Later, between 31 October 1943 and 31 August 1944, an aircraft squadron also replaced the 16th Defense Battalion on Johnston. Fleet Marine Force Status in History Of Marine Corps Operations In World War II, 5 Vols. (Washington, D.C.:

Mobile battalions took advantage of the capabilities of the 155-millimeter towed guns, which replaced the obsolete 5-inch naval guns of the static battalions. The use of 155-millimeter guns by the defense battalions departed from the pre-war practice of using naval guns removed from decommissioned ships and were indication of new equipment becoming available. Until heavier artillery battalions became available in 1944, the battalions took advantage of the 155-millimeter gun's tactical mobility and dual capability as coast or field artillery to supplement the Marine division's organic artillery. These mobile defense battalions operated with landing forces until they were redesignated antiaircraft artillery battalions and lost their 155-millimeter gun groups in 1944.⁴

Meeting the defensive needs of the 14th Naval District drained the limited resources available to the defense battalions in the Hawaiian area. The transfer of entire batteries to Midway and to the other outlying islands

Historical Branch, G-3 Division, HQMC), Vol. 2, Appendix E, 562-570, Vol. 3, Appendix E, 607-617; Vol. 4, Appendix E, 765-779; Vol. 5, Appendix F & G, 819-839.

Note: On 1 March 1942, HQMC redesignated the 1st Defense Battalion detachment at Palmyra as the 1st Defense Battalion. The 1st Defense Battalion detachment at Johnston Island received the designation as the 16th Defense Battalion. See Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 83; and Updegraph, U.S. Marine Corps Special Units of World War II, 76.

⁴Division of Plans and Policies, "Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, 21 February 1942," 2.

further compounded the personnel and equipment problems of the district's defense battalions by reducing the stocks available for operations elsewhere. Similar transfers of personnel to these islands depleted the pool of trained manpower and prevented existing defense battalions from being used in other operations outside the 14th Naval District until they were reconstituted or until additional personnel and equipment arrived from the mainland.⁵

To provide additional protection for Pearl Harbor, newly promoted Brigadier General Pickett ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion to dispatch an antiaircraft detachment for the Navy Yard's defense. He then ordered the remainder of the 3rd Defense Battalion to move from Pearl Harbor to Camp Salt Lake and Camp Beaumont on the Oahu coast in the Nanakuli area. Camp Beaumont served two purposes. First, it provided a training area on the coast for weapons firing, and, secondly, although the entire battalion manned only one battery of 5-inch guns, the Marine battery filled a gap in the Army defenses in the area. Pickett also ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion to form a reaction force of three rifle

⁵Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order 5-42 14 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order 6-42, 19 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1.

companies, and the formation of these rifle companies occupied the remainder of the battalion's manpower.⁶

Between 19 January and 1 April 1942, the 1st Defense Battalion detachment on Palmyra received twelve officers and 330 men, nearly doubling the garrison's strength to thirty-six officers and 767 men. An additional thirty-three officers and 753 men joined the garrison between April and November. Included in the garrison's strength were the 20th and 21st Provisional Companies and a tank platoon. Over the same period eighteen officers and 486 men rotated out of the garrison.⁷

⁶Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 2-42, 8 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 2; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 4-42, 22 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 7-42, 25 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Memorandum For Commanding Officer 3rd Defense Battalion, 7 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.

⁷Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 17 January 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Supplies to Palmyra, 19 January 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 19 January 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 24 January 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 25 February 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Material to Palmyra, 17 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 16 April 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Material to Palmyra, 20 April 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 24 April 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel to Palmyra, 30 April 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Material to

In December 1941 the Japanese attacked Johnston Island three times. During each raid a submarine surfaced at night near the island and began shelling the exposed installations. The Marines responded by firing at the submarine and running it off, although they were apparently unable to score any hits. These attacks on Johnston led to generous reinforcements being sent to the island throughout 1942. By 17 January 1942, the island supported a garrison of seventeen officers and 388 men from the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Defense Battalions. Seven days later, the 24th Provisional Infantry Company joined the garrison.⁹

Palmyra, 16 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Material to Palmyra, 18 June 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Material to Palmyra, 30 June 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Material to Palmyra, 30 June 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Ammunition to Palmyra, 20 August 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Ammunition to Palmyra, 23 September 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Ammunition, 8 October 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Ammunition, 29 October 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Ammunition, 25 November 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel, Equipment, and Ammunition, 21 December 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; 1st Defense Battalion, "Monthly Personnel and Armament Report, 1 April 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.

⁹"Major F.B. Loomis, Jr. to Brigadier General H.K. Pickett, 13 January, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 5; "Major A.R. Pedley to Loomis, 14 January, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; "Loomis to Captain L.C. Reinberg, 17 January, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Marine Personnel and Material to Johnston, 23 January 1942" (AS, MCHC), 24

In the months following Pearl Harbor, throughout the 14th Naval District, Pickett's Marine defense battalions reinforced the outlying island detachments with personnel and equipment and supplemented Army coast artillery and antiaircraft artillery defenses in Hawaii. These activities stripped the battalions of personnel and equipment, leaving them unavailable for duty elsewhere. Marines from the 3rd and 4th Defense Battalions served in scattered locations throughout the Hawaiian area, often attached to other battalions on the outlying islands where they performed a wide variety of duties. The detachment of these Marines obviously reduced the effective strength of their parent units. Nevertheless, they were counted as part of the complement of the parent unit, and this situation prevented the assignment of replacement personnel. Only after the transfer of the detached Marines could replacements be assigned. This meant that a unit appeared to be at full

January, 1942), 1; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 February 1942 To 28 February 1942" (AS, MCHC), 3-4; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 - 31 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 2; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 - 30 April 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 - 31 July 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 - 31 August 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 - 31 September 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Marine Defense Force, Johnston Island, "War Diary from 1 - 31 October 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1.

complement in reports but actually lacked the manpower to function effectively.⁹

Pickett complained to HQMC in February 1942 about the personnel shortages in the defense battalions assigned to the 14th Naval District. The Midway, Johnston, and Palmyra garrisons all doubled in size during 1942 at the expense of defense battalions at Pearl Harbor. This drain on manpower resulting from the transfer of personnel and equipment to the outlying islands reduced the ability of the 14th Naval District's defense battalions to participate in offensive operations. HQMC had hoped to use Hawaii as a training area for defense battalions, but the need for these units elsewhere forced CinCPac to send the 3rd and 4th Defense Battalions to the South Pacific and replace them with one newly activated battalion.¹⁰

The new CinCPac, Admiral Chester Nimitz, ordered the 4th Defense Battalion from Hawaii to the South Pacific, where, jointly with the U.S. Army, it occupied Efate Island in the New Hebrides during March 1942. The South Pacific Command planned to use the island in support of the first American land offensive in World War II at Guadalcanal.

⁹3rd Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 1-1942, 26 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2; 3rd Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 1-1942, 31 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2.

¹⁰Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "General Information on Local Marine Corps Matters, 23 February 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-3.

Prior to the battalion's departure, personnel and supplies arrived from the United States, replacing the men and material that the battalion had sent earlier to Midway. In addition to the battalion's organic supply needs, reinforcements also included the support personnel and supplies for an aviation squadron.¹¹

In July 1942, Nimitz ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion from Hawaii to provide coast and antiaircraft protection for the Guadalcanal Landing Force. The battalion sailed on board the Betelquese and the Zeilin on 22 July to rendezvous with the 1st Marine Division in the Fiji Islands for the assault on Guadalcanal. Thus, when the 3rd Defense Battalion's light antiaircraft batteries went ashore, it became the first defense battalion to participate in an offensive landing. The battalion landed antiaircraft artillery batteries on both Guadalcanal and Tulagi islands, but the early departure of the Navy prevented the

¹¹Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 3-42, 9 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p. The Director, Division of Plans and Policies, HQMC, responded to Pickett's letter with a memorandum to the Commandant of the Marine Corps detailing personnel plans for the 14th Naval District, including plans for the 4th Defense Battalion's impending move to the South Pacific and the transfer of the 10th Defense Battalion to Hawaii. See Division of Plans and Policies, "Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, 19 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-3; 4th Defense Battalion, "Operation Order Number 1-42, 12 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1; Donnelly, "Cloud Interview," 51-52.

battalion's two 5-inch batteries from getting ashore until late August.¹²

American naval planners remained focused on the Central Pacific until after the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Midway marked a turning point in the war in the Pacific for the United States, for after the battle the Japanese Navy was no longer able to conduct large-scale offensive operations, while the United States Navy assumed the offensive. The loss of four carriers with many of their pilots plagued the Japanese throughout the remainder of the war.

During the battle, three of the four defense battalions in the Hawaiian Area contributed to Midway's defense. The 4th Defense Battalion added its three seacoast batteries (A, B, and C Batteries) to the Midway garrison. Batteries A and C of the 4th Defense Battalion, together with VMF-221, which had formed the nucleus for the failed task force meant for Wake's relief, landed later on Midway after the task force had been recalled by CinCPac. Still later, Battery B joined the seacoast group on Midway. Marine Scout-Bombing Squadron 231 (VMSB-231), with seventeen obsolete SB2U-3s and

¹²Frank, "Taxis Interview," 71; Hough, Pearl Harbor To Guadalcanal, 252, 261, 294, 298; Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 115.

additional aircraft for VMF-221 with fourteen F2A-3s, had also joined the Midway garrison in December 1941.¹³

To keep the island's defenses off-balance, the Japanese launched a series of raids on Midway. Their submarines attacked on 25 January, 8 February, and 10 March 1942, and the Marines responded with fire from their naval guns, which apparently frightened off the Japanese ships, although none were apparently sunk. In addition, on 10 March, American fighters shot down a Japanese naval reconnaissance aircraft. The frequency of these attacks highlighted Midway's exposed position after the surrender of Wake Island and indicated continued enemy interest in Midway. In a meeting between King and Nimitz on 25 April, King recommended that the Midway garrison be strengthened. After the conference, Nimitz visited Midway and met with senior officers to assess the island's ability to withstand an attack.¹⁴

Before the June attack on Midway, Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion's Battery K, which had 37-millimeter guns (minus one platoon), to the island on 14 May 1942 on board the St. Louis. Five days later, Pickett ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion's 3-inch

¹³Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 216.

¹⁴Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 217-218; Heinl, Marines at Midway, 17-18, 22; Gordon W. Prange with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, Miracle at Midway (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 38; Lundstrom First South Pacific Campaign, 87.

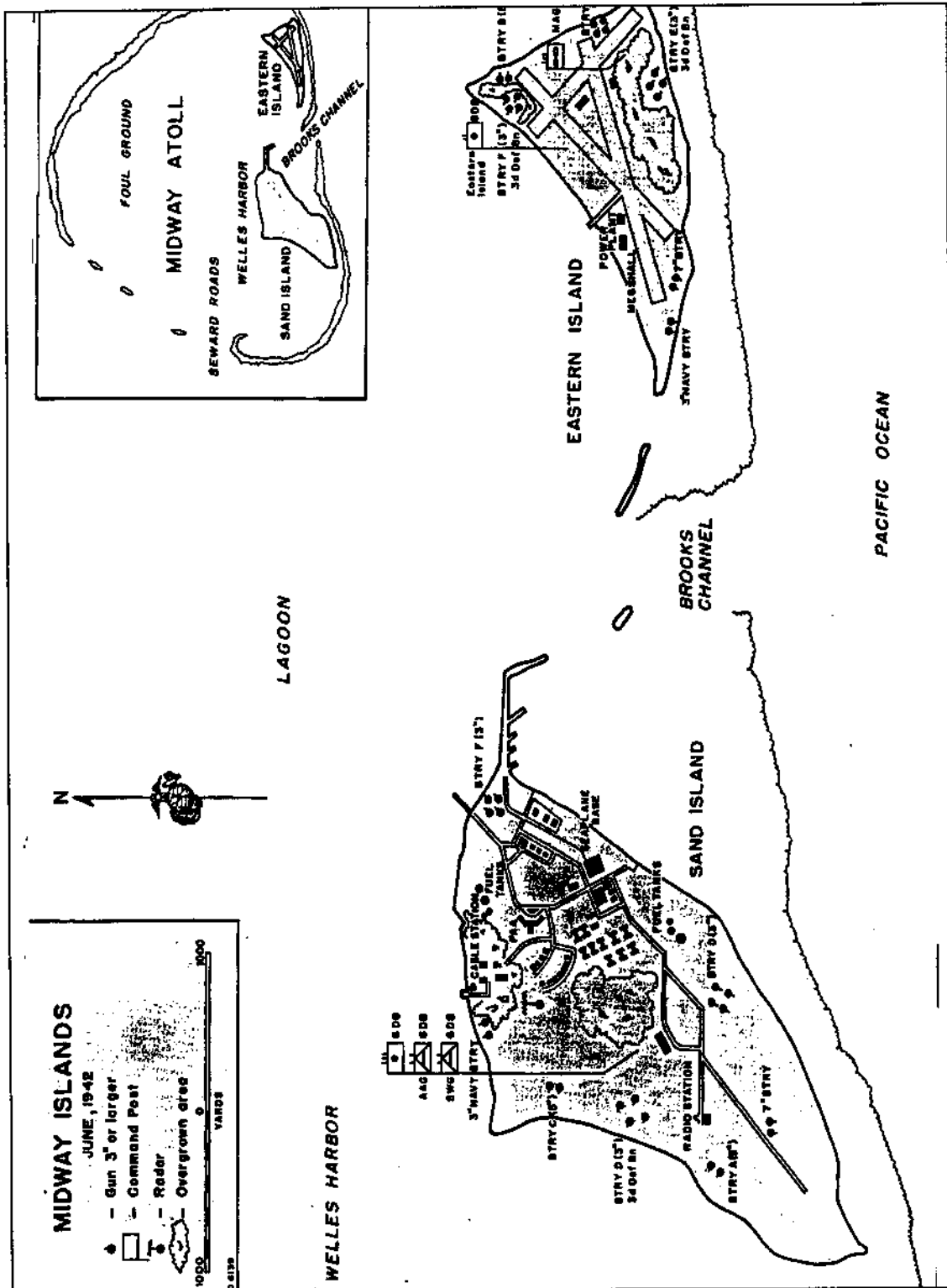
group (one headquarters and three firing batteries) and a battery of 20-millimeter guns, under Major Chandler W. Johnson, to Midway on board the Kittyhawk. These final reinforcements were sent in May 1942 as a result of consultation between King and CinCPac along with supporting intelligence of Japanese plans to attack Midway. [For size of 6th Defense Battalion see figures 9, 10, 11, and 12. Compare this to the standard battalion in figure 2]¹⁵

By June 1942, Midway had received three additional coast artillery batteries and five additional antiaircraft artillery batteries, thereby doubling the size of the 6th Defense Battalion. Unlike Wake, which had no infantry, Midway's defenses also included two companies of Marine Raiders and a light tank platoon for its defense. The air strength on Midway rose to 110 aircraft of all types, including Army Air Corps B-17s. [See map 2]¹⁶

The Battle of Midway began on 4 June at 5:55 AM when the 6th Defense Battalion's radar operators reported "many"

¹⁵Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 5-42, 14 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Operation Order Number 6-42, 19 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Frank, "Taxis Interview," 54; Hough, Pearl Harbor To Guadalcanal, 219; John Prados, Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History Of American Intelligence And The Japanese Navy In World War II (New York: Random House, 1995), 316.

¹⁶Marine Forces, 14th Naval District, "Transportation for Marine Forces, Midway Islands, 23 June 1942" (AS, MCHC), 2-3; Frank, "Taxis Interview," 55; Lundstrom, First South Pacific Campaign, 177.



Map 3. Midway Islands showing battery positions, 3 June 1941. From Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Marines at Midway.

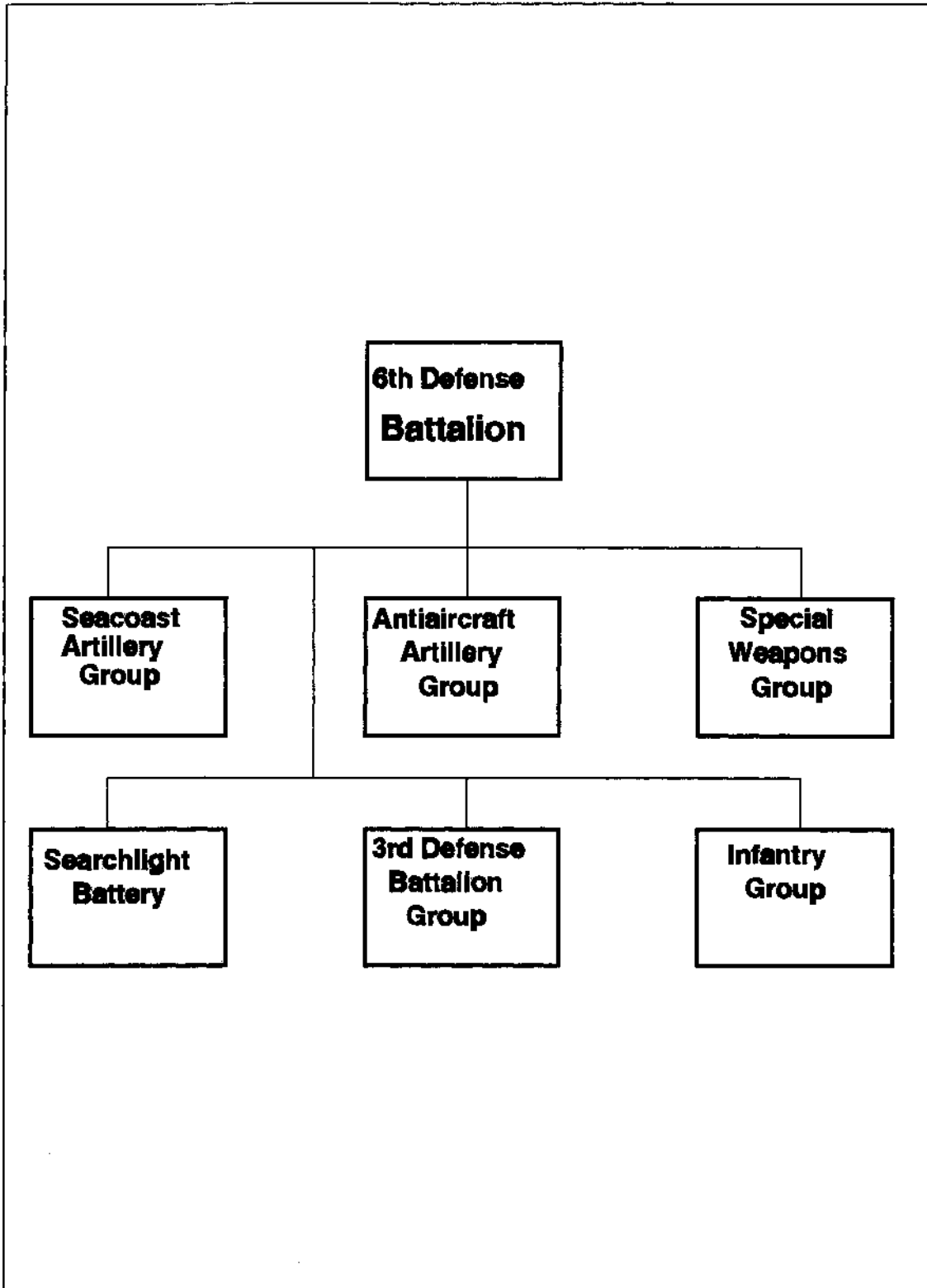


Figure 9 6th Defense Battalion, Midway, 3 June 1941.

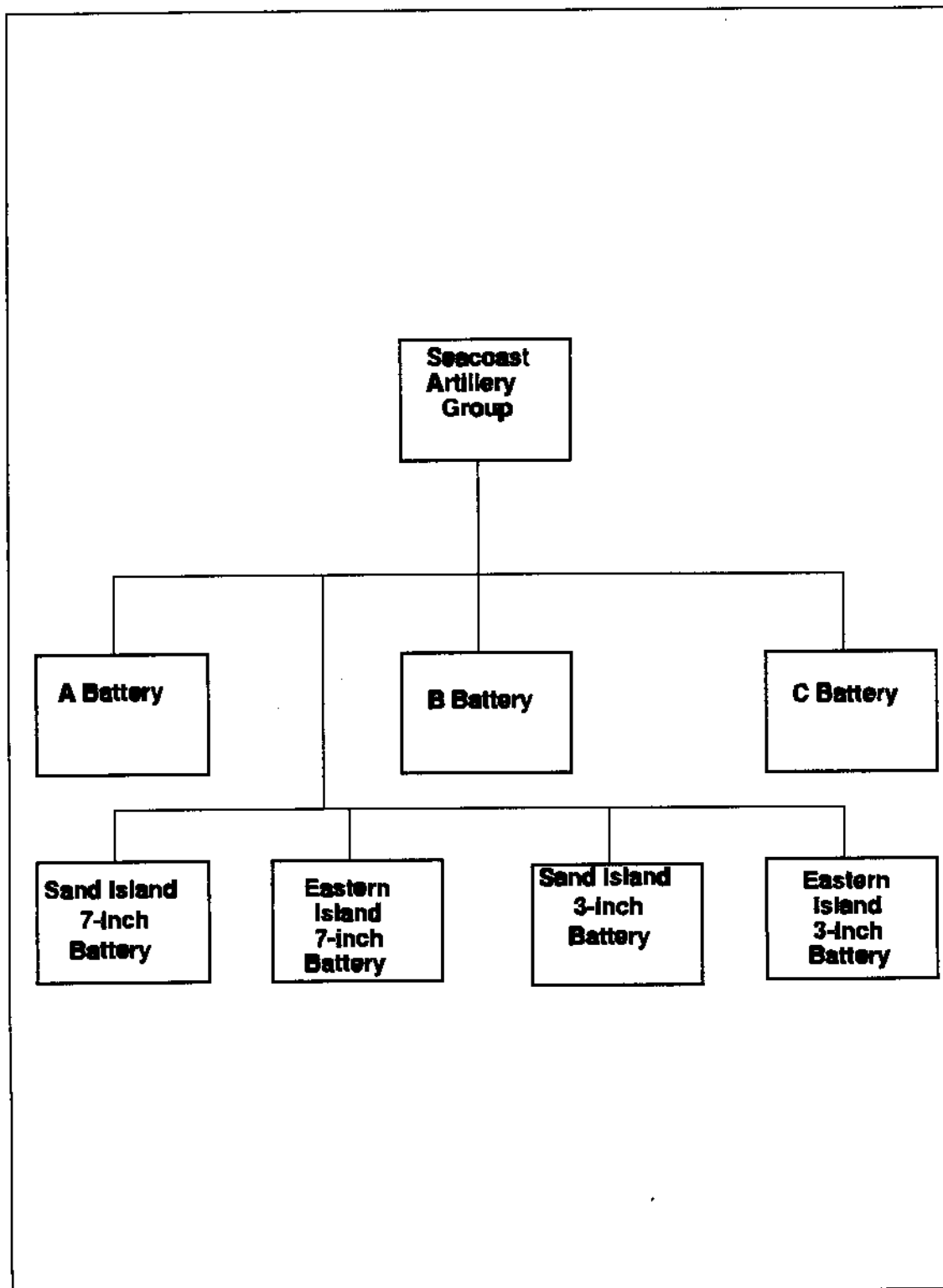


Figure 10 Seacoast artillery group, 6th Defense Battalion on Midway, 3 June 1941.

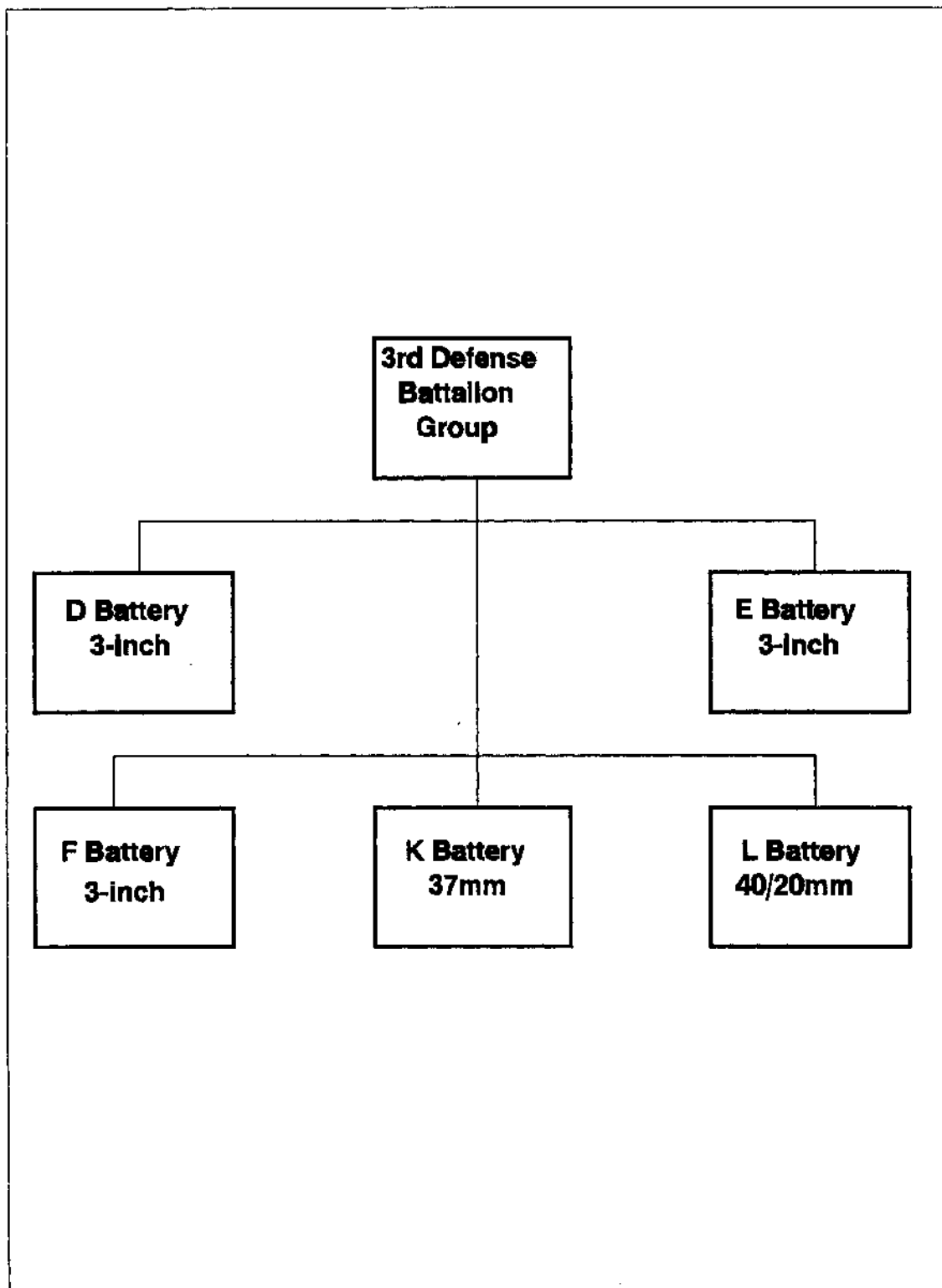


Figure 11 3rd Defense Battalion group on Midway, 3 June 1941.

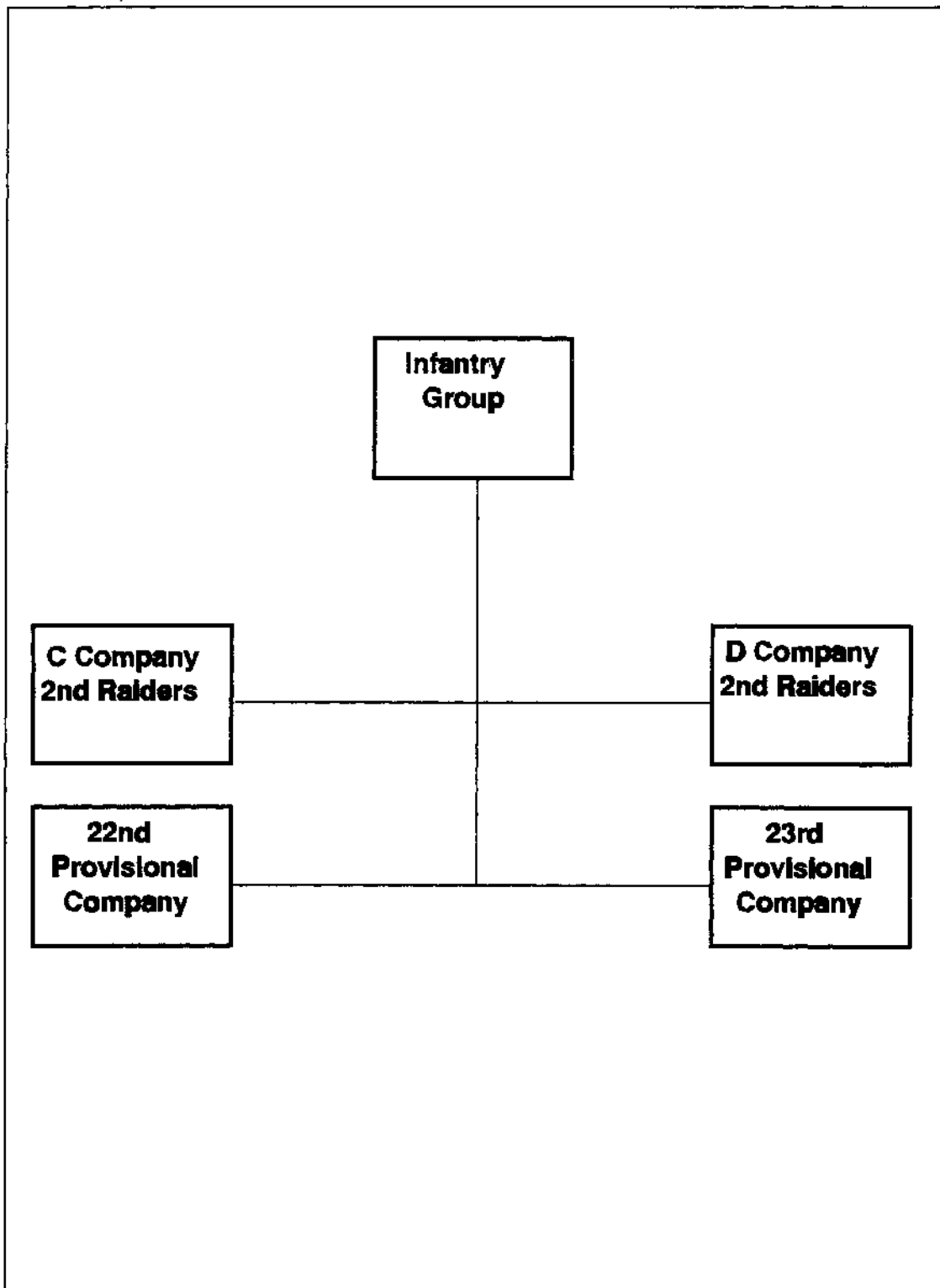


Figure 12 Infantry group, 6th Defense Battalion on Midway, 3 June 1941.

unidentified aircraft approaching the island. Marine radar at Midway gave directional information only, without height data. Such deficiencies required a very skilled operator to determine the number of aircraft, for in most cases the radar could not distinguish individual planes in formation.¹⁷

At 6:30 the antiaircraft artillery batteries received orders to fire on any unidentified aircraft and began firing at 06:31. The Japanese attack lasted fifteen minutes, and the estimated numbers of Japanese aircraft lost ranged from six to sixty-seven. Frank O. Hough, in Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal: History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II, (Vol. I), credits the Marine antiaircraft defenses with shooting down ten aircraft and Midway's air group with having destroyed forty-three, but he also cites Japanese sources, which claim that only six aircraft were shot down.¹⁸ It is hard to credit fourteen obsolete F2A-3s with shooting down twice their number of highly skilled and experienced pilots flying better aircraft, even with the assistance of seven F4F-3s. Gordon Prange, in Miracle at Midway, indicates that only nine Japanese aircraft were shot

¹⁷Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 221-222; Prange, in Miracle at Midway, claims that the Marine radar on Sand Island could not give height information (74). Later, Prange contradicts himself claiming the radar on Sand Island could give height data (199).

¹⁸Hough, Pearl Harbor To Guadalcanal, 223-224, 230.

down by what one Japanese participant called "vicious AA fire." Yet in the two flights of thirty-six aircraft each that attacked Midway, Marines counted only a total of forty aircraft over Midway.¹⁹ Paul Dull, in A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, credits the antiaircraft defense with shooting down thirty-eight aircraft and damaging twenty-nine badly enough that they could not fly after returning to their carriers. Thus, Dull claims that Marine antiaircraft put out of action sixty-seven of 108 aircraft. The loss of four of the Japanese carriers with many of their planes leaves the damage inflicted by Marine ground fire a subject of conjecture. In spite of his low opinion of the antiaircraft fire, Prange claims that ground fire "saved" one of the F2Fs from a Japanese Zero. Aside from Dull, descriptions of the battle fail to examine the operation of the Marine antiaircraft fire and its possible effects. It is only safe to claim that the antiaircraft guns of the defense battalion provided protection for friendly aircraft and destroyed or damaged an unknown number of enemy aircraft.²⁰

In the battles for both Wake and Midway, the defense battalions demonstrated an ability to defend a Pacific

¹⁹Prange, Miracle at Midway, 200, 205.

²⁰Ibid., 205; Paul S. Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941-1945 (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 1978), 152.

island if properly equipped and up to full strength, but problems with equipment and coordination became evident during both battles. The lack of fighters operating with the 6th Defense Battalion at Midway handicapped the antiaircraft defenses, whereas Wake's lack of infantry support and the destruction of most of the garrison's aircraft, along with the reduced size of its detachment, made its defeat a foregone conclusion. In each battle, some essential piece of the defense battalion theory was absent.

At Wake, the first attack was beaten off, with great loss to the Japanese and only limited loss to the Marines, while at Midway the antiaircraft defense destroyed and damaged numerous Japanese aircraft. In both cases and in spite of incomplete defenses, the Marines provided a secure landing field for American aircraft. The destruction of above-ground facilities should have been expected by the Navy, and placing vital facilities underground or in reinforced buildings would have limited the damage by air raids. The Navy built its structures out of wood and light corrugated tin, making them vulnerable to attack. At Wake, as at Midway, however, the defense battalions proved potentially capable of defending advanced bases.

The attack at Pearl Harbor thus acted as a catalyst for Marine thinking about the use of defense battalions. As indicated previously, Pickett had recommended the separation of defense battalions into mobile and static units. The

early Marine divisions lacked heavy artillery and employed 75-millimeter and 105-millimeter howitzers as their main weapons. Thus, 155-millimeter guns, such as those of the defense battalions, were not a part of (organic to) the divisions until September 1945, when the table of organization, G-100, became effective. The first Marine division table of organization (the list of equipment and personnel in a unit), the D-100 series, included a special weapons battalion armed with a single 90-millimeter antiaircraft battery, a 40-millimeter antiaircraft battery, and three antitank batteries. Special weapons battalions provided limited antiaircraft protection for the division. In the E-100 series table of organization, the division lost its 90-millimeter battery, and later, in the F-series tables of organization, the division also gave up its 40-millimeter battery. Thus, the defense battalions had to provide the antiaircraft protection and the long-range artillery available to the divisions.²¹

The limited antiaircraft capability of the Marine division, in the face of the Japanese air threat, required that such protection be added to the landing force; and Japanese naval strength necessitated the addition of

²¹Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Victory And Occupation: History Of U. S. Marine Corps Operations In World War II (Washington D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division Headquarters Marine Corps, 1968), Appendix H and I, 840-848.

seacoast artillery. The defense battalions had the trained personnel and equipment in place to meet both contingencies. The prior use of defense battalions with landing forces in Iceland and American Samoa had demonstrated that they could be integrated into a landing force, and the 3rd Defense Battalion's participation in the Guadalcanal landings would eventually prove its effectiveness in an offensive operation. In addition, the performance of the defense battalions at Wake and at Midway demonstrated that they could provide effective antiaircraft and seacoast defense. Defense battalions thus filled a gap in Marine Corps capabilities and transitioned from static island defense to offensive operations.

After the Japanese attacked, Pickett attempted to create island bastions capable of stopping a large-scale assault because the Navy was unable to support the islands. To do this he sent equipment and men to all the islands. This placed a heavy demand on the resources of the 14th Naval District. The American victory at Midway, however, blunted the Japanese capability to launch attacks on the Marines' islands. Thus, the bastions became unnecessary.

The new equipment becoming available allowed the defense battalions to shift their priorities from island defense to operating with landing forces. After the Battle of Midway, CinCPac ordered two of Hawaii's four defense battalions to the South Pacific. The 3rd Defense Battalion

became part of the force landing on Guadalcanal. In the meantime, other defense battalions took place in different landing operations.

CHAPTER V

Defense of the South Pacific to January 1942:

The 7th Defense Battalion on Samoa

Pre-war American planners anticipated major clashes between the Japanese and American fleets in the Central Pacific. They also believed that the Japanese would attempt to occupy the Samoan Islands if left undefended. Because of its location, Samoa provided both a strongpoint that protected the line of communications to Australia and a base from which American forces could later expand into the Central Pacific. Thus, the CNO ordered HQMC to prepare plans for American Samoa's defense. American Samoa consisted of the eastern two islands of Samoa, Tutuila and Roses. In 1938 HQMC responded by ordering Lieutenant Colonel Harry K. Pickett to conduct a study of the Pacific islands, including Samoa. The following year the War Plans Section prepared a study of defenses for Samoa. Combined with Captain A. R. Pefley's 1940 survey of American Samoa's defensive needs, this study, referred to as "Defensive Installations at Samoa," formed the basis for the island's defense in the early stages of the war.¹

¹South Pacific Area and Force, "United States Naval History of Tutuila," 28; Jack C. Hudson and Kay G. Hudson, "American Samoa in World War II" (Draft Report, Department of Parks and Recreation, American Samoa, 15 June 1994), 7;

To provide a garrison, the Major General Commandant, Major General Thomas Holcomb, ordered the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego, to send Marines to Samoa in December 1940. In response the Commanding General organized the 7th Defense Battalion specifically for duty there. By the time it left San Diego, the battalion included three companies: Headquarters Company (including the detached duty detail), A Company (infantry), and B Battery (artillery), with a total strength of 443 Marines and sailors, only half the complement of other defense battalions serving in the Pacific. The battalion's infantry company made it unique, however, among defense battalions, which at that time did not include infantry in their tables of organization. Between the outbreak of war on 7 December 1941 and the arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade on 20 January 1942, the 7th Defense Battalion constituted the only unit available to defend American Samoa, for the naval station lacked weapons and had only a lightly-armed inter-island steamer at its disposal.² [See Figures 13 and 14]

When activated on 3 December 1940, the 7th Defense Battalion drew on personnel from the 1st Defense Battalion for the nucleus of its manpower, while the remaining men

Miller, War Plan Orange, 49, 94.

²7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion, FMF, USMC, 21 December 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1, 3, 5, and 6; Major General Commandant, "Organization of 7th Defense Battalion, 3 December 1940" (AS, MCHC), 1.

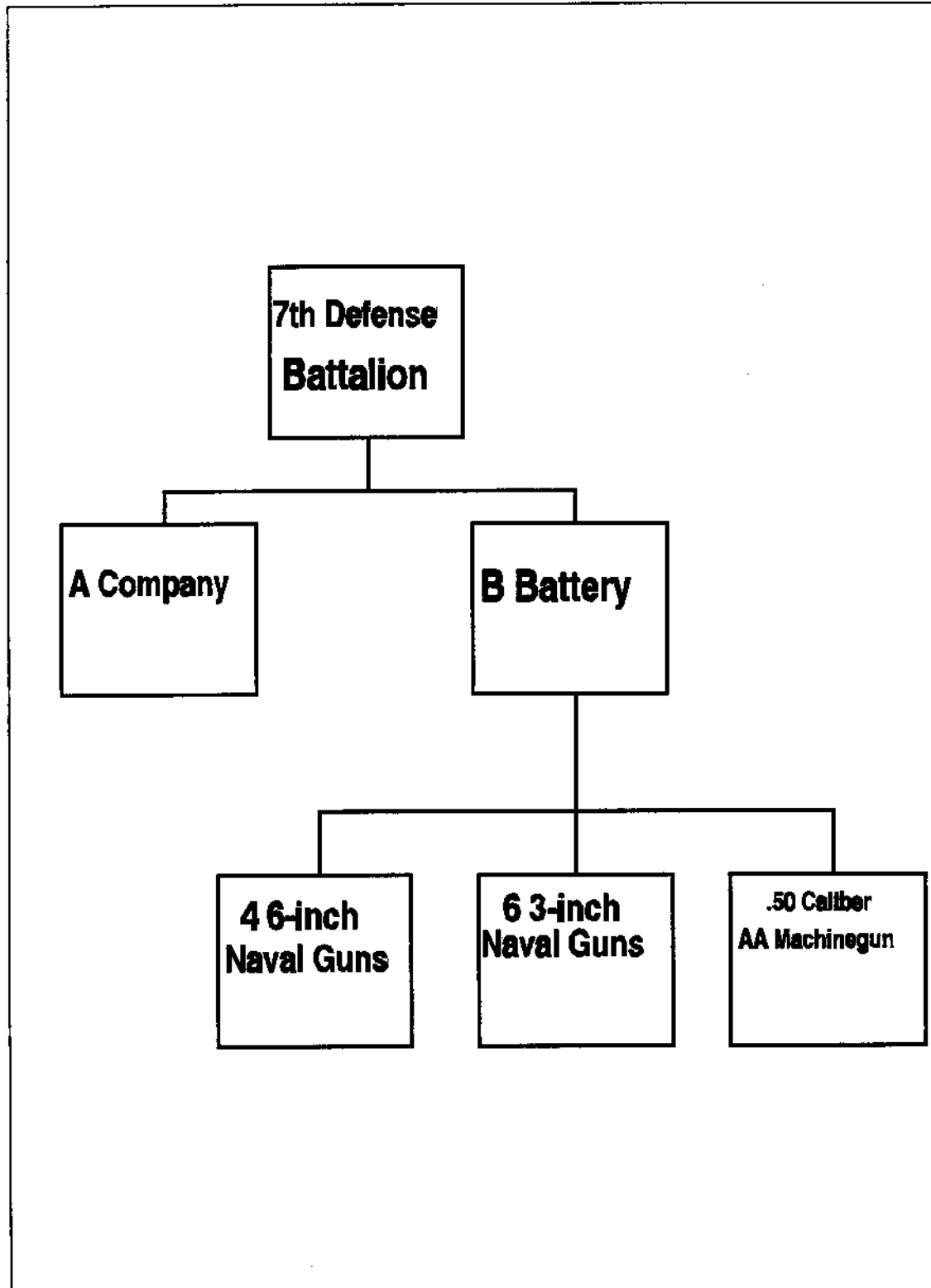


Figure 13 7th Defense Battalion, 3 december 1940.

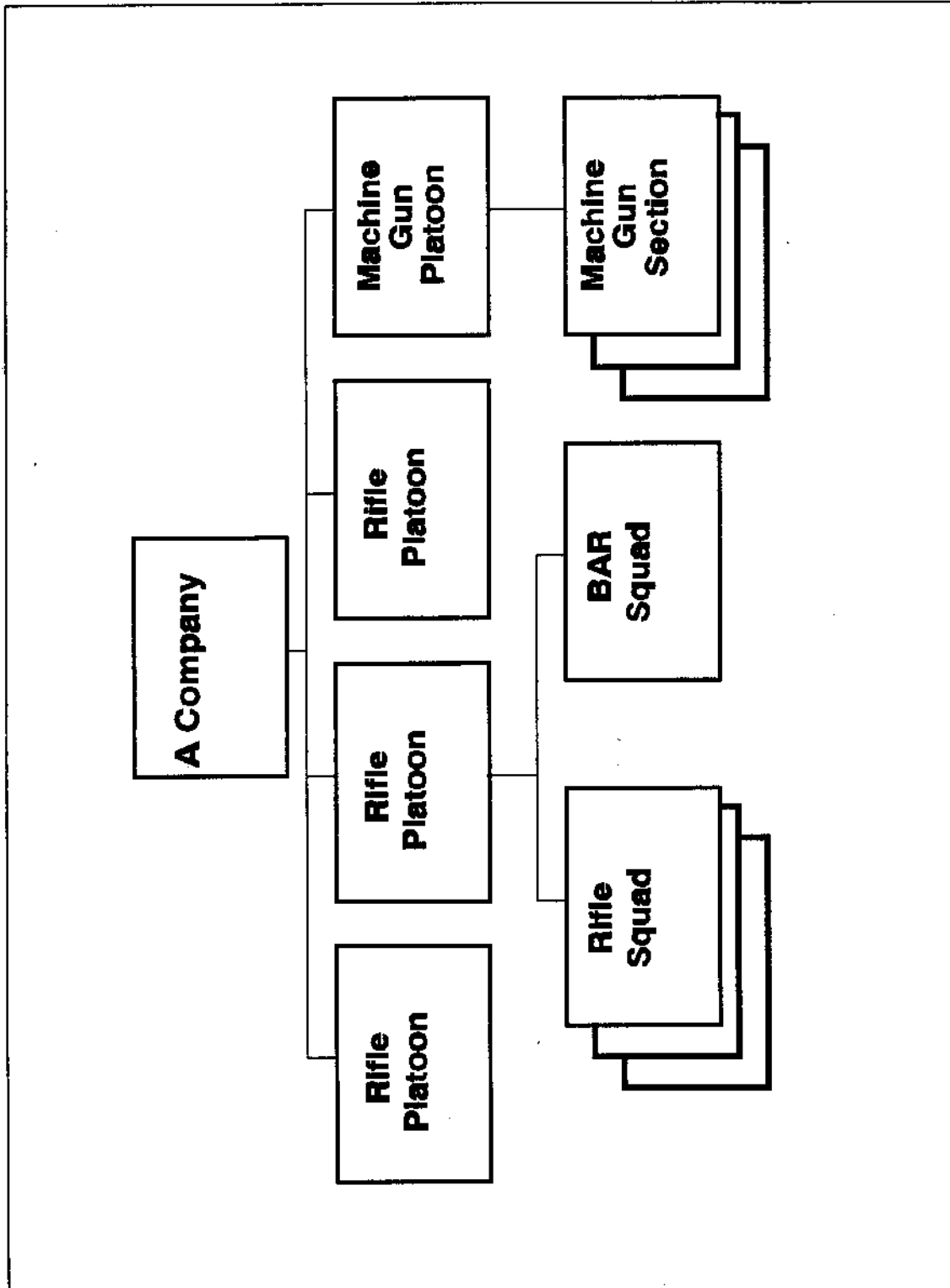


Figure 14 A Company, 7th Defense Battalion, 3 December 1940.

came from activated reserve units. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Lester A. Dessez, the main body spent the time between 16 December 1940 and 26 February 1941 in getting ready for the move to Samoa. Since reservists made up one-third of the battalion's strength, additional training was necessary to bring their skills up to the level of the regular Marines.³

According to the battalion's organization as laid out by the War Plans Section at HQMC in 1939, Headquarters Company included a detached duty detail of three officers and twenty-four enlisted men. This detail was to train a native reserve battalion and, when the war broke out, assume command of the Samoans. The use of Samoan manpower was intended to reduce the number of Marines needed to guard the area and thereby free them for duty elsewhere in the expanding Marine Corps.⁴

The Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego, based the structure of the antiaircraft artillery detachment on the recommendations made by Pickett in 1938. Pickett had recommended the use of one battery of antiaircraft artillery

³War Plans Section, HQMC, "Defensive Installations at Samoa, 9 December 1939" (AS: MCHC), n.p.; Brigadier General Lester A. Dessez, Interview by Thomas E. Donnelly, transcript, Oral History Collection: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1970, 158.

⁴7th Defense Battalion, "Military History of the 7th Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force. Prepared by Bn-2 under the Direction of Colonel L. A. Dessez, Commanding" (AS, MCHC, ND), 2-3.

and a battery of .50-caliber machine guns if an attack on Samoa was unlikely. If an attack seemed imminent, he recommended three batteries of 3-inch antiaircraft guns. The mountains surrounding Pago Pago Harbor, however, created difficulties in planning antiaircraft artillery fire. Thus, the batteries had to be located on the nearby ridges if more than one battery was to be used, thereby limiting the effectiveness of their firing. As a result, one battery could be as effective as two, and with the low expectation of attack, a single battery seemed sufficient.⁵

The building of defensive works began before the 7th Defense Battalion arrived at Tutuila. As tensions increased between the United States and Japan, Samoa received funds for naval construction along with the Central Pacific islands, though it was in the South Pacific. Civilian contractors began work to improve the naval station in September 1940, with the seaplane support facilities receiving first priority. The construction of gun positions and magazines received second priority. The CNO projected that the defenses would be completed by 1 March 1941, the

⁵Harry K. Pickett, "Notes on the Antiaircraft Defenses of Certain Islands in the Pacific Ocean and Alaskan Waters" (AS, MCHC), 11-12; Major General Commandant, "Organization of the 7th Defense Battalion, 3 December 1940," 1; "Tentative Table of Organization 7th Defense Battalion," 1-2.

day he expected the 7th Defense Battalion to arrive in Samoa and assume responsibility for shore defenses.⁶

While the main body of the battalion was to spend the next three months getting ready in San Diego, Dessez created an advance party of two officers and twenty men to prepare quarters for the battalion's arrival. On 11 December 1940, under Captain Thomas C. McFarland, the advance party left San Diego for Samoa on board the Mariposa and arrived there ten days later. The advance party was to furnish living quarters for the battalion and make preliminary surveys for the gun positions. Between their arrival and that of the main body, the advance party built a camp consisting of tents with wooden floors because the naval station lacked the facilities necessary to accommodate the influx of Marines.⁷

On 27 February 1941, the main body of the 7th Defense Battalion left San Diego on board the William P. Biddle, but was delayed en route by the need to take the rear party of the 1st Defense Battalion to Pearl Harbor. After three days of liberty (the last the battalion would have until 1944),

⁶South Pacific Area and Force, "United States Naval History of Tutuila," 22, 25, 37; Hudson, "American Samoa in World War II," 7.

⁷7th Defense Battalion, "Military History, 7th Defense Battalion," 2; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 160, 166-167.

the 7th Defense Battalion left Pearl Harbor for Samoa on 9 March 1941.⁸

The battalion arrived in Pago Pago on 15 March 1941. Dessez reported for duty to Captain Lawrence Wild, USN, the commandant of the naval station and military governor of Samoa. An outbreak of measles among the Marines while they were at sea, however, confined them to the ship until 18 March. After finally leaving the ship, they moved to the camp prepared for them by the advance detachment, where they remained in quarantine until 11 April. The advance detachment then rejoined the battalion after the quarantine was lifted, and work began on Samoa's defensive positions.⁹

While confined to camp the Marines made improvements to their living conditions. They graded roads in and around the camp area and to the naval station and added plumbing to the camp. Later, men moved supplies from the docks to the camp and constructed a post exchange as well as semi-permanent wooden buildings for storing supplies. The

⁸7th Defense Battalion, "Military History, 7th Defense Battalion," 2; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 160, 166-167; Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," Marine Corps Gazette, 17.

⁹Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," 17; 7th Defense Battalion, "Military History, 7th Defense Battalion," 2-3; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 161. Pyramidal tents were 16 x 16 feet and housed five men. Information obtained from pre-printed communication that all members of the 7th Defense Battalion were required to send home. See 7th Defense Battalion, untitled letter dated 23 March to 6 April 1941, in possession of author.

Marines also installed communications lines between the naval station and the camp. In March 1941, the battalion named its main camp, near the naval station, Camp Samuel Nicholas after the first commandant of the Marine Corps.¹⁰

The Marines changed the military and social complexion of Samoa, for the Navy, which had long controlled the island, found itself outnumbered by the new arrivals. In a report written later for the Samoan government, historian Jack Hudson claims that tension between the Navy and Marines characterized the 7th Defense Battalion's early occupation of Samoa. Samoa had limited recreational activities, and the arrival of the Marines placed a strain on existing entertainment options. The defense of the naval station also became an area of conflict between the two services. For example, Captain Wild disagreed with Dessez over the location of the island's defenses and the use of native labor in construction work because the removal of the men from their farms created a food shortage in Samoa. Dessez overcame Wild's objections concerning the placement of the island's weapons, however, by using Marines to supervise the construction.¹¹

¹⁰7th Defense Battalion, "Military History, 7th Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force," 3; information obtained from pre-printed communication that all members of the 7th Defense Battalion were required to send home. See 7th Defense Battalion, untitled letter dated March 23 to April 6, 1941, in possession of author.

¹¹Hudson, "American Samoa in World War II," 14, 16.

The battalion's rifle company furnished security for Pago Pago Harbor against Japanese landings and served as a reserve to support the native battalion against enemy incursions elsewhere on the island. The company consisted of three rifle platoons and a machine gun platoon. [See Figure 14] Commanded by a lieutenant, each platoon had three rifle squads and an automatic weapons squad. A rifle squad consisted of eight Marines and was led by a noncommissioned officer, usually a sergeant. The automatic weapons squad, which was allocated two Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR), had seven Marines with a noncommissioned officer, usually a sergeant, in charge. A lieutenant also commanded the machine gun platoon with assistance from a platoon sergeant. Three sections with two .30-caliber machine guns made up the strength of the machine gun platoon. A sergeant commanded each section, and a corporal commanded each machine gun team. The infantry company received four additional machine guns for beach defense. Since the distance between various platoons and squads of company negated the value of company mortars, these weapons were deleted from the company's table of organization.¹²

The Navy had removed its defensive installations from Pago Pago Harbor in 1931, and this decision allowed the

¹²Major General Commandant, "Organization of the 7th Defense Battalion, 3 December 1940," 1; "Tentative Table of Organization 7th Defense Battalion," 1-2; Frank, Victory and Occupation, 849-850.

Marines to plan their own defenses, taking into account the peculiarities of their weapons. B Battery had three different types of guns divided into a coast defense section and two antiaircraft defense sections. The battery's four 6-inch naval guns furnished seacoast artillery defense for Pago Pago Harbor, and their positioning required hard work and ingenuity on the part of both Marines and civilian contractors. Marine artillerymen installed the guns in two batteries at Breaker's and Blunt's Points, the two promontories that guarded the harbor entrance. Local conditions made mounting the guns difficult and hazardous. The lack of roads and the mountainous nature of the terrain meant that special slipways had to be built to move the guns to their positions on Blunt's and Breaker's Points. Civilian workers constructed concrete emplacements and magazines in such a way that the guns had a 360-degree rotation. The positions were also counter-sunk into the ground to give additional protection against air attack. Each pit had the locations of preplanned targets painted on its inside walls. Temporary camps and mess halls were constructed near the gun positions for the Marines who manned the weapons there.¹³

¹³Major General Commandant, "Organization of the 7th Defense Battalion, 3 December 1940," 1; "Tentative Table of Organization 7th Defense Battalion," 1-2; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 161-162; Hudson, "American Samoa in World War II," 16.

The antiaircraft artillery detachment included six 3-inch naval guns, which were formed into a single antiaircraft artillery battery of four guns at the naval station, and two guns to furnish both antiaircraft and ground support. This detachment also had a platoon of twelve .50-caliber machine guns capable of giving both low-level antiaircraft defense and ground support.¹⁴

Marines reconnoitered possible landing beaches around the island's coastline, and at likely landing places they built pillboxes and strung barbed wire entanglements. To strengthen the beach defenses, the Marines also made land mines out of fifty-five gallon drums. A Company built or improved roads to give better access to these beach defensive emplacements. To avoid delays over the rough terrain, the Marines used coastal shipping to transport material to the north coast. At Mormon Ranch, south of the naval station, the battalion built a rifle range with 200-, 300-, and 500-yard lines, allowing the men to sharpen their rifle expertise.¹⁵

For communications, the battalion initially installed seventy miles of primary telephone lines, which connected

¹⁴Major General Commandant, "Organization of the 7th Defense Battalion, 3 December 1940," 1; "Tentative Table of Organization 7th Defense Battalion," 1-2; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 161-162; Hudson, "American Samoa in World War II," 16.

¹⁵7th Defense Battalion, "Military History, 7th Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force," 3-4.

Camp Samuel Nicholas with the naval station as well as the battalion headquarters with the gun positions and defensive works around the island. Additions to the telephone system continued, and by January 1942 over 170 miles of lines covered the island. The battalion also used radio communication with the company and battery command posts.¹⁶

In May, as work progressed on the defensive positions, HQMC authorized the implementation of the battalion's second mission, which involved recruiting natives to form a reserve battalion of five hundred men. HQMC ordered the detached duty detail to conduct the training of the newly formed 1st Samoan Reserve Battalion, which was to be its official name. Plans called for the Samoans to assist the Marines in providing a defense for the island by watching the likely landing beaches. This assignment took advantage of the Samoans' knowledge of the island and allowed the Marines to concentrate in one location, which enabled A Company to move to the threatened area more quickly. Prior to recruiting Samoans for the reserve battalion, Marines of the detached duty detail established two-man outposts around the island and gave military training for local volunteers. When these Samoans could be spared from farming, they received

¹⁶Ibid., 3; 7th Defense Battalion, "Annual Report of 7th Defense Battalion for the Fiscal Year Ending 30 June 1942 to CG, 3rd Marine Brigade" (AS, MCHC), 13-14.

instruction in close order drill, marksmanship, bayonet drill, and military courtesy.¹⁷

With the authority from HQMC in hand, the 7th Defense Battalion began in July 1941 to recruit local volunteers for the 1st Samoan Reserve Battalion. The detached duty detail trained the reservists during weekly sessions, and the Samoans also received supplemental instruction whenever they joined the Marines in their duties. When war broke out on 7 December 1941, the battalion had 160 Samoans, organized into two companies, in service.¹⁸

After learning that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Captain Wild activated the 1st Samoan Reserve Battalion and assigned it to the 7th Defense Battalion's various gun and defensive positions. The high state of alert remained in effect until the arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade in January 1942. On 31 December refugees from the outer islands arrived in Pago Pago on board the Haleakala and were sent to safer areas in Hawaii or the continental United States.¹⁹

¹⁷7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," Appendix A, 1.

¹⁸South Pacific Area and Force, "United States Naval History of Tutuila," 30; Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," 18.

¹⁹Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," 18; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 163; Morrison, Rising Sun, 259.

Between the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade, members of the 7th Defense Battalion believed that the Japanese would attack at any time. A Japanese submarine did shell the harbor from the south side of the islands, lobbing projectiles over the mountains, but the unaimed fire did little damage, and no Marines were injured. The raid, nevertheless, heightened concern of an imminent Japanese attack on the island. They seemed, however, to be unable to muster the strength to attack both in the Central and South Pacific because of their military commitments in China, but their occupation of Ocean and Naru Atolls indicated that a westward thrust could have severed communications with Australia. This would have isolated Australia and New Zealand from American support and possibly forced those countries out of the war.²⁰

Samoa's location on the line of communications between Australia and the United States, coupled with the limited resources available to the garrison, convinced Dessez that the battalion would be cut off during a war. To prepare for such an eventuality, he stockpiled rations. The CNO also apparently believed that the Japanese threatened Samoa because, on 14 December 1941, he ordered a second defense battalion and a reinforced infantry regiment to Samoa to reinforce the 7th Defense Battalion. Japanese control of

²⁰Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," 18; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 159, 163; Morrison, Rising Sun, 259.

Samoa would have severed the line of communications between the United States and Australia, denying the American forces the use of Australia as a base from which to attack Japanese territory. After the war Dessez claimed that Japanese occupation of Samoa could have changed the course of the war.²¹

In retrospect, the 7th Defense Battalion gave Samoa a limited defense against raids and small landing parties, and the battalion improved facilities providing a base for the 2nd Marine Brigade, which landed on 23 January 1942. The brigade brought an additional defense battalion with three antiaircraft batteries, three seacoast artillery batteries, searchlights, and additional machine guns that added protection outside the harbor. These, along with the brigade's infantry and artillery, created a stronghold from which Allied control would be extended.

No one expected Samoa to be subjected to serious attack, so HQMC gave Samoa a small garrison half the size of those in the Central Pacific. The 7th Defense Battalion had a two-fold mission: one, it protected the harbor; and two, it trained the natives. For the unique nature of the assignment, the Marines formed a battalion unlike any other;

²¹Chief of Naval Operations to Commander-In-Chief, Pacific Fleet, message no title (AS, MCHC, 14 December 1941), n.p.; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 159. See also Walter Lord, Incredible Victory: The Battle of Midway (New York: Harper Perennial, 1967), 4.

it had artillery, infantry, and Marines whose duty it was to train the natives. When war erupted, the battalion had 160 natives available to supplement the Marines' harbor defenses.

CHAPTER VI

The 2nd Marine Brigade in Samoa, January - April 1942: Building the Samoan Stronghold

As the Japanese advanced broadly across the Pacific, a conflict over strategy developed between the Imperial General Staff and the staff of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's Combined Fleet. The former advocated a Southern Pacific offensive to isolate Australia, while the latter proposed a thrust across the Central Pacific aimed at Midway and Hawaii. Before the resolution of this dispute, however, three other Japanese operations got under way. One axis ran from Midway to Hawaii to force the Pacific Fleet to fight, a fight in which the Japanese expected to destroy the American fleet, while the second, and supporting, axis extended from the Aleutian Islands through Alaska as a decoy to draw American resources north. A third axis plunged into the South Pacific, through the New Hebrides and Fijis, and aimed at the Samoan Islands with the goal of severing the line of communications between the United States and Australia and New Zealand. Japanese strategists resolved their conflict

by stopping the proposed southern offensive until after their projected conquest of Midway.¹

Meanwhile, the United States Navy faced several competing demands for the use of its limited resources in the months following 7 December 1941. Pre-war naval planners had envisioned a Central Pacific campaign against Japan, but the severe damage done to the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor forced the abandonment of this strategy. Any loss of the line of communications to Australia carried with it the specter of an Australian defeat, which would deprive the U.S. of a base for operations against Japan. The Navy's new plan, therefore, called for the protection of Hawaii and the preservation of Australian lifeline.²

Naval planners, consequently, had always considered keeping open the lines of communications to Australia a primary objective for the Pacific Fleet and established bases for that purpose in Fiji, the New Hebrides, and Samoa. How to implement this priority, however, led to differences between the Army and Navy. The Army proposed moving aircraft from major bases in Australia and Hawaii to threatened points along the line of communications, while

¹John B. Lundstrom, The First South Pacific Campaign: Pacific Fleet Strategy, December 1941 - June 1942 (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 82, 91; Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Douglas T. Kane, Isolation of Rabaul, (Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, Inc, 1963, reprint), 5.

²Henry L. Larsen, "Building Samoa's Defenses," Marine Corps Gazette, 28 (Feb. 1944), 9.

the Navy argued that such a step would reduce the defensive capabilities of those vital areas, which had the two major Allied bases in the Pacific -- Australia and Hawaii. Naval planners thus offered a counter-plan to station garrisons along the link. In the end the two services compromised, and the Army agreed to garrison selected islands, while the Navy accepted responsibility for Samoa, Wallis, and the Ellice chain.³

As a result of this compromise, and after CinCPac perceived the Japanese threat to Samoa, the Navy directed the Marine Corps to provide garrisons for the South Pacific. On 23 December 1941, the 2nd Marine Division organized the 2nd Marine Brigade, under Brigadier General Henry L. Larsen, for garrison duty in Samoa. Larsen's command initially included the 8th Marines (reinforced), the 2nd Defense Battalion, a Navy patrol squadron (VS-I-D14, amphibian aircraft), and supporting outfits.⁴ Units of the brigade hastily assembled and sailed from San Diego on 6 January 1942. The brigade's various components had previously gone

³George C. Dyer, The Amphibians Came To Conquer: The Story Of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Dept. of The Navy, 1972), 240; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 84; Lundstrom, First South Pacific Campaign, 57.

⁴VS-I-D14 was a Navy scouting squadron that flew amphibious aircraft. The "V" stood for fixed wing (airplane), "S" stood for scouting, "I" indicated that it was the number one squadron, and the "D14" meant that it was assigned to the 14th Naval District.

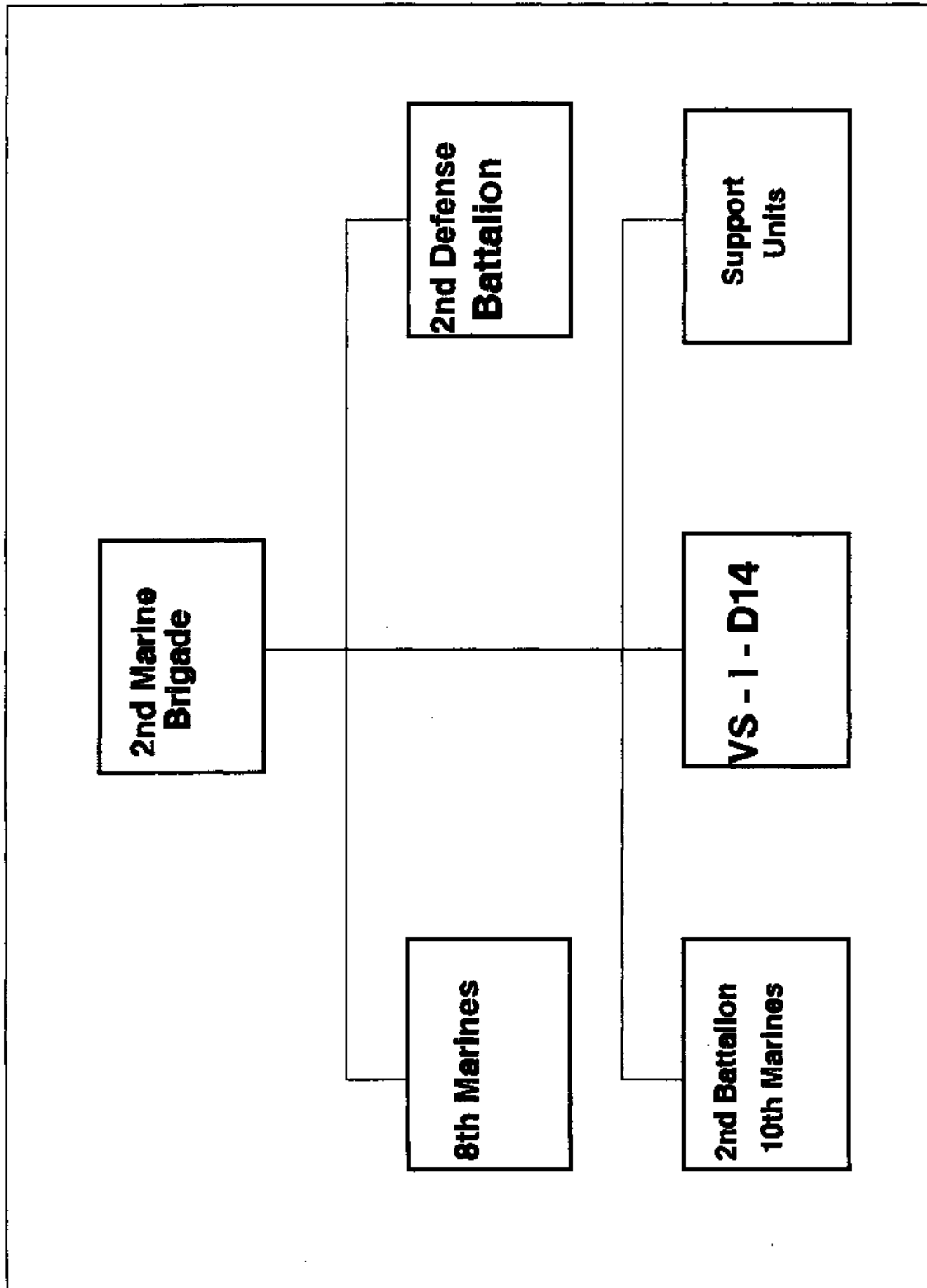


Figure 15 2nd Marine Brigade, January 1942.

through major personnel turnovers as a result of the Marine Corps's expansion. Thus, each unit had to give up experienced Marines to help form new units, and hastily trained recruits replaced these men. The rapid turnover in personnel made the smooth assembly and movement of the brigade all the more remarkable.⁵ [See figure 15]

When HQMC activated the 8th Marines on 1 April 1940 at San Diego, it mobilized only two of the regiment's three battalions. Then on 1 November 1941, HQMC activated the regiment's third battalion. With the expansion of the Marine Corps, veteran Marines had to be transferred to other regiments. As a result, troops from the 8th Marines formed the cadre for the newly organized 2nd Marines, and in May 1941 they helped bring the 6th Marines to full strength. At the same time this was happening to other units as well.⁶

The Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, at San Diego had organized the 2nd Defense Battalion on 1 March 1940. HQMC ordered the battalion moved to Parris Island, South Carolina, in June 1941 to replace the 5th Defense Battalion then in Iceland, and the 2nd Defense Battalion

⁵2nd Marine Brigade, "Informal History of 2nd Marine Brigade from December 24, 1941, to March 31, 1943" (AS, MCHC), 1-2.

⁶Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 48; William K. Jones, A Brief History of the 6th Marines (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1987), 34; James S. Santelli, A Brief History of the 8th Marines (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1976), 11.

remained there until 10 December 1941. As a result of attempts to standardize defense battalion organizations and because of the increased demand for defense battalions, HQMC reorganized the 2nd Defense Battalion twice in the three months preceding its movement to Samoa. This first occurred on 13 October 1941, when new tables of organization for defense battalions went into effect. Then, on 8 December 1941, two days before the unit returned to the West Coast, HQMC replaced the battalion's organic 7-inch artillery group with the 5th Artillery Group (5-inch guns). These changes disrupted training and lowered the readiness level of the battalion. After arrival on the West Coast, the battalion joined the 2nd Marine Brigade.⁷

Units of the 2nd Marine Brigade began boarding ship on 1 January 1942 in San Diego, and five days later it sailed for Samoa. CinCPac charged the brigade with defending Samoa against a Japanese invasion. While the brigade was at sea, the Secretary of the Navy appointed Larsen to the post of Military Governor of Samoa. The Samoan defenders sighted the convoy carrying the 2nd Marine Brigade on 19 January 1942, and the ships entered the harbor the next morning. With the arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade, Samoa became the

⁷2nd Defense Battalion, "Annual Report 2295/REK/hem July 6, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1, 3.

largest of the Marine Corps's island garrisons.⁸ [See figure 16]

After establishing his command post ashore, Larsen reorganized the defenses of Tutuila. He first ordered all hands to maintain a heightened state of alert, called "stand-to," in the early morning hours, and it continued until March 1942. Meanwhile, the 8th Marines assumed the beach defense duties of the 7th Defense Battalion, while the 2nd Defense Battalion began to install additional seacoast and antiaircraft artillery batteries for the protection of the airfield and for guarding approaches to the island. VS-I-D14, the Navy patrol squadron, began operating shortly after arrival in Samoa. The Navy amphibians used the harbor for their airfield operations and provided antisubmarine and reconnaissance patrols for the brigade.⁹

On arrival, Larsen found the airfield only 10 percent complete, so he made its completion the brigade's first priority. As a result, the brigade engineer company worked on the airfield, along with the civilian contractors, around

⁸Brigadier General Fred D. Beans, interviewed by Thomas E. Donnelly, transcript (Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Historical Center), 56; Larsen, "Building Samoa's Defenses," 10; Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," Marine Corps Gazette, 28 (January 1944), 18; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 89-90; Lundstrom, First South Pacific Campaign, 90.

⁹2nd Marine Brigade, "History of the Second Marine Brigade," 4; 7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 6-7.

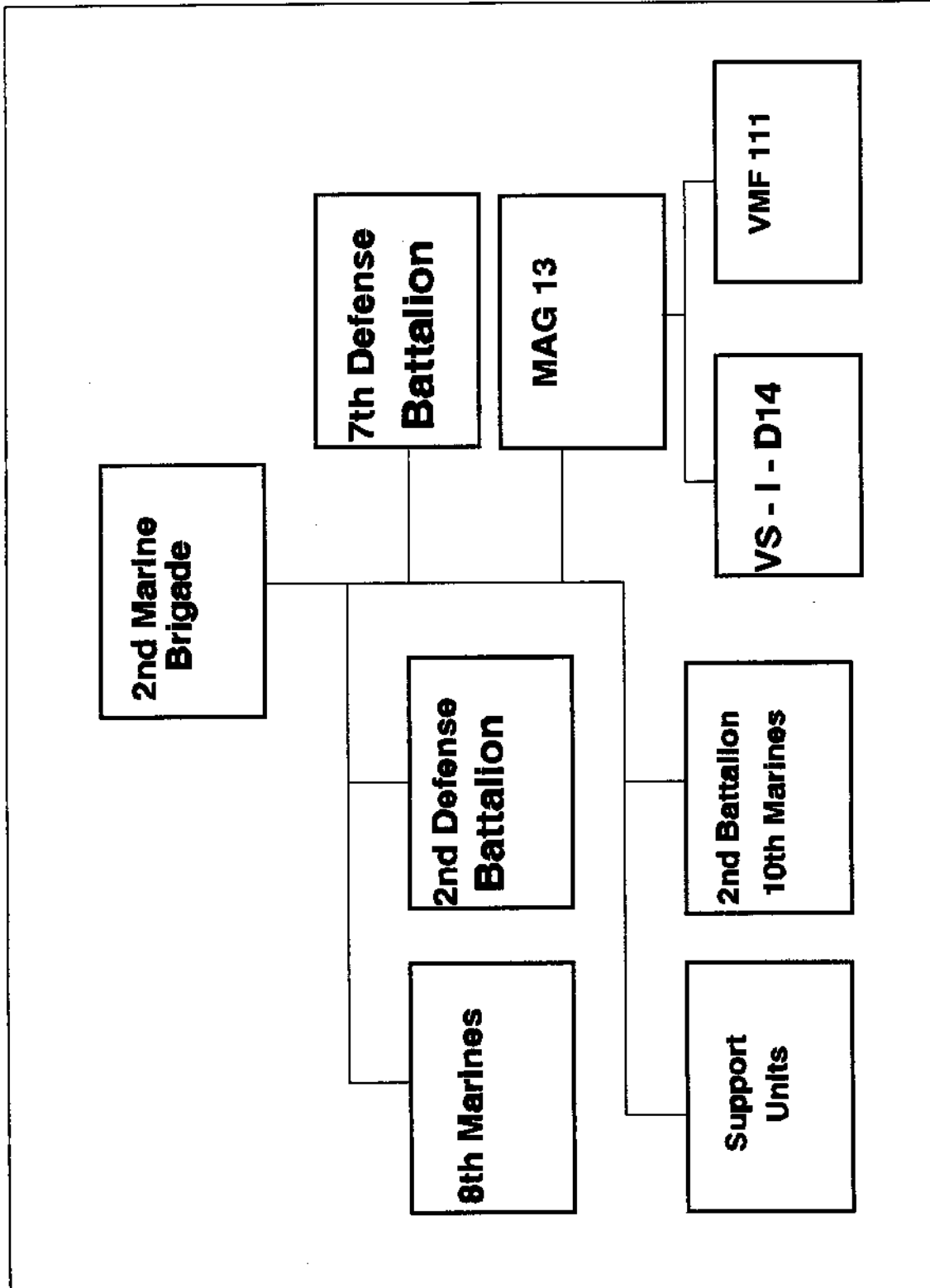


Figure 16 2nd Marine Brigade, March 1942.

the clock. The Marines set up lights around the airfield that allowed the building work to continue twenty-four hours a day. Construction included dispersal areas with ordnance magazines for aircraft as well as work on support facilities such as mess halls and housing for personnel stationed at the airfield.¹⁰

Samoa's airfield became operational on 19 March 1942 with the arrival of the advance echelon of Marine Air Group 13 (MAG-13) and its nineteen F4F-3s, which belonged to MAG-13's fighter squadron, Marine Fighting Squadron 111 (VMF-111). Their arrival provided Samoa with fighter protection for the first time and supplemented VS-I-D14's reconnaissance flights. With its arrival, MAG-13 took over control of air operations in the area and waited for the arrival of its dive bomber squadron, Marine Observation Squadron 151 (VMO-151), which later joined the group at Tutuila.¹¹

The island lacked roads capable of supporting military operations. On its arrival the 2nd Marine Brigade found

¹⁰Personal Letter from Henry L. Larsen, 3 March 1942 (AS, MCHC), 2-4; Defense Force, Samoan Group, "Annual Report of Activities S&C#17117" (AS, MCHC), 3; Robert Sherrod, History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), 47-48.

¹¹Personal Letter from Henry L. Larsen, 3 March 1942, 2-4; Defense Force, Samoan Group, "Annual Report of Activities S&C#17117," 3; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 89-90; Sherrod, History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II, 47-48.

just twenty miles of roads to support its operations, and since it operated outside the harbor to a greater extent than the 7th Defense Battalion had, it assigned a high priority to road construction. As a result, the brigade assimilated and continued construction of the roads and communications lines put in by the 7th Defense Battalion. Within six weeks of arriving, the brigade had completed the first north-south road and had built telephone lines and switchboards connecting all major units.¹²

In addition to general military construction, the defense battalions faced special construction requirements. To connect the various batteries and groups to the battalion headquarters, the 2nd Defense Battalion installed and operated eighteen switchboards, 200 telephones, and 450 miles of telephone lines. It also maintained 125 miles of telephone lines, separate from its routine communications, for use as an aircraft warning net or "J" line. The battalion's radio communication was limited to four radio frequencies (nets), and it used two of the radio nets for routine air-to-ground and ship-to-shore communication. In emergencies, these nets were set aside for the antiaircraft

¹²Larsen, "Building Samoa's Defenses," 13; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 89-90; 2nd Marine Brigade, "History of the Second Marine Brigade," 6.

artillery batteries and used for inter-battery communication.¹³

The brigade found the naval station operating two radar stations from beach positions, which limited their effectiveness because of obstructed lines-of-sight. Larsen consequently attached these radar units to the 2nd Defense Battalion and used them to supplement coverage provided by his units's organic radars. The Marines moved one of the Navy radars from its beach position to a mountain location, providing a 360-degree coverage, and this station began operation on 30 May 1942. The battalion's radars operated in support of the islands air warning net, antiaircraft batteries, and later the air operations of MAG-13.¹⁴

Between 1 February and 5 April 1942, the 2nd Defense Battalion constructed battery positions for its 5-inch seacoast guns, and it dispersed its battery positions to cover the sea approaches to the island with the firepower of at least one battery and other possible sea approaches by two batteries. The machine gun group's Batteries H and I established beach defensive positions to protect the exposed battery positions from landings by Japanese raiding parties.

¹³2nd Defense Battalion, "Annual Report," 5-6.

¹⁴Personal Letter from Henry L. Larsen, 3 March 1942, 4; 2nd Defense Battalion, "Annual Report," 5; 2nd Defense Battalion, "Unit Report No. 1," (AS, MCHC, 20 August 1942), 2.

Marines completed the construction on these facilities primarily with hand tools.¹⁵

The battalion also added three 3-inch batteries to the defense of Tutuila Island, thus extending antiaircraft protection from the harbor to the airfield. In contrast to the 5-inch guns, the 3-inch antiaircraft guns were prepared to fire by 1 February 1942, because the defense of Tutuila Airfield limited the area in which the guns could be deployed, and this speeded their emplacement.

Larsen then ordered the 7th Defense Battalion, minus B Battery, to occupy Pago Pago Valley. The artillerymen continued to man harbor defenses until 25 March 1942, when the 2nd Defense Battalion assumed this responsibility and absorbed the harbor defense group. No support facilities existed in the valley prior to the arrival of the 7th Defense Battalion, so Headquarters Company and A Company had to lay water pipes, erect tents, build galleys and mess halls, and clear training ranges. In addition, the communications section laid telephone wire between it and the widely scattered units. The Marines also constructed and occupied defensive positions in preparation for a Japanese invasion. For operations, the brigade attached A Company of the 7th Defense Battalion to the 8th Marines.

¹⁵2nd Defense Battalion, "Annual Report," 4-5; 2nd Defense Battalion, "Unit Report No. 1," 1-2; Donnelly, Beans Interview, 57.

The battalion's communications section kept busy laying wire between it and the widely scattered units.¹⁶

Early in the brigade's occupation of Samoa, Larsen ordered a survey of Western Samoa, controlled by New Zealand, by the brigade intelligence officer. On his return, the intelligence officer submitted a report that noted the excellent facilities at Upolu and the lack of defenses on both islands of Western Samoa. Larsen then began negotiations with New Zealand authorities for the occupation of the western islands by American forces. Also, during this time, the United States entered negotiations with the Free French government over the use of Wallis Island by American military forces. In March 1942, Larsen visited Apia on Upolu, the capital of Western Samoa, to confer with New Zealand authorities, and he found that the local administrator's government had been instructed to assist in any way the brigade's occupation of the island.¹⁷

HQMC then ordered the 2nd Marine Brigade to provide a defense battalion for the occupation of Western Samoa and to cover the landing there of the 3rd Marine Brigade, then organizing in the United States. At the same time,

¹⁶7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 6-7; 2nd Defense Battalion, "Annual Report," 4-5.

¹⁷Personal Letter from Henry L. Larsen, 13 March 1942 (AS, MCHC), 1-2; 2nd Marine Brigade, "History of the Second Marine Brigade," 8; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 89-90.

reinforcements began to arrive at Tutuila in anticipation of the activation of the 8th Defense Battalion and the occupation of Western Samoa and Wallis. Larsen planned to use this newly activated unit to occupy Western Samoa. His plans, detailed in letters to HQMC, arrived after planners there had designated the 7th Defense Battalion as the occupation force for Western Samoa and the 8th Defense Battalion for Wallis Island.¹⁸

In March 1942 HQMC appointed Major Wilburt S. Brown, then in command of the 4th Battalion, 10th Marines, to head a replacement draft destined for duty in Samoa. His orders designated him as the executive officer of the 8th Defense Battalion. The draft consisted of 1,400 Marines recently out of recruit training, twenty second lieutenants fresh from school, and forty noncommissioned officers. These Marines provided the necessary resources to fill the vacancies in the reorganized 7th Defense Battalion and to man the soon-to-be activated 8th Defense Battalion.¹⁹

As the 7th Defense Battalion prepared to move to Western Samoa, the 2nd Defense Battalion took responsibility

¹⁸CinCPac, "Naval Message 081B/21, 210111NQR 5724" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Personal Letter from Henry L. Larsen, 13 March 1942, 2; Major General Commandant, "Naval Message to ComGen 2nd MarBrig, 23 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Major General Commandant, "Serial 003B6842 9 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1.

¹⁹Major General Wilburt S. Brown, Interview by Benis M. Frank, transcript, Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Historical Center, 142-143.

for the harbor defenses. The attaching of the harbor defense group to the 2nd Defense Battalion gave the battalion control over all of the coast and antiaircraft artillery defenses in American Samoa. In addition, the 2nd Marine Brigade charged the 2nd Defense Battalion with training the Marines of the 7th and 8th Defense Battalions in the use of seacoast and antiaircraft artillery.²⁰

The 7th Defense Battalion embarked aboard the President Garfield for duty in Western Samoa on 28 March 1942, and the New Zealand Defense Force at Apia, Upolu Island, was to report to the commanding officer 7th Defense Battalion for orders when the American unit arrived. Infantry training for the battalion began shortly after its arrival, for the reorganization at Tutuila had left the battalion without its heavy artillery. The battalion established a beachhead at Apia, with checkpoints restricting access to the landing area, in preparation for the arrival of the 3rd Marine Brigade.²¹

On the same day, the 4th Defense Battalion landed in Vila, Efate Island, in the New Hebrides. Efate's airfield, together with the fields on Samoa, New Caledonia, Fiji, and Tongatabu chain, was to serve as a base for Navy and Army

²⁰2nd Marine Brigade, "History of the 2nd Marine Brigade, 12-7-41 to 4-28-42" (AS, MCHC), 2; Frank, "Brown Interview," 145.

²¹7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 7.

Air Corps aircraft operating in support of the Guadalcanal landings scheduled for 7 August 1942. Because of the distance between Efate and Guadalcanal, however, Efate's airfield could not provide fighter cover for the landing. As a result, Rear Admiral John S. McCain, Commander, Air, South Pacific, planned to deploy fighters from the New Hebrides to Guadalcanal to relieve the Navy's carrier-based aircraft. Efate also provided a protected supply dump for operations in the Solomons, and its radios monitored the coastwatcher transmissions and relayed the information to the 1st Marine Division and the Navy's V Amphibious Force.²²

The occupation of Efate also created new strategic theory. The demonstrated ability of the static battalions to defend an island against attack, coupled with their strategic mobility, made them ideal for extending the strategic reach of the Allied aircraft. They did this by landing on unoccupied islands within range of Japanese territory for use as refueling and rearming bases.

In Samoa the arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade was instrumental in expanding the island's defenses. As a result of the reduced size of its complement, the 7th

²²4th Defense Battalion, "Operations At Roses July 1, 1942, (AS, MCHC), 1-2; John Miller, Jr., United States Army in World War II, the War in the Pacific, Guadalcanal: The First Offensive (Washington D. C.: Center of Military History, 1949, reprint), 27, 31-33, 44, 59.

Defense Battalion was limited to defending the harbor. The arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade added the 2nd Defense Battalion, a fully manned defense battalion, to the Samoan garrison, and this allowed the expansion of coastal defenses beyond the harbor. The 2nd Defense Battalion contributed three batteries of coast artillery, three batteries of antiaircraft artillery, and two radar sets to the existing defenses. These new batteries targeted the shipping lanes that approached the island and covered potential landing beaches. In addition, the brigade brought with it three field artillery batteries and three battalions of infantry along with logistical and supply units. The island's garrison increased from fewer than 500 to nearly 6,000 Marines with the arrival of the 2nd Marine Brigade, thus creating a formidable fortress.

Like American Samoa, other strategic islands had defense battalions assigned to them. The 4th Defense Battalion occupied the first of these islands, Efate, on 28 March 1942 with an Army task force. On the same day, the 7th Defense Battalion boarded ship to occupy Western Samoa. Planners also used the defense battalions to secure these other islands that guarded the strategically important line of communications to Australia or as bases from which the Allies could conduct future operations against Japanese territory. Thus, units from Samoa were later used to occupy Funafuti in the Ellice Islands and Tarawa in the Japanese-

held Gilbert Islands. Samoa represented a change in planning, since the decisive theater had by that time shifted from the Central Pacific to the South Pacific. The defense of Samoa was the first step in that shift as it established a secure base from which defense battalions moved up the island chains toward the enemy.

After Pearl Harbor, the defense of the Australian lifeline became the Navy's number one priority. The expansion of Samoa played a major role in this strategy. HQMC ordered the 2nd Marine Brigade to Samoa to strengthen the garrison there. The brigade's 2nd Defense Battalion added three antiaircraft artillery batteries to the island's defense. Marines also contributed three batteries of seacoast artillery covering the approaches to the island, while the machine gun batteries augmented the beach defenses.

The 7th Defense Battalion occupied Apia to cover the landing of the 3rd Marine Brigade. At the same time the 4th Defense Battalion became part of the Army garrison at Efate. Both occupations illustrated a new mission for the defense battalions. They would occupy islands near the Japanese for refueling and rearming bases, which extended the reach of Allied aircraft.

CHAPTER VII

The Samoan Area Defense Group, March - December 1942:

Extending the Allied Reach in the South Pacific

The Samoan Area Defense Group extended Allied influence into the northern and western areas of the South Pacific by occupying Western Samoa, Wallis Island, and the Ellice chain. In these operations both the 2nd Marine Brigade and later the Samoan Area Defense Group used defense battalions as the nucleus for their task forces. The defense battalions combined the antiaircraft protection and seacoast defenses necessary to defend each occupied island until a permanent garrison arrived. For every landing, Allied planners used a defense battalion to provide the basic structure and added reinforcements as needed.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the lack of a strong garrison on Western Samoa encouraged possible Japanese occupation and threatened the security of American Samoa. If the Japanese had made such a move, they could have been in position to threaten the line of communications between the United States and Australia. To forestall this possibility, the 7th Defense Battalion occupied Western Samoa after an agreement between General Henry L. Larsen, the Military Governor of American Samoa, and Alfred C.

Turnbull, New Zealand's administrator in Western Samoa.¹ The 7th Defense Battalion actually moved to Western Samoa before the main body of the planned occupation force arrived in the South Pacific.²

In the meantime, HQMC ordered the 1st Marine Division to organize the 3rd Marine Brigade at New River, North Carolina, and the division commander responded by forming the new unit around the 7th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines; and since the newly formed unit was expected to engage the enemy, he filled those units with the division's best men and equipment. At that time the division detached a reinforced infantry battalion for duty on Wallis Island, the main island in the Wallis chain. This battalion, the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, went by train to San Francisco, California, for shipping to Pago Pago, American Samoa, while the main body of the 3rd Marine Brigade traveled from the East Coast to American Samoa by ship through the Panama Canal. Thus, after the 2nd Marine Brigade occupied American Samoa, planners quickly organized

¹Peter Truhart, Regents of Nations: Systematic Chronology of States and Their Political Representatives in Past and Present, A Biographical Reference Book, Part II, Asia/Australia-Oceania (New York: K.G. Saur, 1985), 2249.

²2nd Marine Brigade, "Annual Report, II Intelligence," 2.

a garrison for the occupation of Western Samoa to prevent the Japanese from occupying the islands.³

In March 1942, planners at both HQMC and American Samoa readied forces for the occupation of Western Samoa. HQMC ordered the 7th Defense Battalion to occupy Western Samoa, while Larsen had intended to use the newly-activated 8th Defense Battalion for the same mission. As a result, he substituted the 7th Defense Battalion for the 8th Defense Battalion and continued the occupation of Western Samoa.⁴

In preparation for the occupation of Western Samoa the 7th Defense Battalion underwent a reorganization according to a new standard defense battalion table of organization. This was, in fact, a paper reorganization because little equipment existed in American Samoa for the 7th Defense Battalion. The battalion's equipment traveled from the United States with the 3rd Marine Brigade. Thus, Marines of the 7th Defense Battalion had to train on the weapons of the 2nd Defense Battalion. The 8th Defense Battalion had brought with it additional personnel and light weapons in March, and by transferring these men among the three defense

³Donnelly, "Beans Interview," 58; Major General Commandant, "Defense of Western Samoa and Wallis Island" (AS, MCHC, 20 March 1942), 3; Vandegrift, Once a Marine, 99; Parry, Three War Marine, 59; Samuel B. Griffith II, The Battle for Guadalcanal (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 27-28.

⁴South Pacific Force And Area, "Command History" (in author's possession), 50-51; Personal letter from Henry L. Larsen, 13 March 1942, 2.

battalions, the 2nd Marine Brigade brought the 7th and 8th Defense Battalions up to strength according to the standard table of organization.⁵

With 486 men added to its strength, the reorganized 7th Defense Battalion now included a two-battery 155-millimeter group, a three-battery 90-millimeter group, and a special weapons group (minus the 20-millimeter and 40-millimeter batteries). Since its equipment was en route with the 3rd Marine Brigade, however, the 7th Defense Battalion lacked 90-millimeter guns for its antiaircraft artillery group and the 20-millimeter and 40-millimeter guns for its special weapons group. The special weapons group thus substituted .50-caliber and .30-caliber machine guns for the missing 20- and 40-millimeter guns. This deficiency meant that the 7th Defense Battalion had to operate as an infantry battalion after landing at Apia in March.⁶

On 28 March, the 7th Defense Battalion arrived at Apia Harbor on Upolu Island, the most important of Western Samoa's two islands.⁷ At that time the New Zealand

⁵South Pacific Force and Area, "Command History," 50-51; 2nd Defense Battalion, "Unit Report 1," 2-3; 2nd Marine Brigade, "History of the 2nd Marine Brigade," 3; Anonymous, "Guarding the Crossroads," 18; Frank, "Brown Interview," 145.

⁶2nd Marine Brigade, "Brigade Operation Order 6-42, 26 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2.

⁷The naval records claim the 7th Defense Battalion arrived on 27 March. The unit records the date as 28 March 1942, and the Army's official history claims it arrived in

infantry company defending the harbor reported to Dessez for duty. As landing progressed, the battalion installed .50-caliber antiaircraft machine guns on the harbor's seawall. With its occupation of Western Samoa, the 7th Defense Battalion had secured the landing area for the coming forces of the 3rd Marine Brigade.⁸

In addition to denying the island to the Japanese, another purpose for the occupation, as with all the islands occupied by the Samoan Area Defense Group, was to build an airfield to help protect the line of communications between the United States and Australia. Equipment for airfield construction at Faleolo, outside Apia, arrived on 13 April with additional supplies and equipment coming every few weeks. A naval construction battalion detachment began work on Faleolo airfield, while Marines helped clear the area for runways and other building projects. By May 1942, Marines

April 1942. I believe the unit's records to be the most accurate account of its activities and so use that date. See South Pacific Area and Force, "History of the Samoan Defense Group," 32; 7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 7; Leighton, Global Logistics 1940-1943, 177.

⁸Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 90; South Pacific Area and Force, "History of the Samoan Defense Group," 32-33; 7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 7.

of the 7th Defense Battalion had finished preparations for the coming of the 3rd Marine Brigade.⁹

To take over Savaii, the second major island in the Western Samoan Group, the 7th Defense Battalion sent a small detachment under Second Lieutenant Ernest L. Medford, Jr. It arrived at the unoccupied island on 3 April. Although the island was not suitable for the development of an airfield, its occupation nevertheless prevented the Japanese from using it. An infantry company from the 7th Marines replaced Medford's detachment in May 1942, and the detachment went back to Upolu Island for use in the defense of the airfield there.¹⁰

In May 1942, the Samoan Area Defense Group attached to the 3rd Marine Brigade a naval construction battalion to build an airfield and assigned aircraft from VS-I-D14 to patrol the area around Western Samoa. The 7th Defense Battalion moved to the airfield at Faleolo following the arrival of the 3rd Marine Brigade, where it established antiaircraft defenses and began training with the additional equipment that the 3rd Marine Brigade brought to Western Samoa. This equipment completed the reorganization of the

⁹Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 168; South Pacific Area and Force, "History of the Samoan Defense Group," 32-33; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 90.

¹⁰7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 8; Donnelly, "Dessez Interview," 168.

7th Defense Battalion, since it now had the equipment needed to operate as an integrated defense battalion.¹¹

Allied planners used a defense battalion to secure Western Samoa for the landing of the 3rd Marine Brigade, rather than using the brigade to capture a landing area for the defense battalion. Among the tasks it accomplished, the 7th Defense Battalion established antiaircraft defenses and a safe landing area, and then the Marines took charge of the local defenses. They also occupied the adjoining island, Savaii. Thus, a defense battalion covered the landing of an infantry and artillery force, thereby taking the place of a traditional landing force.

In addition to safeguarding the Samoan Islands, the safety of the New Hebrides concerned the Navy because Australian coastwatchers used Efate Island in the New Hebrides as a base for their communications and resupply operations. The Navy and Marine Corps used the intelligence provided by the coastwatchers to keep accurate accounts of Japanese movements and to provide the 1st Marine Division, after 7 August 1942, with warning of Japanese air and sea attacks. In an effort to speed the garrisoning of Efate, the Navy ordered a carrier to land a part of its crew to establish a foothold. When Brigadier General Dwight D.

¹¹7th Defense Battalion, "History of the 7th Defense Battalion," 3; Samoan Area Defense Group, "Unit Report 1, 5 June 1942" (AS, MCHC), 3; 3rd Marine Brigade, "Unit Report 1, 18 March 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2.

Eisenhower, then head of the Army's War Plans Division, heard of this action, he scraped together some Army ground troops and ordered them to provide a temporary garrison. The Army's Americal Division then created a task force for the occupation of Efate, Task Force A, under Brigadier General William I. Rose. This move made the Army the senior service in the joint garrison.¹²

On 18 March, Task Force A, two infantry companies, an engineer platoon, and support troops landed on the island. Task Force A remained on the island until May 1942 when it left for Espiritu Santo, which was further north, to build an airfield. The occupation of Efate by the United States denied the Japanese a step south and provided a base for the Allied advance into the Solomon and Bismarck Islands.¹³

As its contribution to the garrison, the Navy promised a Marine defense battalion for Efate until Army antiaircraft artillery units became available. The Navy based its decision on two issues: one, the lack of available Army

¹²Francis D. Cronin, Under The Southern Cross: The Saga Of The Americal Division (Washington, D. C.: Combat Forces Press, 1951), 15-16, 31-32; John Miller, Jr., Guadalcanal: The First Offensive (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Department Of The Army, 1949), 32, 44; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), 26.

¹³Dyer, Amphibians, 240-242; Cronin, Under The Southern Cross, 15-16, 31-32; Miller, Guadalcanal: The First Offensive, 32, 44; Samuel Eliot Morison, Struggle For Guadalcanal, August 1942 - February 1943 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1949), 12; Williams, Chronology, 29.

antiaircraft units, and, two, the threat of a Japanese attack. CinCPac then ordered the 4th Defense Battalion from Hawaii to Efate, and on 29 March, eleven days after Task Force A landed, the Marines arrived on the island.¹⁴

Colonel Harold S. Fassett, the battalion commander, apparently disagreed with Brigadier General H. D. Chamberlin, the garrison commander, over the placement of the seacoast artillery. Fassett wanted to replace 155-millimeter guns on Pango Point on the east coast with 6-inch guns. Chamberlin refused, however, on the assumption that the 4th Defense Battalion was a permanent part of the island's defenses. His decision ignored the first premise on which the Navy based its decision to send the battalion to Efate--that no Army antiaircraft artillery units were nearby and that the 4th Defense Battalion would be relieved as soon as Army units arrived. Later, after Army units became available, CinCPac withdrew the 4th Defense Battalion for use in the Northern Solomons campaign.¹⁵

¹⁴Allen R. Millet states that the Marines landed in April 1942, while H. P. Willmot claims that naval artillery arrived at Efate on 14 May 1942. However, the battalion reported landing on 29 March 1942. See 4th Defense Battalion, "Operations at Roses," (AS, MCHC, 1 July 1942), 2; Leighton, Global Logistics 1940 - 1943, 177; Matloff, Strategic Planning, 156. See also Millet, Semper Fidelis, 359; H. P. Willmot, The Barrier and the Javelin: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies February to June 1942 (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1983), 184.

¹⁵4th Defense Battalion, "Seacoast Defense, 27 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2 with indorsement; 4th Defense Battalion, "Certain Changes in Seacoast Installations, This

Marines organized the island's air and coastal defenses, which included building roads to the various gun positions. To provide a base for Allied aircraft, the battalion's airfield construction work occupied much of its own manpower as well as personnel in the attached aviation detachment. Navy SeaBees arrived to build a hospital and completed the airfield with the help of native laborers. Later, wounded troops from Guadalcanal were airlifted to the hospital on Efate. During the 4th Defense Battalion's time on the island, only a couple of Japanese reconnaissance aircraft flew over the island because the American naval victory in the Coral Sea stopped further southward expansion by the enemy.¹⁶

Efate allowed a defense battalion to demonstrate its strategic mobility. Although problems developed, the Marines set up the island's air and sea defenses, worked on the new airfield, and were able to take the place of unavailable Army antiaircraft artillery units. The operation also underlined the Navy's intention to use defense battalions for combat operations, not garrison duties.

HQMC organized the Samoan Area Defense Group under Major General F. B. Price to command the expanding garrison

Base, 31 May 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.

¹⁶5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events, 2 - 26 July, 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Donnelly, "Cloud Interview," 52-55.

and increasing geographic area. At that time the Samoan Area Defense Group included American Samoa and Western Samoa. Later, on 27 May and 2 October respectively, the Wallis chain and Funafuti in the Ellice chain became part of the command, which by December 1942 was the largest garrison in the Pacific.¹⁷ [See figures 17 and 18]

In the Wallis and Ellice landings, defense battalions exercised control over the operations, while infantry and other units provided reinforcements to create an integrated all-arms landing force. These forces established positions blocking the path of any Japanese advance southward, and as the islands were secured, the Marines occupied additional ones nearer to the enemy. The air bases on these islands allowed American land-based fighter aircraft and heavy bombers to attack Japanese-held islands. The raids and air reconnaissance flights thus provided valuable support and intelligence to the assaulting units.

On 1 April 1942, the 2nd Marine Brigade activated for duty on Wallis the 8th Defense Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Augustus W. Cockrell. Marines from the 2nd and 7th Defense Battalions provided some veterans for the 8th Defense Battalion, offsetting the inexperience of the large number of recruits Major Wilburt Brown had brought from the

¹⁷Donnelly, "Beans Interview," 58; South Pacific Area and Force, "Command History," 55; Hough, Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, 90; Major General Commandant, "Defense of Western Samoa and Wallis Island," Enclosure A.

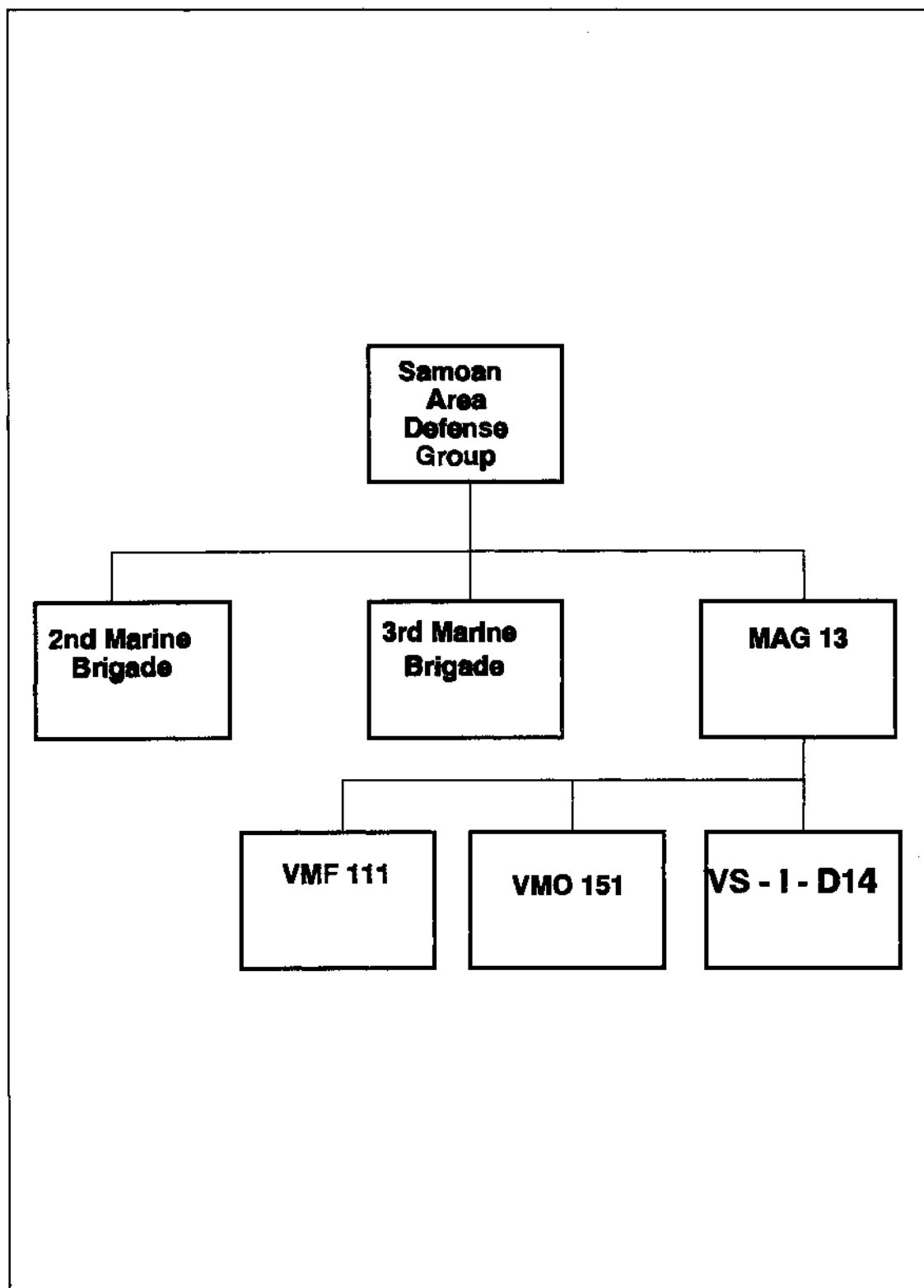


Figure 17 Samoan Area Defense Group, April 1942.

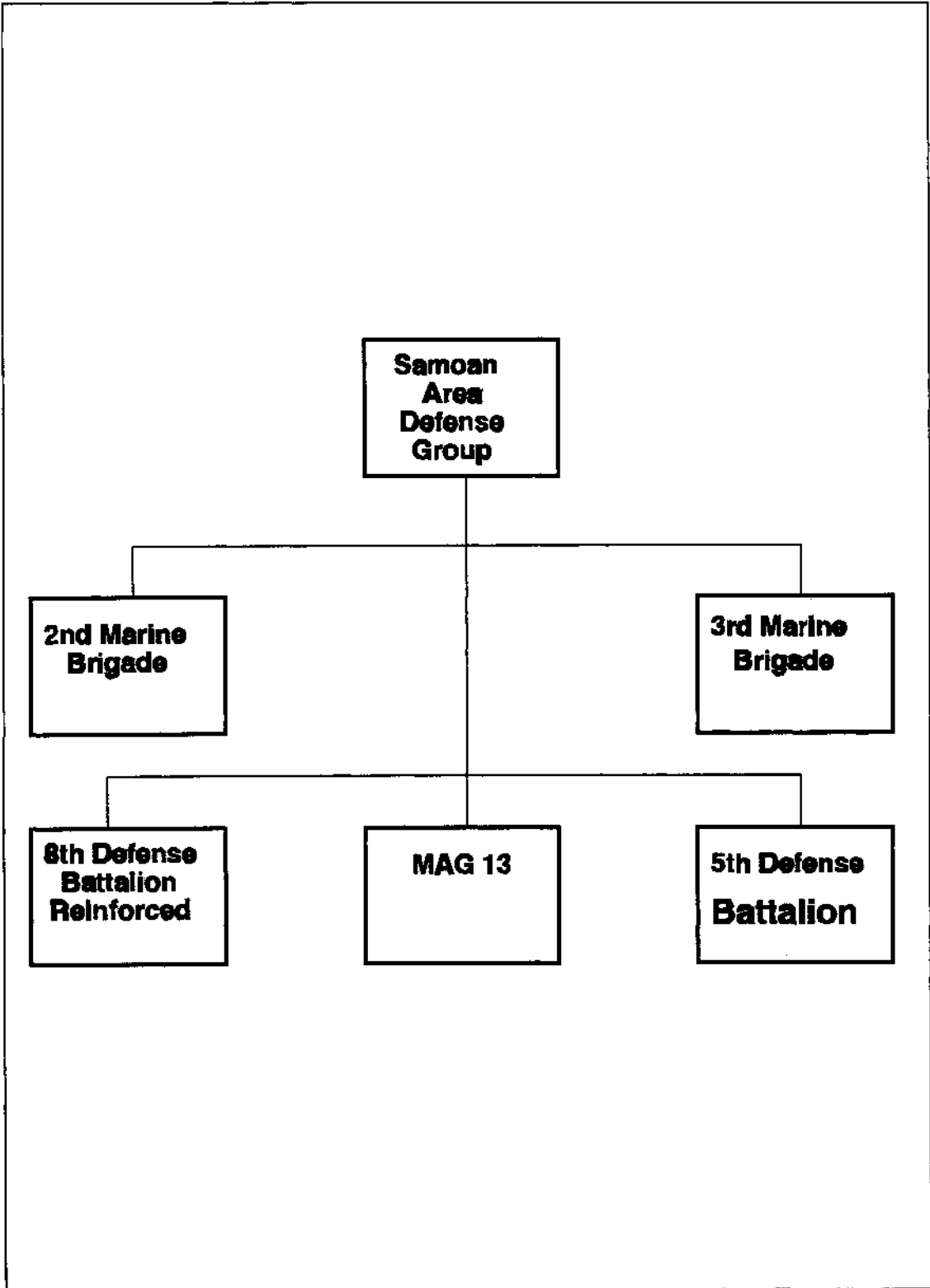


Figure 18 Samoan Area Defense Group, October 1942.

United States in March. The 8th Defense Battalion had, in return, transferred some of these recruits to the 2nd and 7th Defense Battalions. This process gave the new battalion an even mix of recruits and experienced Marines.¹⁸

The 7th Defense Battalion's movement to Western Samoa prepared the way for the 8th Defense Battalion's occupation of Wallis. CinCPac first received permission to occupy the Wallis chain from the Free French government on New Caledonia, and then, following the successful deployment to Western Samoa, Price ordered the 8th Defense Battalion to occupy Wallis in accordance with a directive that HQMC had sent to Larsen. The 8th Defense Battalion waited for the arrival of the 3rd Battalion (reinforced), 7th Marines, before taking over Wallis Island. To defend Wallis, the battalion had two 155-millimeter batteries, Batteries A and B, a 3-inch antiaircraft group, Batteries D, E, and F, and .50-caliber machine guns on antiaircraft mounts. With the arrival in May of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, Price created a task force combining the two battalions, attaching the infantry battalion to the 8th Defense Battalion.¹⁹

In late May 1942, the 8th Defense Battalion (reinforced) and the Navy's 5th Detachment, 2nd Battalion, 1st Construction Regiment, boarded the Sumner and Swan to

¹⁸Frank, "Brown Interview," 144-145.

¹⁹Ibid., 144, 146; South Pacific Area and Force, "Command History," 52; Parry, Three War Marine, 60-62.

begin the occupation of Wallis. [See figure 19] The ships sailed under the protection of a New Zealand cruiser, two French frigates, and two American destroyers. On 27 May the small convoy arrived at its destination. Battery C, 8th Defense Battalion and Company I (reinforced), 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, landed first and secured the beach for the arrival of the main body. The unopposed occupation was the first Marine landing on foreign soil in World War II and extended the reach of the Samoan Area Defense Group an additional four hundred miles, increasing protection for ships sailing between Hawaii and Australia.²⁰

The 8th Defense Battalion placed its seacoast batteries at either end on the island, using "Panama mounts" for the guns of each 155-millimeter battery. Constructing these batteries occupied all of the island's motor transport and most of the 8th Defense Battalion's Marines which left the anti-aircraft guns undermanned until the seacoast guns were sited. The island command also made plans to use the 8th Defense Battalion's 90-millimeter guns along with the howitzers and guns of Battery C, 11th Marines, to support the seacoast artillery in the event of a Japanese attack, if no aircraft raids or enemy landings were occurring

²⁰Samoan Area Defense Group, "Unit Report 1," 3; Parry, Three War Marine, 58-59; Edward Andrusko, "The Wallis Island Landing," Leatherneck, May 1992, 22.

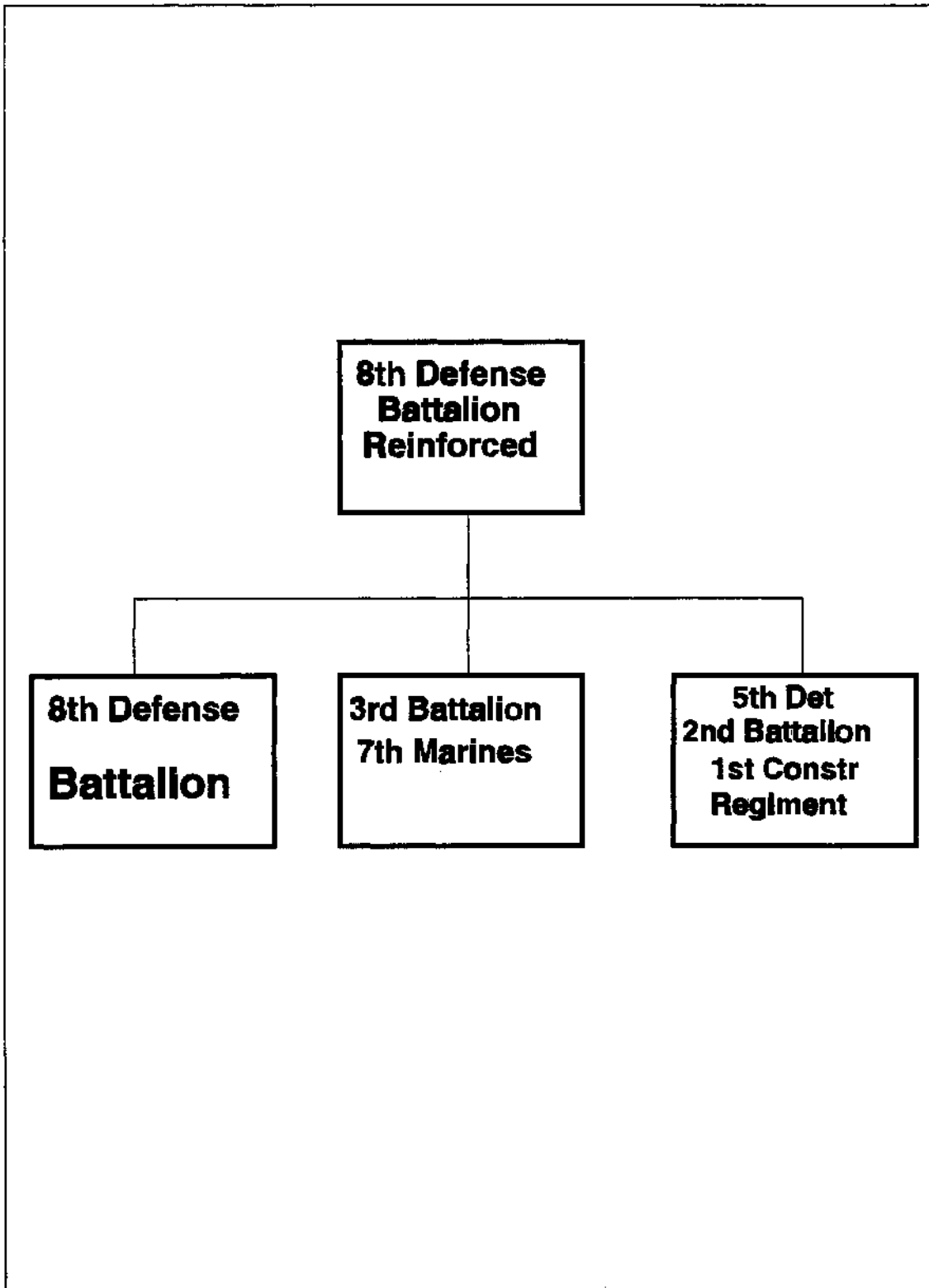


Figure 19 8th Defense Battalion on Wallis, 27 May 1942.

simultaneously.²¹

During the occupation of Wallis, Marines helped the Navy construction detachment build an airfield. Later in the occupation, the battalion requested HQMC supply target drones for antiaircraft gun practice, a request denied because the battalion's training had not progressed far enough to justify their use. In the fall of 1942, a battalion from the 22nd Marines replaced the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, thus allowing the 7th Marines to be transferred to Guadalcanal.²²

To prevent the Japanese in the Gilberts from occupying the Ellice chain and threatening the Hawaii-Australia line of communications, the Navy ordered the 5th Defense Battalion to occupy Funafuti. The battalion left the United States on 6 July 1942 and sailed to New Zealand, where it arrived on 3 August. To prepare for occupation duty in the Ellice chain, the battalion executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Franklin G. Good, Jr., conducted a reconnaissance of the area and returned to New Zealand with a native from

²¹Frank, "Brown Interview," 148, 150; Parry, Three-War Marine, 59-60. NOTE: The name for the "Panama" mounts came from the Army coast artillery emplacements in the Panama Canal Zone, where this type of mount supposedly originated. Each emplacement consisted of a circular concrete base with a pivot in the center to give the guns a 360-degree firing radius.

²²Frank, "Brown Interview," 147-149, 154.

Funafuti. As a result of his reconnaissance, the island was chosen as the site of a new airfield.²³

On 2 September the 5th Defense Battalion split, and half of the battalion sailed for the New Hebrides in convoy with the 7th Marines.²⁴ On the same day the remainder sailed for the New Hebrides aboard the Heywood with their final destination being Funafuti. The unit conducted practice landings at the Tonga Islands on 5 and 6 September, and one month later, on 2 October 1942, it landed on Funafuti.²⁵

American planners kept the Marines' arrival at Funafuti a secret because they feared that the Japanese, who had recently reinforced their Gilbert possessions, would attack the garrison. The native that Good had brought back from his reconnaissance acted as a pilot in bringing the ship close enough to shore to unload. The convoy began unloading as soon as it anchored, because it was under orders to be at sea by dark. When it set sail, however, nearly 25 percent

²³5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events, 16 September, 1942 to 2 October, 1942" (AS, MCHC), n.p.; Frank, "Good Interview," 97-98, 100, 102.

²⁴This half of the 5th Defense Battalion arrived at Guadalcanal on 4 November 1942. Together with part of the 3rd Defense battalion, it formed the 14th Defense Battalion. See Williams, Chronology, 62-63.

²⁵Samoan Area Defense Group, "Unit Report 6, 5 November, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2, 5. 5th Defense Battalion, "Diary of Events, 16 September, 1942 to 2 October, 1942," n.p.; Frank, "Good Interview," 97-98, 100, 102; Dyer, Amphibians, 622-623; Williams, Chronology, 57.

of the battalion's equipment was still on board, although the Marines did have their battery of 90-millimeter guns together with a search and a fire control radar, which they placed in operation within twenty-four hours. In addition to the 90-millimeter battery, the battalion had a platoon each of 20-millimeter and 40-millimeter guns and two companies of infantry.²⁶ [See figure 20]

The Japanese did not attack the Ellice chain until after the Allied aircraft began using Funafuti to stage raids on enemy possessions in the Gilbert Islands. By this time the preponderance of naval force was shifting in the Allies' favor, making it nearly impossible for the Japanese to mount a successful assault on the island. These air raids provided valuable information to the Allied forces for the later invasions of Tarawa and Makin in the Gilberts.²⁷

At Wallis and Funafuti, defense battalions with attached infantry and artillery commanded the landing. The battalion commanded the islands' integrated coast, antiaircraft and infantry protection along with the building of an airfield. The 5th Defense Battalion guarded a way-station for Allied aircraft that extended their reach into Japanese territory, while both landings prevented the enemy

²⁶5th Defense Battalion, "Unit Report 1, 20 October, 1942" (AS, MCHC), 1-2; Frank, "Good Interview," 97-99, 103; Morison, Struggle For Guadalcanal, 184.

²⁷5th Antiaircraft Battalion, "Report of Operations," 1; Frank, "Good Interview," 103.

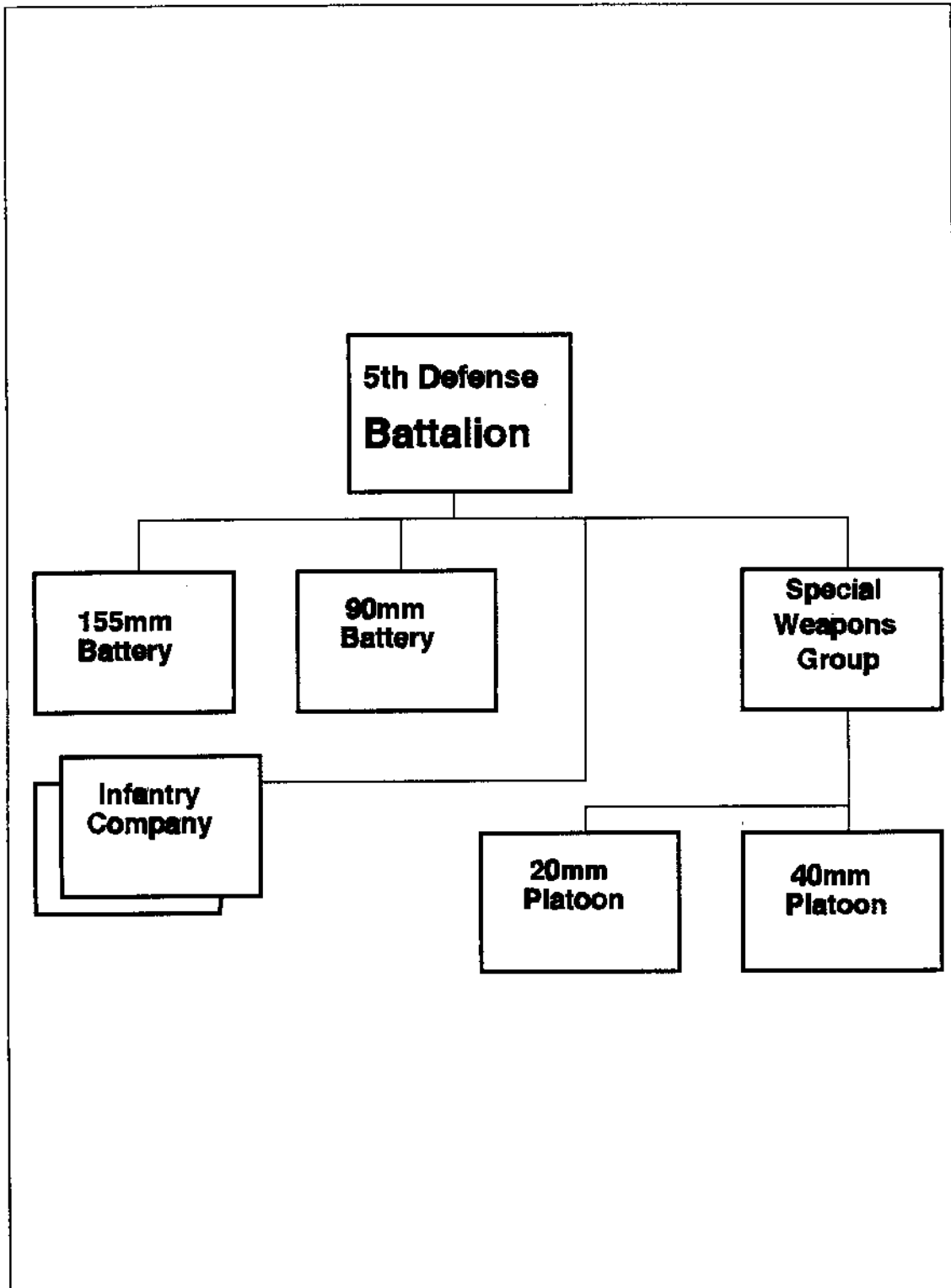


Figure 20 5th Defense Battalion on Funafuti, 2 October 1942.

from landing near the Hawaii-to-Australia line of communications. Raids staged through Funafuti provided valuable intelligence and pre-invasions bombardment to facilitate landings in the Gilberts.

Thus, between March and October 1942, defense battalions occupied Western Samoa, the Wallis chain, and Funafuti, allowing the Allies to extend their strategic reach and to augment their control of the South Pacific. In the process, defense battalions transformed garrison troops into combat units. In each occupation the Allied planners used a defense battalion to provide the basic structure of the landing force, while reinforcements were added as needed. At each location the Marines established antiaircraft artillery and coast artillery defenses. Defense battalions contributed units capable of expending heavy firepower and demonstrated a high level of strategic mobility and flexibility for these operations. Planners used the strategic mobility and availability of the defense battalions to replace unavailable Army units. This flexibility allowed the Allies to occupy strategic points in defense of the line of communications between the United States and Australia and to provide points for staging attacks on the Japanese. In the takeover of Efate, the Navy made it clear that Marine defense battalions were to be used for combat operations and not as permanent garrisons. By occupying Funafuti, a defense battalion acting as a landing

force also gave the Allies a base within striking distance of Japanese possessions. These landings prevented the enemy from disrupting the Hawaii-Australia line of communications and placed the defense battalions on the front between the Japanese and vital Allied bases.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1943, because of battle casualties and a subsequent need for more Marine divisions, HQMC began to reassign its special units to replacement pools. As a result, the Marine Corps ended experimentation in barrage balloon and glider squadrons in 1943, and those Marines became replacements for combat units. The next year, Vandegrift ordered the raider battalions in the Pacific reorganized as the 4th Marines, and in the same year he used the parachute battalions as the cadre for the 5th Marine Division. In spite of this demand for men, the defense battalions remained intact.

The flexibility demonstrated by the defense battalions between December 1941 and December 1942 convinced planners that they were more valuable as separate entities than as replacements. In addition to their original mission, defense battalions took the place of scarce Army antiaircraft artillery units and conducted landings on strategically important islands. Defense battalions also provided antiaircraft artillery protection for Marine and Army landing forces. Before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, HQMC had organized seven defense battalions for duty in the Pacific.¹

¹The defense battalions were deployed thus: 1st Defense Battalion had detachments at Johnston, Pearl Harbor, Palmyra, and Wake; 2nd Defense Battalion at Parris Island;

HQMC originally formed defense battalions to give seacoast and antiaircraft artillery protection to the Pacific islands, which the Navy had planned to use as bases for its submarines and patrol planes. The Navy did not expect defense battalions to defeat large-scale landings. The disaster at Pearl Harbor changed thinking concerning the use of defense battalions, but actually, even before Pearl Harbor, operations in Iceland planted the seeds of change.

On 22 June 1941 the 1st Marine Brigade left the United States for duty in Iceland, and since German aircraft were the primary threat in Iceland, HQMC had to equip the brigade for antiaircraft defense. Assigning a defense battalion was simpler than creating new units for the job, because these Marines already had training for antiaircraft operations. Thus, the defense battalions assumed the duty of furnishing antiaircraft protection for the Marine divisions, relieving HQMC of the need to create new groups for this task.

In spite of the large number of field grade officers, defense battalions still demonstrated an economy of manpower. Their 3-inch antiaircraft artillery batteries used only half the men of similar Army batteries. The reduced manning tables for the batteries, however, diminished the amount of labor available to work on

3rd Defense Battalion at Pearl Harbor; 4th Defense Battalion at Pearl Harbor; 5th Defense Battalion at Iceland; 6th Defense Battalion at Midway; and the 7th Defense Battalion at American Samoa.

defensive emplacements. Because of these limits, defense battalions needed an early start to complete their defensive works. This, however, did not happen.

At Midway, the first island to receive a garrison, the full defense battalion did not arrive until February 1941, less than a year before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Wake, the most exposed of the islands, did not receive a Marine detachment until August 1941. Equipment was also in short supply. Wake had only one battery with complete instruments, and the island's radar units never arrived. These deficiencies resulted in the garrison's being unprepared for attack when war began.

In spite of their handicaps, the Marines at Wake sank two destroyers and one transport and damaged two cruisers, forcing the Japanese to turn back from the island. Wake's fall owed more to the slow American build-up, lack of equipment, and reduced manpower than to Japanese capabilities. Coastal batteries kept the attacking Japanese force at bay, except for the transports that beached themselves on the island. Being undermanned, the Marines were unable to repel this assault, and Wake fell. The action on Wake proved, however, that although the defense battalions could stop raids on the Navy's islands, they could not, without greater support, turn back large-scale assaults. CinCPac's decision to call back the relief force was a clear indication that he did not believe the fleet

could influence the outcome of the battle and was further evidence that the island garrisons were left to fend for themselves.

Palmyra, Johnston, and Midway also came under attack. The Marines successfully drove off these raiders, usually before the enemy could cause any damage. Here the defense battalions showed that they could execute their original mission. The battle of Midway was an example of the defense battalions working in tandem with the fleet. During the battle, in spite of the fact that CinCPac ordered away the garrison's aircraft, antiaircraft fire forced the Japanese to consider a second strike on the island. Their actions allowed the Navy's pilots to catch the Japanese unaware and turn the battle into an American victory.

The Marines arrived in Samoa on 15 March 1941. To defend the island they placed their 6-inch guns on two promontories at the entrance to the harbor and their antiaircraft guns in the valley. Mines and wire obstacles covered the beaches, and pillboxes targeted the beach exits. In addition to their defensive works, the Marines built roads and installed telephone lines. In July they began to recruit for a native battalion. The Samoans received weekly training sessions from the detached duty Marines and supplemental instruction from the battalion's gun crews. The 7th Defense Battalion nearly doubled its strength by using the Samoans.

After Pearl Harbor, the Navy's primary objective was keeping the line of communications open to Australia. To this end, the Navy ordered the Marine Corps to expand its South Pacific garrisons. HQMC then organized the 2nd Marine Brigade to expand Samoa's facilities. The 2nd Defense Battalion had responsibility for defending the airfield, so the unit placed its antiaircraft artillery batteries around the base, thus increasing the number of batteries there from one to four. Outside the harbor, the 2nd Defense Battalion added three seacoast batteries. The battalion's machine gun batteries augmented the existing beach defenses. As a result of this activity on Samoa, the 2nd Defense Battalion gave the Navy a secure harbor midway between the United States and Australia.

At the same time, the 4th Defense Battalion became part of the Army garrison on Efate. Because of the danger of Japanese attack and since Army antiaircraft units were unavailable, the Navy ordered a defense battalion temporarily assigned to the Efate garrison. This decision determined a new use for defense battalions--the occupation of islands near the Japanese for refueling and rearming stations, a move that extended the reach of Allied aircraft.

Defense battalions conducted three landings between March and October 1942. These landings, together with earlier ones, also helped secure the line of communications between the United States and Australia. Planners took

advantage of the strategic mobility and firepower of the defense battalions to establish secure bases within range of the Japanese. These bases allowed Allied aircraft to stay out of range of Japanese attack while still being able to reach the enemy. CinCPac sent these battalions to the areas most threatened by the Japanese, transforming the defense battalions from garrison troops into combat units.

Since operations in Iceland had indicated the defense battalions' potential to furnish antiaircraft protection to Marine Corps combat units, CinCPac ordered the 3rd Defense Battalion attached to the 1st Marine Division to give it antiaircraft protection. CinCPac later ordered the 4th Defense Battalion to provide antiaircraft artillery defense for the Army garrison at Efate in the place of nonexistent Army antiaircraft artillery units.

At the same time, defense battalions occupied islands close to the Japanese, giving Allied aircraft a longer reach. Raids staged from these island bases provided Allied planners with important intelligence for upcoming offensives, as well as a place at which damaged aircraft could land.

Thus, between October 1940 and December 1942, the defense battalions had convincingly demonstrated to the Navy and HQMC that they were a valuable asset whose operations as independent units should continue. During this time, the defense battalions had performed admirably as: (1) island

garrisons, (2) antiaircraft artillery units, and (3) landing forces. Throughout World War II, therefore, these units were an important part of the Marine Corps's combat team. Their versatility and adaptability kept them from being disbanded, as had happened to other units that did not successfully adapt to the changing nature of the Pacific War.

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