

2d Battalion, 5th Marines

on

GUADALCANAL

7 August 1942

A Pocket History



The 1st Marine Division, under the command of MajGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, arrives in Wellington, New Zealand in June of 1942.

14 June 1942: 2d Battalion, 5th Marines disembarks transport ships in New Zealand. 2/5 is commanded by LtCol Harold E. Rosecrans. The 5th Marines are commanded by Col LeRoy P. Hunt, who had been with 2/5 as a company commander and battalion commander during WWI, and again commanded 2/5 during the 1930's.

The 1942 Table of Organization for an infantry battalion was 933 Marines and Sailors:

HQ Co	111
Wpns Co	273
(3) Rifle Co	183

2/5's rifle companies are "Easy", "Fox", and "George". Weapons Company is "How".

26 June 1942: General Vandegrift is ordered to seize Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon islands.

After much hurried planning, a convoy of

The First Marine Corps Utility Uniform

The Marines of 2/5 came ashore at Guadalcanal armed with the M1903 Springfield Rifle, the same weapon they had carried 25 years earlier at Belleau Wood.

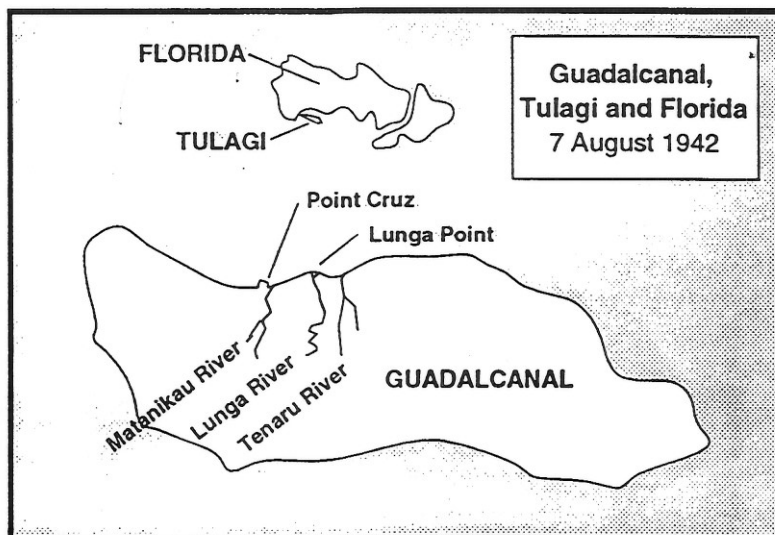
The M1 steel helmet had just been issued.

The new utility uniform had been issued nine months earlier. It consisted of a jacket and trousers made from green herringbone twill cotton. The jacket had two lower pockets and a single left breast pocket to which was stenciled the Eagle, Globe and Anchor and the letters "USMC". Marines called this uniform "dungarees", the same term used for the pre-war, dark-blue denim fatigue uniform.

The web equipment, scrubbed to a light tan shade, was the standard cartridge belt with a bayonet and metal canteen.

The boots were rubber-soled, rough-side-out leather "boondockers", worn with canvas leggings. Most Marines pulled their trousers out in the heat of the tropics.

Camouflage clothing was introduced in stages. The camouflage helmet cover was introduced after the landing, followed by a camouflaged poncho, and full utility outfit.



The ridge where the battle occurs is named **Edson's Ridge**. 2/5's company commanders had prudently made a leader's recon of the ridge earlier in the day knowing that their movement would be made piecemeal, in total darkness, and under enemy fire. 2/5 relieves 1st Raiders on Edson's ridge.

23 September 1942: 1/7, under the command of LtCol Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, begins patrolling an inland trail toward the Matanikau River. The next day, 1/7 engages strong Japanese forces, pulls back and regroups. At the division perimeter, Capt Harry Connor's E Co sights a Japanese patrol.

25 Sep 1942: At 0500, LtCol Walter Reaves moves 2/5 west to rescue 1/7. Leading the new advance, E Co finds abandoned enemy campfires still warm.

26 September 1942: 2/5 and 1/7(-) reach the river, and move to the coast.

2/5 attacks across the river, with E Co in the lead, but is beaten back by the Japanese.

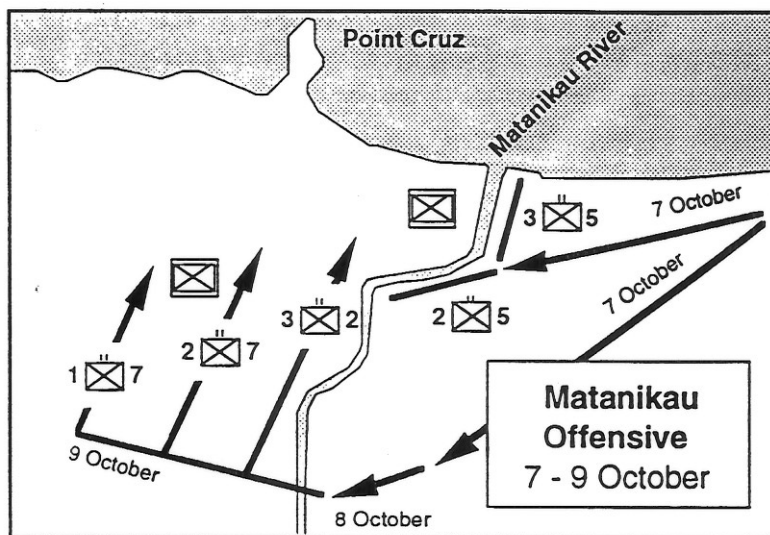
Under heavy automatic fire, E Co takes positions in the protection of the near-side trees. G Co, under Capt Tom Richmond, attacks. The lead platoon, led by 2dLt Paul Moore, tries twice to cross, but the depth of the river is over the Marine's heads. G Co has 25 casualties.

A three Battalion attack is planned. 2/5, 1/7, and the 1st Raider Battalion are placed

under the new 5th Marines CO, Colonel Edson, with Chesty Puller as second in command.

27 Sep 1942: 2/5's aggressive attack across the Matanikau River is hurled back again. F Co and G Co sustain excessive casualties. The 1st Raider Battalion attempts to flank upriver, but is hit by Japanese forces before crossing the river.

1/7 attempts a seaborne attack. They land near Point Cruz, move inland, and are cut off from behind. All three battalions are now



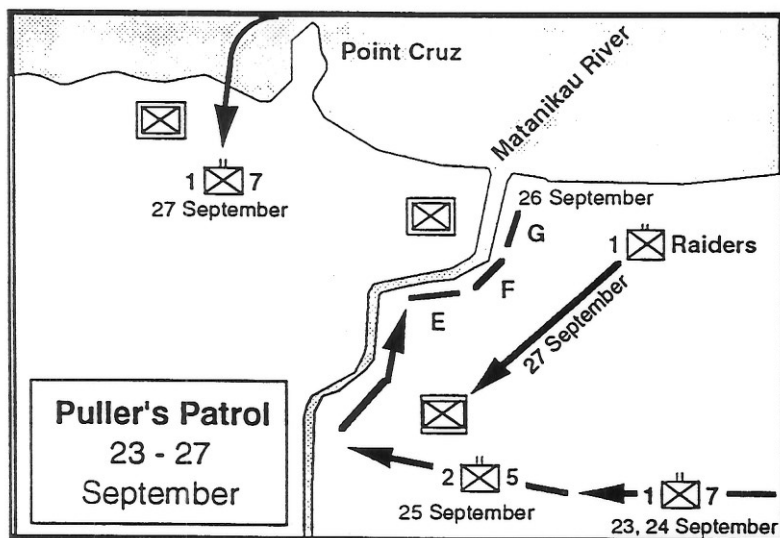
immobilized. Col Edson decides to withdraw. 2/5 has 16 KIA, 68 WIA.

7 October 1942: OpPlan 2-42 is another five-battalion attack at the Matanikau River.

2/5, now led by Maj David S. McDougale, and 3/5 attack at the mouth of the river, 1/7, 2/7 and 3/2 make a left flank attack.

3/5 is stopped early by a Japanese force that had crossed the river. 2/5 moves forward. As Wpns Co, under Capt Charles A. Rigaud, moves toward the river, they are suddenly hit by rifle, mortar and machine gun fire from both front and rear. Trapped between two Japanese forces, the company is saved by Capt Rigaud's strong leadership.

At the 2/5 command post, Maj McDougale is hit by mortar fire. Maj W. Piper takes command of the battalion.



warships and transports sails on 22 July at 0900 from Aotea Quay, Wellington, New Zealand. The 1st Marine Division is embarked. The operation is named WATCHTOWER. The code word for Guadalcanal is CACTUS, the code word for Tulagi is RINGBOLT.

The Division conducts an amphibious landing rehearsal off the Fiji islands on July 28 through 31, then sails for Guadalcanal.

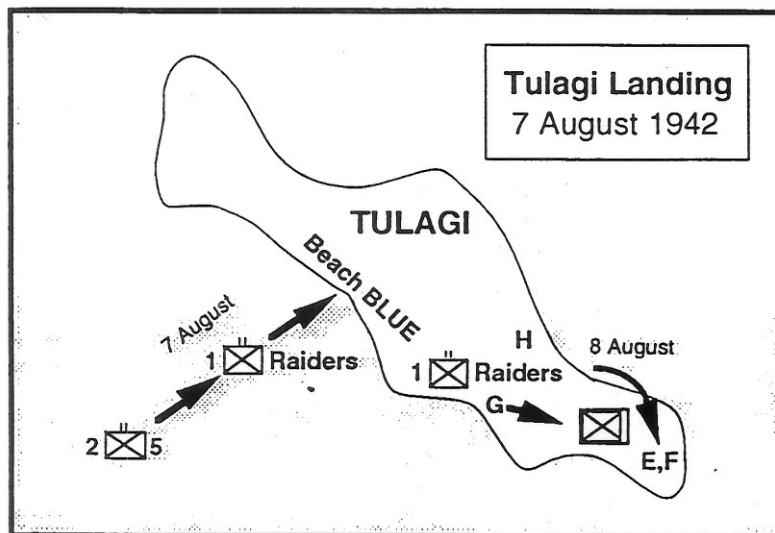
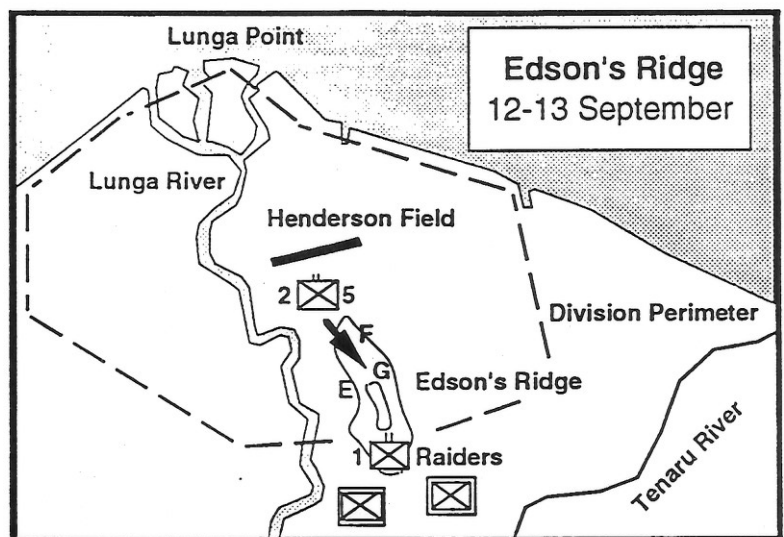
6 August 1942: The convoy, west of Guadalcanal, splits: Group X-RAY sails to Guadalcanal, Group YOKE, with 2/5 embarked, sails to Tulagi, off Florida Island.

Friday, 7 August 1942: In the first U.S. offensive of WWII, the 1st Marine Division assaults Guadalcanal. At 0614, Tulagi is hit by fighters, dive-bombers and 5-in naval gunfire. 2d Battalion, 5th Marines climbs down the cargo nets and into the waiting 36-foot Higgins boats. At 0916, the battalion lands at BLUE BEACH on Tulagi behind the 1st Raider Battalion. The Raiders, led by LtCol Merritt A. "Red Mike" Edson, turn east, while F Co sweeps northwest. By nightfall, 2/5 reinforces the Raiders at the southeast tip of the island. Multiple attacks by the Japanese 3d Kure Special Naval Landing Force are repelled that night. The 1st Raider Bn and 2/5 were chosen by Gen Vandegrift for this independent action because they were the "best-trained and most aggressive battalions available."

8 August 1942: E Co and F Co advance along the north coast of the island, trapping the remaining Japanese between the Raiders and themselves. Wpns Co 81mm mortars pound the enemy position. At 1500, the 1st Raiders and G Co attack through the ravine, wiping out all resistance on the island. 347 of 350 Japanese defenders are killed, 3 surrender. 2/5 loses 6 dead and 18 wounded during this two-day action.

21 August 1942: 2/5 leaves Tulagi, rejoins 5th Marines on Guadalcanal. 2/5 is named the division reserve, and takes position near Henderson airfield between the Lunga and Tenaru rivers.

11 September 1942: LtCol Rosecrans is



injured in an air attack. Capt Joseph J. Dudkowski takes command of the battalion.

13 September 1942: 2/5 moves south of Henderson Field to again reinforce the embattled 1st Raider Battalion. On this, the second night of a fierce Japanese attack, 2/5 is fed into the fight at 0400. G Co, moving up on left flank, is pinned by machine gun fire and loses 30 dead and wounded. E Co attacks on right side of ridge, losing five killed and nine wounded. Two more Japanese attacks are repulsed before dawn. Artillery from the 11th Marines fires "danger close" all night.

8 October 1942: E Co engages enemy forces digging in, G Co attempts a flank attack. Both companies are smashed by Japanese fire.

The three battalions on the east side of the river move north. Puller's 1/7 traps an enemy unit in a draw and wipes them out with artillery, mortars and machine gun fire.

9 October 1942: 2/5 and the other battalions return to Henderson Field. This five-battalion action effectively annihilated the 4th Japanese Infantry Regiment.

1 November 1942: 2/5 leads the 5th Marines in an attack across the Matanikau River. E Co makes a rubber boat assault at 0200 to secure the far side. Under a heavy artillery prep fire, the remainder of 2/5, now under the command of Maj Lewis W. Walt, crosses the river at 0630 on wooden foot bridges. 1/5 and 3/5 follow. 2/5 had been trained on rubber boat assault early in the war.

2 November 1942: The 5th Marines surround enemy defenders near Point Cruz. Capt Harry Connor, now S-3, leads F Co and G Co. F Co cuts Japanese phone lines on the beach and is then hit from the rear.

3 November 1942: E Co and G Co attack at 0800. Wpns Co machine gunners attack as riflemen. F Co holds the left flank. The companies advance into the underbrush using bayonets and close-in fighting to destroy over 230 Japanese. 2dLt Paul Moore, Jr., G Co, wins the Navy Cross, shot through the chest

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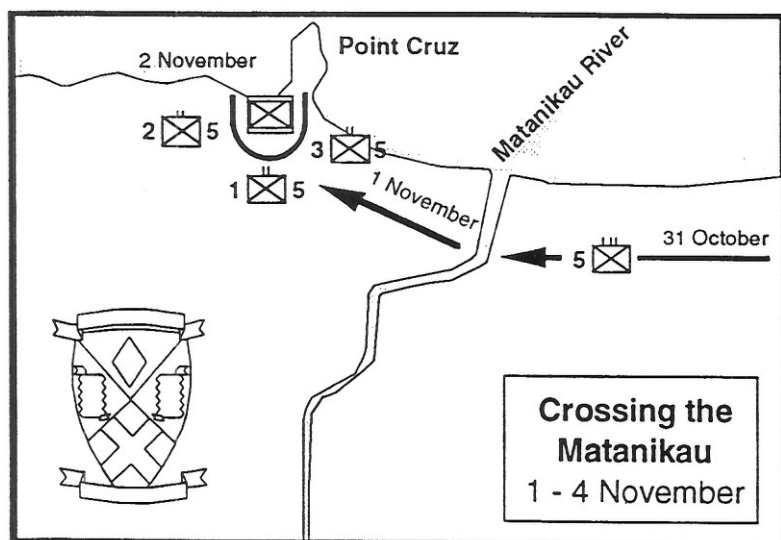
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leading his platoon. The regiment then returns to the airfield perimeter.

9 Dec 1942: The 1st Marine Division is relieved. Gen Vandegrift hands Guadalcanal over to MajGen A. M. Patch, U.S. Army. 2d Battalion, 5th Marines sails for Australia, landing on 12 January 1943. The battalion's first battle of WWII is over.



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Project Leatherneck
Training and Operations
2d Battalion, 5th Marines
Box 555473
Camp Pendleton, California 92055
(619) 725-7884