

2d Battalion, 5th Marines

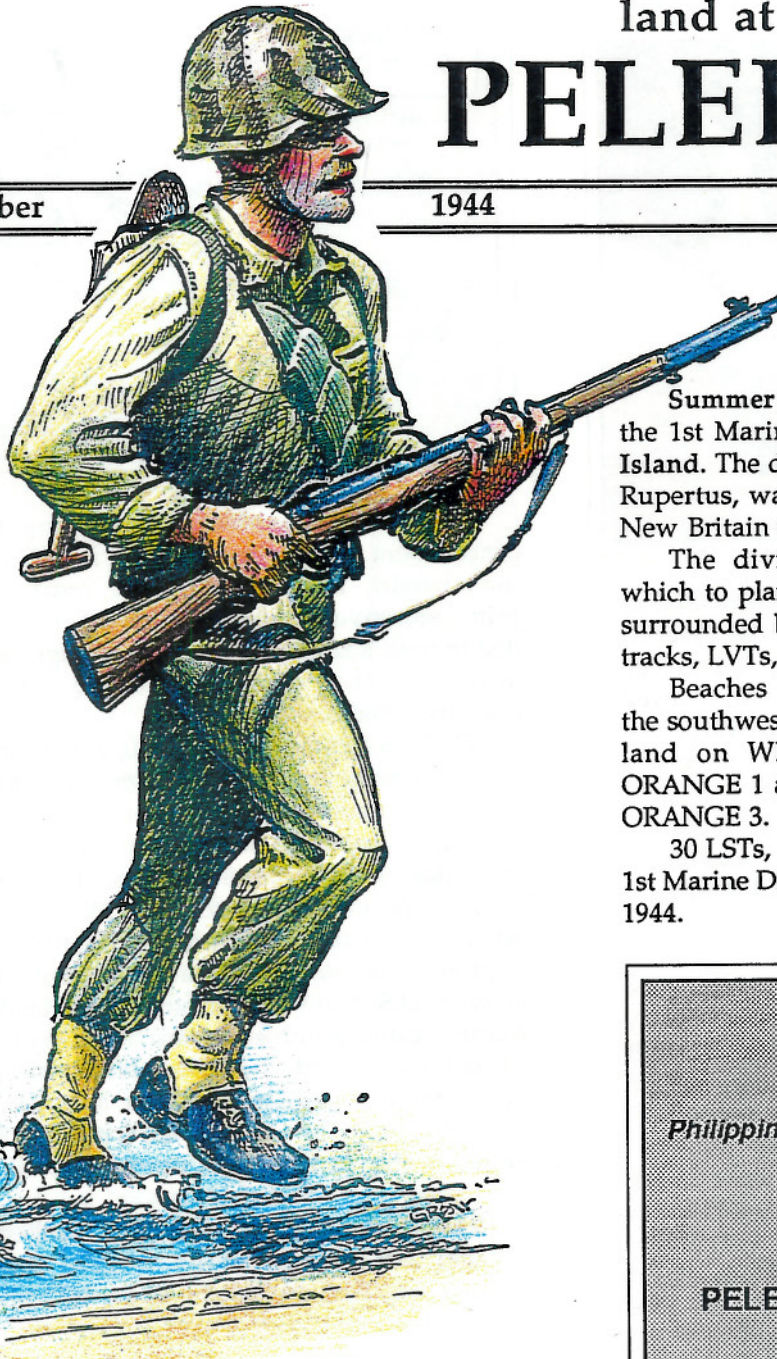
land at

PELELIU

15 September

1944

A Pocket History

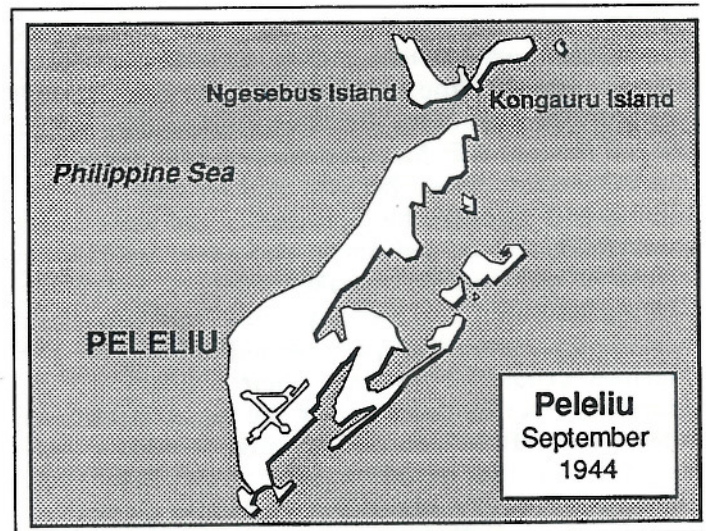


Summer 1944. As part of operation STALEMATE, the 1st Marine Division was ordered to seize Peleliu Island. The division, commanded by MGen William H. Rupertus, was then resting on Pavuvu island after the New Britain Campaign.

The division had very little intelligence with which to plan the operation. The island of Peleliu was surrounded by a reef, which dictated that amphibious tracks, LVTs, be used by the assault waves.

Beaches WHITE and ORANGE were selected on the southwest side of the island. The 1st Marines would land on White, the 5th Marines would land on ORANGE 1 and 2, and the 7th Marines would land on ORANGE 3.

30 LSTs, 17 transports, and 2 LSDs, loaded with the 1st Marine Division sailed from Pavuvu on 4 September, 1944.



USMC Utility Uniform on Peleliu

The Marines of 2/5 assaulted Peleliu armed with the M1 Garand .30 caliber Service Rifle. Ammunition for the Garand was issued in 8-round clips.

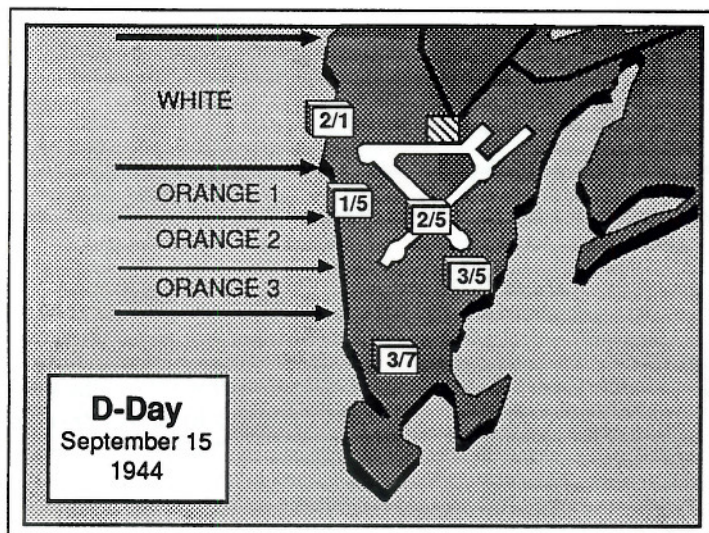
The Marine infantryman's utility uniform was herringbone twill cotton. On the left breast pocket of the jacket was stenciled the Eagle, Globe and Anchor and the letters "USMC".

The web equipment included a cartridge belt with bayonet, first aid kit, and metal canteen.

The boots or "boondockers" were worn with canvas leggings. The steel helmet was covered by a camouflaged helmet cover.

D-Day, 15 September 1944, was a clear, cool day with excellent visibility. The first waves of LVTs moved ashore just after 0830. 1/5 landed on ORANGE 1 and 3/5 landed on ORANGE 2. The 5th Marines were commanded by Col Harold D. Harris, the XO was LtCol Lewis W. Walt, a former 2/5 commander.

The Japanese opened fire. Some LVTs, hit by enemy fire, blackened and burned on the shore. Enemy rifle and machine gun fire, accompanied by murderous mortar and artillery, swept the airfield, preventing any advance off the beach.

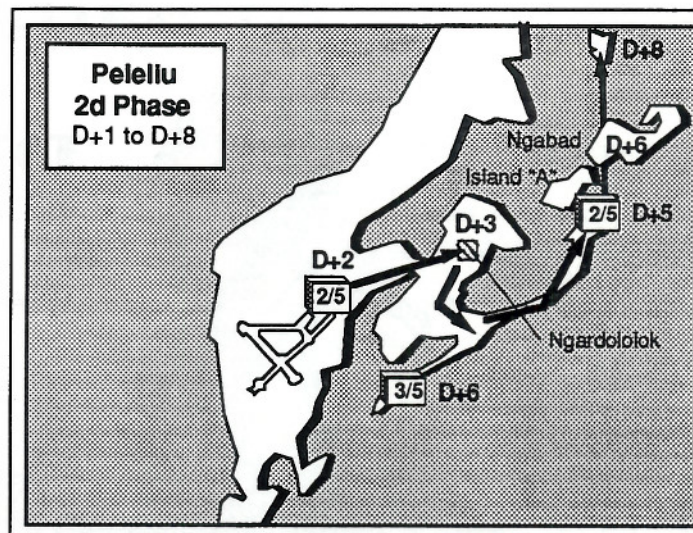


2d Battalion, 5th Marines, under the command of Major Gordon D. Gayle, was the regimental reserve. The battalion landed on Beach ORANGE 2 between 0935 and 1015. 2/5 moved quickly to the front, relieved 1/3/5, and launched a vigorous assault eastward. The battalion then turned north, deployed across the entire southern end of the airfield, and reduced a nest of pillboxes that had 3/5 pinned down. The battalion manned a defensive line oriented north. G Co was on the left, E Co on the right, while the battalion CP and F Co faced south protecting the rear.

At approximately 1650, the Japanese counterattacked. Thirteen enemy tanks supported by infantry crossed the airfield into the 5th Marines position. The bulk of the attack was repulsed by 1/5 on the left flank of 2/5. Maj Gayle ordered his supporting tanks forward. Four Sherman tanks rolled onto the airstrip and repelled the Japanese. In the wake of the tank attack, 2/5 surged north, and advanced halfway across the open airfield to make the biggest gain of any Marine battalion for the day. This was significant because it achieved the space needed to bring the 11th Marines ashore to emplace their artillery on the island. 2/5 set in defenses for the night. Additional attacks and infiltrations that evening included a probe at 1800 on the battalion left flank. Star shells illuminated the first night with a greenish glow.

D+1, 16 September. At dawn on the second day, the Japanese shelled the airfield, hitting the 5th Marines regimental CP. 2/5 fought north across the airfield's east side through nearly impassable scrub jungle and thick swamp. No tank support was possible in this close terrain, but the jungle provided protection from fire

from the ridge north of the airfield. At dark, 2/5 pulled back to their airfield positions.



D+2, 17 September. Again using the excellent concealment of the jungle, 2/5 advanced 700 yards from the airfield, thus securing the entire airfield, the prime objective of the operation. E Co, on the left flank tied in with K/3/5. F Co was on the right and G Co was in reserve. The extreme heat of the day caused more casualties than enemy.

D+3, 18 September. At 0700, 2/5 jumped off in the attack. Immune from enemy observation, and supported by a 2/11 prep fire, the battalion moved rapidly. F Co, leading the battalion across a narrow causeway toward the village of Ngardololok, called an air strike on the village. The airstrike missed. At 1335, as F Co and G Co advanced on the village, a new airstrike, ordered by Regiment but not coordinated through the battalion, arrived. U.S. Navy planes strafed the leading F and G Marines causing numerous casualties. As E Co and H&S Co crossed behind, they were hit by friendly artillery and later by misplaced mortar rounds. 2/5 lost 34 casualties this day, nearly all from friendly fire. The battalion dug in that night outside the village.

D+4, 19 September. After dive bombers blasted the village, 2/5 moved in and secured the entire area against scattered resistance. G Co led the battalion to the southern beach that afternoon, and began patrolling northeast to start clearing positions on the peninsula and off-shore islands.

D+5, 20 September. G Co secured the northeast tip of the peninsula. A patrol sent to Island "A" found it unoccupied.

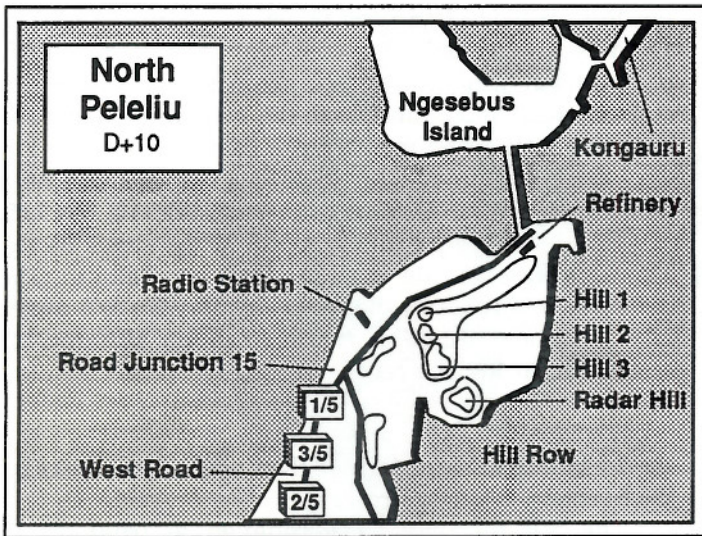
D+6, 21 September. G Co seized Island "A". F Co passed forward to secure Ngabad Island. E Co remained in reserve with H&S Co.

By **D+8, 23 September**, G Co had seized the northernmost island.

On **D+10, 25 September**, the 5th Marines were trucked on the West Road to the northern end of the

island. At 1700 the lead elements of 1/5 hit Japanese resistance at Road Junction 15.

D+11, 26 September. At 1600, 1/5's attack on Hill Row stalled, so 2/5 attacked around 1/5, left of Hill 1, and continued north. F Co had all four supporting tanks hit by enemy fire. 2/5 moved past Hill 1 and received plunging fire from both the ridge line above to their right and Ngesebus Island to their left. Maj Gayle set up the battalion perimeter on the northern beach just short of the Refinery. The Refinery, converted to a defensive blockhouse by the Japanese, was very well defended.



D+12, 27 September. At 0800, the battalion CP, exposed like rest of the battalion to murderous fire from three sides, is raked by enemy fire. Maj Gayle had men killed all around him by extremely accurate mortar fire. In order to attack the Refinery, a tank dozer filled an anti-tank ditch and a LVT flamethrower moved forward and incinerated the 60 Japanese defenders inside the Refinery. Patrols from E Co seized a small ridge above the east side of the road. With the Refinery cleared, 2/5 resumed its advance to the northern tip of the island.

In the lead, F Co became entangled in a maze of caves and pillboxes in the hills. The company seized the northwestern ridges and established OPs on the crests. The Japanese still had positions halfway down the hill, which dominated the road. These honeycomb caves were knocked out with hand grenades, gasoline, 81mm WP, and flamethrowers.

G Co, supported by tanks, moved up the road and past the deadly caves. 2/5 consolidated and dug in for the night.

The next step was to attack Ngesebus and Kongauru islands. A skillful combined arms preparation was planned:

Artillery and tanks would hit Ngesebus with HE and Smoke to obscure observation.

Navy ships would hit Kongauru.

LVT(A) 75mm guns would fire point blank into the caves and LVT(A) Flamethrowers would seal the caves.

On D+13, 28 September, 3/5 assaulted Ngesebus and Kongauru islands. E Co 2/5 was the regimental reserve. 1/5 seized Hill 3 and Radar Hill. 2/5, now at the northern tip of Peleliu, attacked south to seize the flat ground northeast of the ridges.

At 0700, G Co led the battalion through a coconut grove near the eastern base of the ridges with three tanks. By 1000, G Co had killed 150 of the enemy in the assault. G Co continued to sweep southward until it could fire on Radar Hill in support of 1/5. F Co and E Co neutralized the caves honeycombing the area using demolitions. At one point, when 70 enemy broke from their positions, F Co chased these enemy in three LVTs, killing those Japanese who did not surrender.

On 29 September, G Co mopped up the enemy east of the ridge, drawing fire from the ridge east of the Refinery. Tanks then sealed the tunnels. F Co, on top of the ridge, sealed four caves. The Japanese reopened the caves by blasting them out from the inside. G Co started to receive fire from the rear from caves previously sealed. E Co finally assaulted the caves, chased some Japanese onto a reef, and shot these enemy with LVTs.

On 30 September, 2/5 and 1/5 consolidated and mopped up the northern tip of Peleliu. At 1000 the battalions assembled at the Radio Station and were relieved by the 321st Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army. The battalions trucked back to Ngardolok for a rest. By now, the regiment had killed or captured 1,172 Japanese. With the exception of the high ground in the Umurbrogol pocket, The 1st Marine Division had secured Peleliu.

The 7th Marines were ordered to attack the remaining Japanese in the Umurbrogol Pocket. Three days later, E Co sent a combat patrol to help the 7th Marines deal with snipers along the West Road.

On October 5th, the weary 5th Marine are ordered to relieve the 7th Marines in the Umurbrogol Pocket.

At 0800 on October 6th, 2/5 relieved 3/7 at the northern end of the Umurbrogol Pocket. Thirty minutes later, E Co attacked toward Ridge 120. The company seized two knob hills and then came under heavy and accurate enemy fire. G Co made a frontal attack against a ridge named Baldy. One platoon made the summit and discovered that Baldy was primarily an enemy observation post.

During the 7th, 8th and 9th of October, 2/5 made numerous preparations for a general attack:

Bulldozers cleared the way for LVT(A) flamethrowers,

E Co mortars fired on enemy positions, and bazookas on caves,

G Co searched for avenues forward,

F Co, in reserve, patrolled the gap between E and G companies,

Twenty aircraft made two airstrikes,

Sources

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prisoners. With the enemy on Baldy subdued by G Co, E Co aggressively secured Ridge 120 at 1215. The remainder of G Co attacked forward and secured Ridge 3. At the close of the day, 2/5 consolidated on the most difficult and stubbornly contested terrain in the entire Umurbrogol Pocket and the entire island of Peleliu.

On 11 October, 2/5 resumed the attack against the final objective: Hill 140. G Co moved south on Ridge 3, with E Co parallel. Both companies were stopped by fire from Hill 140. F Co, in reserve, passed through E Co, assaulted and secured Hill 140 by 1500. This F Co attack took the final and most important single position. Hill 140 had been taken with only 2 KIA and 10 WIA. This minimum cost was due to thorough preparation and thorough professionalism. F Co consolidated and eliminated the remaining Japanese positions, killing 60 more of the enemy. That night, F Co held Hill 140, E Co held Ridge 3, and G Co held Baldy. The Japanese counterattacked Hill 140, but 2/5, in good defensive positions, repulsed the attack easily. This action was the last for 2/5 on Peleliu. The battalion was relieved the following day by 3/5 under heavy sniper fire. The two battalions suffered 22 casualties during the relief.

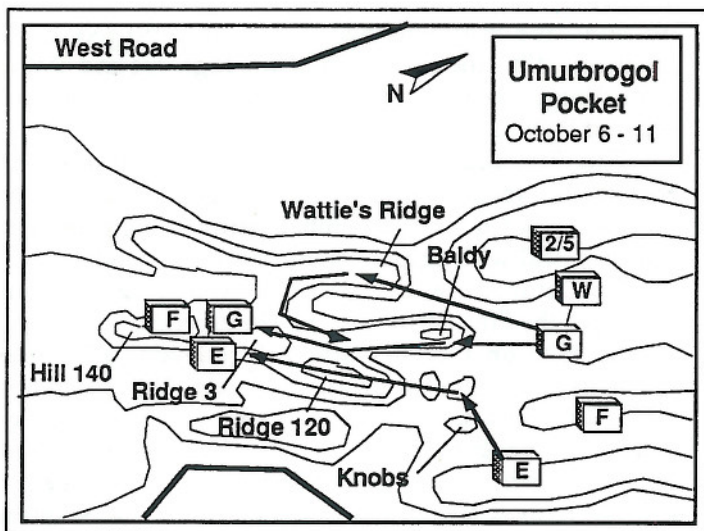
and Weapons Co took up positions near the battalion CP to support G Company's attack.

Maj Gayle directed 2/11 to fire directly into the ridge positions point-blank. When asked about the fighting qualities of his battalion, Maj Gayle said, "Every Marine fighting in those hills is an expert. If he wasn't, he wouldn't be alive."

2d Battalion, 5th Marines then spent two weeks on the northern islands in reserve.

The 5th Marines were relieved at 0800 on 15 October, 1944. This was exactly one month since D-Day. As the Army took control of the island, the Regiment was attached to the 81st Infantry Division. It remained in defensive positions until 26 October. The transport *Sea Runner* and two smaller ships took the 5th Marines back to Pavuvu.

The 1st Marine Division suffered 6,526 casualties on Peleliu. Estimates of enemy dead were 10,695 with 307 prisoners. The 5th Marines lost 1,378 casualties, nearly 40% of the regiment that had landed on Peleliu.



On 9 October, one platoon of G Co, led by 2dLt Robert T. Wattie, attacked an important ridge to the west which allowed further attacks on Baldy and controlled the West Road. The ridge is named "Wattie's Ridge". The platoon withdrew after knocking out the enemy positions.

On 10 October, 2/5 attacks. After a preparatory artillery barrage, G Co and E Co lead off in the attack. Lt Wattie retook his ridge, moved down and made a U-turn and fought and held Baldy Ridge, capturing 50

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The battle for Peleliu became one of the least publicized but most viciously fought actions of the entire Pacific war. 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, resting on Pavuvu, would soon receive the order for their last battle of World War II: Okinawa.

